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Stories from the frontline of music and social transformation: a study of teachers working for Batuta in the Caribbean coast of Colombia

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

Dissertation

**STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINE
OF MUSIC AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION:
A STUDY OF TEACHERS WORKING FOR BATUTA IN THE
CARIBBEAN COAST OF COLOMBIA**

by

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Dedication

A María Andrea, que está en el centro de mi pequeño universo.

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory case study of a group of teachers working for Fundación Nacional Batuta in war-affected places of the Colombian Caribbean region. Batuta is one of Colombia's largest Social Action Through Music (SATM) organizations, and it was born as an offshoot of the Venezuelan El Sistema de Orquestas y Coros Juveniles e Infantiles (El Sistema). As such, Batuta receives an important amount of funding and it plans to keep expanding, both in funding and in the number of children linked to the program. However, there are very few scholarly publications that analyze Batuta with a critical eye.

This research is part of a larger body of academic literature that critically analyzes SATM and El Sistema-inspired organizations (Baker, 2014, 2022; Bates, 2016; Bull, 2016; Dobson, 2016; Fink, 2016; Kuuse et al., 2015; Logan, 2016; Rosabal-Coto, 2016), and it sought to study and systematically record the experiences of teachers at the local level, in order to identify problems and contradictions and propose solutions.

Data analysis revealed 6 themes that create contradictions stemming out of the official discourse of the organization, the guidelines issued to teachers in the territories, and the implementation at the local level by the teachers.

Keywords: Social Action Through Music, SATM, Batuta, Fundación Nacional Batuta, critical studies

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PART I
CHAPTER 1

Overview and History of Fundación Nacional Batuta

In 1991, after going through an “Asamblea Nacional Constituyente” [National Constituent Assembly], the Republic of Colombia issued a new democratic constitution. This new constitution, more progressive than the one that ruled the Colombian state since 1886, aimed to include sectors of society that had been historically excluded from political and social participation. In this context, the Colombian state, represented by the first lady Ana Milena Muñoz de Gaviria, promoted the creation of Fundación Nacional Batuta, which was inspired by El Sistema, the Venezuelan system of symphony orchestras, with the idea of creating a similar system in Colombia.

Ana Milena Muñoz de Gaviria was in close contact with José Antonio Abreu, El Sistema’s founder. She spent time in Venezuela, learning about El Sistema, and came back to Colombia with the idea of creating something with the same characteristics of what had been happening there since the 1970s. To that end, Muñoz sought the support of private sector companies, such as Coca-Cola, Mazda Foundation, Bavaria, Nestle, and Seguros Bolivar. The government guaranteed that for every cent that she found in the private sector, they would contribute the same amount from the public sector (Duplat, 2021, p. 2). In a 2022 documentary, Muñoz explained that what inspired her to create Batuta was that many young boys were becoming assassins for the Colombian mafias,

because they could not find any other personal development opportunities. Thirty years later, María Claudia Parías, the current executive president of Batuta, stated that what motivated the creation of Batuta was the success that El Sistema was having in Venezuela (Roa, 2022, July 8, my translation).

Batuta was thus created with the clear goal of tackling specific social problems through an imitation or adaptation of El Sistema in Venezuela. Manuel Cubides, the first director of Batuta, traveled to Venezuela and toured the country trying to understand how El Sistema worked. When he returned to Colombia, he drafted a project and presented it to the Colombian government (Duplat, 2021, p. 21). Batuta's certificate of incorporation states that there is a need to "crear una Institución que tenga como objetivo el promover y apoyar las expresiones musicales, en general, y en particular las orquestas sinfónicas de jóvenes y niños del país" [create an institution whose objective is to promote and support musical expressions, in general, and in particular youth and children symphony orchestras of the country] and "organizar un Banco de Partituras e instrumentos musicales, así como de patrocinar la vinculación de profesores de música que contribuyan a la formación de las orquestas sinfónicas juveniles e infantiles y de las diferentes agrupaciones musicales" [organize a sheet music bank and musical instruments, as well as to foment the inclusion of music teachers who can contribute to the creation of youth and children symphonic orchestras and of different musical ensembles] (Batuta, 1991, p. 2).

In 2001, after 10 years of El Sistema-inspired work throughout the country, Batuta signed a contract with the Colombian Government with the purpose of

implementing a pedagogical model of socialization and psychosocial recovery through musical practice, with children from families displaced by violence (Duplat, 2021, p. 67).

María Claudia Parias, the president of Batuta, stated:

when musicians started touring the country, with the idea of implementing the El Sistema model, they found war. They found victims of war, displaced, and uprooted from their territories, traditions, and customs. It was a different situation from what was happening in Venezuela, and this meant that there was a need to construct a different operational and pedagogical model, one that adjusted to the specific needs of Colombia (Duplat, 2021, p. 66).

The aim at that initial moment in the year 2001, was to work with 210 children from displaced families; however, over the years, the idea of using music as a tool for the social advancement for this population kept growing. In the year 2011, with the institution of the “Ley de Víctimas” (Victims Law) (República, 2011), which created a system for the social and economic restoration and reparation for victims of the armed conflict since the year 1985, Batuta started implementing the program Music for Reconciliation¹, which aimed specifically at using music as a restorative tool with children who had been directly affected by the conflict in the country.

The signing of this contract meant a total change in the focus of the work. Vicaria (2014) explained how Batuta needed to adapt to the Colombian context and as such, the idea of creating a National System of Orchestras and Choirs was simply unattainable for

¹ The program Music for Reconciliation changed its name to Sounds of Hope in the year 2022. For clarity, I will use the term Sounds of Hope from now on to refer to this program.

several reasons: first, the cost of symphonic instruments for the creation of a national system of orchestras was impossible for a private organization to finance. Second, it was difficult to implement the program in the regions as it was thought up and designed in Bogota. Third, the long-lasting Colombian civil war meant that the resources had to be allocated to more urgent issues than music education. And fourth, there was a need to create strategies to work with victims of the conflict. All these complexities forced the organization to move towards a more cost-efficient pedagogical model than El Sistema, and Batuta decided to implement a pre-orchestra model, based on an adapted version of the Orff ensemble (Vicaria, 2014, p. 117), which includes a guitar or a piano, and typical Colombian percussion instruments.

Batuta is without a doubt one of Colombia's biggest and most important music education institutions. It receives a significant amount of funding and, as we will see further in this dissertation, it plans to keep expanding, both in funding and in the number of children linked to the program. María Claudia Parias stated that the board of directors has given instructions to expand in the coverage of territories, increase the number of children and increase the number of funding sources (Duplat, 2021, p. 156).

In the year 2021, Batuta served 30,455 children in 209 music centers in 101 municipalities. It is important to note that 19,101 children attended Sounds of Hope, meaning that this program accounts for 63% of the population of students in Batuta. In 2021, 57% of students attended the music initiation (Orff ensemble) program, 35% attended the choir program and only 5% attended the orchestral program. The remaining 3% of students attended special programs, such as the disability program, early

childhood, and free courses. The 2021 report stated that some of the children who attended the pre-orchestra programs also attended the choir program; however, the data is not clear as to the exact number of children who attended both. The report also stated that 97% of the population that attends Batuta is in a range between six and eighteen years of age and 81% of them belong to the lowest socioeconomic stratum of the country. This means that these children belong to impoverished families. Finally, it is important to mention that 57% of the children are labeled as a “vulnerable” population, and 51% are victims² of the Colombian armed conflict (Batuta, 2021).

Batuta implements a psychosocial program, mediated by social management professionals at the local level. In 2021, 16,020 children had access to the psychosocial strategy through a team of 63 psychosocial professionals nationwide. The 2021 report stated that in that year, Batuta focused on the following lines of psychosocial work: integral wellness, which “focused on strengthening identity, self-esteem, life meaning, positive relationships, social contributions, and social networks” (p. 100, my translation); empathic capacities, which focused on “dynamizing empathy” (p. 100, my translation); social inclusion, focusing on promoting actions for the mitigation of practices of exclusion and discrimination of groups of people (p. 101, my translation); peaceful coexistence, focusing on the search to “amplify forms of coexistence and daily contact based on interchange and construction of respectful social bonds” (p. 102); and finally,

² In order to receive government aid, victims must be registered in the national Victim’s database called “Unidad de Víctimas”. For more information see <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394>. For the remainder of this dissertation, whenever the term “victims” is used, it will refer to people who suffered some form of violence related to the Colombian armed conflict and who are registered in this database.

school retention, focusing on “enriching school life as a strategy to minimize school desertion” (pp. 102, my translation).

Finally, a short note on human resources, to provide some context as to the magnitude of the organization. In 2021, Batuta had a monthly average of 889 employees; however, 92% of those people were hired on contracts of less than 10 months’ duration, and only 2.25% had continuous and indefinite employment contracts (Batuta, 2021, p. 184).

Personal Introduction

From the year 2017 to 2021, I had the opportunity to lead the operation of Fundación Nacional Batuta in the Caribbean region of Colombia, with a team of close to 85 people, between music teachers, psychosocial professionals, and administrative assistants. Batuta was the largest organization in Colombia dedicated to implementing music education programs with children and young people with a social focus. The almost four years in which I worked for Batuta were of great personal and professional growth, considering that previously I had developed my career as a music teacher in different contexts and as a trumpet performer.

My experience at Batuta allowed me to learn about the operation of a huge music education organization, with around 900 employees and a presence throughout the entire territory of Colombia. With Batuta, I had the opportunity to travel to all the eight departments of the Colombian Caribbean, to visit and learn about impoverished, indigenous, and Afro-Colombian communities, and to meet people in territories that have

been affected by the Colombian armed conflict, which resulted in 800,000 internally displaced people, 230,000 homicides, 80,000 forced disappearances, 32,000 kidnappings and more than 300 massacres in 50 years (Aguilera, 2019; Avila, 2019). Fundación Nacional Batuta's biggest program, Sounds of Hope, was a strategic initiative of the government to help ease the devastating effects of the war.

As part of the senior management team of Batuta, I learned about its processes for planning, managing, obtaining, and executing resources. I participated in these processes in Bogota, at the national level, as well as in my management capacity, locally. Despite my role inside the organization, on occasion I felt that some aspects of the organization's mission were paradoxical or contradictory, particularly how the local work teams' knowledge and experience were made invisible, due to a marked hierarchy and inflexibility in the institutional processes; everything was dictated from Bogota at a managerial level and these processes did not involve people from the regions. The diversity of the country, and the particularities of each territory, made work always a challenge for the people who worked at the local level. Yet I must admit that I never did a truly critical analysis of our work. Perhaps this was due to my own inability to see the bigger picture, and/or because the enormous amount of administrative work in front of me did not allow me to do a thorough analysis.

In 2021, I decided to retire from the organization to dedicate myself full-time to my doctoral studies. I requested authorization from Maria Claudia Parias, the executive president of Batuta, to allow me to do my doctoral research with Batuta's teachers. Therefore, I went from being the head and chief of management for the Caribbean, to

being a researcher, working with my former colleagues but now as research subjects. As mentioned above, Batuta, like all organizations of its size, is not exempt from problems and contradictions, and one of the clearest was the great experience that those who work in the regions have, but the little influence they have on decision-making in Bogota and on the policies that govern the actions of the organization. For this reason, I decided to carry out a critical study focusing on this angle, so that I could bring to light the problems, document opinions and suggestions and, in general terms, give voice to those who work hard from the territories to carry out the guidelines that are transmitted from Bogota to the periphery.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: From Acclamation to Critical Reflection

Acclamation for Batuta

Like many large, well-funded, long-established institutions, Batuta has its own published official history. Baker (2021) asserted that rhetorical excess has been the glue that has kept the global edifice of the SATM field together. In the case of Batuta, this could not be truer. Official communications, press releases, and internal communications, but also the media and academic studies, are all flooded with praise extolling the organization's supposed social and musical achievements. In this section, I analyze some of those publications to understand how the organization's discourse has been crafted over the years.

Tatiana Duplat's book (Duplat, 2021), which was commissioned by Batuta to celebrate its 30 years of existence, has an official English translation as "Brief story of a dream," but in its original text in Spanish, the title is even more romanticized, replacing the word "dream" with "utopia." The book begins by narrating the foundational facts of Batuta, and in Chapter 2, Duplat relates Batuta's first concert, which took place in September 1991. The chapter ends with a display of grandiloquence and rhetorical excess that is characteristic throughout the book:

The heart of the square was still beating to applause when the national anthem played. The audience, standing, sang along, and flags waved to join a chorus of

tears. Who knows if the echo of what happened that morning in 1991 still resonates at Plaza de Bolívar. But it is irrefutable that the spell worked. The magic of Batuta travelled the wind and spread through rivers, seas, vales, jungles, and mountains, until it covered the entire national territory. Those touched by that strange enchantment say that no one was ever the same. (Duplat, 2021, p. 24)

Rhetorical excess and poetic references are unsurprising; after all, this is a book commissioned by the organization to celebrate its 30th anniversary. It is understandable that it highlights the successes and achievements of the organization. What is more striking, however, is the construction of the book, whose chapters are named after the movements of a symphony: Prelude, First Movement, Second Movement, Third Movement, Coda, and Highlights. The foregoing is a clear reference to Batuta as a classical music system with the symphony orchestra as the backbone of its programs – something that is contradicted by its own numbers and figures, as already mentioned.

Another noteworthy aspect of Duplat's book is that it is full of references to Batuta's alleged social achievements and changes to the social fabric, without providing any empirical foundation. For example, speaking about the expansion of the Orff ensemble model, she stated that "work with the ensembles generated the pedagogical model and the great transformative power that, over time, has allowed Batuta to train almost a million boys and girls throughout Colombia" (p. 48). It is important to ask, train for what? Where is the evidence of this "transformative power" in Colombia, a country plagued with violence, drug trafficking, and corruption?

As mentioned, it is understandable that such rhetorical excesses occur in a book

commissioned by the organization; after all, it can be understood that for Batuta, it has a publicity function. However, there are also several scholarly dissertations and papers that carry strong echoes of official Batuta narratives. Such is the case of the doctoral thesis of Vicaria (2014), which is a more descriptive than prescriptive document, but it shows a lack of critical sense and the lightness of some of its claims are worth analyzing. For example, Vicaria (2014) stated that

to some extent, the Colombian government has given Batuta the responsibility of providing childhood music education. Batuta has taken this challenge seriously: In the absence of a music education policy in schools, it has proposed an organizational model that has served thousands of students” (p. 120).

First, there is no official document that expressly says that the Colombian government has done such a thing, and the fact that Batuta must negotiate with different government entities year after year for the continuity of its existing programs and new projects, makes it clear that the reality is more complex. Second, Vicaria failed to question whether a private entity should be in charge of executing a public education policy.

The only criticism that Vicaria made of the organization is its supposed weakness in the area of music literacy, which he, as a professor and member of the admissions committee of a Bogota university, identified as problematic, because he saw that most of the students who applied to that university arrived with a lack of knowledge in that area. This assertion suggests that Batuta is or should be a musical training program with a clear purpose of training musicians who aspire to a professional or technical career in music, which contradicts Batuta’s stated aims as an organization that seeks social change.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Vicaria's document is riddled with assertions with little scientific foundation, such as the closing paragraph, which stated, without citing bibliographic sources or presenting evidence, that:

Batuta has offered children and youth of Colombia the possibility of receiving a positive music-making experience. This accomplishment of spreading music to children has been crucial in changing the history of music education in Colombia. Furthermore, Batuta has influenced the community to a greater extent by using music, and its power, to produce social change" (p. 121).

As with the case of Duplat's book, I ask: what social change? Where is the evidence of the supposed social change that these authors say has been achieved?

The absence of a critical perspective is a constant in the few academic studies that have been done specifically on Batuta. The doctoral dissertation of Rincón Prat (2015) is another example. The author, in her own words, sought to demonstrate that music is a tool for social transformation; that it encourages the development of values and attitudes that guide human conduct; that awareness is fostered by collective and individual work and the sense of responsibility; that options are generated to occupy free time; that in the case of excluded communities, options for citizen growth and strengthening are generated; and that the fact of offering training in symphonic music in social sectors where this type of music is not offered, generates changes in the mentality of citizens (pp. 44, my translation).

Rincón Prat (2015), rather than looking critically, built her thesis on premises long coined by El Sistema and José Antonio Abreu: that is, that symphonic music

changes and rescues people just by practicing it. Furthermore, the author's hypothesis was that Latin America is characterized by its musicality and the importance of music in people's attitudes and behaviors, and therefore, according to her, given that the Venezuelan El Sistema has yielded so many artistic results, it is important to deepen the study of El Sistema-inspired programs. However, she failed to ask important critical questions, the most obvious one being: if these programs are so effective, why is Latin America so violent? Additionally, in her literature review, Rincón Prat (2015) included a group of studies that yield similar results as the ones that she presented in her hypothesis (p. 73). This makes it clear that instead of entering her research with an open mind, she was seeking to reassert her hypothesis.

Although Baker (2014) had already published his groundbreaking study on El Sistema in Venezuela, at the time of the research and publication of Rincón Prat's thesis, critical studies on the field of Social Action Through Music (SATM) were still few, and the belief in the saving power of music was widespread throughout the world, and even more so in Latin America, given the influence of Venezuela. Still, critical thinking on music education and social justice was hardly a foreign concept in 2015. Scholars in music education and the arts in general had been discussing these ideas for quite a while (see Belfiore, 2002; Benedict et al., 2015; Borchert, 2012; Jorgensen, 2015; Miñana et al., 2006). Arango (2008) had already published her article proposing that Batuta implement a differential approach that took into account the culture of the people of the region she studied and advising that Batuta should be careful not to replicate colonialist models, which had happened in the past. It is therefore striking that the author stated that:

La aplicación de programas de con fines (SIC) de desarrollo social a través de las artes, involucra necesariamente un conocimiento y una experiencia previa en el sector artístico escogido. En el caso de los programas de educación musical, estos implican una responsabilidad por parte de agentes expertos en temas relacionados con sistemas pedagógicos, metodológicos y puestas en práctica de los mismos.

Aunque los objetivos de las políticas que promueven el uso de la música con fines sociales no se centran en aquellos de evolución técnico-musical y formación académica, el desarrollo de la música se ve beneficiado por sí mismo, así como los músicos que pertenecen a estos programas siendo educadores, directores y gestores; impulsando una ampliación de la visión de la profesión del músico profesional y aumentando de forma positiva el enfoque hacia la pedagogía musical

[The implementation of programs for the purpose of social development through the arts necessarily involves previous knowledge and experience in the chosen artistic sector. In the case of music education programs, these imply a responsibility on the part of expert agents in aspects related to pedagogical and methodological systems and their implementation. Although the objectives of the policies that promote the use of music for social purposes are not focused on those of technical-musical evolution and academic training, the development of music is benefited, as well as the musicians who belong to these programs being educators, directors and managers; promoting a broadening of the vision of the profession of the professional musician and positively increasing the approach towards musical

pedagogy] (Rincón Prat, 2015, p. 44).

It is important to note the contradictions in statements like this. On the one hand, it stated that even when the programs do not seek “technical-musical” purposes or “academic training”, teachers must have knowledge of pedagogical and methodological systems. It is obvious that music teachers must know their art and the pedagogy to teach it, but it is not clear if the author was referring specifically to symphonic music and musical training. On the other hand, it is worth questioning the author’s affirmation that “the development of music is benefited, as well as the musicians who belong to these programs.” I wonder, based on the above, if the author considers that Batuta seeks to benefit the children and young people who attend the programs or if, on the contrary, it seeks to benefit teachers and the professional music sector, specifically symphonic music, which was what she studied.

Although in 2015 critical studies on the field of SATM were incipient, this has not been the case since 2020. Important scholars in the field have critically analyzed El Sistema and El Sistema-inspired programs around the world and have pointed out many of its shortcomings and contradictions — the next section of this dissertation focuses on such studies and writings — yet there are authors who continue to affirm that occupying the free time of children and young people in Colombia can also be a factor in the prevention of direct violence (Cobo Dorado, 2021, p. 58). Many of these authors repeat unsubstantiated statements and, in many cases, unfortunately say things that are simply not true. Cobo Dorado (2021, p. 64), for example, stated that the hiring of teachers in Batuta is strategic. According to her, Batuta demands that teachers meet certain criteria to

work in the program, such as believing in music as a tool for social transformation, having an attitude of respect and trust in the project, having the ability to adapt and have pedagogical creativity, and committing to the social and musical objectives of the project and be willing to train. As the head of the northern regional management, I was in charge of hiring teachers, and in most cases, especially when we had to hire teachers in remote or difficult-to-access territories, they were hired without any of these criteria, but rather minimum criteria, such as the fact that the teacher had a technical or professional degree in music and that he or she had the possibility of accessing the territory.

These authors undoubtedly write in good faith and many other assertions are properly grounded. But I argue that they participate in a romanticization of the Batuta programs, and that their studies show very little critical distance from official narratives. Unsurprisingly, the organization grants itself the benefit of the doubt regarding its own success. There is a propaganda machine inside and around Batuta, and while employed there, I myself was part of it; I contributed to spreading the poorly supported discourse about the supposed social benefits of the programs. On multiple occasions, almost weekly, I had meetings with mayors, governors, directors of private companies, among other personalities, to whom I tried to sell Batuta programs to be implemented in their organizations. In those meetings, the strategy was always to point out how the implementation of a Batuta program could help rescue children and youth from gangs, drugs, and other social difficulties through the use of free time – assertions that were based on ideology and institutional self-interest more than evidence.

But this was not all I did. With the arrival of Iván Duque to the presidency of

Colombia in 2018, Batuta had not been able to secure the resources for the continuity of the Music at the Borders program, which had been implemented in the border areas of Colombia, with financing from the Ministry of External Relationships. As part of the efforts to get the resources, I wrote an article titled “Music at the Borders: A community music program implemented by Batuta National Foundation and the Colombian National Government” (Puche, 2020), in which I repeated arguments without proper support, just like the authors that I critique above. For example, I wrote:

Music at the Borders has been successful in its aim of improving the quality of the lives of children and young people on the borders of Colombia, through the implementation of actions that generate opportunities for social inclusion and the strengthening of bonds with children from neighboring countries. Furthermore, the program has yielded unexpected positive results, such as the deepening of relationships between local authorities of Colombia and its neighboring cities of other countries, fostering a constant cultural exchange between bordering cities and villages” (p. 75).

Believing that a musical training program can not only improve the quality of life of children, but also serve as a kind of diplomatic tool to improve relations between countries, is optimistic to say the least. I emphasized the issue of symphony orchestras as the backbone of Batuta, knowing that the numbers did not support these statements, and that the most widespread program in the entire national territory is the Orff ensemble. So, my own article is little different to the writings I have reviewed thus far: riddled with exaggerations, unsupported assertions, and rhetorical excess.

In the year 2023, with the arrival of a progressive government to the presidency of Colombia, the music sector has been shaken by the proposal of President Gustavo Petro to create the National System of Orchestras in Colombia linked to the formal educational system. That is, he intends to create a Colombian El Sistema, connected to public schools (@petrogustavo, 2023). The proposal met with a lot of resistance in many sectors of music and particularly music education, and so, as I finish this dissertation, its future remains uncertain. Nevertheless, it is striking that after all that has been written and discussed about the problems of El Sistema (Baker, 2014; Baker et al., 2018; Baker & Frega, 2018), and specifically about El Sistema-inspired programs in Colombia (Baker, 2021), a progressive government should favor the implementation of a conservative and retrogressive program like El Sistema, and even more problematic, that it intended to implement it in the formal educational system of Colombia. This recent development points to the need to produce critical literature on the different SATM programs that operate in Colombia, especially on Batuta, as the one that has received the most resources from the National Government. In this way, proposals and debates on public policy may be grounded in research and critical thinking rather than myths and beliefs.

Critical Examination

Critical literature on Batuta is almost impossible to find. This prevents the implications of the organization's work, both internally and externally, from being truly understood. In the same way, discussions about curriculum reforms, methodological adjustments, implementation adjustments, among others, suffer due to the lack of critical

documentation to support them.

Among the publications specifically on Batuta, the only author who took a moderately critical stance is Arango (2008), who analyzed how in an Afro-Colombian region, some dominant sectors instrumentalize musical education in order to indoctrinate and build new social subjects. Arango analyzed the role of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), including Batuta, in these processes and affirmed that previously, religious communities came to Quibdó to “liberate and implant the faith” in black and indigenous communities, and that now “we are facing international political movements that come to save the faithful from the destruction of voracious capitalism and war” (p. 178). Probably the most striking statement in her article is that the teachers in four music education programs in the city of Quibdo, including Batuta, were the same people, with the same training, and using the same pedagogies. Arango affirmed that, despite the fact that these programs “promote a musical education under an openly instrumental discourse which responds to the needs and guidelines of international cooperation scenarios”(p. 180), the pedagogy for the implementation of all the programs was the same and followed the logic of traditional music education.

In a document commissioned by Batuta, Arango (2017) made a series of recommendations for a differential work with the Afro-descendant populations of the Colombian Pacific and proposed that in the implementation of the program, the design of the repertoires, and the pedagogical strategies, the organization take into account the historical impositions to which these populations have been subjected. She proposed that Batuta should recognize the knowledge of these communities and use it to strengthen

creative spheres. In the same way, Arango (2017) proposed to take advantage of the scenarios of musical expressions in the region to generate significant learning (p. 135). In summary, Arango proposed to base Batuta's work on the needs, worldviews, and scenarios of the communities, and to work collaboratively and horizontally with the community, not vertically. Surprisingly, this document, which ought to have been of utmost importance for Batuta because it provides insights from a serious author who lives in the territory and knows the community, was made invisible within the organization. In the three years that I worked there, I never heard mention of this document, nor did I witness discussions about a work model like the one proposed by Arango.

Beyond the confines of Batuta, the instrumentalization of art and artistic education has been widely discussed in academic and non-academic scenarios. According to Miñana et al. (2006), there exists an increasing interest in possible instrumental uses for art, and it is legitimized if it can be used as a tool for projects focused on coexistence and conflict resolution (p. 4). However, these authors problematized discourses about the potentialities of artistic education for fundamental issues, such as peace and values, coexistence, and conflict resolution. The above means that, according to this view, arts and culture are legitimized not by their intrinsic values, but because of their potentiality to work towards the solution of complex social problems.

In this sense, Bates (2016) argued that music is important, but that it cannot replace social and psychological needs such as “food, safety, clean water, vaccines, political empowerment, and basic literacy” (p. 2). Furthermore, Batuta bases its work on the fact that music has a “transformative power” that improves the quality of lives of the

children who participate in the music education programs (Batuta, 2022). Boeskov (2018) challenged this notion and argued that music may be damaging in some cases and that a deep analysis of the role of music in society is necessary to fully understand the implications of music and musical practice.

Taking into account that Batuta was created emulating El Sistema, the Venezuelan National System of Choirs and Youth Orchestras, I must direct attention to recent studies on it that have pointed towards the need to look beyond the simplistic discourse of the “miracles” of collective music making. Baker (2014) affirmed that a major obstacle to the social analysis of musical practices—particularly in El Sistema and similar programs—is the tendency towards idealization (p. 11) . Batuta is a case in point: Its motto is “the transformative power of music,” which foments an idea that music can transform people or society by itself; however, such an idea has been challenged by numerous scholars with insightful and serious independent research, in which different problems have been uncovered, such as the hierarchical and abusive dynamics of the use of the symphony orchestra as a driving force for social transformation (Baker, 2014), a model that reinforces exclusionary practices (Godwin, 2020), and fails on its promises of upward mobility through music education (Logan, 2016).

In 2016, a special issue of *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education* was devoted to critical perspectives on El Sistema and its offshoots, in which the authors explored themes of history, social justice, and politics and Social Action Through Music (Bates, 2016; Bull, 2016; Dobson, 2016; Fink, 2016; Kuuse et al., 2015; Logan, 2016; Rosabal-Coto, 2016), and problematized El Sistema, placing it as a neo-colonial effort to

civilize impoverished and disadvantaged people through classical music, and which uses a progressive social action discourse towards the outside while implementing regressive dynamics towards the inside. Furthermore, Baker (2021) pointed out that even though Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil all have massive SATM programs, they are all countries which are plagued with violence (p. 330). Evidence of social transformation is notably thin.

Baker et al. (2018) analyzed a series of evaluations of El Sistema in Venezuela and Aotearoa in New Zealand and asserted that “a striking aspect of El Sistema’s history is that repeated investigations in Venezuela over a period of 20 years have failed to generate robust evidence of its efficacy” (p. 264). The authors performed a critical analysis of an Interamerican Development Bank study, which has been used by El Sistema to justify claims that children who participate in El Sistema have proven to improve self-control and reduce behavioral difficulties, especially children from vulnerable families (Alemán et al., 2017). However, Baker et al. (2018) exposed serious failures in the methods that were used to arrive to the aforementioned conclusions, which lead them to conclude that “the data display no convincing evidence of El Sistema’s efficacy” (p. 260) and that “the research foundation for El Sistema’s claims of social transformation, and hence for its fame and international proliferation, may be weaker than first appears” (p. 264).

Critical studies and critical inquiry are not exclusive to El Sistema and the larger field of Social Action Through Music. Other fields such as music education and community music have been subjects to such critical processes. Music education research

has come a long way in critically analyzing its possibilities and exploring more effective ways of implementation, and important music education scholars have thought critically and deeply about the relationship between music education and social change in the last few years. In her study of music education and social change, Kertz-Welzel (2021) stated that the arts can empower, transform or question, but they certainly cannot substitute for the work of politicians (p. 2), who are the ones called to take care of social and political issues. Assuming that music education can change society, argued Kertz-Welzel, entails a risk of being used to support certain ideologies. This line of thought makes it evident that the relationship between music education and social change is ambiguous, therefore, she proposed to rethink music education and social change and to take into account the inherent ambiguity of this relationship. Looking to the future, she proposed that more research is needed:

Daring and courageous, but also critical research, imaginative and realistic, infused by a desire to be otherwise, while being engaged with the current reality. This indicates that as a profession we might need to learn to live with ambivalences, with the insight that one side, such as only seeing the positive aspects of music education and social change, or only understanding music education as social fact, may no longer be sufficient given the global situation we face. New situations demand new solutions (p. 168).

Various authors have made novel proposals to update and rethink music education and social change. Hess (2019) took an activist approach and advocated for an anti-oppressive pedagogy. Hess's proposal goes against the oppressive practices that Baker

documented in his writings for both El Sistema and the Red de Orquestas de Medellin (Baker, 2014, 2021). Jorgensen and Yob (2019) explored metaphors that can shape education for social change but acknowledged the ambiguity of the term “social change,” as it is difficult to set goals for action. Similarly, important questions about positive change are raised: “who determines what good is? Positive for whom?” (p. 34). Yob and Jorgensen (2020) expanded on their 2019 essay and used the UNESCO report, “Rethinking Education: Toward the Common Good,” to frame an exploration of the implications and complexities of how music education can and should respond to the challenges of humanity. This edited book proposed new ways of thinking about and using music education for social change.

As I mentioned, the field of community music has also seen similar critical reflections. In *Engaging in Community Music: An Introduction*, Higgins and Willingham (2017) advocated for a deeper relationship between research, inquiry, and practice and invited to ask “what if” and “how might” so that new perspectives can be generated. Higgins and Willingham proposed a culture of inquiry that is then taken into action.

Finally, as with Kertz-Welzel (2021) ambiguity at the heart of Benedict et al. (2015) in-depth exploration of music education and social justice. On the one hand, they were concerned with inclusion and potentially transformative practices in music education; on the other hand, they recognized that music education can foster injustices, privileging a particular group of practices, traditions, and musical knowledge. In fact, in their preface, when they mentioned John Dewey’s warning about the possibility that hegemonic and authoritarian educational practices can potentially discourage creativity,

the authors in turn warned teachers and social activists about implementing copied practices or models—and they explicitly mentioned the Venezuelan El Sistema—without taking into account the cultural and political contexts that can make the implementation different. In this sense, it is convenient to return to Baker's (2021) words about this book:

The Oxford Handbook of Social Justice in Music Education (Benedict et al., 2015) devotes just one of its forty-two chapters to El Sistema, and the perspective therein is distinctly ambivalent (Shieh, 2015). There are occasional references to the approach and practices that it incarnates in other chapters, but they are strikingly critical (e.g. McCarthy 2015; Kelly-McHale and Abril 2015; Matthews 2015). Gaztambide-Fernández and Rose (2015) critique the Venezuelan model directly, and their analysis lays bare just how far it lies from contemporary thinking on SJME. (p. 6)

In short, critical perspectives on music education and social change are now well established, and it is high time to bring them to bear on Batuta, considering that it is the largest non-formal music education institution in Colombia, and it is awarded a large percentage of the resources allocated to the cultural sector in the country. Furthermore, its field of action lies in an intersection between the cultural, educational, and social development sectors (Batuta, 2022).

Bringing My Critical Lens to Bear on Batuta

I worked for Batuta from 2017 to 2020 as North Regional Manager, and while I was an employee, I started to notice some contradictions between the stated aims of the

programs and what happened in the territories. Furthermore, my involvement in the doctoral program and gaining experience as a researcher led me towards identifying problems more specifically through the lens of critical literature. This dissertation is part of a small but growing body of literature of former El Sistema-inspired program employees who have grown aware of such issues and have gone on to research and document them.

Dobson (2016) argued that the program for which he worked utilized authoritarian, teacher-centered methodologies, which prevented children from exercising their creativity and agency, while obscuring these dynamics in a progressive discourse. Fairbanks (2019) decided to pursue doctoral research during his tenure as director of an El Sistema-inspired program; he became intrigued by the tension between his own discourse as an El Sistema advocate, and a counter-discourse that scrutinized El Sistema as a neo-colonial program. Godwin (2020), a program manager, became “disquieted by the adoption of the philosophy and approach of El Sistema in Australia and unsettled by assumptions about the value of classical or Western art music” Godwin (2020, p. 2).

During my time as a senior Batuta official, I was in charge of the general supervision of the administrative aspects of the programs in the Caribbean region of Colombia. My job description involved the allocation and supervision of budget execution, securing resources with public and private sector organizations for increasing the presence of Batuta in the Colombian Caribbean, and the general leadership of the program in the region. I was never in charge of musical or music education tasks; however, I did visit all 32 music centers that Batuta had at the time, and I met all the

teachers, psychosocial professionals, and administrative assistants that worked under my supervision. Even though I never taught music, I personally was never able to separate myself from my music teacher background, and as such, from the beginning I developed concerns about issues of implementation of the program at the local level and the implications for the teachers.

Batuta implements a strict pedagogical model that is designed by the National Academic Council, which is formed by nine people, all of whom have teaching experience, but who perform strictly administrative tasks in the organization. As a member of the Directive Council of the Foundation, one of the major concerns that I expressed during my tenure as north regional manager is that teachers' experience of working in complex territories was not considered when designing the repertoires and the pedagogical programs for each year. Likewise, teachers to whom the institution confers the responsibility of "safeguarding the rights of children and young people of the country" (Batuta, 2022, para. 5) should be granted with opportunities to prepare themselves for the fulfillment of such an important task. Furthermore, expectations for these teachers were quite high and it was always my feeling that the conditions in which they worked were far from optimal to meet their musical and social goals. They were required to work in complex environments and perform tasks that moved beyond the musical realm into the social realm, where they must work with victims, engage actively with the community, and work with parents, school administrators and local authorities. Yet many did not receive adequate training for this complex, multi-faceted work, either before or during their employment at Batuta.

When studying a similar program in the city of Medellin, Baker (2021) found that there were tensions between the expectations of the management in terms of socially oriented work and the capabilities of the teachers to implement such work without the proper pedagogical and philosophical tools. Many teachers taught, Baker argued, as they were taught: following a pedagogical model of the traditional conservatory of music, with little or no explicit focus on the social outcomes of the program. In other words, the program had both high musical expectations and ambitious social goals, but teachers' training was skewed heavily towards the former. Furthermore, the immediate pressure to produce musical results made it harder for the teachers to focus on the social side of the programs, which was supposedly the main point. Therefore, entering my fieldwork, I believed that it was important to ask if music teachers working at Batuta also experienced these tensions between the musical and social aims of the program and what they thought the solutions might be. I also wondered about what the teachers' perception of their own work was. Did they really think that they helped to restore the social tissue of the community, as Batuta claims, or did they think that this was more of a justificatory discourse to support music education?

Furthermore, it is important to ask in a country like Colombia, which is plagued with violence, forced displacement, and other pressing social problems, whether music is the right tool for restoring the rights of children and young people, and if so, whether the current efforts are effective. Are resources being spent in the right way? While fully answering such fundamental questions extends beyond the scope of this dissertation, I want to initiate the discussion, drawing on the perceptions of music teachers who work in

these programs.

It is evident that teachers working for Batuta in the Caribbean region of Colombia did so under special circumstances. They faced complex territories with a constant fear of moving through some of the most violent areas of the country. Given the circumstances in which they operate, I ask if they believe that it is possible to achieve the stated goals of the program.

This transformative power of music narrative may have helped Batuta consolidate a place of privilege to secure public resources over the years, but it may also have obscured ethical debates about the allocation of considerable public funding to a project that may be irrelevant for a majority of people. In this sense, Batuta needs to seriously and critically revise the outcomes of the programs, avoiding simplifications and empty statements about the transformative power of music without proper scientific support. Jancovich and Stevenson (2023) explained how cultural organizations often work towards ends that do not necessarily benefit society and spend public funding in unnecessary or irrelevant projects. Furthermore, they argued that failures need to be recognized and understood as part of the process of enacting necessary changes (p. 44). Avoiding discussion of failure weakens cultural organizations and ecosystems. I argue that given the proportions of Batuta's programs, and the scope that the organization itself claims to have, it is necessary for it to embark on a serious self-critical process, to acknowledge problems that emerge, and to seriously seek solutions. Listening to the voices of teachers who work in some of its most complex contexts would be a good place to start.

Chapter 3

Preliminary Tensions

On November 15th, 1991, Ana Milena Muñoz, the first lady of the Colombian nation, met with a group of prominent businessmen to sign the certificate of incorporation of Batuta. The full name that they chose for the foundation was Fundación Nacional de Orquestas Sinfónicas Juveniles e Infantiles Batuta, translated as National Foundation of Youth and Infant Symphony Orchestras Batuta³. The choice of the name has a direct implication for the philosophy of the work of Batuta. In choosing this name, Batuta linked itself with El Sistema, the Venezuelan System of Orchestras and Choirs, and set out a focus on orchestras and large ensembles.

The certificate of incorporation states that Batuta, understood as the National Foundation of Youth and Children Orchestras, should make a “contribution to the development of culture, as well as in the social field with a program aimed at children and youth” (Batuta, 1991, pp. 2, my translation). The document does not explicitly state how such a contribution will be made; however, it does emphasize the focus on collective learning, which supports the idea that music is intrinsically good, and that collective music learning automatically helps improve the quality of life of children and young people of Colombia. The certificate of incorporation is a short document, which focuses mostly on the financial contributions of the initial contributors and leaves out

³ The word *batuta* means “conductor’s baton” in Spanish.

explanations about the functioning of the Foundation. Therefore, to understand the inner workings of the Foundation, one must refer to the statutes. I will continue by analyzing the Statutes (Batuta, N.D.) of the organization and directing the reader's attention to specific places in the document where I identify tensions between the musical and social aspects of Batuta's work. I will also address how these tensions have a direct impact on the teachers' work at the local level.

Article 4

Article 4 states that the object of Batuta is to “contribute to the reestablishment of the rights of children and adolescents whose rights have been violated, threatened or unobserved and to the strengthening of their family systems, through a music-based care model” (pp. 11, my translation). There are a few questions that come to mind: How does Batuta do this? What is a “music-based care model” and how does it differ from conventional music education? Can music really help children whose rights have been violated? Is there empirical evidence to support such a claim? Who are the people who perform such a delicate task and what is their training? Music teachers at the local level are in charge of their music centers, and they are accountable for their performance and results. This dissertation interrogates how these teachers pursue the goals of Batuta.

Article 5

This article divides the purposes of Batuta's work into eleven numerals, the majority of which are problematic in terms of what is written and what can be put into practice with a music program working towards social goals. Numeral b. states that Batuta's purpose is to “prevent and mitigate the damage caused by violence and other

environmental factors in vulnerable Colombian children and adolescents through education and collective practice of music and contribute to their social recovery” (pp. 12, my translation). This numeral takes us back to the idea of music as an intrinsically good tool, which helps young people who practice it to be safe from violence or other dangers of society. I cannot help but ask if the resources that are spent in massive music education programs would not be better spent providing psychological assistance to such children and young people. Why would music be a better tool than psychological assistance, or as Bates (2016) mentioned, “food, safety, clean water, vaccines, political empowerment, and basic literacy”? Some of the communities where Batuta operates lack one or several of these basic elements, yet the state chooses to use music education to help these children and young people. Again, it is worth asking what the teachers’ perceptions about these social aspects are, and how they carry out this work.

Numeral e. states that Batuta’s purpose is to “contribute and facilitate access, consolidation and strengthening of children’s and youth symphony orchestras in Colombia”; numeral f. states that Batuta’s purpose is to “contribute to the creation, consolidation and strengthening of children’s and youth symphony orchestras in Colombia”; and article h. states that the purpose is to “build a network of youth and children’s symphony orchestras that ensures integration and coordination between them and their members and contributes to the realization of joint plans and projects” (Batuta, N.D., pp. 12–13, my translation).

However, Vicaria (2014) explained how such a national system of youth orchestras was ultimately impossible to create in Colombia. In fact, as noted above, the

management report for the year 2021 disclosed that only 5% of students participated in orchestral training (Batuta, 2021, p. 138). This is a strikingly low statistic for a program whose objective is to create a national system of children's and youth symphony orchestras.

Furthermore, Batuta classifies its orchestras according to their level of proficiency and the size of the orchestra. They have “semilleros de iniciación”, which are entry-level programs in which students are only getting familiar with string instruments; string orchestras, which have only string instruments; and symphony orchestras, which are full orchestras with wind and percussion instruments. String and symphony orchestras are also classified between type A and B orchestras, with type B orchestras playing arranged and adapted repertoire and type A orchestras focusing on canonic central European symphonic works. The 2021 report does not break down child attendance by orchestra type; however, I will refer to the information contained in the 2019 report and assume the numbers have remained more or less constant. In 2019, 42% of students playing string instruments attended the “semilleros instrumentales”, 35% attended a string orchestra, and 23% attended a symphony orchestra (Batuta, 2019). The report is not clear as to how many students attended a type A or type B orchestra; however, it is easily inferred that the majority of them attended the “semilleros instrumentales” program and sat in type B orchestras. These numbers actually reflect an organization that is characterized more by its Orff ensembles and choirs, and they certainly do not reflect an organization that prides itself with being a national system of symphonic orchestras. Again, it is important to ask what the implications are for teachers. There is a clear tension between the aims of Batuta

of being a national system of symphonic orchestras and the reality, which shows that Batuta's main program lies with the Orff ensembles.

Numeral g. states that the purpose of Batuta is to “promote and support other musical projects of a massive nature and with a social integration purpose”. The truth is that most SATM programs are financed with public resources and institutions compete with one another for funding. Batuta 2021's management report, for example, stated that they signed contracts with the national government for a total of \$17,937 million pesos, and \$20,845 million pesos with other local public entities (Batuta, 2021), around \$17.9 million dollars at the time (DIAN, 2023). In practice, this means that Batuta is receiving funds that are not reaching other culture and music education programs in Colombia.

I, as one of Batuta's regional managers, was in charge of securing funds for the organization at the regional level and I had a specific financial goal which I had to accomplish every year. In the year 2019, as north regional manager, I secured a contract for \$60 million pesos in order to implement a string instrument initiation program with children from the city of San Martin. That same year, there were two other organizations struggling to secure funds for their organizations with the local government's resources in that city. This happens throughout the national territory, as I was able to discuss with my peers from other managements. Therefore, my own experience confirms that instead of supporting and promoting other musical projects, Batuta in fact competes with other similar and smaller projects at the national, regional, and local level. Furthermore, Batuta's regional managers often depend on teachers to make arrangements to get appointments and meetings with local mayors and other officials to secure those

resources. In the case of the city of San Martín, I depended on the local teacher to push local authorities to sign the agreement; however, this meant that the visible face of Batuta in the territory in the competition for resources was the teacher.

Finally, numeral k. states that its purpose is to spread the musical and social achievements of El Sistema in the country and abroad (Batuta, N.D., p. 13, my translation). This numeral refers specifically to the Venezuelan El Sistema, and it is a clear indication that Batuta has not distanced itself from El Sistema, but that it has rather strengthened its longing for the creation of a symphonic music education system such as the one in Venezuela. In fact, in an interview at the end of 2022, María Claudia Parias, the executive president of Batuta stated in a press article that “Batuta is the world’s second incarnation of El Sistema” (Parias, 2022, para. 3). As I discussed in chapter 1, Batuta has been obliged to move away from the El Sistema model. Yet, at the level of official discourse, it continues to aspire to close alignment with it. This points to a deep confusion at the level of identity.

It is necessary to address in this dissertation issues about the implications for teachers working in an organization that claims to be an incarnation of El Sistema. The first thing that must be said is that, in a system of this type, teachers must work with large groups of children, because the work methodology seeks to cover quantity. This eagerness to present large numbers has direct repercussions for teachers, who must implement a systematized model with little room for student-centered education. In a model of this type, with groups of at least 35 children, how can teachers focus on the individuality of the children, attend to their needs, encourage creativity, among other

premises of student-centered education?

On the other hand, working with large groups forces teachers to keep their classrooms full; that is, when students drop out, teachers must replace them. This creates great pressure on teachers and forces them to make efforts to achieve student quotas and send reports to Batuta every week with 100% attendance. In light of the above, it is clear that a model centered on the philosophy of El Sistema has direct repercussions on teachers and on the way that they implement the programs at the local and regional level.

Chapter IX. The Academic Director

Batuta's academic director is the second most important position according to its organization chart, and this is the person who, according to chapter IX of the statutes, oversees developing plans and projects, submitting monthly reports to the executive president containing evidence of the implementation of the programs, among others. Numeral b. of article 45 states that the Academic Director will "present to the executive president an annual musical development plan, with monthly reports, in which the goals to be achieved by the orchestras in terms of teaching levels and musical repertoires are evidenced" (Batuta, N.D., p. 39, my translation). It is striking that the article explicitly mentions the orchestras and it leaves out all the other programs, given the fact that symphony orchestras represent a tiny part of Batuta's work, as the 2019 management report showed. I find it even more striking that the entire chapter leaves out any mention of the social department, whose director has a seat in the academic council of the organization. There are obvious questions that arise: How does Batuta accomplish its social goals if the actions needed to "improve the quality of lives of children" and the

“reestablishment of their rights” are not mentioned in the job description of the person who is in charge of directing and implementing such strategies? If the social aspects are not mentioned in the Statutes, how do teachers and psychosocial teams mediate their work at the regional and local level? Are there practical differences between what is written (and not written) in the Statutes and what music teachers and psychosocial teams do in the field?

Even though the discourse of the Foundation focuses on its social aspects, only 14,400 children had access to the psychosocial program in 2019 (Batuta, 2019). This means that around 63% of the children could not access this portion of the program. How do this 63% of children improve their quality of life and get their rights restored? Are music teachers implementing any social strategies where there is no psychosocial accompaniment?

Concluding Remarks

The figures on the number of symphony orchestras and children participating in symphonic training processes speak volumes about what Batuta really is not: a national system of orchestras and choirs. However, references to El Sistema are embedded in the organization’s DNA, from its founding document to its statutes, as well as its public communications. The truth is that in practice Batuta works as a model for music classes using the Orff ensemble as its main mechanism and in some cases inserting a psychosocial component. However, the psychosocial component, although it is prominently publicized in Batuta’s daily communications as well as on its website, does

not really have the same importance in the documents that guide its work.

All the above is indicative that Batuta is, as Baker (2021) has pointed out about other similar SATM organizations, contradictory, ambivalent, and complex. It was clearly created with a specific purpose, but for political, geographical, and economic reasons it could not consolidate its initial project, having to mutate towards something else, but maintaining its initial philosophy. Establishing a music-based care model may seem progressive and innovative, however, doing it through a system of youth orchestras is conventional and conservative. At the moment, at the level of its official discourse, it is not clear if and how Batuta promotes music-based care or if on the contrary, it aims to train orchestral musicians as in Venezuela. For all these reasons, it is necessary that Batuta, as one of the main music education organizations in Colombia and Latin America, be studied with a critical and serious eye.

Rationale

Baker (2022) defines Social Action Through Music (SATM) as a field of music education with strong ideological ties to Europe, characterized by learning with large ensembles, free programs for participants, and more intensive hours than most extracurricular programs. Similarly, according to Baker, attempts have been made to equate the field of SATM with that of Community Music; however, the genesis of the two fields differ greatly, as well as their philosophies, which is why there is a growing interest from independent academics in performing peer-reviewed research focused on SATM, mostly critical, which has raised questions about the field's methods and results,

specifically its claims of social transformation through music instruction.

SATM is one of the fields that has not been sufficiently studied in the context of war and conflict in Colombia, especially in the Caribbean region. More specifically, music teachers in these contexts often find themselves dealing with difficult situations with students and their families, due to the state of mind that results from the violent and traumatic events that they have faced in the past. How do teachers navigate these situations? How well trained do they feel to accomplish the program's goals? There is a need for research to delve into these issues and to help provide insight for teachers working with SATM organizations that implement programs that focus on work with vulnerable children.

Further analysis of the aims of the different SATM programs in Colombia, paired with the realities of teachers at the local level, should contribute to the numerous critical scholarly reflections that are currently being made of SATM programs around the world. Considering its size and scope, Batuta provides a fertile ground for this type of research.

Background, Context, and Problem Statement

Batuta's work is oriented towards solving several social problems through collective music education under the premise that music has a socially transformative power. Its mission statement, its guiding principle, and basis for its field of action state that it seeks to:

Contribuir al mejoramiento de la calidad de vida de los niños, niñas, adolescentes y jóvenes de Colombia, mediante una formación musical de excelencia, centrada

en la práctica colectiva, desde una perspectiva de inclusión social, derechos y diversidad cultural.

La Fundación Nacional Batuta cree en el poder transformador de la música y en el estímulo que la educación musical en grupo proporciona al desarrollo de las facultades del ser humano y de la sociedad

El quehacer de la Fundación Nacional Batuta se sitúa en la intersección de los sectores de educación, cultura y desarrollo social. Contribuye desde la formación musical a:

- La educación integral de la población Infantil y juvenil, con énfasis en la población menos favorecida.
- Implementación de una política pública orientada a democratizar el acceso de la niñez y la juventud colombiana al disfrute, conocimiento y práctica de la música.
- La salvaguarda de los derechos de los niños, niñas, adolescentes y jóvenes.
- La formación de tejido social.

[Contribute to the improvement of the quality of lives of children, adolescents, and young people of Colombia, through excellent musical training, centered in collective practice, from a perspective of social inclusion, the exercise of rights, and cultural diversity.

- Fundación Nacional Batuta believes in the transformative power of music and in the stimulus that group music education provides to the

development of human beings and society.

Fundación Nacional Batuta situates its work in an intersection between education, culture, and social development, contributing through music education to:

- The rounded education of children and young people, with emphasis on the underprivileged population.
- The implementation of a public policy oriented towards the democratization of access of children and young people of Colombia to the enjoyment, knowledge, and practice of music.
- The safeguarding of the rights of children, adolescents, and young people.
- The formation of social tissue] (Batuta, 2022).

Sounds of Hope functioned at the national level, and it had many complexities that I will enunciate in the following lines: Colombia is composed of different and diverse territories, with specific complexities for each of them, and there are different threats to the security of the communities throughout the country, such as constant fear of displacement due to illegal economic activities such as unregulated mining and drug trafficking. Teachers who worked in these contexts faced many challenges: they often taught in remote territories, worked with children who were recognized as victims of the Colombian armed conflict, belonged to different ethnic groups, and sat below the poverty lines (Batuta, 2021; Vicaria, 2014), among other social issues.

On the other hand, the policies, instructions, and pedagogical approaches were dictated from the central authority of Bogota, most often without considering the voices and necessities of the teachers and work-teams in the different territories, hence, the

guidelines issued from Bogota often did not find practical application at the local level and needed to be adapted to the social and cultural contexts, which put extra pressures and obligations on teachers who already carried out work in complex conditions.

Finally, working with students who were victims of displacement, extreme violence, and lived in vulnerable conditions, may have presented special challenges for teachers, and made them vulnerable to experiencing Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder. Smith (2021) explained that teachers who work with students who have experienced trauma may be prone to displaying symptoms as if they had experienced the trauma themselves. In summary, teachers were expected to accomplish goals that transcend the musical sphere into the social realm. However, as Baker (2021) stated, there are no higher music education programs in the country that train teachers to work towards socially oriented goals (p. 118). One might ask then: how do teachers implement such complex programs, if they may lack the proper training? How do they accomplish the programs' social goals?

These questions point towards a clear tension between the training that teachers receive to implement the Sounds of Hope program, the expectations that are placed upon them, the goals that they must meet, and the stated (and non-stated) social aims of Batuta's programs in Colombia. In other words: if teachers do not receive training for working with communities who have been victimized, how are they supposed to transform those communities through music? I argue this as a researcher, but also as an observer from within the organization.

There is plentiful scholarly research that criticizes SATM for being overly

idealistic, sentimental, and utopic, and for hiding an authoritarian pedagogical model under a progressive discourse (Baker, 2021; Dobson, 2016; Godwin, 2020). The above distracts the field from objectively fulfilling its aim of improving society and the lives of those whom it intends to serve. This dissertation focuses on the work of Batuta teachers, because most studies on SATM focus on visions of the leaders, directors, and the stated official aims of the programs, and/or the experiences of participants. However, teachers are the crucial intermediaries who are responsible for implementing the program and without whom this work would not happen, yet they are often relegated to the background by the organization's directives, which do not count on them for the pedagogical designs of the programs. The above was very well documented by Baker (2014, 2021) and I can attest to this as a former Batuta employee. This relegation of teachers to the background is also evident in scholarly literature, which most often focuses on either the narratives of senior officials or students and their families, but hardly ever on the teacher's.

I argue that Batuta's rigid and vertical structure sometimes does not allow it to work from the bottom up, but that it functions from the top down, missing an opportunity to capitalize its teachers' and work-teams' knowledge. Therefore, it fails to represent the communities' interests and does not work with them, but it works on them. Therefore, my aim is that this research will help to inform the policies and guidelines of organizations implementing SATM programs throughout the world, but especially in the Global South⁴.

⁴ The term Global South refers to less developed countries around the world. For a more detailed description of the term, please see: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo->

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to delve into the experiences of teachers who work for Batuta in the Colombian Caribbean, and for this I focused on the following points: first, analyzing how national level programs and aims are mediated at the local level, far from the center, by specific individuals. Second, analyzing the ways in which those individuals are trained to do such work and learn on the job. Third, studying the beliefs and perceptions of those individuals about their work, such as its effectiveness, limitations, constraints, challenges, and joys. And fourth, documenting their suggestions for improvement.

As such, the research questions for this study were: What are the expectations of music teachers working in the Caribbean region of Colombia in Sounds of Hope? Are they looking to accomplish musical or social goals? How well prepared are these teachers to accomplish the social goals and aims of Sounds of Hope? Have they taken classes, seminars, or other formal courses? Does Batuta offer any guidance directed at socially oriented work, or do they only work towards musical goals? How do the participants in this study perceive their experiences as music teachers working in war affected settings? What are the musical, social, administrative, and philosophical challenges that they face in their daily activities? How do these teachers think the program can improve, based on their experience from the implementation at the local and regional level?

Through these questions I examined the teachers' everyday experiences, the

academic and nonacademic tools that they possessed to face their daily challenges, their students' experiences through the teachers' points of view, and the ways in which they thought the music programs helped or did not help their students. Finally, I examined the teachers' perceptions of the communities in which they taught and the ways in which the families interacted with the music education process of their children.

Method

I chose to perform an exploratory case study, using Yin (1994) as a primary guidance for the design. The case study consisted of teachers working in difficult places of the Colombian Caribbean, and it sought to understand if and how their training and their experience aligned with the social and administrative requirements of their tasks, so that I could better understand the implications of the program and identify opportunities for improvement.

Yin (1994) defined case study as the study of events within their real-life contexts and affirmed that these contexts have direct implications for both problem identification as well as the collection of data (p. 66). Even though I knew that I needed to perform site visits, I also knew that I would have budgetary and distance constraints. Therefore, my study needed to rely heavily on online and phone interviews. For this reason, as I was preparing my data collection protocol, I decided to perform a first set of interviews before moving on to site visits. For this, I took advantage of a training session that Batuta teachers had in the city of Barranquilla, to be able to speak with them in person and present the study to them personally, as well as organizing appointments for online and

telephone meetings (For a specific timeline of the events of this dissertation please see Appendix A).

Exploratory case study provided several benefits for this study. First, it aligned with the research questions that I proposed, which mostly revolved around how teachers perceived their work and experiences in the organization. Second, exploratory case study methodology allowed me to rely primarily on systematic interviewing of teachers and site observations, but also to analyze a variety of evidence, such as administrative reports, foundational documents, newspaper articles, and scholarly publications. Furthermore, as Yin (1994) pointed out, case study interviews are most commonly of an open-ended nature (p. 84). Considering that my aim was to understand the organization through the experiences of the teachers, my interview questions needed to be open-ended, so that I could construct such a narrative (to see the specific questions please see Appendixes B and C).

As a former administrator for Batuta, I had the opportunity to travel to every administrative department of the Colombian Caribbean, and I had the opportunity to speak with many social and political leaders, as well as people who witnessed some of the horrible acts of violence that took place in the region. This dissertation presents my interpretations and understanding of the data that I collected via semi-structured interviews with teachers and ethnographic fieldwork, as well as my own perceptions as a former Batuta senior official.

I was careful to follow the three principles of case study design as outlined by Yin (1994): Using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database, and

maintaining a chain of evidence. First, as I describe in detail in the next section, I had a sample of 19 teachers with whom I performed one exploratory interview and one follow-up interview. I also performed five site observations, and I analyzed two management reports, the organization's statutes, as well as Batuta's foundational document. This process allowed me to use different sources of evidence, which was helpful, because it allowed me to triangulate the information stemming out of the interviews with different teachers.

For the creation of a case study database, I kept a research journal throughout the process, and I tried to connect my past experience to the testimonies of the teachers; therefore, portions of my dissertation have used ethnography and autoethnography (Glesne, 2016). Similarly, all the teachers agreed to have the interviews recorded, which allowed me to take my time to transcribe the interviews and go back to them, which permitted me to be thorough in my descriptions of the teachers' testimonies. In the same way, every time I finished an interview, I instantly took the time to record case study notes, which I kept separately from the research journal. In these notes I recorded my impressions, thoughts, and the teachers' reactions to the questions and themes as they arose during the interviews.

I also maintained a chain of evidence through constant meetings with my dissertation supervisor. At the beginning of the process, as well as during the data collection phase of the dissertation, we met at least once a month. In such meetings, I presented summaries of the interviews and the possible directions in which the data could be interpreted, and my supervisor also proposed scholarly literature and shared his own

thoughts about what I was presenting.

Crotty (1998), referring to constructionism, stated that there is no true or valid interpretation of reality. With this premise in mind, I sought to analyze how discourse had affected SATM in Colombia and to challenge the generalized assumption that music has a transformative power that can help save and change the lives of impoverished and in-danger children and young people. Furthermore, I used a critical perspective to challenge and uncover how narrative accounts have been constructed, read, and interpreted in Batuta (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The fundamental idea behind all of this is that teachers possess practical and empirical knowledge of these programs, as well as the communities in which they work, and their accounts can help to co-construct their meaning.

Participants

As a former senior official at Batuta, I can attest that its human resource is one of the organization's greatest assets. My time there allowed me to know brave and intelligent people who are committed to music education and specially to working towards the music education of children and young people in Colombia. I was fortunate enough to know all the teachers in the Caribbean region and I knew that they possessed a lot of knowledge that could be made available to the organization and the greater field of music education.

With the above in mind, I requested permission to Batuta's executive president to perform my research, and I worked with Batuta's academic director in order to establish the participant selection criteria. We decided that participants in my study should have at

least five years of experience working in Batuta, and she shared a list of 22 teachers. The Academic Director informed the teachers that I would be contacting them, and I proceeded to do so individually. One teacher communicated that she was not interested in participating, and two other teachers who manifested that they would participate were unavailable for interviews during the research process. Therefore, my sample size was 19 teachers. I arranged the meetings anonymously and neither Batuta nor the teachers themselves know who else participated in the study. In order to protect the confidentiality of the teachers, I gave them pseudonyms and I took extra measures such as changing the names of the places and cities, adjusting their ages and other strategies to preserve confidentiality.

Even though I did not include these testimonies in the findings section, I also interviewed former employees, music teachers from different institutions, psychosocial professionals, and people in senior and junior administrative and academic positions at the organization. This was important for me to be able to triangulate the data that I was gathering and to understand not just the present, but also the processes that Batuta has undergone in the past. I also drew from my own experiences as a Batuta senior official, and in Chapter 4 I will present a chronicle from one particular experience that struck me while I was still an employee of Batuta.

Data Collection and Analysis

Collecting data was a challenge because my subjects were scattered throughout the Caribbean region of Colombia. I took advantage of the training session that took place in

the city of Barranquilla on May 17th of 2022, where all the teachers were gathered (but with a busy schedule), to start speaking with them and introduce the study. I was able to perform two interviews between the 17th and 18th of May 2022, and started scheduling online interviews for the coming weeks.

For the first set of interviews, I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix B for the initial interview protocol), which sought to have a full description of the teachers' settings, communities, their perceptions, and their general feelings about the program. Moreover, the interview questions aligned with my research questions. All the teachers allowed me to record the interviews, for which I used the recorder in my phone. The recordings allowed me to transcribe the entirety of each one of the interviews, which later facilitated the development of the codes for the analysis of the data and the presentation of the results. Being able to record the interviews allowed me to be free to fully concentrate on the teachers' responses and reactions, which at the same time allowed me to ask more questions when I considered that the participants were open to provide extra information. This process led to interviews that lasted an average of one hour and a half with each teacher, which provided me with about 28 hours of recorded interviews for the first phase of the data collection process.

Furthermore, following Glesne (2016), I took notes after each interview with fresh perspectives and I was able to reflect upon the process and made corrections and necessary adjustments for each future interview. Glesne (2016) advised to keep an account for every respondent and interview. For this, I created a database of the interviews in which I included all the information about the teacher, date of the interview,

and the page number that I assigned to that particular interview in my research journal and my hand-written notes. This process also allowed me to easily start making sense of responses from different teachers and to make thematic connections right from the beginning.

I finished the first round of semi-structured interviews in September 2022 and started coding and sorting the data right away. I used thematic analysis for this process. Glesne (2016) explained that “the goal of thematic analysis is to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of some social phenomenon through understanding the processes that tend to involve that phenomenon as well as the perceptions, values, and beliefs of people toward it” (p. 184).

For the initial coding process, I began to observe that when I asked teachers the first three questions in my interview protocol, which asked for general descriptions of the teachers’ academic life, their experience at Batuta and the generalities about their work environment, they all focused primarily on the socioeconomic conditions of the children and their families, as well as the hardships of their tasks. I followed Glesne’s (2016) suggestion to use gerunds for the coding process, which allowed me to think in terms on processes and actions.

I took the time to transcribe every interview and print it on paper, which I of course always kept at a secure location at my home office, and to protect the confidentiality of the participants I gave them pseudonyms right away before printing every interview. Having the interviews printed allowed me to constantly compare the transcriptions with my interview notes and my research journal. I used colors to highlight emerging codes,

and once I had a large number of codes, I started an iterative process to determine which codes could be rearranged into major categories and subcategories.

Preliminary emerging themes

Seven themes emerged from the initial process, mostly of things that the teachers found somewhat problematic for their jobs. First, teachers manifested that the socioeconomic situation of the children is complex, so much so that they questioned the validity of the programs if they could not do something to alleviate that situation. Second, teachers and work teams make personal sacrifices that go beyond their job descriptions, and most of them even make economic contributions to guarantee the operation of the program. The third topic that recurrently came out in interviews was issues with repertoire, which was particularly interesting, because there was no consensus on specifically what the problem was. Some of them stated that they felt overwhelmed by the amount of repertoire, others stated that the repertoire was too easy for their children and that for this reason they got bored, and others stated that the repertoire was out of context of the children's interests and that for this reason the teachers had a hard time keeping the children's attention.

A fourth issue was that teachers valued the training that Batuta provides, but they mentioned that it falls short for what needs to be done. Specifically, many of them manifested that they needed to perform musical and socially oriented tasks, yet their training revolved only around the musical ones. A fifth topic that naturally came up on interviews revolved around tensions between the musical and social aspects of the

program, and how these tensions were related to the expectations that the management had concerning the outcomes of the program.

The sixth major theme that came out of this research involved work with victims. Teachers unanimously expressed that this was a major source of problems and tensions with management, schools in which they operate, and communities. Furthermore, teachers expressed that work with victims generated exclusion problems for children who were not victims and wanted to participate, as well as attrition problems. Seventh, most teachers reported that there were tensions between musical and administrative tasks, which took up too much of their time and prevented them from developing activities that could help make the program more interesting for the children.

As a form of triangulation and verification, from September to the end of the year 2022, I performed follow-up interviews, in which I presented my provisional findings to the teachers. These interviews had an average duration of 45 minutes to one hour and were specifically focused on the seven themes that arose during the first rounds of interviews. These interviews allowed me to concentrate on the solutions that the teachers offered, from the perspective of their local experiences.

Positionality

My former role as Batuta's North Regional Manager shaped this study in significant ways. As the head of the organization in the Colombian Caribbean for three and a half years, I recognize that I exercised power over the teachers who were now research subjects in this study: that is, I was in charge of hiring them, deciding the

number of hours for which they were hired (which determined their monthly salaries), supervising their performance based on the guidelines of the organization, and if necessary, opening disciplinary processes and firing them, which luckily never happened. As a result of my former role in Batuta, I adopted a reflexive approach (Holmes, 2020), attempting to be self-critical about how I positioned myself in front of my research subjects and the preconceptions that I brought to the research.

My biggest concern entering this research project was that the teachers might feel that I could exercise power over them and that they might not be completely honest in their responses to my questions. I do feel that, at times, some of the teachers may have been uncomfortable with the direction our conversations took. However, I strived to position myself as a researcher and I always made it clear that my relationship with the organization was over. I think they had the frankness to express their discomfort when they considered it necessary, and in general terms, I was able to have a frank and sincere dialogue with them.

I recognize that entering this study, I had a preconceived notion that teachers' experiences and opinions were consistently overlooked in Batuta, especially regarding how the programs were implemented. I am referring specifically to academic issues, repertoire, social issues, and operational issues. In other words, I believed that some matters were designed in a way that did not necessarily work in practice and that teachers could help to contextualize such design; however, the organization did not take this into account.

As Batuta's north regional manager, I wrote an article for a Dutch academic

journal, about the Music at the Borders program (Puche, 2020). In 2019, when I worked on the article, Batuta was in a strong bid with the Colombian Foreign Ministry to obtain the resources to continue that program and I was presented with the opportunity to present a paper and then publish the article. I want to acknowledge that this article was an effort to help Batuta obtain the resources for the Música en las Fronteras project, and in that document, to support my arguments, I cited Alemán et al. (2017) and Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2018), which in this dissertation I look at with greater critical distance. This is an acknowledgment that because of my research and deepening of the critical reading on SATM programs, I have assumed a more critical position not just on this type of program but also on my own previous work and publicly stated opinions.

Outline of the findings section

In the following chapters I will present the results of my research. Chapter four will present two ethnographic accounts of my visits to Batuta music centers and one autoethnographic report of an experience that I had during my time as a manager. Chapters five and onwards will present results in a three-part structure: first, the teachers' accounts without any intervention or analysis by me, followed by a discussion of their accounts and their possible implications. I will close each chapter with a brief conclusion.

PART II**CHAPTER 4****Impressions on Site Observations****Institución Educativa del Caribe – City of Lagunas**

I arrived at the Institución Educativa del Caribe at around 10 o'clock in the morning during break time. There were hundreds of kids everywhere in the school and many different groups of young students, but there was one particular group that drew my attention: boys and girls were playing football (soccer) and there was one particular young boy who seemed to be the alpha male of the group. He played very rough and dirty, hitting the other boys and girls with his body and even using his elbows. What really struck me was how accepting of this behavior the other kids were, considering that they were getting hit.

When I arrived at the music room, the teacher, Andrés González was working with the students on a game to help the kids identify the position of the fingers on the pan-flute. The game was called “the fastest flute of the west”, and it consisted of all the kids moving the flute in their hands waiting for the teacher to scream out a note: “B flat!”. All the kids needed to play the note as fast as possible. From that game, I immediately inferred that this is a beginner group, because they did not quite have a full grasp of the positions of the flute, and they still played very noisily and loudly. All the

noise did not bother the students nor Andrés at all.

When the class came to an end, the administrative assistant took the kids back to their classroom and about five minutes later, she came back in with another group of students. This was a group of about 15 fourth-grade children, but apparently, a big group of them did not come to school today, because their schoolteacher had a commitment and canceled the class. This accounted for more than 50% of the class, considering that Batuta worked with groups of 35 children.

One boy entered the class a little late and sat in a back corner, without participating or interacting with anyone. He looked down all the time and had a very sad expression. A few minutes later, the administrative assistant sat next to him for a couple of minutes, but she did not accomplish much and left him alone. A few minutes later, he sat closer to his peers, but remained non-participatory. I later learned that he was upset because an older boy stole his snack.

The class was working on a song in an African language, which they already knew. They first performed the song, and then Andrés explained the lyrics to them in Spanish. After this short exercise, they started learning a new song in “paseo vallenato” rhythm. Andrés played the guitar and sang, and the children sang by repetition, but this was clearly a demanding task for Andrés for two reasons: first, he needed to use his head or “falsetto” voice and sing one octave higher than his natural register, so that the children could tune the melody in their natural octave. This took a lot of physical effort, and he clearly struggled with making the kids hear him. Second, there was a lot of outside noise from all the children and young boys and girls playing just outside the classroom.

While all this was happening, one boy approached me from just outside of the classroom and spontaneously told me that he belonged to this class, but that he did not come because he was doing homework.

When the class finished working on the melody and lyrics, Andrés explained to them that they were now going to work on the flutes and in a different class they would prepare the Orff ensemble (the plates). As soon as the children received the flutes, most of the children started to play loud and noisy. Andrés went through the position of the major scale on the flute as a preliminary exercise and the children learned by repetition as well. The class finished after about 50 minutes in the middle of great noise coming from outside of the classroom, as well as from inside, where some children were playing the flutes, while others were just playing around.

After the second class, Andrés had a 20-minute break, and we got a chance to talk a little bit about his work. He told me that the administrative assistant needed to go to a different building and from one classroom to another to pick the children up, and this was the reason why the classes never started on time and had to finish earlier than planned. This meant that they never worked on one and a half hour blocks, as they were supposed to, but they had 50 minutes maximum. This was one of the major problems that he faced: he told me that he felt that he never had enough time to prepare the repertoire, because the circumstances were not optimal.

After the break, another group rushed into the classroom. As soon as the class started, a group of teenagers sat outside the classroom, by the door, and made it even noisier, which made Andrés' job much harder. The group worked on the lyrics of a song

by repetition, with Andrés playing guitar and singing, again using his head voice, and the children repeating the lyrics. After about 15 or 20 minutes, the children received a “cartela”, which is a piece of soundless cardboard with the printed image of an Orff plate, in which the children practiced the movements mechanically. Batuta uses “cartelas” in lieu of real instruments.

When they finished working with the “cartelas,” Andrés hand-picked the students who seemed to have learned the melody to come forward and play on the Orff plates. Andrés asked the names of those coming forward and wrote them on the board, so that they could remember who would be in charge of playing the plates in future classes and the concert. This made me realize that Andrés had so many students that he did not even know their names.

At the end of the class, he quickly reviewed what they had learned, but the children were now very distracted. When the children were exiting the class, a chaotic scene unfolded, with many of them hitting each other and screaming for no apparent reason. As soon as the class finished, Andrés rushed to the bathroom and when he came back, he told me that he encountered a young couple who were almost engaging in sexual intercourse. This event led him to tell me that teenage pregnancy is a major problem in the school, and this is something that affected Batuta’s students as well. After this short talk, we said goodbye to each other and I got in my car, but I got the chance to give a ride to the administrative assistant and talked a little bit with her on the journey. She told me that the day had been particularly “quiet” and that Andrés was able to work “comfortably.” She also told me that bringing the children on time was an almost

impossible task, because she needed to pick them up from a different building. It was very striking that she told me that she could not take her eyes away from the children, because they sometimes got hit by the high-school boys when they were coming to the classroom.

This was my first visit to a regular class at a Batuta music center since I had left my position as north regional manager. The first thing that came to my mind when I sat down to reflect on this visit was the very difficult task that these teachers had to perform on a daily basis: they were required to accomplish monthly attendance goals, which were sometimes outside of their reach because of external circumstances; they taught music to large groups of children with a limited amount of instruments and musical resources, so they needed to resort to the use of “cartelas” in order to be able to engage all the children in the class; and they had to teach music in very loud settings and in classrooms that were not designed for a proper music class.

On the day of my visit, only 15 children out of 35 attended the first class, which, as other teachers revealed in interviews, was not unusual. This happened because Batuta’s teachers relied on the primary schoolteachers to “borrow” the children for Batuta’s class; however, if schoolteachers canceled their classes, the children simply did not attend school, which made Batuta’s teachers miss their weekly attendance goals. This had a direct impact on the perception of the teacher’s performance; their manager instantly put pressure on them to keep the attendance goals at 100% of fulfillment. This attendance problem also had a direct impact on the musical results, for which the teachers were also responsible.

When Andrés brought out the “cartelas,” the children participated with very little enthusiasm or emotion, so much so, that I could not keep from thinking negatively about the effects of the class. I even wrote in my notebook: “how the hell is this supposed to change the lives of these children?” I also reflected on the fact that the class took place during regular school hours, which made Batuta something that is in the normal routine of the students. In other words, Batuta was not different from any other curricular class. The only thing that was different was that the teacher had the support from the administrative assistant and the psychosocial professional. In other respects, this was a regular school music class, with no sign of Batuta’s aspiration to be either “music-based care” or an El Sistema-style symphonic program.

Finally, Batuta did not own any of the spaces in which it operated, therefore teachers needed to find borrowed or rented spaces in all its territories. Batuta operates mostly in what in Colombia are called “mega-schools,” which are schools with a capacity of up to 4000 students. These mega-schools are usually noisy and busy during the entire school day, which means that given the fact that Batuta did not have the proper space and the rooms are open, all the outside noise came right into the classroom, making the teachers’ job much harder. Batuta’s activities were therefore prone to outside distractions, as I witnessed during my visit to Institución Educativa del Caribe.

Institución Educativa Superior – City of Puerto Nuevo

I arrived at the “Institución Educativa Superior” at 7:30 AM, on a warm Wednesday morning of September in the year 2022, just in time for the first class of the

day. The room was particularly well lit and spacious. The small library on the left corner drew my attention because it had brand new editions of very nice children's books, which was not common in these music centers.

The first class of the day started right on time. The children entered the classroom, and they were very enthusiastic about their class. I counted about 30 children, and Karen Daza, the teacher, told me before the start of the class that this was her "star group." These were brand new children, who had started that same year; all of the children who were enrolled during the pandemic had withdrawn from the program at the beginning of 2022.

The class lasted an entire two hours, which felt like a long time to me. The teacher had a very well-planned class, with a different set of activities and a nice balance, so that she could retain the children's attention for the entire two hours. They began with a warm-up routine where the children stretched while doing vocal exercises and a little body percussion. Karen played uplifting background music, which helped to waken the children up that early in the morning. After these preliminary exercises, Karen asked the children if they remembered the song "La Fiesta en el Mar" (The Party at the Sea), which they all sang joyfully by heart. After singing two other songs which they knew very well, the assistant helped to hand out the "cartelas," so that they could all practice the Orff plates. This part of the class started to fall in intensity and the children started to get distracted. Karen chose six children to come up to the plates and practice for a couple of minutes, and she proceeded to repeat the exercise with a different set of children.

I noticed that the children who were not on the plates lost interest, and Karen

started to struggle to maintain their attention; however, she was very effective in reading the situation and bringing them back to the class by changing the activity. The second half of the class was more difficult for Karen, because the children became more unsettled as time passed. It felt as if the class started on a very high note and ended in a very low one, with the children raising their voices almost to the verge of screaming and Karen trying her best to even get herself heard.

I went back for an afternoon class, which worked in “contrajornada,” which means that these children attended outside of their school hours. I arrived about ten minutes before Karen and it was striking to me that all of the children who were already in the room were doing something productive: five children were sitting at the Orff plates practicing, three children were reading books from the library, one child was practicing the tambora and two were drawing pictures at the board. Some of the children walked back and forth from the library to grab different books and back to their seats. This class had about 19 children, and the administrative assistant told me that there were regularly a few more children, but she received some messages from parents excusing their children from that day’s class.

When the teacher arrived, again she told me that these were her “star” children, just as she did in the morning session, and that they came because they wanted to come, they were not there because they were instructed to attend by their regular schoolteacher. The class had a similar structure to the morning class: the stretching exercises, vocalizations, repertoire, plates, and flutes at the end. It was evident that they were more in tune and their general sense of musicality was a little more developed than the children

in the morning class. However, I wondered if the development of musicality is the goal of this program. The work with the flute was particularly tedious in both classes and considering that this happened at the end, I had the feeling that it made the momentum of the classes fall.

During the second class, I got a chance to speak a little with the administrative assistant, and I asked her about the children. She told me that most of them were new to the program. At the beginning of the course, in the month of February, most of the children who were enrolled in the program during the months of the Covid 19 pandemic and who received online music instruction signed up; however, as time went by and everyone started going back to their regular routines without isolation, the children started to withdraw from the program, due to different causes: inability to attend in the afternoon, lack of resources for transportation, and lack of interest, just to name a few.

I was struck that these children spent almost two years “attending” music lessons online, receiving instructions to create music videos that they would send back to Batuta. However, as they went back to face-to-face music instruction, they simply withdrew from the program. This did not only happen because they could not attend in the afternoon, because Batuta’s teachers were available to work in the morning during the regular school day. I presented this concern to the teacher at the end of the class, and she told me that considering that they were forced to meet a goal of attending to registered victims, it was easier to simply negotiate with the school so that an entire 4th grade class could attend during regular school hours. Because most of the children who attended during the pandemic were not in that grade, they simply stopped being offered the program.

Visiting San Jose and Sitionuevo

In the year 2018, while I worked for Batuta, I visited San Jose and Sitionuevo, two municipalities that, because of their geographical locations, have been two of the places most affected by violence and drug trafficking. I arrived at San Jose early in the afternoon and the teacher, Nubia Sánchez, took me straight to the public school, where Batuta had a space that the school facilitated. San Jose is a small town with just a few paved roads, and the school was located in one of the most problematic neighborhoods. Nubia told me that they saw young boys and girls using drugs and drinking alcohol just outside. Even though the school was muddy, and one could easily get dirty, the room was open, and it was not as hot as some of the other music rooms in the Caribbean. The room was equipped with one chalkboard, Batuta's distinctive banner with the image of the Orff plates, and the closet in which they guarded their instruments. It was an open room, and it was nice that it was ventilated; however, because the teacher could not close the room, the children were easily distracted by other children who roamed the room when they were moving from one room to another, or during their class break.

When the class began, the teacher introduced me to the children, and I got a really warm reception. This happened in every music center that I visited, and I admit that it usually made me a little uncomfortable, because the children treated me as if I was some kind of important personality. After the introduction, I asked the teacher to just go on with her class and act as if I was not there. The children were responsive and respectful of the class, but their level of musicianship did not conform to my expectations: they were out of tune, and it was evident that they had serious rhythm problems. I was not there to

evaluate the musical aspects of the process, considering that my job was strictly administrative; however, I could not keep my musical training out of my personal assessment. When the class finished, I asked the teacher to give me 10 minutes and I showed her a rhythm exercise to work with the children. Looking back, I think that I was out of line and that I should have shown more respect for Nubia's job, which I now understand to be a quasi-herculean task.

I got to see another class and at the end of the afternoon I went out with Nubia for a meal and a beer. She told me that she actually lived in Arenal, a town 100 kilometers away from San Jose. She hired a motorcycle to take her back and forth from Arenal to San Jose and the trip took about two hours. Before going to my hotel, we agreed to meet at around 7:00 AM for a short breakfast and drive to Sitionuevo.

The next morning, which was coincidentally my birthday, Nubia was on time to pick me up and we went for breakfast. I tried to hurry up, because I really wanted to spend time in Sitionuevo, but I did notice that she was deliberately wasting time and she did not seem very eager to get to class. She kept explaining that the children would wait and that we had some time left, so she took me to another place for coffee. Almost to the point of being upset, I insisted that we should go, so finally we got in my car and took the 40-minute drive to Sitionuevo. I admit that the car ride was unsettling, considering that there had been news about armed groups making presence in the area, and I felt as if something war-related was going to happen at any moment. I got nervous every time I saw a motorcycle pass by us. Nonetheless, the ride was smooth, and nothing happened on the road. Nubia told me about her students, and she did not refrain from speaking about

the violent events that had taken place there. She explained that it had marked the life of the town and everyone in Sitionuevo would always end up speaking about it.

Sitionuevo is a very small village in a rural area of San Jose. When we arrived at the village, I saw a group of young men sitting around their motorcycles, and Nubia explained that farming and having a motorcycle to transport people were the only employment options for most young people. A couple of meters from where the motorcyclists were sitting, there was a dead tree, and Nubia told me that that some people were slaughtered there. The tree died, but the community kept the dried stump to remind themselves of what happened.

We arrived at the elementary school and when I entered the classroom, I was greeted by a large group of students singing “Happy Birthday.” There was a birthday cake, and the walls were decorated with Happy Birthday signs, balloons, and decorative papers. They really made an effort to impress me and to give me a really warm reception, which I remember to have felt overwhelming. I later learned that Nubia was deliberately wasting time, because she was waiting for the administrative assistant and the children to finish organizing the classroom and for the cake to arrive, which was brought from San Jose, because it was impossible to get one in Sitionuevo. After the initial reception, I sat down in the back, and I observed the classes.

The standard Batuta classroom had 35 students, but I noticed that the teacher was working with larger groups, and during the break she told me that she actually offered music lessons to the entire body of students of the primary school. She did this on her own account, and she never reported this to the management because she knew that there

were not enough resources to compensate for the extra effort. She also explained that she had to do this as part of her arrangement with the school's management.

When the classes finished, we went to the administrative assistant's house, where I was invited to have lunch with her and her family. She told me about her ordeal during some of the violent days of the war in her municipality and how the violence had forever marked the life of the village. She also explained how important Batuta's job was for the school, because they did not have a primary music teacher and Batuta offered an alternative for the children and the school. After lunch, I was told that I should head back to San Jose, because it was unwise to return late in the afternoon, due to the dangers of the armed groups that had a presence in the area.

This was the first time in my life when I visited a place that had been marked by violence so profoundly. This visit made me reflect on the work that the teachers of institutions such as Batuta perform, the dangers that some of them assume, and the demands that we placed upon them. In the following directive committee, I reported my experience in San José and Sitionuevo and I manifested that the teacher deserved a mention in the committee because of the sacrifice that she made on a weekly basis. Sadly, Batuta's lawyer expressed her concern because the teacher was assuming a workload for which she was not getting any compensation. Furthermore, she stated that allowing her to continue with such a workload presented a legal danger for the organization. I was then instructed to send her a letter prohibiting her from working with the entire school and to limit herself to working with the specified number of children that the program demanded. To my regret, I admit that I drafted a letter in such terms. I know that Nubia

kept working with the entire school, because she had no other choice; however, she limited herself to reporting the number of children that the program instructed.

These events happened in the year 2018, my second year as North Regional Manager for Batuta. In the year 2021, before the declaration of the Covid 19 pandemic, the village was being threatened again and the names of some communal leaders appeared in pamphlets. I informed Batuta's executive president, and we decided to instruct the teacher to cancel her classes until the authorities manifested that the situation was under control.

My experience in San Jose and Sitionuevo marked my time in Batuta and left me with many reflections on the work that we did. First, I really understood all the difficulties that the teachers of the organization had to overcome in order to perform their tasks, and the arrangements that they needed to make with third parties such as the school and the communities in which they worked in order to be able to accomplish the goals that the program demanded. Second, and probably the most important reflection that I made at the time, had to do with the disconnection that sometimes existed between the center in the city of Bogota and the different territories in which the teachers at Batuta performed their job. From that moment on, I always felt that the teachers and teams needed to be heard and that their experience should shape the orientation of the programs. Batuta should not be designed from the comfort of a desk in a city where things work very differently from rural areas and small towns, and without the input of the people that work hard and make sacrifices in order to get good results.

On August 19th, 2022, I spoke again with Nubia. I apologized for sending her that

letter back in 2018 and she responded in a very empathic way. She said that she understood, and she knew that back then that I was following orders. However, she was very clear about her feelings of disconnection between the management and the people working on the local level. She explained that whenever there was a visit from someone from Bogota or from the regional management, they called the authorities to request back-up when traveling to Sitionuevo; but she simply hired a motorcyclist to drive her back and forth. She even said that she feels that teachers “have death glued to their ears,” because anything can happen at any moment when traveling on the road. She was emphatic about the fact that people in managerial positions at Batuta had no understanding of the difficulties that teachers had to overcome.

CHAPTER 5

Work With Victims

The Colombian law created a set of measures and actions to work directly with the people who were victimized during the Colombian armed conflict, and to repair the damage done to them, through strategies of humanitarian aid, attention, assistance, and economic and social reparation. The purpose of Law 1448 of 2011 is to

establecer un conjunto de medidas judiciales, administrativas, sociales y económicas, individuales y colectivas, en beneficio de las víctimas de las violaciones contempladas en el artículo 3º de la presente ley, dentro de un marco de justicia transicional, que posibiliten hacer efectivo el goce de sus derechos a la verdad, la justicia y la reparación con garantía de no repetición, de modo que se reconozca su condición de víctimas y se dignifique a través de la materialización de sus derechos constitucionales

[establish a set of measures judicial, administrative, social and economic, individual and collective, for the benefit of the victims of the violations contemplated in article 3 of this law, within a framework of transitional justice, in order to make it possible to make effective the enjoyment of their rights to truth, justice and reparation with a guarantee of non-repetition, so that their condition of victims is recognized and dignified through the materialization of their constitutional rights] (República, 2011).

Batuta's main program, Sounds of Hope, operates under the umbrella of this law and in 2021 received \$17,840 million pesos from the Ministry of Culture (Batuta, 2021), approximately \$4,7 Million USD at the time, an important figure in the context of Colombia's cultural sector. Sounds of Hope has a specific goal of catering to registered victims of the Colombian armed conflict, and in 2021 it worked with 19,101 children, of which 13,332 were registered victims of the conflict. Batuta teachers are delegated the responsibility to locate the victims and offer them the program. In other words, neither Batuta nor the Ministry of Culture guarantees to find children who fall within this category; it is the teachers and their work teams in the different territories who must do this.

Recurrently, teachers expressed having negative experiences with the victim's enrollment goal. Complying with this goal means that the teachers need to locate the children who are victims, convince them to sign up for the program, and then ensure that they stay in it, which for several reasons that I analyze in this chapter, presents a real challenge. In order to have access to populations with a high concentration of registered victims, Batuta's teachers worked directly with the public schools to identify the classes or grades where most child victims were found. Once they had that information, they negotiated with the teachers of the specific grades so that they would allow them to withdraw the children from their curricular classes, so that they could attend the Batuta classes during school hours.

The majority of teachers informed me that it is practically impossible for large groups of children to attend Batuta classes outside of school hours for various reasons:

once the children leave school and arrive home, they do not want to return; their parents do not have the resources for transporting the child back to school; and/or children attend other extracurricular activities offered in their communities, which are generally subsidized by some state entity and may be more attractive to them, such as soccer or dance. The teachers enunciated a series of problems that work with victims generates – in particular, that many children who want to participate cannot do so, and that many who do not want to participate are compelled to do so.

Several teachers explained that some children approached them in the corridors to ask them to be included in Batuta, to which they often responded evasively or simply told the children that they would take them into account in the future; but the truth is that they did not, because the teachers knew that they were not victims and by including them in the lists of participants, the teachers could fail to meet the goals, thus putting their jobs at risk. Andrés González was clear about this problem:

Yo te pongo un ejemplo del centro musical que estoy coordinando ahorita.

Nosotros logramos un convenio con el rector: nosotros le propusimos a él que nos cediera a todos los niños víctimas de tercero, cuarto y quinto. Verificamos a los niños y vimos que en un curso había cinco niños, en otro curso había diez niños, ocho niños en otro curso y así fuimos llenando los cupos con niños víctimas. El resto de los cupos los podemos llenar con los niños que quieran o que nosotros escojamos o que quieran participar. Entonces yo llevo al salón hoy y se levantan solamente los niños víctimas y los otros niños que el profesor haya metido.

Entonces nosotros nos llevamos a los niños víctimas a clase de música. Es más, si

a mí un niño víctima me dice que no quiere continuar, yo tengo que hacer lo que sea para que ese niño cambie de parecer. Entonces, el niño vulnerable termina sintiéndose desplazado por el niño víctima, porque mira, por ejemplo: yo llegaba a una casa y preguntaba que, si ellos eran víctimas del conflicto, entonces me decían que sí, pero resulta que los de la casa de al lado no eran víctimas y todos se enteraban de que escogíamos a los de al lado solo por ser víctimas. Resulta que yo matriculaba al que era víctima y al que era vulnerable no lo matriculaba, y resulta que a ese sí le gustaba la música y sí quería y ellos se sentían desplazados. A mí ya eso no me pasa mucho por lo que logré con el colegio, pero la verdad es que uno sí les da más prioridad a los niños víctimas. Yo llego a la puerta del salón y todavía tengo muchos niños que me dicen que quieren hacer parte del programa, y cuestionan que no puedan asistir. A mí me cuesta mucho trabajo explicarles a esos niños que los cupos están llenos y que no pueden ingresar. Mira, yo voy por el colegio y muchos niños de otros cursos como sexto, séptimo, octavo, me dicen que quieren hacer parte del programa. Y, yo siempre tengo que preguntarles que si son víctimas para ver si pueden ingresar, entonces es muy incómodo para nosotros, porque el que no es víctima se siente desplazado.

En otro centro musical que yo tengo, sale todo el salón de quinto de primaria. Sacamos a todos los niños de ese curso. Ahora, a todo el grado quinto no le gusta la música, a todo el grado quinto no le gusta Batuta. Y uno ahí es donde tiene que hacer de cuanta cosa para que a esos niños les guste el programa. Mira, yo tengo niños que sencillamente se quedan sentados en la puerta. Ahí han entrado

trabajadoras sociales, los ponemos de monitor, entre otras cosas, pero nada, sencillamente no les gusta. Mira, yo a veces estoy dando clase y hay niños pintando o haciendo otras cosas y yo no les digo nada. Hay otro niño que se queda jugando fútbol en la cancha, y pues eso es lo que a él le gusta. Yo personalmente, a veces cuando veo que está influenciando a otros, le digo, mira guarda el cuaderno. Me da cosa, porque yo sé lo que significa que a uno lo pongan a hacer algo que no le gusta y que le quiten lo que sí le gusta, entonces es fuerte. Esa parte es muy dura, porque definitivamente a todos los niños no les gusta el programa. Tenemos otra amenaza y es que las Instituciones Educativas que tienen jornada extendida hasta las tres o cuatro de la tarde me imposibilitan dar clase en contra-jornada. Esa estrategia de sacar a los niños de clase la tuvimos que hacer también por eso, porque las instituciones educativas empezaron a extender la jornada escolar y eso nos perjudicaba.

[I will give you an example of the music center that I am coordinating right now. We reached an agreement with the principal: we proposed to him that he give us all the child victims of third, fourth and fifth grades. We verified that the children were in the victims' database and we saw that in one class there were five children, in another class there were ten children, eight children in another class and thus we filled the slots with child victims. We can fill the rest of the slots with the children who want to participate or that we choose. So, I come to the classroom today and only the victims and the other children that the school-teacher has brought in stand up. So, we take the child victims to music class.

What's more, if a child victim tells me that he doesn't want to continue, I have to do whatever it takes to make that child change his mind. So, the vulnerable child ends up feeling displaced by the child victim, because look, for example: I would come to a house and ask if they were victims of the conflict, then they would say yes, but it turns out that the ones from the house next door next door were not victims and everyone found out that we chose those next door just because they were victims. It turns out that I registered the one who was a victim, and I did not register the one who was vulnerable, and it turns out that he did like music, and he did want to participate but they felt displaced. That doesn't happen to me anymore, because of what I achieved with the school, but the truth is that one does give more priority to child victims. I arrive at the door of the classroom, and I still have many children who tell me that they want to be part of the program, and they question or complain about not being able to attend. It is very difficult for me to explain to those children that the slots are full and that they cannot participate. Look, I go to school and many children from other grades like sixth, seventh, eighth, tell me that they want to be part of the program. And, I always have to ask them if they are victims to see if they can enter, therefore, it is very uncomfortable for us, because the one who is not a victim feels displaced.

In another music center that I have, the entire fifth grade classroom comes out. We take all the children from that class. Now: the whole fifth grade doesn't like music, the whole fifth grade doesn't like Batuta. And that's where we have to do everything so that those children like the program. Look, I have children who

just sit at the door. Social workers have entered there, we make them monitors, among other things, but nothing, they simply don't like it. Look, sometimes I'm teaching and there are children painting or doing other things and I don't say anything to them. There is another boy who stays playing soccer on the field, and well, that's what he likes. Personally, sometimes when I see that he is influencing others, I tell him, look, put the notebook away. I feel bad, because I know what it means to be forced to do something that one doesn't like and what it means to be taken away what one does like. That part is really hard, because definitely all the kids don't like the program. We have another threat and that is that the schools that have extended their hours until three or four in the afternoon, making it impossible for me to teach outside of the school hours. We also had to do this strategy of taking the children out of class for this reason, because the schools began to extend the school day and that was detrimental to us].

Most teachers had something similar to say. Another issue is that children must attend Batuta an average of five hours of class per week, according to the program's guidelines. This translates into around 20 hours of classes per month. It is evident that these are hours in which the children should be attending curricular activities and not ones related to Batuta. Several teachers said that, at some point in their careers at Batuta, they have had to deal with parents who did not know that their children participated in this program and who made complaints disagreeing that their children were removed from their curricular classes. Similarly, they explained that in some cases, schoolteachers allowed their students to participate with great reluctance and at the express indication of

the school principal.

The need to work with victims also created a problem of relations with the community outside the school. If Batuta's classes and activities take place within public schools, during class hours, in school classrooms, the teachers have a difficult time interacting with people other than the schoolteachers and school officials. Many teachers said that one of their biggest problems was getting the children's parents and relatives to attend Batuta's activities, and that when they were invited to attend the concerts, musical shows, and other activities, they simply did not show up, or did so in small groups. Several teachers said that, probably, one of the reasons parents and relatives did not attend was that many of them simply didn't know that their children belonged to Batuta, because everything happened within the regular schedule, inside the school.

Another serious problem was that of attrition. For teachers, it was particularly difficult when a single child decided not to continue, which created a problem for them, because in light of the fact that they were working with entire grades, it was impossible for another child from a different grade to attend an extracurricular class that took place during curricular hours. Most teachers reported that dropout rates were very high, as it was difficult to keep child victims of violence enrolled in the program. Camilo Gallego said that it was around 50% from one year to the next. Desertion happened, several teachers explained, for different reasons: victims of violence are constantly moving in Colombia because they return to the regions from which they were displaced, they obtain state-funded social housing elsewhere, or they obtain subsidies of different types, among other reasons. In the same way, teachers reported that whenever a group was close to

entering high school, once they did, all the children tended to drop out because they could not continue participating in the program with the same freedom of time with which they did when they were in elementary school.

Dropout was sometimes caused by factors external to children or their families. At Keyla Sarabia's music center, an NGO offered free transportation for a group of 70 children, so that they could attend Batuta classes. Apparently, the administrative assistant had an argument with one of the people from the NGO and the organization decided to stop supporting the program and denied the transportation service for the children. Therefore, Keyla had to urgently look for a new group of children who were registered victims, so she found a public school with a high percentage of victims and convinced the school principal to let them implement the program. They started working in the new school in the month of August, just three months before the program ended in 2022. When I asked Keyla if she thought that these children would continue, she emphatically said that they would not, considering that they did not have a proper space in the new school, and it was overly complicated for them to keep operating there.

Discussion

In the previous section, teachers referred to four specific issues stemming from working with victims: first, having such a high goal of care for child victims of the conflict generated exclusionary dynamics for those who were not registered as victims; second, to guarantee the goal of victims, teachers removed children from their curricular classes; third, Batuta only related to the children and their families within the school,

hence, it did not generate community relationships outside of it; and fourth, child victims had great difficulty continuing in the program over time, meaning that dropout rates were high. I will discuss each of these topics below.

During my time as North Regional Manager between 2017 and 2021, I had to oversee that each of the music centers would comply with the victims' goal to 100% every week. In short, out of 4,480 children who were enrolled, 2,688 of them needed to be victims in order to comply with the victim's goal to 100%, which was required by contract by the Ministry of Culture, which financed the program. Whenever a music center reported that just one of the children who were victims withdrew from the program, I would have to call the teacher and instruct him or her to get the goal back to 100%. If the victim's goal was not in 100%, a non-compliance report was sent to the Ministry of Culture.

Families who are not registered victims have the same difficulties as those who are. The children go to the same schools, they live in the same neighborhoods, and they interact with one another; however, because of the legal issues stemming from its funding, Batuta, as the teachers explained, excludes children because they lack the condition of victims. (Recall that those classified as victims may actually be the children of victims, meaning that their life experiences may be indistinguishable from their non-victim peers.) When I expressed this concern to Camilo Gallego, he told me that "we are the most exclusionary inclusive program that exists," and that Batuta's teachers "have become victim-chasers" (Camilo Gallego, 2022, my translation). To put it clearly: Many children who participate in the program may not want to participate, and many children

who do not participate would like to but cannot because they do not have the victim status. Hence, the exclusionary nature of Sounds of Hope.

Baker (2021) proposed a version of SATM that “would be more accessible and appealing to those with the fewest advantages – the most excluded rather than the most includible” (p. 311). In that sense, it is worth asking which description fits victims more accurately. Are they the most excluded or are they the most includible? Furthermore, what should be the participation criteria for a child in this type of program? Batuta is supposed to be an extracurricular program, so should children not participate voluntarily or at least have a minimum interest in music? What appeared to be happening in Batuta at the moment of this research was that children were taken to Batuta, the only criteria being the class in which the most victims could be found. To put it more clearly: Children did not opt to be in Batuta; rather, Batuta teachers came to agreements with schoolteachers and school principals, and they chose the classes in which they would teach based solely on what class had the highest concentration of victims.

This brings us to the second issue that teachers pointed to: By the time of this research, children were withdrawn from a curricular class and taken to an extracurricular class, so although it cannot be said that they attended by force, neither can we say that they did so voluntarily. Resorting to withdrawing children from curricular classes is a pragmatic solution to a profound problem that was not necessarily created by Batuta, but by a system promoted by the Victims’ Law. However, it is important to reflect upon the fact that children were missing 20 hours per month of curricular activities to attend Batuta. Should Batuta be replacing or substituting these curricular hours? On the positive

side, a couple of teachers mentioned that when the children exited the curricular classes, many of the schoolteachers got a break. Andrés González said that “it was a balm for schoolteachers” because they got to correct papers or exams, do other administrative tasks, or simply just relax. Nevertheless, the costs need to be considered as well as the benefits.

Other teachers said that Batuta was a supplement for the lack of artistic and music education in curricular public programs. It is undeniable that the Colombian national education system lacks music education. However, should Batuta be a replacement for the music education that the state should provide to all its children? It is important to reflect on the reality that a program imagined as extracurricular ends up supplying the shortcomings in the academic offer of public schools. Baker (2021) documented how parents and children are rarely interested in the social action side of SATM programs, and how they generally see it as free music education. In this sense, Baker argued that having to cover the shortcomings of the state in music education ends up constraining what SATM can do (for example, adopting more radical or socially-focused approaches).

The third issue is that since Batuta, despite being nominally extracurricular, worked as a curricular program (in the sense that it functioned during school hours and in the school settings); it forged little relationship with the community. What kind of work does Batuta do to create bonds with the communities surrounding the music centers? In one of my visits to a music center, the assistant explained to me that the children from the neighborhood surrounding the school were very poor and vulnerable; however, considering that the neighborhood did not have a high concentration of victims, the team

refrained from trying to attract children from that neighborhood, specifically targeting child victims from other areas. It should come as no surprise that parent participation and attendance to concerts was low. In this sense, one can easily conclude that Batuta worked as a proverbial island, completely isolated from its surroundings, rather than a community music project.

Several authors critical of El Sistema and models inspired by it have documented how this type of program creates barriers between participants and their social environments. Baker (2014) reported how El Sistema actively distanced itself from the community by portraying its surroundings as dangerous places to be escaped, while Baker (2022) described SATM as a bubble into which music students enter to interact with each other, but not with their surroundings, ultimately generating a kind of tribalism. Bull (2019) discussed the factors that make classical music predominantly practiced by middle-class white people and described her own experience as one of not engaging with other people from her surroundings, because as a classical musician she felt she was doing something more important than the rest of the people. Wald (2015) explained that to belong to this type of project it is necessary to have an affinity between the moral and ethical principles of the participants and their families and those of the program; therefore, not all children and young people can participate.

The case of Batuta is not quite the same as the ones described above, because Sounds of Hope did not work with classical instruments, and the program, even though is based on El Sistema, did not expect children to spend as many hours developing musical activities as some El Sistema-inspired programs do. However, it is paradoxical that the

victims' focus ended up creating the same "bubble" for participants. Furthermore, Baker (2021) discussed the responsibility that music students have towards the rest of society and proposed that instead of just receiving music lessons and performing concerts, they should also have a responsibility towards constructing the social fabric. I agree with this conception of SATM and I argue that Batuta should promote spaces so that the children can give back to their communities. Batuta should not be a passive program in which students receive music lessons five hours per week and nothing more. Batuta's students could and should use the program to work for the betterment of their communities, or as Baker (2021, p. 186) put it, "become political subjects in formation and prospective agents of social change" (p. 186).

The fourth issue stemming out of working with victims is attrition. On the same visit in which I found out that the children from the neighborhood near the school could not participate in the program, I also found out that the children who attended virtual activities for more than a year due to the pandemic stopped attending once face-to-face classes resumed. The reason was very simple: The children who attended during the pandemic did not live near the school, so classes could not be taught outside the school hours, for the reasons that I already explained. On the other hand, many of these children lived far away from their school area, and despite the fact that at the beginning of the year many signed up, almost all of them ended up leaving and only four children remained in the program, which forced the team to look for a complete group of fourth graders, with which they could meet the goal of caring for child victims. I followed up with other teachers and they all confirmed that something similar had happened in their music

centers.

I wonder, then, what is the point in finding a new group of children, taking them out of their classes during school hours in the middle of the school year, if they will not be there for more than a few months? The answer is that these children served the purpose of feeding the statistics, but there was no real process or future plan with them. Batuta knows, as Camilo Gallego told me, that attrition from one year to the next is around 50%, and as teachers clearly explained, one of the reasons is the work with victims. It seems like the attrition problem is easily diagnosed, so why insist on targeting a population that is prone to abandoning the program in less than 10 months? Does this kind of short-term numbers game really a route to the social transformation through music that is often claimed?

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that one of Batuta's main problems is the work with victims, not only because of the exclusionary dynamics that this focus creates, but also because the teachers' solution—taking the children out of curricular classes— may actually harm the children as much as it helps them. Considering that this dissertation focused only on teachers, I did not check with schoolteachers, parents, or school officials to see if there are repercussions for taking the children for five hours per week. I argue that it is of the utmost importance that Batuta review whether or not this practice may be having repercussions on those children's academic achievement. This should also be the object of study of future research.

This chapter has also argued that Batuta operated as a “bubble” inside the schools, during school hours and with school resources. This bubble also prevented students, teachers, and work teams to engage actively with the communities – something that is a vital part of sustainable cultural development and social change. There is no engagement with the barrios, other than the occasional concert or musical sample, which also usually took place inside the schools. Baker (2021, p. 187) affirmed that “the dominant conception of orthodox SATM has been that students receiving music education equates to social action,” and that “what is largely lacking from this osmotic model is the idea that social action entails students giving – in other words, a conception of social action built on service to others.” I also argue that the focus of work with victims, with all the implications that have been discussed here, prevent Batuta from offering a music education focused on the formation of participatory citizens or justice-oriented citizens in the sense discussed by Westheimer and Kahne (2004). That is, a music education aimed at the formation of participatory citizens would strive to help students to think about solving social problems and “take leadership positions within established systems and community structures,” and a music education aimed at the formation of justice-oriented citizens would strive to help students “question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice” (p. 240). At the moment of this research, none of this happened, and I argue that Batuta’s students were passive beneficiaries who received music lessons, merely based on their condition as registered victims, but had no agency in their music education, nor did they give anything back to their communities.

Batuta has been working with the victim approach for 20 years, yet the effects (positive or negative) of that focus have never been questioned. During my time at Batuta, I never witnessed a discussion about it or read any document that questioned that work or that proposed a critical look at that model. This lack of critical sense responds to a logic of pleasing those who finance the program, in this case the Colombian state, which has meant that, instead of being inclusive, Batuta has ended up excluding an important part of the population that could be interested in participating. In this sense, Batuta (and the Ministry of Culture) should seriously and critically evaluate whether or not this policy has worked, and as Jancovich and Stevenson (2023) proposed, ask themselves: What is the evidence to support continuing to do exactly the same thing that they have always done?

In 2023, the Ministry of Culture gave Batuta 19,000 million pesos for the implementation of this project. I argue that it is time to start reviewing the possibility of a change of approach. Baker (2021) recommended targeting children with less educational commitment, aspiration, and cultural capital; however, I argue that victims, just for being victims, do not necessarily fit this description. Furthermore, Bernatzky and Cid (2018, p. 91) affirmed that “after-school programs do not produce positive impacts simply by changing the environment in which students spend their time out of school: parental commitment seems to be a pivotal factor, playing a crucial role.” In this sense, Batuta’s Sound of Hope was designed as an after-school program, which in practice functioned as a curricular program, hence preventing parents from getting involved. Therefore, Batuta needs to look for strategies for engaging parents in the activities. This means that the

program would need to operate after school hours, which at the same time means that the victims' goal would have to be eliminated or at least reduced.

CHAPTER 6

Subsidizing a Large SATM Program: Shortcomings and Failure

Batuta is managed from Bogotá, a metropolis of more than 8 million inhabitants, and with the infrastructure, connectivity, and pace of life of any modern city in the world. However, things do not quite work the same in such a large city as they do in rural areas and smaller cities in Colombia, where technology and infrastructure is limited, and everything works at a slower pace. Furthermore, the realities and complexities of each of the regions in Colombia present a series of challenges so that teachers can implement the program to the letter, as indicated in the operating manuals of the organization. Some of the music centers in the Caribbean region are located kilometers away from urban centers, with limited connectivity and few, if any, companies that provide services that are required for some of the activities of the music centers.

In these contexts, not only teachers, but entire teams must make sacrifices to achieve all the goals that are imposed on them, and also, to be able to relate adequately with all their stakeholders, including the public schools in which the programs operate, the schoolteachers, and the families of the children. On a recurring basis, teachers must collect money to cover specific needs of families. Keyla Sarabia, for example, revealed that a family from her music center had recently been evicted from their home for not being able to pay the rent, so she contacted family and friends to raise funds to help them. Jairo Lara, for his part, explained that they frequently contribute money, because the

children tell the team that their parents have not been able to work, and they, therefore, have not been able to eat. In cases such as these, Jairo's team raised money and managed to help these families so that they could eat for a few days or even a week; however, Jairo wondered what happened after those particular days or weeks.

According to Jairo, the economic difficulties of the families persist, and he felt impotent for not being able to solve the problem in depth. In the same way, he explained that on many occasions, children came to ask for help days or weeks after already receiving it, and in these cases, they doubted whether the family was really in a serious financial situation, or if the family was simply instrumentalizing the child in order to gain something else.

On some occasions, teachers tried to help, but felt powerless because making financial contributions implied a serious financial cost for them. Ricardo Sánchez said that his self-perception as a Batuta teacher was that in addition to being a teacher, he was a counselor and helper because he had to solve food and social situations. Ricardo's testimony was very telling, and it is worth reproducing it verbatim:

Yo honestamente siento que no siempre logramos resolver todas las situaciones, porque son muchos casos y a veces no me alcanza para eso, porque yo tengo mi familia, no tengo dinero, eso lo hace Diana. Diana incluso hace más que yo, porque Diana tiene familiares de su marido y de su papá que están bien económicamente, entonces ella consigue donaciones y ella regala ropa, regala mercados

[I honestly feel that we are not always able to resolve all situations, because there are many cases and sometimes it is not enough for me, because I have my family, I have no money, Diana does that. Diana even does more than me, because Diana has relatives of her husband and her father who are financially well off, so she gets donations and she gives away clothes, she gives away groceries]

When prompted to say if he could say clearly if he had to put in his own money to cover needs of the music centers, he responded “I put in money. And that generates other difficulties, because I have a family, I have a daughter who is in college” (Ricardo Sánchez, 2022, my translation).

The financial needs of the families were varied, and did not always imply food issues, but they were equally pressing. Jorge Torres explained that during the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was practically impossible for children to comply with all the online activities that were carried out, because they simply did not have the money to pay for internet and cell phone data plans that would allow them to upload videos and audio files. Therefore, he and his team constantly had to help families with data recharges and minutes. Jorge said that considering that it was impossible to help all the families, they decided to hold participation contests, so that the children who were more proactive and participatory would receive recharges of minutes and data plans. This was an important incentive, because in this way they helped the children and their families to be able to comply with the school’s curricular activities as well, for which they also required internet data.

A very particular case was that of teachers who had to travel from one

municipality to another to teach classes. They all received a transport allowance to cover travel expenses, but they all explained that it is simply not enough, and that they had to contribute with their own resources to attend work. Two of these teachers explained that the travel expenses that they had to assume to go to work in other municipalities amounted to almost 10% of their monthly salaries. Jazmín Andrade said that having to spend that money on transportation, added to the fatigue caused by constant travel and the stress generated by the dangerousness of the road she must travel, made her decide to decline the job offer for the year 2023.

However, by the time she made that decision, Batuta managed to sign a new agreement in the municipality to which she traveled twice a week, generating an increase in her number of paid hours and another transportation subsidy, with which she could cover the expenses. Jazmín said that only under the current conditions she would agree to continue in 2023, not otherwise, because she felt that there was no correlation between the risk she assumed on the road, the expenses she herself assumed to get around, and the income that she generated. On February 15, 2023, in a follow up interview, Jazmín said that she had again accepted the same job offer without the extra income, because she was in no position to refuse a work offer at that moment.

The climate in the municipalities of the Colombian Caribbean plays a determining role in the social dynamics and the forms of behavior and relationships of people. Helena Rey, who worked in one of the Caribbean's hottest locations, explained that the first classes of the day were pleasant and were done without setbacks, however, by 11:00 AM the weather became almost unbearable in her classroom, which made it difficult to carry

out her work. Both she and her students felt tired and fatigued after that time, so they always had to keep hydration in the classroom. Batuta provided the work teams with a specific resource called “petty cash,” for hydration expenses and food incentives for children; however, given the number of children with whom they had to work weekly, the resource was simply insufficient.

Helena mentioned that for them it was necessary to have hydration, otherwise the class simply could not be done. The truth is that the organization did not differentiate between music centers that worked in 18° or 20° Celsius, from those that worked in 35° Celsius and a relative humidity close to 90%. Helena said that the team made a weekly contribution from their own pockets to buy water and soft drinks, especially for the classes that were taught between 11:00 AM and 1:00 PM.

In some cases, the contributions and efforts made by the teachers were directly related to the achievement of the attendance and participation goals of the children in the program and the resources for some of the strategies to achieve these goals came out of the pocket of the teachers. Karen Daza, for example, said that to achieve good attendance in the classes she taught outside academic school hours, she had to obtain resources, gifts, and groceries to give away as incentive for the children. In her music center they invented a strategy called “The Magic Board,” which consisted of a board with windows, and the children had to accumulate points to be able to open those windows, which had gifts inside. They also had a table with balls, games, and school supplies. All the resources for these types of strategies were obtained by them or provided from their own pocket.

Similarly, teachers who worked in Sounds of Hope had to meet a goal of working

with registered victims of violence. These specific goals created difficulties for teachers, who had to ensure that they located and maintained victims enrolled in the program, and to do so, they sought to work within public schools and during school hours, so that they could guarantee that the victim population was concentrated in one place. However, the strategy of working within schools was not exempt from problems and challenges, which teachers and their teams often solved without the assistance of the administrative and management part of Batuta.

Jazmín Andrade said that in 2022 she had to start working a few weeks earlier than her contract stated, because her school's principal pressured her to do so. The principal informed her that she had to start her work in the month of January, together with the rest of the school's teaching staff, or they would take away her right to use the room in which the Batuta program operated. Andrade agreed to the principal's demands, because she considered that it was easier to work without salary and without social security coverage than to lose the space and have to guarantee compliance with the goal of care for child victims in a different space, with all the implications and difficulties that this would have had for her and her team. If the resources that Andrade contributed in the year 2022 to cover her transportation expenses, plus the days she had to work without receiving a salary were added, it would surely come to what she earns for a month's work.

On a different subject, Batuta teachers were hired for a specific number of hours. Within that number of hours, Batuta included a few for planning, generally ten a month. However, many teachers explained that they ended up working more hours than

contracted, on many occasions for activities that were not described in their contracts, such as those that they had to dedicate to acquiring and securing funds and spaces with other entities.

In some cases, teachers also had to dedicate more time to their academic activities. Vanessa Zapata explained that due to the characteristics of her music center, she had to arrive to class at least half an hour before and leave half an hour later and spend many more hours planning activities for her center. In her view, this is a normal issue, and it has to do with what she described as the “dedication” of the workers. Vanessa thought that in any company the workers must be willing, when the occasion requires it, to work a weekend or in extra activities.

One of the great challenges of public policy in Colombia is the implementation of budgets within the annual term. In other words, projects with public money must be budgeted and implemented in the same fiscal year, which means that organizations that work with public money often hire many of their employees for periods of less than one year. This was documented by Baker (2021) in Medellín’s Red, and it also happens in Batuta, which generally signs contracts with its teachers for between 9 and 10 months, depending on the budgets that have been approved by the Ministry of Culture for the term.

Isabel Costa reported that lately she felt sorry for having lost teachers of very good qualities in Batuta. The reason, she explained, is that “the contracts end, and when they end, you don’t know if you will return the following year. So, that job instability is undermining our work” (Isabel Costa, 2022, my translation), and she believed that this

was the reason why many teachers left. Isabel regretted that Batuta has made a significant investment in teacher training over the years, but that teachers often leave the organization as soon as they get a job option that represents greater stability for them. In fact, when I contacted Isabel for a follow-up interview, she informed me that she was no longer with Batuta. During this research, I found out that the same had happened with Susana Nieves, another experienced teacher who had been with Batuta for more than 15 years.

Many teachers spontaneously spoke about how the amount of administrative work affected many of their academic activities and considered that this work had direct repercussions on the implementation of the programs with the children. Jairo Lara, for example, explained that in 2022 he was forced to cancel classes on many occasions to attend online meetings. Jairo complained that the meetings were a bad legacy of the era of COVID-19, because, according to him, a culture of immediacy was created in administrative meetings. According to Jairo, many of these meetings were summoned with little notice and for things that they already knew, such as how to spend the resources on a new project or to give specific guidelines for music centers, something that could be done with a simple email.

Several teachers stated that they did not allow the meetings to distract them from the pedagogical activities. Andrés González, for example, said that on many occasions he attended class while participating in administrative meetings. He did it using a single headset connected to the meeting from his cell phone, while he taught classes with the children. The reason, according to Andrés, was that he had to present concerts and that

the Academic Direction evaluated him for this, so he preferred to passively participate in meetings, without even paying attention to what was being said:

Yo la verdad soy de los que me conecto con un audífono Bluetooth y doy mi clase, porque a la hora de la verdad, cuando tenemos que hacer una muestra musical, o sea, la reunión no es la que me va a sacar a mí. Y con tan poquito tiempo, yo no voy a cancelar clase. O sea, el lenguaje es: profe, deben estar en esta reunión, y es necesario y esa clase miremos cómo se repone. Eh, nos mandan un diseño de clases virtuales para que repongamos, pero eso a uno no le conviene, porque con la limitación de tiempo que tiene uno dentro de los colegios, con el número del repertorio... Con todo eso a uno no le conviene mandar una clase virtual

[The truth is I am one of those who connect with a Bluetooth headset and teach my class, because at the moment of truth, when we have to do a musical show, the meeting is not what shows results. And, with so little time, I'm not going to cancel class. The language [of Batuta] is: Teachers, you must attend this meeting and then we will see how the class is rescheduled. So, they send us a design of virtual classes for us to replace the face-to-face class, but that doesn't work for me, because with the limited time that I have in schools, with the amount of repertoire... With all that, it doesn't work for me to send a virtual class]

The problem of the meetings is not reduced to internal Batuta meetings, but also to those related to the external efforts that teachers must make. Jacobo López expressed that he felt that at times administrative issues took on even more relevance than

pedagogical ones and that this could cause discouragement in students, because teachers were sometimes forced to leave administrative assistants in charge of the classes for them to attend meetings with other organizations. Jacobo said that it was not unusual that by attending administrative activities he failed in his academic activities and that this directly affected the interest of the children: "when a child is hooked and I begin to fail, the children get discouraged" (Jacobo López, 2022, my translation).

On the other hand, several teachers considered that most of the administrative and academic reports that they had to submit were repetitive and redundant. For example, they had to submit a report in a Word format and another report directly in the SIGE⁵, but both answered the same things; therefore, the teachers considered that they had to do double work to report the same issues. Andrés González wondered if anyone really read these reports, considering that some were very similar to others and the amount of information was enormous. What are so many reports for, who reads them and when? Andrés asked.

Some teachers considered that the issue of administrative activities had a direct impact on their performance and on what they decided to do, or not do, for Batuta. Jairo Lara explained that when he did something for Batuta, such as meeting with someone to find a space to perform an activity or a donation, he had to submit a relationship report. Jairo was emphatic in expressing that he now preferred not to do anything, so as not to

⁵ SIGE: Sistema de Información y Gestión de Estudiantes. In English Student Information and Management System. This is a specialized software that handles and processes all the information of beneficiaries who participate in the program. The software provides statistical information based on the data that the teachers and work-teams upload. See <https://www.fundacionbatuta.org/sige.php>

have to submit a report, because that unnecessarily increased his workload. For Jairo, as well as for other teachers, it was preferable to dedicate more time to musical activities, even extracurricular ones such as writing arrangements, adapting works, and other activities that added value to their work.

Keyla Sarabia complemented Jairo's assertion by stating that she had so much administrative work that sometimes she didn't even have time to sit down to prepare her classes or write arrangements, which is something she enjoyed. Similarly, she complained about the perpetual urgency of administrative tasks, saying that on many occasions, she received emails late in the afternoon on Fridays with administrative work to deliver on Monday, forcing her to work during the weekend. Keyla acknowledged that Batuta is a large organization and there must be procedures and protocols, but at the same time, she affirmed that the burden of this process becomes a problem for teachers and that it ends up affecting the children.

Discussion

The fact that teachers feel forced to contribute their own resources to support children and their families for issues of food security, rent and other needs is closely related to what I presented in the previous chapter: The socioeconomic situation of the children and their families is so serious that the operation of the programs diverges from what Batuta proposes on paper. Due to the above, and even though Batuta receives such an important budget, the teachers end up covering some of the needs of the children and their families. These contributions, viewed individually, may appear minor, but if added

up, they would result in a large amount of resources contributed by teachers and work teams.

One of my main priorities when I was in the management was that resources should be turned over to people on time, so that they could buy the necessary things for the operation of the music centers. However, due to the size of the organization and slow internal processes, Batuta sometimes took weeks to send money to employees. As a result, when concerts had to be held, for example, the employees had to either contribute the resources themselves or ask for credit with local suppliers until Batuta sent the resources to them, which caused them enormous stress. I personally received calls from employees explaining how this affected their finances as well as their relationships with local suppliers. This was discussed year after year in the administrative committees, but it was really very difficult to find solutions.

Teachers and work teams ended up subsidizing part of the program, not only with financial resources, but also with time and creativity. Cohen (2015) argued that exploitation is the main process driving transformations in the culture industry, stating that for writers this includes unpaid work time and an aggressive pursuit of copyrights. In a similar vein, Belfiore (2022) argued that artists are willing to work without pay, because their livelihoods depend on project based contracts, which translates into exploitative practices because there is an obvious power imbalance. In the same way, what Vanessa Zapata explained about working more hours than stated in her contract, is in line with what was reported by Belfiore (2022) about how in the arts sector, the number of hours that are budgeted and paid for are not really related to the number of

hours that are needed to produce work.

Are Batuta's employees being exploited in the sense that Cohen (2015) and Belfiore (2022) argue? Is the organization willing to analyze this critically and open a channel to discussing possible solutions? My experience as a former Batuta senior manager is that the organization knows about this issue because it was recurrently covered in senior management and administrative meetings; however, it has not been discussed carefully and critically. In other words, Batuta does not really understand – or want to understand – the implications of this issue for teachers and work teams at the local level.

What does this mean for the people running the programs locally? Baker (2021) documented the tension that is generated in La Red due to the precariousness of the teachers' contracts, something similar also happens in Batuta, but it also raises a relevant discussion about the understanding of SATM employees as workers and not as angel-musicians. The truth is that in Batuta, contributing with money, working more hours than those contracted, or carrying out activities that are not in the contracts, are all actions that are completely normalized. In many of the visits I made to music centers in my capacity as manager, the teachers and work teams told me about some of the actions they had to do to help families, such as putting in money from their own pockets and asking their friends and families to make contributions. I must admit that I never did anything to change this situation, and that only now, being outside, I begin to see how problematic it is. In this sense, I must make an act of contrition and acknowledge my fault. I admit that when I could, I should have raised my voice and I did not.

Having said the above, I must agree with Belfiore (2022) in stating that the fact that teachers end up financing part of the operation of a program of the magnitude of Batuta points to a moral failure of cultural policy in Colombia. Could it be that, in Colombia, this only happens in the case of Batuta, or are there other cases? If that is so, what should the Colombian Ministry of Culture do in terms of cultural policy so that this does not happen? If Batuta is aware of this, is it not under an ethical and moral obligation to promote an open conversation with the Ministry of Culture to review it and propose solutions? Should the Ministry of Culture and Batuta not consider and openly discuss the ethical and moral problem of implementing a program that seeks to work for social change, but at the same time ends up placing a financial, psychological, and emotional burden on its employees? Belfiore (2022) argued that placing these burdens on workers deepens historical difficulties of professionals in the arts sector. I argue that an organization such as Batuta should work towards solving and discussing these problems.

As I have already discussed, it is not the same to carry out the pedagogical work of the Foundation in the large and medium-sized cities of Colombia, with easier weather conditions and acceptable locations, than to do it in small municipalities and rural areas of the country, in which climatic and logistical conditions can increase operating costs, forcibly transferring this burden directly to teachers and work teams, sometimes without the organization being aware that this is happening. One issue might be that the budgets are distributed in the same way throughout the Colombian territory, meaning that music centers in Bogota or Medellin, where temperatures are cool, are allocated the same “petty cash” resource than music centers located in hot areas of the Colombian Caribbean. In

this sense, Batuta should examine the possibility of reorganizing existing resources, so that the budgets adjust to the contexts of each of the regions. As was mentioned by Helena Rey, it is not the same to work with a thermal sensation of 20° Celsius as working with a thermal sensation of 35° Celsius, which implies that teachers and students need more hydration, which at the same time implies more financial resources. A review of this type would favor greater equity and division of the labor force.

When I was manager for the Caribbean, my team and I had an annual goal of obtaining resources. That goal was the main indicator by which the performance of the regional managers was measured, and, considering that it was difficult to obtain resources, one of the things that Batuta offered to possible financiers was its installed capacity: teachers and musical instruments in areas far from the large cities of Colombia. This meant that sometimes we got a new funder for a project, and we simply offered teachers an increase in the number of class hours, as Jazmín Andrade described, so that we could offer music training programs at a lower cost, taking advantage of what we already had in the territory. The problem was that we could legally hire teachers for a maximum of 160 hours per month, but in practice, they ended up working more, because they spent more time commuting, preparing classes and performing administrative activities.

María Claudia Parías, the executive president of Batuta, stated that the Board of Directors has given guidelines on "territorial expansion, the increase in the number of beneficiaries and the expansion of financing sources" (Duplat, 2021, p. 156). Given that Batuta has self-imposed the obligation to grow annually, it depends enormously on what

teachers can do in the territory to relate to local authorities and support management in achieving new agreements, among other activities. Keyla Sarabia, a teacher with more than ten years of experience in Batuta, explained to me that in 2022, during her maternity leave, she had to disconnect her phone and not answer calls from management, who asked her to perform errands, even though she should legally be resting and taking care of her newborn son, because Batuta was about to sign a contract with the mayor's office of her town and she had a direct line with the mayor. As a manager, I did something similar with a teacher who had good relations in his municipality and whom I called on several occasions to ask for help with bureaucratic efforts to secure resources when his contract had ended. I even visited this teacher in his hometown during his vacations and asked him to accompany me to a meeting with the local mayor, which he did gladly, because it implied the signing of a new contract for Batuta, in which he was promised to participate as a violin teacher. Yet far from being rewarded for such assistance, teachers were generally expected to make further contributions of time and/or money.

In the last portion of the preceding section, I described teachers' concerns about the amount of administrative and bureaucratic work. My perception, which is also based on my experience as a regional manager, is that Batuta is determined to continue growing, but this growth is not in line with the possibilities and capacities that exist in the territories. For example, considering that Colombia is a geographically complex country, with many remote rural areas and far from urban centers, it is not easy to find music teachers with the academic or practical preparation to implement the pedagogical guidelines; therefore, Batuta hires teachers who travel to the music centers on school

days. This means that such teacher must travel, teach their class, and return to the place of origin, wasting a lot of time, effort, and resources. On many occasions such teachers are unable to meet the families of the children or interact with the community. If there is no community relationship, it can be deduced that a portion of the objectives of the program is lost. However, from the point of view of numbers and statistics, Batuta can show that the number of children has increased, thus complying with the guidelines of its board of directors. In the same way, for teachers who implement several projects at the same time, the administrative burden also increases, which, as I have said, takes away time from musical tasks or pedagogical planning.

What I can affirm, based on the accounts of Batuta's teachers, is that they are people with a deep vocation for service and that they are willing to make personal sacrifices that are not contained in the description of their positions. Many of these sacrifices, as I have sought to show, have serious implications for them. However, most of these teachers assume these sacrifices with integrity and a great sense of responsibility and work ethic. I argue that Batuta is, probably without realizing it, subjecting these workers to an exploitative labor model. This reality must be made visible and openly discussed in the organization.

Conclusion

I argue that Batuta allowed itself to be drawn into the neoliberal quicksand of the numbers game: more territories, more children, more orchestras, more visibility, but the same amount of financial resources, while maintaining goals that are clearly impossible to achieve without the sacrifice of the teachers and work teams. The foregoing has placed

an enormous operational weight on the shoulders of those who work locally, because excessive growth has a cost that they ultimately end up paying. This chapter has shown that Batuta, like other orthodox SATM programs, follows Abreu's urgency for constant growth and expansion, but the need for growth comes at a price, which ultimately teachers and work teams end up paying. Baker (2021) offered many ideas for how a sustainable SATM might look like, and when discussing the need to think about the climate crisis, he argued that "a music education system that reproduces the ethos of the economic and social system that got us into this mess hardly points the way out of it" (p. 377).

I argue that in the tangle of administrative tasks, driven by a constant and prevailing need for growth, Batuta has missed an enormous opportunity to create something that may be truly meaningful to the communities. What if Batuta freed up hours so that teachers could spend more time on creation-related activities? Wouldn't it be more useful to stop growing in numbers and start growing in quality? And by quality I do not mean more polished musical results, but the ability to serve communities through effective relationships, led by teachers aware of their social environments.

My experience, as well as the teachers' accounts, suggests that in Batuta, the urgent always prevails over the important, and that urgency is precisely driven by the need for growth, systematization, and homogenization of processes. The teachers are desperately looking for a rethinking of the labor dynamics in the organization. Surely a different work dynamic would allow teachers to work more effectively for the good of their communities.

I argue that Batuta has created and perpetuated an oppressive system within the organization itself, while outside it generates discourses of equity, inclusion, and social transformation. This is not exclusive of Batuta; Hadley et al. (2022) argued that “many cultural organizations have created cultural equity statements while failing to acknowledge their own ongoing histories of perpetrating oppression and failing to engage in the required work of dismantling oppressive systems within their organizations and their communities” (p. 9). Hence, I argue that Batuta must take actions to speak internally about these issues and commit to executing projects that can be met with existing budgets and that do not imply financial burdens and personal sacrifices for its teachers and work teams. In this sense, Batuta must participate in a mutual process of liberation from oppression in the terms raised by Paulo Freire (2014) in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which the oppressor recognizes his condition and helps the oppressed to overcome his.

It is necessary for Batuta to seriously consider reducing the number of children that teachers must attend to, as well as reducing some of the goals that they have to meet, such as the number of concerts, the number of children attended, the number of victims attended, among others. A large organization such as Batuta needs to have indicators and measurable goals; however, such goals and indicators should be achievable with the means that the project has, and not rely on transferring the load to teachers and work teams.

Finally, I argue that the problems need to be made visible. Teachers and work teams must be heard. To repeat the central argument of this dissertation, Batuta ought to involve teachers in decision-making and in participatory processes of planning and

design of their academic programs, so that it can eliminate the need for teachers to subsidize part of the programs at the local level.

CHAPTER 7

Socioeconomic Situation and Academic Performance

Teachers at Batuta faced daily situations that transcended the music pedagogy realm, and these situations affected the development of classes. Specifically, as I have explained before in this dissertation, Batuta works with impoverished children, who belong to the lowest socioeconomic strata of Colombian society. At the same time, teachers were expected to accomplish specific musical measurable goals. However, the socioeconomic difficulties of the children directly affected the fulfillment of all these goals, thus, in practice the implementation of the program became something completely different from what was stated on paper.

Almost all the teachers explained that it was very common for the differences and discussions that take place in the classroom to be resolved in a violent way, because in general, the children's environments were violent. Susana Nieves explained that previously, when she did not have psychosocial support, she had to make visits to the children's homes, and there she understood the reasons why the children behaved violently in the classroom: very small houses with big families living in overcrowding, children who did not eat breakfast before going to school and who were ignored and made invisible at home, among other factors. Susana said that when she arrived at Batuta, no one explained to her that she had to work with children in those conditions, and that she learned this through experience over the years. She understood that with some children she had to adjust the levels of demand and her methodologies, considering their

contexts.

Ricardo Sánchez, who had more than 20 years of experience, questioned Batuta for not offering some type of snack to the children during their classes. Ricardo explained that many of his students came to rehearsals in very bad conditions, hungry and dirty, which at times made him question the relevance of the program. He also stated that the children's problems were structural: most of them came from divorced families, in which the father or the mother was missing or that on many occasions, they were raised by grandparents, uncles, or even other extended family. According to Ricardo, the children came to class without energy to participate actively, so he thought that the first thing Batuta should do was seek an alliance with some entity or foundation that could provide at least one meal per day.

Karen Daza spoke along the same lines. In her music center there were children with diverse family backgrounds: families with father and mother, families with single parents, children who are raised by grandparents, among others. Some of the children in that music center had parents who belonged to guerrilla or paramilitary groups. She also mentioned that many of the children experienced domestic violence and that was reflected in the classes. These children who suffered domestic abuse had difficulties to adapt and participate in a disciplined manner in the activities, according to Karen. Several teachers stated that the problems of adaptation and violence within the classroom had been exacerbated after the pandemic. Rocío Navas said that with the return to face-to-face classes, it was very difficult for her to make progress, and that especially when the 35 children in one group attended, the situation in her center became chaotic. She felt that

on the occasions when fewer children attended, she managed to advance with the musical content. Andrés González expressed himself in the same way and said that what they had suffered and experienced lately in terms of indiscipline, harassment and displays of disrespect within the classes, they had never experienced before in Batuta.

Several teachers mentioned that lack of food is a serious problem in their music centers, and some narrated recent experiences that revealed how serious these problems were. Vanessa Zapata, for example, said that she had children who went to the music center just to sleep, because in many cases they had not eaten anything during the day. If the children did not have one meal during the day, what was the point in going to Batuta? asked Vanessa. For her, it was unthinkable to ask a student who was starving to stand on his feet and sing. She even went further and told me that the only benefit that she could offer some of these children is to allow them to sleep, because “when one is hungry, one goes to sleep” (Vanessa Zapata, 2022, my translation). It is a physical problem, she said, one that music is not really going to solve.

Helena Rey also mentioned the issue of the difficult conditions of the children and the food difficulties they have. However, she mentioned that in her municipality it is very common to see parents who, although they have jobs, have problems with excessive alcohol consumption. On some occasions, children commented to Helena that their parents were arguing at home because the father spent the money for food on drinks, and that is why they came to class without a meal. Jacobo López explained that he had recently suggested to the coordinator of his school to cancel classes and send the children home, because there were bad weather conditions and he felt that the children were at

risk. The coordinator explained that it was important for the children to stay in school, despite the bad conditions, because only there were they guaranteed a meal (that particular school had the benefit of school meals subsidized by the government) and the parents preferred to have children at school than at home so that they could eat.

Jacobo reflected on what the school coordinator told him and said that he believed that the children went to their Saturday classes more for the snack than for the music. In the same way, Jazmín Andrade mentioned that the day before our interview, her school distributed some snacks, and due to the despair of the children when they were in line, she was able to realize that more than half of the children in her class had gone without breakfast. Jazmín acknowledged that with the resources that Batuta had, it was not possible to meet the food need for the entire month; however, she considered that a solution and a redistribution of resources should be thought of, so that the situation might be at least ameliorated. Even though there were no concrete solutions, almost all the teachers stated that the food issue should be a priority for Batuta.

The food problem was also manifested in the continuation of the children in the program, as well as in the involvement of parents in the activities of the musical center. Jacobo López explained how difficult it was to get the children to stay in the music center over time and to attend the activities. He said that the children of his music center had very complex characteristics and that the population of the neighborhood in which he worked has become accustomed to receiving aid and government subsidies, and without gifts or incentives such as snacks or raffles of objects, they simply did not attend the activities. When they had parent meetings, they had to offer food, raffle objects, or give

out some prize, otherwise, it was impossible to get them to attend. Similarly, Andrés González explained that he had many children who never attended class, but on concert days showed up unannounced and unprepared. The reason is that, for concerts and open classes, the music center had funding to buy snacks and refreshments. Logically, having children who never attended class at a concert diminished the musical quality, which in many cases meant that the teachers were given a poor evaluation by the Academic Direction of Batuta. A group of teachers corroborated this and said that it was constant source of concern for them.

Vanessa Zapata also said that keeping children and parents engaged over time was complicated. Generally, parents did not attend concerts or other musical activities, and if they attended the first concert, they usually did not attend the second or the third. Her impression was that, with some exceptions, the families that attended the concerts were usually of new children. She reflected on the strategies that they needed to get families to attend, which involved raffles and groceries giveaways. According to Vanessa, whenever they announced that they would give away groceries, they had families lining up in the music center. The reason for this lack of interest in the program was simple: music is not the priority when there are other unmet basic needs.

Even though the issue of nutrition was so obvious, some teachers stated in private that they did not dare to express the problem in public, for fear that their bosses or colleagues would think that they were trying to justify low musical results with the problem of hunger. In this sense, Vanessa Zapata was very clear about how some of her colleagues had dared to mention the issue in training workshops and she heard derogatory

comments from other colleagues, saying that they were really using hunger and the socioeconomic conditions of children to justify poor musical results. Paradoxically, in a conversation with Javier Diaz, when I told him that many other teachers expressed concern about the socioeconomic conditions of the children, he said that the results of the music centers varied depending on different socioeconomic factors. Javier stated that

Es cierto que se siente una diferencia en los centros musicales y en dónde estén ubicados, en si funcionamos dentro de la jornada escolar, si el colegio por ejemplo tiene PAE, o si estamos en la tarde. También en el tema del clima, porque el desgaste que sienten los profesores cuando nosotros íbamos a hacer las visitas de seguimiento son bastante fuertes, y claro que eso va también en el proceso de formación. Aunque es una realidad y aunque Batuta trata de utilizar el mismo lineamiento en todo el país, los resultados son diferentes. Yo siento que es una realidad, pero no podemos tomarlo como una excusa para el resultado final

[It is true that a difference is felt in the music centers depending on where they are located, if we work within the school day, if the school, for example, has a PAE⁶, or if we are working in the afternoon. Climate is also important, because the physical wear felt by teachers when it is hot is quite strong, and we know this from when we go to make follow-up visits, and of course that also affects the music process. Although it is a reality and although Batuta tries to use the

⁶ PAE means Plan de Alimentación Escolar. In English School Meal Plan, which in public schools is funded by the National Government. Unfortunately, not all public schools in Colombia have access to the PAE.

same guidelines throughout the country, the results are different. I feel that it is a reality, but we cannot take it as an excuse for the final result]

In other words, for Batuta, external elements such as extreme heat or malnourished children could not serve as an excuse for poor musical results. Clearly, Vanessa Zapata's statement about the fear that teachers felt of giving priority to social issues over musical ones was not unfounded and responded to a real dynamic of Batuta, and that is that musical results must be achieved, regardless of other variables.

Discussion

The previous testimonies by teachers raise an obvious question that some scholars of social action through music have been asking: is music the appropriate tool to work on such serious social problems (Bates, 2016; Sloboda, 2015)? Bates (2016) argued that “addressing poverty and inequality through music education, then, cannot be a simple matter of providing music lessons and music resources to poor children” (p. 5). Given the fact that Colombia faces such serious child development problems, should the state be investing so much money in music education as a tool to fix such serious problems or should it work directly on investing in sanitation, infrastructure, vaccines, among other basic necessities?

Furthermore, other similar organizations are critically and openly pushing these types of discussion within themselves, as was documented by Baker (2021) in the Red in Medellin. However, in nearly four years as a manager for the Caribbean region of Colombia, and as a member of the organization's directive and administrative

committees, I never witnessed a discussion about it. What is more worrying, Batuta carried out internal studies using its databases and its Student Management System (SIGE), to try to verify the correlation between the implementation of the program and the supposed improvements in other academic and personal areas of the children. Those studies were never published, and Batuta did not continue with them, having found no indication of the correlations the organization was seeking. Although they were never published, internal studies like these add weight to certain scholars' questions about the effectiveness of music lessons as a tool to respond to deep material problems.

On the other hand, what I was able to verify during my research is that although teachers defend the discourse of the supposed virtues of music to deal with social problems, often without much empirical support, they are also capable of self-criticism, a self-criticism that, if it were done systematically and if spaces were opened for its discussion internally in the organization, would surely bring many benefits to Batuta and to the field of Social Action Through Music in general. Unfortunately, these spaces within the organization do not exist, and Batuta's vertical structure and internal dynamics do not allow this type of discussion. This lack of self-critical awareness was corroborated by Camilo Gallego, a former senior official at Batuta, who said in his interview that "in Batuta, we lost the capacity for divergent thinking. It is simply impossible to disagree."

The administrative and management committees, in which I participated as a member of the management team, were limited to talking about operational issues, achievement of goals and indicators, strategic planning, resource execution, and other similar issues; never about how our work effectively impacted or could impact the lives

of children and their families. In other words, Batuta's mission in the territory was never discussed. This may be a recurrent issue in large SATM organizations, as Baker (2021) documented happened in the Red as well, where "the curriculum was full (of music), the work rhythm of rehearsals and performances was excessive, and meetings were usually taken up with logistical, technical, and musical matters" (p. 113).

Furthermore, it is worth saying that in Batuta the discourse of social transformation is deeply rooted; I was also part of the organization and at first, I believed it without questioning, so it can be said that one possibility is that as Baker (2016) commented about SATM organizations, Batuta functions as a belief system in which the "absolute truth" that music is capable of transforming the reality of children is not questioned.

However, this contradiction between discourse and practice generates a deep identity confusion that teachers do not quite recognize. Teachers like Vanessa Zapata, for example, presented a grave account of the realities of children and acknowledged that music cannot solve hunger problems, but she immediately went on to say that she believed that music contributes somehow, and that having the discipline to come to practice, working as a team and performing in a concert generated benefits that alter the realities of these children. This is an interesting dichotomy: On the one hand, there is some recognition that the work of the organization may be a sticking plaster for such a big problem, but on the other hand, she argued that they help in some other aspects of the lives of the children.

It is worth asking if, at a managerial level, Batuta is aware of the reality that

children experience in the regions and that their teachers and work teams must manage at the local level. As I already mentioned in the previous section, teachers say they feel uncomfortable verbalizing the realities of children in public settings in Batuta, because they feel that their peers and bosses may think that they are looking for excuses to justify low musical performance. However, in light of all the recently published peer-reviewed research that criticizes El Sistema-based music teaching models, Batuta should be able to open spaces to generate these discussions and seek alternatives.

Such discussions were not held at the local level either. Batuta teachers attended an annual training in which they reviewed topics from the repertoire and pedagogical methodologies for the coming year. Although the majority of teachers expressed themselves very positively about the training, it is worth asking why Batuta focused its training efforts only on pedagogy and music and not on issues of working with communities with these particular characteristics. Everything that these teachers know about working with communities of this type, they know from their experience and from the awareness that comes from contact with families. However, this is something that was left to the discretion of each teacher and there was no specific guideline or procedure to work towards concrete solutions to these types of problems.

Susana Nieves told me that when she started visiting the children at home, she understood the need to temper her discourse, modify her methodologies, and adjust her classes so that the most distracted, violent, or disinterested students could become interested and actively participate in her classes. Rocío Navas, on the other hand, informed me that she had never wanted to get involved with social issues and that she

limited herself to teaching her music classes, which is what she knows how to do. Rocío has two music centers, one type A with psychosocial accompaniment and another type B without psychosocial accompaniment. She explained to me that in the type A center, she left all the discussions about social or behavioral issues of the children in the hands of the psychosocial professional, and in the type B center, those same topics were handled by the administrative assistant. What this shows is that teachers in Batuta managed social issues at their discretion, especially in those music centers without psychosocial accompaniment.

Is there any specific reason why Batuta deliberately decided to concentrate on working only on the repertoire during its teachers' training sessions and left aside the social problems that they will inexorably have to face? Duplat (2021) described the importance of strategic planning processes within Batuta, but, as I was able to verify myself, the issue of children's food security was never addressed in those extensive strategic planning sessions. Why?

On the other hand, Batuta has focused its discourse on the mitigation of violence through musical practice, as its president has repeatedly stated in multiple settings (Cultura, 2022; Duplat, 2021, p. 158). However, many of the children of Batuta, if not the vast majority, were not directly exposed to violence stemming from the war, considering that many of them, although they are children or grandchildren of displaced persons, have not had to experience the war themselves and live in cities and urban municipalities, far from the rural centers of confrontation between armed groups. I am not denying the difficult socioeconomic conditions of children, about which I elaborated in the previous

section. However, it is important to understand what the risk factors of children attending Batuta are, and based on the testimonies of the teachers, I suggest that although children are exposed to everyday forms of violence in their neighborhoods, the greatest threats for many of them are hunger, inequality, extreme poverty, and lack of access to basic services. In this sense, if Batuta really wants to work for the social transformation of Colombian children, should the organization not be more active in discussing the main social problems that its beneficiaries face?

Despite all the above, I acknowledge that it would be unfair to blame Batuta for the childhood food problem in Colombia, just as it would be unfair to place upon it the responsibility of solving a structural problem that corresponds to the Colombian state, not to a non-governmental organization whose goal is not food security. Nevertheless, Batuta claims to address social problems, and it spends a considerable amount of public resources implementing its programs. In 2021, Batuta reported income for a total of \$41,658 million pesos, the equivalent of approximately \$10,464,200 USD⁷. Of that value, 45.7% came from agreements with national government entities and 42.2% came from other public companies and entities (Batuta, 2021). It is worth asking, then, whether in a country with the needs of Colombia, where many children come to class without eating and have serious problems developing basic activities, it is justifiable to spend nearly \$9.2 million USD on a publicly funded music training program on the grounds that it is socially transformational. These numbers raise questions about whether Batuta really

⁷ The calculation of the value in dollars is made with the representative market rate as of December 31, 2021

meets pressing needs of the most disadvantaged children in Colombia, or whether, on the contrary, it represents primarily a logic of extension of power by the music education sector.

Furthermore, the budget of the Ministry of Culture of Colombia for 2021 was \$353,834 million pesos (Cultura, 2021), which means that that year, Batuta managed a budget of nearly 12% of that of the budget of the Ministry of Culture. This is important, because although Batuta does not receive all its resources directly from the Ministry of Culture, most of them do come from the public sector. It is therefore worth asking what the role of Batuta in the design and implementation of cultural public policy in Colombia is, and what influence it has or can have in working towards a better distribution of resources, so that the food conditions of children can be improved in the different territories. In this sense, it is worth bringing up Logan's (2017) criticism of Venezuela's El Sistema for requiring greater resources than the Venezuelan Ministry of Culture and for constituting a "political opportunism driven by the financial and cultural exploitation of the poor" (p. 248). Is Batuta really working towards social justice, or is its discourse of social transformation through music a cover up for a neoliberal organization working merely towards increasing its financial resources to secure its own survival?

Baker (2021) questioned the lack of research to support the argument that music education is the appropriate tool to solve problems that arise in the field of SATM (p. 330). Similarly, Sloboda (2015) stated that while it is important to advocate for the benefits of music and music education, it is nevertheless important not to go beyond what the evidence supports. In this sense, I ask, what justifications do the Ministry of Culture

of Colombia and the other government organizations that finance Batuta have to fund such a large-scale program, when its resources could be used to work directly on food security for children with nutrition problems in the country? Could it be that Batuta is, as (Logan, 2016) argues, turning “music into a cultural veil to be draped over failures of the state and the inconvenient facts of everyday life” (p. 61)?

I believe that it is necessary to have these uncomfortable conversations inside and outside the organization, because the truth is that the reality of children and their families is much more complex than what is realized at first sight. And, most importantly, music and music education are obliged to engage fully with social realities if they are to present themselves in terms of social action or transformation; therefore, Batuta needs to be aware of what it implies for a five-year-old child, who has not had breakfast, to go to music class and whether it actually has any practical effect on such a child. One way to start this conversation may be by asking what Batuta does or can do to make visible the problems of food deficiencies suffered by children and their families. Here, I bring Bates’ (2016) argument that “music educators can and should play a role in addressing poverty and inequality — as long as they recognize up-front the cultural, personal, and social affluence of people who have otherwise been subjected to political and economic impoverishment” (p. 4). But how should Batuta engage in these conversations? It is impossible to provide a straight answer to such a complex question, however, in the following section, I will discuss some ideas more at length.

Conclusion

In November 2022, María Claudia Parias, the executive president of Batuta signed an article in *The Ensemble* in which she affirmed that Batuta is "the world's second incarnation of El Sistema" (Parias, 2022, para. 3). Similarly, Batuta's mission is achieved through what the organization calls "excellent music education" (Batuta, 2022, para. 2). Clearly, Batuta continues to base its actions on the ethos of the Venezuelan El Sistema: providing music education but framing it as social work. As has been argued repeatedly, there is no robust evidence that the El Sistema model works towards solving social problems. Abreu's discourse on overcoming poverty through the spiritual wealth of music—"The most miserable and tragic thing about poverty is not the lack of bread or roof, but the feeling of being no-one" (Abreu, 2009), to quote his famous TED speech—has become world-famous, but my research suggests that material poverty actually prevents many children from enjoying or gaining much benefit from their music lessons, supporting Fink's (2016) argument that Abreu's view is simply idealism. How are children supposed to be saved by music if they cannot concentrate or if go to sleep in class because of a lack of energy?

El Sistema-inspired organizations such as Batuta use a very effective communication strategy that has allowed them to reach international audiences: portraying individual cases of success in short documentaries and videos for social media (see Batuta, 2023). However, this is a misleading portrayal of a crude reality. A few do indeed manage to make it as musicians and transform their lives, but many, perhaps the majority, fall through the cracks of the poverty traps. The data provided by OECD speaks

for itself: In Colombia, “it could take 11 generations for children of poor families to reach the average income” and “inequalities particularly affect ethnic minorities and displaced people” (OECD, 2019, p. 34). Furthermore, attrition in SATM programs is notably high: Baker (2021) stated that nearly 40% of the Red’s students dropped out within a year, while Alemán et al. (2017) found that just above half of the students remained in the program for two full semesters. In the case of Batuta, there is no clear public data, but Camilo Gallego stated that “the permanence of children from one year to the next is more or less 50%. The other 50% is rotating population” (Camilo Gallego, 2022, my translation). Why are half the children dropping out and what happens with them once they do?

The first conclusion that I come to is very simple: Uncomfortable discussions need take place, and in this sense, the teachers and work teams of the different territories have a lot to say. Batuta ought to move away from the utopian discursive strategy of El Sistema, at the very least internally, and reconsider the verticality of its administration and communications model, so that it can begin to open spaces to document the experiences, suggestions, and proposals stemming out of its work teams. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging shortcomings and working towards pragmatic solutions. The negation of failure has been a constant in cultural projects and policies, and it has fostered overstated aims and narratives of success, obscuring serious discussion (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2023); this of course includes El Sistema-inspired programs. This dissertation is an effort to open a space for self-critique as a source of change.

I argue that instead of perpetuating a utopian discourse on the benefits of musical

practice, as Boeskov described it, Batuta could generate spaces to openly discuss, deepen, and propose solutions to the problem. Elliott (2012), stated that music educators should be more concerned about the reasons why they do what they do and not so much about how they do what they do. In that sense, he proposed that praxis should combine active and critical reflection, dedicated to the well-being and care of people. I argue that Batuta should implement such practices and promote critical reflections with its teachers and work teams. In a sense, the teachers already reflect on these issues, however, they just do not find echo at the upper management level.

Javier Díaz, for example, suggested to me that a simple reorganization of the petty cash budget could help buy snacks to give the children during classes. Although there is a specific resource to buy snacks and drinks, what is bought are sweets and ultra-processed foods, and in very small quantities. When I commented on this proposal to Jairo Lara, he told me that he fully agreed, and although he acknowledged that it is difficult, because resources are already limited, and they have to cover concerts and pay salaries, he said that surely a way out could be found. Jairo even suggested a campaign for each teacher to make a monthly donation of about \$2 USD, which according to him, teachers spend on a soft drink or a beer, to create a food fund. Perhaps in practice, these two proposals might end up being insufficient or in some way unfeasible. Arguably, such a large and expensive program should not be co-subsidized by its employees. However, these ideas demonstrate the ability of Batuta's teachers to make concrete proposals for specific problems. I insist that opening spaces so that teachers and work teams can express their solutions from the territory is of the greatest importance.

A second conclusion is the capability of Batuta to make local problems visible at the national and international level. Batuta has a huge platform, which allows it to reach larger audiences, and this platform can very effectively communicate serious issues like the one described in this chapter. Instead of adopting an obscuring discourse on social justice, Batuta could think more deeply about why it does what it does and work towards real solutions to the real problems that the teachers themselves manifest. What is more important than feeding children? Instead of thinking about the growth of its musical centers and its financial resources, Batuta could, with its current structure, become an ally of the Colombian government in identifying serious social problems and an agent to bring them to light. In the same way, Batuta could help in the search for allies to solve these problems, at both international and national levels, as well as at the local level.

In this sense, teachers have the capacity to obtain resources at the local level, but in the same way, they are concerned about administrative and bureaucratic constraints to advance in said efforts. Jairo Lara, for example, was very clear when he told me that he preferred not to request donations from private companies and micro-enterprises, for fear that his administrative burden would increase. Batuta can create channels, committees, or thinking sessions for the solution of community problems, which can be led by teachers, social professionals, and administrative assistants who work in the territories. In my view, all the experience and knowledge of the territories that Batuta officials have at the local level is lost in the bureaucratic tangle of a huge organization that shows great resistance to change.

Arango (2017) proposed a differential pedagogical approach that includes

understanding the world of Afro-descendant communities in the Colombian Pacific and argued that “Batuta’s challenge is to recognize the cognitive atmospheres that operate in Afro-descendant communities and take advantage of them to build emergency platforms, creatively and without falling into essentialism, in order to strengthen the pedagogical spheres” (p. 135). I support this proposal, but this time not only from the pedagogical point of view, but from the social point of view as well. I think the teachers and the rest of the work teams can lead a rethinking of Batuta’s actions, based on their knowledge of the communities, so that the organization better adapts to the context and needs of the people whom Batuta claims to serve. These discussions should revolve around the following questions: What good is music education when the children cannot eat? What is excellent music education when children are hungry? What does that mean?

I want to end this chapter by suggesting that Batuta teachers actively think of the profession as one that seeks justice and works for the good of the community, after all, that is what Batuta states that it does. Jorgensen (2015) stated that teachers should be interested in social justice and should try to establish links to policymaking, research, and practice; furthermore, music educators ought to be motivated to help create laws and regulations that serve the interests of justice (p. 24). For that reason, it is important that Batuta teachers take advantage of the knowledge they have of the different communities in which they work, so that they can make practical, discursive, and philosophical contributions that help modify and adjust educational policies, thus seeking to improve the conditions of the people Batuta serves.

This chapter has uncovered some of the reasons that impede the accomplishment

of goals as Batuta publicly states. Furthermore, it has shown that Batuta cannot work towards solving pressing social needs, and that in fact, social needs prevent children from attending and benefiting from this program. This points to contradictions between the social and musical aspects of Batuta.

Chapter 8

Music vs. Social

Baker (2021) documented the tensions that arose between music teachers from the Red de Escuelas de Música de Medellín and their psychologist and social worker colleagues in the implementation of the Red's programs. Batuta and the Red are similar organizations in their size and aims. Furthermore, they were both created under the influence of El Sistema. Given the similarities between both organizations, it was only logical to include this topic in this research.

This project had eight research questions, and four of them revolved around the interrelation of the musical and social aspects. For clarity, I restate them here: Are they [teachers] looking to accomplish musical or social goals? How well prepared are these teachers to accomplish the social goals and aims of Sounds of Hope? Have they taken classes, seminars, or other formal courses? Does Batuta offer any guidance directed at socially oriented work, or do they only work towards musical goals? To answer these questions, I needed to understand the teachers' perceptions of the social side of Batuta, therefore, as an exercise, I invited teachers to read Batuta's guiding principles from its website, and then asked how those principles were translated into the music classroom.

The interpretation of Batuta's philosophical principles varied enormously from one teacher to another, and in some cases, they simply informed me that they did not have these principles in mind and that they were limited to being music teachers, which is the

reason that they were hired by Batuta. Rocío Navas, for example, said that she focused her work on music, because for her the psychosocial component was related to respect for the individualities of children and their families. For her, treating children well was essential, which includes seeking a good relationship with children and their families. Rocío worked in two music centers: one type A, which had psychosocial support, and one type B, which did not. When asked about the differences in the behavior between the children from the two centers, she explained that in practical terms, for the work that she did, there was no difference, because she taught the same repertoire, the same songs and techniques, and that psychosocial issues were dealt directly by the social worker of the type A music center. However, in the type B musical center, Rocío admitted that she really did not know how to deal with some social situations that arose, and she followed her own intuition.

For her part, Isabel Costa, who worked in a type A music center, which had psychosocial accompaniment, explained that in her music center complex social situations constantly arose, especially related to the violent ways in which the children interacted with each other. The behavioral problem in that music center was so complex that even small children leave class without paying attention to Isabel's observations, and for that reason she always had to keep the classroom door closed to control the children inside. Recently, they had to mediate a case of sexual abuse between two 9-year-old boys. All these problems, Isabel explained, forced her team to focus musical and psychosocial work on children on improving the way they interacted with each other. On the other hand, Mrs. Costa tried to solve the affective and emotional issues by giving

specific functions to children according to their emotional needs, for example “give more responsibility to the shyest child and make him do musical interpretations, so that he changes and feels better” (Isabel Costa, 2022, my translation).

Isabel considered that, although the psychosocial care component had been gaining momentum in Batuta, it still did not have the relevance it should. It is striking that she mentioned that when they receive follow-up visits from their superiors from Bogota, what was reviewed and evaluated was the musical process, and very little was said about what happened in the musical center in psychosocial terms. Regarding this, Isabel explained that the social situations that arose had to be handled independently, because her team had to concentrate on preparing the repertoire and could not dedicate time to other things; for them it was extremely important to concentrate on achieving musical goals and she said that she felt that “clearly the psychosocial issue is not the central focus of what we do” (Isabel Costa, 2022, my translation). For Isabel, there was no conflict between the musical and the psychosocial, because in her musical center there was a clear primacy of the musical over the psychosocial and she affirmed that all her work team understood that this is the logic of relationship between the two components.

When I asked them to read Batuta’s guiding principles from the organization’s website, several teachers used themselves as an example of social transformation, and they explained that they tried to use their own life stories to explain to the children that they have paths to ascend socially. Such was the case of Jairo Lara, who, although he recognized that music was not the exact “medicine” for the children’s problems, was convinced that it did manage to transform their lives, just as it had transformed his. Jairo

explained that he tries to present himself as he is, without “masks or pretensions,” talking to the children and telling them his own story. He said that he tries to get children to see him as a role model, and to convince them that through music they can generate income to financially support their families. He acknowledged, however, that serious problems such as malnutrition, displacement, lack of opportunities, or child abuse are not resolved in the classroom; however, he considered that by being there and offering his music classes, he managed to generate incentives for children to succeed.

For Yaneth Mantilla, Batuta’s mission has to do with the responsibility that teaching implies. For her, teaching is an intrinsically social activity, which is why she considered that what she should do is be responsible and fully comply with the teaching goals that the program imposed on her. Mantilla appreciated the fact that Batuta has allowed her to develop her teaching work and expressed that she should give back to the organization for the training opportunities it has given her by being responsible and consistent with her work and contributing socially through music education. However, she made a historical account of Batuta, in which she explained that the organization was born as a musical training process focused on symphonic music, but over time it discovered that it was more cost-efficient to implement an Orff ensemble model. This way, explained Mantilla, Batuta was able to increase coverage and end up serving 18,000 children nationwide.

Considering that Batuta was born as an eminently music education organization and was later given the novelty of the psychosocial component within its processes, Yaneth reflected and admitted that currently it is not known if the musical process is

being taken to its maximum potential or if, on the contrary, it was focusing more on the psychosocial process. Given the ambiguity that she perceived between the musical and psychosocial processes, she proposed that a reflection be made on the matter within the organization.

Yaneth had many years of experience in Batuta, so she knew the causes and genesis of many of the internal processes. When I pursued the question about possible tensions between psychosocial and musical processes, she provided an account of the birth of the psychosocial process, which presented a perspective on Batuta's adaptive process to circumstances of the territories, and explained the challenges that they faced in this long process. Yaneth traced how the pedagogical model evolved over the years, how local circumstances and the demands of the project's funders forced Batuta to adapt and adjust, and made specific proposals to the model based on Batuta's current experience:

Pues a mí me parece que el tema social sí es importante. Es importante, porque esa es una necesidad que tenemos nosotros de tener un apoyo. Y, yo creo que suma más tener el componente psicosocial que colocar a dos profesores en el mismo salón. Es decir, creo que es algo estratégico para lo que Batuta desarrolla y de lo que necesita Batuta para sostenerse. Antes, nosotros en el formato de pre-orquesta, nosotros trabajábamos con dos profesores. Es decir, en un salón había dos profesores: uno tocaba la guitarra y cantaba y el otro apoyaba y hacía otra cosa, porque eso nació de lo que vivieron María Cristina y Martha Sofía, una a cada lado haciendo música. Entonces eso se replicó. Cuando ese proyecto se convierte en una opción

sería para que Batuta se sostenga económicamente, se definió empezar a aumentar el número de niños que se atendían en el salón, pero ahí nos dimos cuenta de que no se podían contratar tantos profesores, entonces dejaron esa responsabilidad de trabajo a un solo docente, para atender 35 niños en un aula. Y, ahí es dónde empiezan los problemas, porque realmente el modelo pedagógico de nosotros de orquesta escuela está bien fundamentado, pero en el aula empezamos a ver que las condiciones del espacio no siempre son las mejores, hay salones pequeños, a veces los instrumentos son muy pocos, etc... Yo considero que con 20 alumnos, como trabajábamos antes, el modelo funcionaba muy bien, pero ahora no. Entonces, en cuanto al tema de la formación musical siento que hay un poquito de desbalance en que no se tuvo en cuenta crecer instrumentalmente. Nosotros ahora mismo deberíamos contar con dos sets de placas para trabajar con grupos de niños tan grandes. Entonces, el resultado de esa presión musical genera otros problemas. Si no hay una estrategia por parte del docente para que esos niños mantengan su concentración en torno a la música, empieza a haber distracciones en el salón, se generan ciertas conductas en el aula que nosotros creemos que son producto de temas sociales. A veces son sociales, a veces no. Entonces, ese tema de la atención psicosocial tomó mucha fuerza cuando ese formato empezó a modificarse, lo vieron como un apoyo pensando que eso podía ayudar con los niños que eran agresivos, o los que se distraían o hablaban mucho, pero también puede ser que nuestro modelo musical en cierta forma

pudo también haber generado esos comportamientos de algunos niños, que yo a veces pienso que para un niño son normales, porque un niño que en un aula de clases se concentra 5 minutos, pero después se aburre y mientras trabajamos las placas, pues el niño aburrido se pone a hablar. De ahí empezaron a surgir ciertos retos para el docente y, eso se viene cubriendo desde la parte psicosocial, porque para Batuta es muy importante empezar a hablar ya de eso. Es una forma de contribuir a la formación integral de los niños, y creo que ese tema psicosocial parte de ahí. Creo que, en últimas, a nosotros nos faltó crecer en la parte instrumental para poder brindarle más atención a los niños

[Well, it seems to me that the social issue is important. It is important because that is a need that we have. We need to have support. And, I think it adds more to have the psychosocial component than to place two teachers in the same room. I think it is something strategic for what Batuta develops and what Batuta needs to sustain itself. Before, in the Orff format, we worked with two teachers. In other words, there were two teachers in a room: one played the guitar and sang and the other supported and did something else, because that was born from what María Cristina and Martha Sofía did when they made music alongside with each other. So that was replicated. When this project became a serious option for Batuta to sustain itself financially, it was decided to start increasing the number of children that were cared for in the classroom, but then we realized that there were not enough teachers in

Colombia, so they left that responsibility of work to a single teacher, to care for 35 children in a classroom. And that is where the problems began, because our school-orchestra pedagogical model is really well founded, but in the classroom, we begin to see that the space conditions are not always the best: there are small rooms, sometimes the instruments are very few, etc. I believe that, with 20 students, as we worked before, the model worked very well, but not now. So, regarding the issue of musical training, I feel that there is a bit of an imbalance in that the increase in the number of musical instruments was not considered. Right now, we should have two sets of plates to work with such large groups of children. So, the result of that musical pressure generates other problems. If there is no strategy on the part of the teacher so that these children maintain their concentration around music, there begin to be distractions in the classroom, certain behaviors are generated in the classroom that we believe are the product of social issues; sometimes they are social, sometimes they are not. So, the issue of psychosocial care gained a lot of strength when that format began to change, they saw it as support, thinking that this could help with children who were aggressive, or those who were distracted or talked a lot, but it may also be that in a certain way, the musical model could also have generated these behaviors in some children, which I sometimes think are normal for a child, because a child can maybe concentrate for five minutes in a classroom, but then gets bored. And, while we work on the Orff plates, well, the bored child

starts talking and interfering with the class. From there, certain challenges for teachers began to emerge and this has been covered from the psychosocial part, because for Batuta it is very important to start talking about it now. It is a way of contributing to the integral formation of children, and I think that this psychosocial issue starts from there. I think that, ultimately, we lacked growth in the instrumental part to be able to give more attention to the children]

This historical review of the musical and psychosocial processes within Batuta suggests that the psychosocial model was created as a response to the growth the organization had in the number of children it worked with, but also as a response to problems that this growth created. For Yaneth Mantilla, it was impossible to get so many teachers in the multiple territories of Colombia, as to be able to have two in each group, therefore, Batuta resorted to hiring psychosocial professionals to help with music classes. Strikingly, she identified Batuta's musical model as a potential cause of (rather than solution to) social problems.

When Helena Rey read Batuta's philosophical principles, she stated clearly that she believed that they were not fully achieved, because not all people take those principles on board. Helena affirmed that in order for the psychosocial goals as presented by Batuta to be met, it would be necessary for parents to become actively involved in the process of musical and psychosocial training, which in most cases did not happen. For example, a month before our first interview, she summoned the parents of one of her music centers to a meeting to talk about some specific issues in the process of their children, and of the

140 children who were registered, only three mothers attended. For Helena, in a music center like this, the program was reduced to offering music classes to children, but they failed to apply the social goals that Batuta imposed.

Andrés González's position on Batuta's guiding principles in the classroom shows that for some of the teachers the psychosocial issue represents an added stress that they did not exactly know how to handle. For Andrés, the teachers and work teams had a workload that was well above the capacities they had in the territory, and he questioned if these psychosocial goals were achieved, or if the program was simply limited to being a musical intervention with a recreational background. Like other of his colleagues, Andrés explained that he felt pressured to obtaining musical results quickly, because that was the component by which he was evaluated. A few days before our interview, Andrés received a message from the psychosocial professional at his music center reminding him that many of the children at his music center attended classes without eating or that they had many personal problems at home and in their schools, and that for this reason they did not concentrate on class. Andrés recognized that because he was so focused on getting the children to quickly play their instruments, he frequently forgot those realities of children that are directly related to Batuta's mission.

Susana Nieves expressed herself along lines similar to Andrés'; however, she was eloquent about a very clear tension that she perceived, which has to do with the issue of resources. Susana explained that psychosocial professionals were given a resource each semester to buy snacks to distribute during psychosocial activities. In Susana's words, she felt at a disadvantage when the money was given to the psychosocial professional and

not to her, because she thought that in this way the children had incentives to attend the psychosocial activities, but not the musical ones. In the same way, Susana explained that Batuta demanded musical results from her, but she had to compete with other publicly funded programs which offered snacks, and that in addition to that, psychosocial professionals also did so in their activities, but she did not. Susana considered that the resource for snacks should be distributed equally between the music teacher and the psychosocial professional.

On the other hand, Susana explained that she felt that there was a lack of articulation between the musical and the psychosocial, because the psychosocial activities were planned and worked at a regional level in the psychosocial team, but without taking into account what the musical part did. She felt that all psychosocial activities were pre-designed and in most cases were immovable or unalterable, which is why she affirmed that if she wanted to articulate the two components, she would have to adapt to what the psychosocial team had already designed.

After talking about working with psychosocial professionals and reading Batuta's stated aims, I asked the teachers about their perception of Batuta. Is Batuta a musical program with a psychosocial component, or is Batuta a social program that uses music as a vehicle to achieve social results? On this, there were no unified responses from the teachers, but rather an array of different opinions. Susana Nieves, for example, stated that Batuta is a social program that uses music as a channel. Camilo Gallego, on the other hand, stated that although he acknowledges that Batuta has taken a turn towards the psychosocial, granting it more resources and efforts, Batuta in its stated aims also offered

a quality musical education, and that for this reason he considered that music teachers should concentrate on the topic of musical preparation. Camilo said that he had several clashes with people from the social team, because he considered that music should prevail, because Batuta is committed to that.

Javier Diaz explained that he perceived the psychosocial part as a component of the Batuta programs, but that it was not a fundamental element of what Batuta did. For that reason, he believed that there was no conflict between the two elements, because he clearly saw one process as supporting the other. This was corroborated by Andrés González, who said that in the last training they had at the beginning of the program in 2022, their bosses from the Academic Direction were very insistent in stating that Batuta is a musical training program, not a psychosocial one. According to Andrés, the people from Batuta's Academic Direction were concerned about the decline in the musical quality of Batuta's ensembles, and for this reason they strongly insisted on the need to work towards musical objectives.

Discussion

The previous section demonstrated that in Batuta there really was not a unified understanding, at least on the part of the teachers, of the nature of the organization, whether it is primarily musical or social. This generated a disconnection between the psychosocial team and the music teachers. This research did not focus on psychosocial professionals working for Batuta, however, Rodríguez-Sánchez and Cabedo-Mas (2023) documented this possible disconnection from the view of the psychosocial professionals,

“stemming out of the demands on the music teachers to produce high quality results. Such strict requirements might conflict with the project’s mission because the music teachers need time to achieve these musical goals” (p. 69). This assertion was corroborated by the teachers who participated in this research.

The majority of teachers valued positively the work of psychosocial professionals and stated that it was a necessary component for Batuta’s work. However, as far as the vast majority of teachers were concerned, there was a kind of hierarchy, with music predominating over the social aspects of the program. Even so, as I have already discussed, teachers have divergent ideas about the social function of their work and how it should be mediated and implemented on a day-to-day basis.

All of the above is reflected in teachers implementing the social aspects of their work according to their own criteria. Some affirmed that music intrinsically benefits children socially; others affirm that music does nothing, but that it gives teachers an opportunity to set themselves as an example and give motivational speeches on social mobility to children; and others simply did not conceive their work as social but rather as eminently musical, and that is the only thing they dedicated themselves to.

This lack of consistency on the part of the teachers mirrors what Baker (2021) discovered in Medellín. Batuta, like the Red, was built with a presentational model, aimed at developing musical and technical skills, with the social as implicit. In that same sense, it may be that in introducing a psychosocial element, Batuta, like the Red, is trying to insert something into the program that doesn’t really fit. Furthermore, Yaneth Mantilla’s testimony, which was presented in the preceding section, reflects something

that Baker (2021) argued: that the psychosocial teams ended up having to deal with the social problems caused by the musical training, rather than engaging with bigger issues of music and social change. However, my research did not deal with the work of social professionals, nor did it conduct interviews with them, so it is necessary to recommend that further research be conducted.

I argue that the lack of clarity on social issues is fostered from Batuta's institutional discourse. For example, in its stated aims, Batuta claims to accomplish a number of social goals and to work towards solving social problems. Specifically, Batuta claims to work towards

the integral development and improvement of the quality of life of children, adolescents and young people, for the construction of the social fabric, the generation of spaces of reconciliation and coexistence, and for the construction of useful individual capacities to exercise an active participation in society (Batuta, 2022, para. 1, my translation).

However, Batuta's mission says that it does all this through an "excellent musical training," and finally, its vision statement says that Batuta "will be recognized for the high quality of its musical training programs" (Batuta, 2022, my translation). These contradictory statements lead to further questions: How does an organization work for the integral development of children and for them to obtain tools for citizen participation, while at the same time dedicating itself to achieving an excellent musical training and achieving recognition for the high quality of musical ensembles? Musical excellence – as understood in the culture of classical music, which has guided Batuta from the start –

requires technical skills that can only be achieved through the individual study of an instrument, which implies time, sacrifice, and effort. If a child must dedicate all their time to the study of an instrument, at what point do they work towards what Batuta says? On the other hand, if teachers are obliged to provide a quality musical education—classical European music education focused on performance—how does this musical education produce the social effects that Batuta claims?

Chapter 3 of this dissertation analyzed Batuta's statutes critically and identified a series of tensions between what is written and what actually happens in the territory. Article 5, which I analyzed in depth in that chapter, and which presented the different purposes of Batuta, is a mixture of musical proposals (especially related to symphonic music), social work, and the development of networks, however, this research has proved that in practice, it does not work that way, at least not from the perspective of the teachers, who are the ones who mediate the programs at the territorial level.

Conclusion

Everything that I have presented in this chapter leads to a conclusion that in Batuta there is a lack of understanding on the part of the teachers of what the leadership claims to achieve with its programs. I argue that this is not the teachers' fault, but that there is confusion created from the official discourse of the organization, which foments the idea of a social program, and the demands that it places upon its teachers, who are pushed to focusing solely on musical aspects. This indicates that Batuta has failed to define an institutional culture with a specific and clear purpose. Instead, it has focused on

developing an outward success narrative, especially as it relates to the supposed social achievements of its programs, while not being concerned with effectively articulating the two components inwardly. I argue that this has happened for a reason: the need to justify the social impact of Batuta's work in order to achieve medium-term and long-term funding from the Colombian state and other private organizations.

As Jancovich and Stevenson (2023) stated, narratives of social transformation and empowerment justify public spending on cultural programs, but the programs may fail to generate the desired changes, despite long-term funding. I recommend that Batuta base the implementation of its programs on independent empirical research. Undoubtedly, Batuta and other similar organizations can greatly benefit from more research being carried out on the relationship between the musical and the social aspects in SATM programs, which can help them structure better work plans intertwining the two components. However, a decade of intensive research on SATM already provides many pointers to ways forward.

Chapter 9

Teacher training

One of the purposes of this research was to analyze the ways in which Batuta teachers are trained to perform the tasks that stem out of the stated aims of the organization and how they learn on the job. Therefore, it was important to ask about their educational background and if and how they had received any training from Batuta.

The research had a sample of 19 Batuta teachers working in the Colombian Caribbean. Three categories of teachers emerged during this process: those who took professional courses in music or who had professional degrees other than music, such as Spanish or Arts; those who studied music or music pedagogy formally or in conservatories; and those who were empirical musicians. The first group was composed of teachers who, because they were in remote regions, had not been able to study music formally, or had managed to do so through courses and validation or professionalization programs designed for people who have some prior knowledge, and who obtain their bachelor's degree in abbreviated times or studying only on weekends or at night. This is a reality in the context of music education in Colombia and the truth is that many music professionals use this type of courses to obtain their diplomas as musicians or music graduates. In the last group of teachers are included those who stated that they did not have a life-plan related to music pedagogy, but rather accepted jobs in this area because they had no other employment option.

Keyla Sarabia had a degree in Spanish and, at the time of the research, was finishing her studies in music. Sarabia was a student at Batuta, where she learned to play the violin with a teacher who was now one of her colleagues. Keyla had about seven years of experience in symphonic processes, Orff ensemble and coordination of one of the music centers. Fernando Alvarez, for his part, said that he began his career taking music courses and playing in folkloric bagpipe ensembles, because there were no formal music education programs in his region. However, he eventually managed to enroll and finish a music degree. Mr. Alvarez wanted to do a master's degree in music or music education, but there were no masters programs in his region and for that reason he did a specialization in Educational Information Technology Administration.

Vanessa Zapata, one of the oldest teachers from the sample, explained that she began her studies at a Foundation that offered a technical degree, not a higher one.⁸ In parallel, she attended every Batuta training workshop she could. Zapata attended Orff, symphonic, and ensemble training workshops, and eventually became part of one of Batuta's orchestral processes. When the university of her city opened a program for homologation of a Bachelor of Arts, she enrolled. Zapata clarified that she had a degree in arts, not music, and that she trained with an organization that offered a technical degree, not a professional one.

⁸ In Colombia there are three levels of undergraduate degrees: Technical Professional, Technological and Professional. A Technical Professional degree has an average duration of 2 to 3 years, while a Professional degree lasts between 4 and 5 years Nacional, M. d. E. (2021). *Niveles de la Educación Superior*. Retrieved 04/17/2023 from <https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/Educacion-superior/Sistema-de-Educacion-Superior/231238:Niveles-de-la-Educacion-Superior>

In the second group of teachers, those who studied music in conservatories, the experiences of Rocío Navas and Jairo Lara stood out. Rocío Navas explained that her studies were not aimed at pedagogy, but at conducting bands. She studied at the Conservatory of the National University of Colombia and lived and worked for 25 years in Bogota as a professional musician and private music teacher. Jairo Lara lived and grew up in a family of musicians and always knew that he would study music. From a very young age he learned to play accordion and guitar and studied for a degree in music. Jairo has dedicated his entire professional life to musical pedagogy and musical interpretation. Jairo is one of the most prolific composers of the Batuta teachers and has made numerous arrangements and original compositions that have been included in the Batuta repertoire nationwide.

In the third group of teachers, the experiences of Nubia Sánchez and Helena Rey stood out. Nubia does not have a professional or technical degree in music, but she learned the trade empirically. Initially she started playing guitar and then bass to be able to play in Vallenato music groups. At the same time, she pursued a career in industrial engineering, but because she couldn't get a job as an engineer in her town, she began working as an arts and technical drawing teacher. Her activities as an arts teacher and bass player allowed her to apply for a Batuta call and thus began her long career as a teacher in this organization. Helena Rey, on the other hand, explained that she never really thought about being a music teacher, because the music school where she studied in Venezuela did not have a focus on music education for children. Helena always imagined that she was going to play in Vallenato music groups, but she openly explained

that she never had opportunities to develop a career in music performance and that is why she felt forced to accept a job as a Batuta teacher, where she ended up working with five- and six-year-old children. For her, it was a great challenge, because she recognized that she did not have the academic preparation for a job focused on such young children, and she affirmed that at some point she felt fear and great anxiety due to her lack of preparation in this field.

Jacobo López is another teacher with a particularly striking history in terms of his preparation. Because he was born in an indigenous community, he had late contact with mainstream popular music. Jacobo began his professional path studying engineering in his hometown, but halfway through his career, he decided to enroll in a music professionalization course in the city of Barranquilla, so he had to travel every fortnight to attend classes and academic activities. For him, it was eventually impossible to continue his engineering and music studies simultaneously, so he decided to suspend his engineering studies and dedicate himself to his music professionalization program. In May 2022, Jacobo presented and defended his master's thesis in music.

Batuta implements a model of group learning on a huge scale throughout the Colombian territory; for this reason, it has invested a great deal of capital and effort in training its teachers. Batuta annually holds a training “bootcamp” for all the teachers who participate in the Sounds of Hope program at the national level, which all the teachers who participated in the study valued very positively. Many of them said that they felt the organization had invested a lot in them and they appreciated it. In the same way, most of the teachers affirmed that when they started working at Batuta, despite having studies or

experience in music, it was only after the training sessions that they felt they had some pedagogical control over their groups of children.

Because all the teachers worked in different territories, the opportunities to meet with their colleagues from other regions are almost nil throughout the year; therefore, many of them explained that it was a great opportunity to share experiences, learn from each other and enjoy fun activities among colleagues. However, due to budgetary reasons, over the years the Batuta training programs have been steadily reduced in length. Some teachers informed that previously, Batuta did training sessions of up to five days, in which they had much more time for all the activities. By the time of this research, the training sessions lasted only two days, in which the teachers went directly to work on preparing the repertoire. Despite all their positive comments above, many of these teachers also complained about the fact that year after year, the training sessions consisted only of the preparation of the obligatory repertoire that would be worked on throughout the year; they did not receive new content in musical pedagogy techniques, social work, or other areas related to the work they did in the field. What many of them explained is that considering that the time they have is so short, the training sessions are devoted to working on the preparation of the repertoire.

A criticism that many teachers made has to do with the issue of the differences between the context in which they have to work and the context of the trainings, in which all the attendees are professional musicians, who manage the Orff ensemble and the flutes, and who can read music and sight sing it, something completely different from a classroom with 35 young children who have never read music before and who do not

have the skills of sight reading music or the limb independence to play the Orff instruments. Many of them suggested that the training be done with real groups of children and not in controlled settings, only with the teachers, as is currently done. In fact, several teachers told the anecdote of one of the great Colombian choirmasters, who went to teach choral training workshops with a real group of children during a training session for teachers, and who never managed to get the children to sing simple melodies in tune, much less tackle polyphonic works, which shows that working with mixed-ability, amateur children is not the same as working with music teachers. Specifically, the teachers stated that the arrangements can be prepared very well during the training sessions, but that when they face the groups of children in real-life settings, a series of difficulties arise that force the teachers to simplify the arrangements, eliminate voices or melodic lines, and eliminate complete harmonic passages.

Vanessa Zapata was very eloquent in explaining that the training was currently beneficial primarily for new teachers, because what is worked on in the training has already been done in the past. Vanessa explained that Batuta did a good job of pedagogical foundation with teachers over the years, specifically in the early and mid-2010s, in which new repertoires were created, specifically four volumes of musical arrangements in which teachers could choose from rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, and orchestration themes. However, after this very fruitful training period, Vanessa felt that the training sessions had become very repetitive and that currently they were simply dedicated to preparing the repertoire. Jorge Torres suggested that the training should focus on technical aspects of the Orff ensemble, and not only on the preparation of the

repertoire. Jorge accepted that many teachers, including him, have weaknesses in specific aspects of the ensemble, which is why he insisted that it was necessary for Batuta to emphasize the strengthening of pedagogical skills rather than the direct preparation of the works.

Psychosocial professionals do not attend the live training sessions. The foregoing is striking, because as has been said before, Batuta focuses its discourse on the intersection between the musical and the social. However, all the teachers explained to me that during these trainings there is no space or time to talk about practical or theoretical issues of social action through music, but rather they were limited to preparing the repertoire.

Discussion

I began my research with several questions in mind: How does Batuta manage to prepare teachers for all the non-musical challenges they must face on a daily basis? How do teachers prepare for the social side of their work? How do they organize their content in articulation with the psychosocial team? I posed these questions to all of the teachers, but no answers went beyond the function of the training sessions as repertoire preparation.

It could be argued that there are budgetary constraints that prevent psychosocial professionals to attend these yearly training sessions. However, it is also worth reflecting on the fact that year after year, the training focuses on the same element: repertoire. There is no prioritization of what should be the backbone of Batuta's projects: the

intersection between music pedagogy and social action.

Furthermore, the academic training of the teachers shows that none of them really has special training for social work, which does not differ from what Baker (2021) found in his studies of El Sistema and the Red de Medellín, in which he stated that many teachers teach how they were taught, that is, through conventional methods of musical training (especially focused on Central European models) without any focus on aspects other than music. Baker (2021, p. 319) asked the following questions:

How were new pedagogies to be put into practice if the training of teachers in universities remained largely the same? How were teachers to impart creative skills when many had been through a conservatoire-style education that Peerbaye and Attariwala (2019, p. 44) call “training *out* of creativity” (see also Waldron et al., 2018)? How were teachers to promote social justice and avoid perpetuating injustices if they had not been trained to reflect on the social and political aspects of music learning and teaching (Aróstegui & Rusinek, 2015)? How were they to take decolonizing steps when they came from a higher education profoundly structured by coloniality (Silva Souza, 2019)?

To answer these questions, Baker argued that universities and higher musical training institutions can play a fundamental role and make adjustments to their curricula, offering SATM lines. Although this is a logical and well-intentioned proposition in the context of Medellín, in which the Red is the major musical employer and it is managed by the University of Antioquia, I argue that in practice, at least for Batuta, this is highly unlikely. The curriculum reform processes of higher education institutions in Colombia

are slow. Also, higher education programs follow a market logic, so for this to happen, they would have to be absolutely certain of the financial viability of programs of this nature. This means that there needs to be a demand for them, and universities are unlikely to take a step in this direction without a certainty of financial sustainability.

In the case of Batuta, it is even more unlikely that the organization can rely on or depend on the universities to provide it with music teachers with some emphasis on SATM or social training, because Batuta operates at the national level, and in this sense, it must find teachers in the different territories, in many of which there are not even formal musical training programs. As I have already explained, many teachers must travel to the cities on weekends to be able to study, considering that this offer is not available in their towns.

What to do then? The first thing to note is that Batuta has all the tools to implement training processes with its teachers and work teams. These training processes do not necessarily have to take place as a kind of bootcamp, which is what currently happens, in which teachers work frantically for two days to prepare the repertoire. Teacher training could revolve around using Batuta's installed capacity. For example: Batuta currently has an e-Learning platform aimed at children, in which a significant amount of technical music content is housed. Content for teachers could be created on that same platform. Equally, Batuta could look for a partnership with the National Learning Service⁹ to create specific courses for its teachers, which could later be

⁹ SENA or Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje is the government platform to implement national education policies. It offers free education to millions of Colombians in specific technical and technological courses. Please see <https://www.sena.edu.co>

expanded to musicians working towards social goals in Colombia in other institutions.

Now, Batuta will have to decide whether to continue focusing the training towards eminently musical skills, or if, on the contrary, it can shift its focus towards helping teachers to develop another type of training. This, I argue, should be one more focused on the students, and with some methodologies and purposes that meet the specific needs of the socio-cultural environments of Batuta, as well as the stated aims of the program. In this sense, Batuta could focus on promoting the training of activist teachers who understand music education as a space for the development of critical thinking and the integration of sociocultural problems that affect the school (Zamorano Valenzuela, 2020). In the same way, it is important that Batuta can integrate the team of psychosocial professionals into the training process, which, although it receives workshops, does so separately and isolated from the teachers. In this way, Batuta can seek integrality and horizontality between the work of teachers and that of psychosocial professionals.

Currently, psychosocial professionals develop social mapping exercises and work directly with families and children, but as many teachers explained, most of the time they did not participate in these activities, because their time is filled with musical and administrative activities. Due to the above, the cartographies developed by psychosocial professionals remained a mere exercise without much significance, at least for teachers. That is, the cartography exercises were done, but the teachers did not have a real involvement with what is reflected there. In short, they are trained to give music classes and present a repertoire. At present, social action and music are two separate spheres;

improved training could bring them together as social action *through music*.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Batuta makes an important effort in the qualification and training of its teachers. However, the philosophy based on El Sistema, and on the orthodoxy of many SATM programs, does not allow the organization to capitalize on these efforts. I take up the words of Zamorano Valenzuela (2020) and argue that Batuta should move from a passive type of training – essentially assimilating curricular content – to a more active one, in which teachers create spaces for critical thinking and activism.

I argue that Batuta needs to start looking for alternative ways to train its teachers and stop repeating the same seminars year after year. There is literature that can certainly illuminate the path for these alternative training for teachers. In Yob and Jorgensen (2020) edited volume, several authors offer practical alternatives for a more humane music education focused on the common good. For example, Younker (2020), proposed an inquiry-based learning model in which students identify, frame and solve problems and in which teachers work as facilitators who work to assist students with their propositions. Younker (2020) stated that such a model is motivated

by a sense of dissonance that is identified as a problem. The engagement begins by posing questions in response to the problem as felt, noted, or presented. The problem could be a specific part of a larger context or it could arise within a scenario that is being formulated. The key is that students are active learners from the onset of framing or identifying the problem. Throughout, the educator serves

as a facilitator who assists as necessary in constructive ways. In music education environments, students are the problem “framers and identifiers,” as they create original music within parameters identified by them; solve musical problems within given parameters that result in original music; identify musical challenges and negotiate and evaluate those solutions in performing and listening environments; interpret given music in ways that are meaningful to them in solo and group performance based settings; and interpret that which is heard through critical ears while applying theoretical, historical, social, and political knowledge as it relates to the music (p. 82)

An approach of this type would be more related to Batuta’s stated aims, but for that, teachers would have to be trained in such a methodology. At the moment, what happens is that teachers work with pedagogical approaches that are inflexible due to the rigidity of Batuta’s model; added to the inflexibility of the pedagogical models in which the teachers themselves studied, this makes it very difficult to move towards a model like the one proposed by Younker. I bring up the words of Shively (2020), about how it is very common to hear music teachers describe themselves as Orff or Kodály teachers, or as choir or band directors. The same happens in Batuta; teachers describe themselves as symphony or Orff teachers. However, Shively affirmed that establishing a broader sense of integrity and identity of a music educator can help expand the possibilities of a more open and humane education, which puts the needs of students at the center of decision-making. As I have established, it is not possible to achieve this from Colombian music universities, or at least not in the short term; but Batuta could redirect its teacher training

efforts, that is, moving away from a merely technical and methodical education and training for teachers, towards one designed to break out of the orthodoxy so characteristic of SATM programs and explore the interrelationship of the musical and the social.

CHAPTER 10

Repertoire

The topic of the repertoire is interesting, because all the teachers, without exception, had something to say about it, however, their opinions differed among themselves. Some teachers stated that the repertoire was out of context for their territories, others that it was too easy and the children lost motivation, others that it was too difficult and the children lost motivation. This chapter will explore the teachers' concerns about repertoire.

In 2022 Batuta teachers had to put together a total of 12 songs a year, six in the first semester and six in the second semester. Of those 12 songs, teachers had 4 compulsory songs, and the rest had to be chosen from a suggested repertoire. As of 2022, a new task was implemented, which consisted of children creating lyrics for a song in some activities that they developed with psychosocial professionals, so that later the teachers wrote music and arrangements. This way, the children, teachers, and psychosocial professionals created new content together. They called this component “creative project.”

Many teachers expressed that 12 songs plus the creative project were a lot to cover in nine and a half months, which is what they had in their contracts, and most of them repeatedly expressed concerns and disagreements about the repertoire. In particular, they complained about the pressure they felt due to the urgency of putting together a

quick repertoire and the implications that this had on their daily work. Ricardo Sánchez, for example, felt that the most important thing was that children learned to read music and basic concepts of music theory through a training process, which, according to his vision, differed from Batuta's, because he thought that for Batuta the most important thing was that the children played and sang. Ricardo said that he felt that he should always have a set repertoire, in case a minister or the president of the republic came to his municipality and he had to present a show. But for him, that is a problem, because to achieve it, he needs to put together the repertoire by ear or by imitation, not by means of a painstaking and analytical process.

Isabel Costa said that in the training they had in 2022, she really enjoyed learning and seeing first-hand the process of building a repertoire. However, Isabel said that when they go to the territory, they always have the urgency to meet repertoire goals, for which they leave the process behind and dedicate themselves to preparing songs based on repetition. When push comes to shove, Isabel said, they must focus on the repertoire and forget about the main processes, because they must deliver fast results.

The stress stemming from the urgency of preparing repertoire was tied to a problem to which Ricardo Sánchez also pointed: a high drop-out rate. Ricardo explained that generally, groups that start together in February do not finish together in November, meaning that he had children who drop out and he had to find replacements, in order to comply with the attendance and care for victims' goals. For that reason, he constantly needed to enroll new children who arrived without prior preparation. "Every child that leaves, we have to replace him, and that is a child that comes from scratch" (Ricardo

Sánchez, 2022, my translation). This caused him a lot of anxiety, because he felt that if he did not show results, it was possible that his employment contract would not be renewed the following year. Yaneth Mantilla corroborated this and said that considering that the turnover of children was very high, they always had some children with a very low level of musical knowledge and skill; therefore, teaching choral songs with more than one voice was practically impossible in one year.

Fernando Alvarez expressed something similar about results. He felt that not all groups were the same and that for this reason not all could yield the same results; however, the standards were the same for all, despite their previous level of musicianship, knowledge, and even their socioeconomic conditions, which as we have discussed, affected their performance. Although he stated that he felt that planning is good and that seeking to achieve standards is good, Fernando missed the freedom they previously had to create and choose the repertoire they prepare in each music center. For him, the limitations with the repertoire translated into difficulties to have music ready quickly, which at the same time translated into a never-ending feeling of urgency.

In the same way, Fernando said that they currently have many restrictions due to copyright issues, which limits how they interact with children and families. Ricardo, like some other teachers, felt that it is easier and quicker to prepare music that the children know and that interests them because it is playing on the radio. However, he said that they cannot play some representative songs of their region, or music that is played on the radio, because they do not have the permits for the public performance of those works. The issue of copyright and the restrictions and difficulties generated by not being able to

play music that is in fashion was corroborated by several teachers. Some even said that they use current repertoire without notifying Batuta and avoided using those songs in concerts and public shows. Vanessa Zapata said that playing up-to-date music helped her appeal to older kids and teenagers in particular, who might not otherwise be interested in the program. Similarly, Vanessa pointed to a fundamental theme: teachers must like the repertoire in order to appropriate it and then pass it on to the children. Vanessa felt that in many cases the repertoire was strange, and she had no particular interest in teaching it. Rocío Navas said the same thing: for the repertoire to work well, it was necessary that the teachers themselves first understand and enjoy it. If the teachers did not like the songs that they have to teach, they would hardly be able to transmit it to their students.

Jairo Lara, for his part, acknowledged that he understands that copyright infringement is an issue, therefore he used strategies such as introducing famous songs that were played on the radio and when he had to perform them in public, removing the “borrowed” parts so as not to infringe copyright. In one of his last concerts, for example, he was preparing an African song called “Siyajamba”, but in the chorus he introduced a whole passage from Shakira’s “Waka-Waka.” Jairo said that this made it easier for him to get the children’s attention, but unfortunately, they felt disappointed when they had to remove that part of the song for a concert, because it was what they liked the most. Jairo said that he implements other strategies, such as setting up the suggested repertoire on a reggaeton beat, so that children felt attracted to something that interested them. When the children managed to prepare the songs on the reggaeton beat, Jairo then proceeded to remove the beat and the song remained assembled.

Jairo made two other interesting points. First, for him it was absolutely necessary to prepare current and fashionable repertoire, along with the more “academic” repertoire. He said that in 2022 he had to prepare a *currulao*, which is a genre from the Colombian Pacific coast, but that it was simply not possible; the kids just were not interested. Second, he pointed out that there are differences that exist between each musical center and how those differences make the repertoire preparation processes also different. He had two music centers in the same city, but one is in a more depressed neighborhood than the other and he worked with younger children there. Working with this music center was a bigger challenge, because the children did not respond in the same way and the process took more time. In that center, Jairo said that the children were more undisciplined and, in many cases, violent, for which he felt that the repertoire that is suggested from Bogota did not appeal to the interests of these children, and therefore he made adjustments and changed songs from Batuta’s repertoire for things that were current and playing on the radio. Jairo said that if he didn’t do that, he just didn’t make progress.

Several teachers stated that the impossibility of preparing songs that are playing on the radio meant that the children did not feel interested in the repertoire that they had to prepare. Similarly, some teachers mentioned that parents sometimes complained about the fact that they did not prepare *vallenato* songs, which is a very famous genre in different parts of the Colombian Caribbean. Some of these teachers told me that it would be easier to relate to children and parents if songs known to them could be prepared.

Helena Rey had many indigenous children in her music center, and she explained to me that her students failed to internalize musical rhythms with ternary subdivisions,

because the music that these indigenous populations listened to did not have that subdivision. In fact, those children were not even capable of clapping to the beat of a ternary subdivision genre, much less playing it on a percussion instrument; therefore, she suffered a lot when she had to prepare repertoire from the Colombian Andes, which is mostly written in ternary measures.

When I presented these teachers' concerns to Camilo Gallego, he explained to me that it was very important for Batuta to expose children to other standards and that one of the roles of the organization was to determine aesthetic, artistic, and cultural horizons for the children. In the same way, Camilo explained to me that, if the proposal to leave teachers free to choose the repertoire according to the criteria of each one of them in their regions were accepted, Batuta would cease to be a scalable, controllable, and verifiable program, because it would be left to the discretion of each teacher. Camilo recognized the need to make the choice of repertoires more flexible; however, he was very emphatic that this flexibility must be based on decisions that are methodologically consistent, that is, that children be exposed to different tonalities, different metrics, among others. In the past, Camilo explained to me, there were projects in which teachers were allowed to make the selection of the repertoires; however, they noticed that on many occasions they ended up thinking more towards artistic results than towards pedagogical results, which, according to his criteria, generated exclusion in children who did not have the skills to develop the repertoires.

Andrés González, on the other hand, explained that Batuta has only one repertoire a year; however, teachers worked with children between the ages of 6 and 16, and that

working with small children was not the same as working with adolescents. Andrés suggested that Batuta should have two types of repertoires, one to work with children and the other with adolescents. What Andrés pointed may help to address the issues that Jairo Lara enunciated, and perhaps having two repertoires may help.

An issue that also worried teachers was the difficulty that working with the Orff ensemble presented on many occasions. Batuta had a unified pedagogical model to work with groups of 35 children. Generally, a music center had 140 or more children, and the teachers worked with four groups of 35 children. Yaneth Mantilla lamented the fact that because the instruments were in the Batuta room and the children did not have instruments that they could take home, the process slowed down and became tedious, which is why many children got bored and ended up dropping out. Yaneth summarized the problem as follows:

Yo tengo 6 placas y tengo 35 alumnos, entonces cada niño no practica más de unos 2 minutos a la semana. El niño pasa muy poquito tiempo en su instrumento. Y, lo que pasa es que nuestra rutina consiste en talleres: taller de flautas, taller de placas. Entonces, en una hora y media hacemos tres talleres, quitándole el saludo y la despedida. Eso son 20 minutos por cada taller, en 20 minutos un taller para 35 niños, pues saca la cuenta. Es muy poco tiempo de práctica para un niño. Los niños tienen muy poca experiencia con el instrumento. No es lo mismo que un niño tenga un instrumento una clase completa, a que lo tenga que compartir con otros 35 niños

[I have six plates and 35 students, so each child does not practice more than two minutes a week. The child spends very little time on his instrument. And, what happens is that our routine consists of workshops: plate workshop, flute workshop and choir workshop. So, in an hour and a half we do three workshops, removing the greeting and the farewell dynamics, that's 20 minutes per workshop. In 20 minutes per workshop for 35 children, so let's do the math. That's very little practice time for a child. Children have very little experience with the instrument. It is not the same for a child to have an instrument for a whole class than for him to have to share it with 35 other children]

Yaneth wondered if Batuta only worked to meet a goal of reaching a certain number of participants or if it really worked for the well-being of the children. She questioned the fact that 35 children only had one set of Orff plates, which she considered to be insufficient for such a large group. She proposed that the size of the groups be reduced, and recalled that previously, the groups had a maximum of 20 children and achieved better musical results. Yaneth said that she felt that the classes were like giving a child candy and then taking it away, because there was really very little time that they could spend playing the instrument, even in class. For her, this meant that the program was superficial and with very little depth:

Es que es imposible. Nosotros necesitamos atender muchos niños a través de esa estrategia. Creo que nosotros brindamos una experiencia musical, pero no un proceso serio de formación. No, porque los niños no tienen un acercamiento fuerte con la enseñanza. Nuestro compromiso se limita a lo que podemos hacer con un

set de placas y a los niños que lo hacen súper bien, pues les garantizamos un puesto en el concierto

[It is impossible. We need to serve many children through this strategy. I think we provide a musical experience, but not a serious training process. No, because the children do not have a strong approach to learning. Our commitment is limited to what we can do with a set of plates and to the children who do it super well, we guarantee them a place in the concert]

Yaneth recognized that for an organization like Batuta it was necessary to have guidelines. She acknowledged that if there were no guidelines, it was possible that some teachers could implement models that ended up moving away from what the children needed in terms of pedagogy, or that simply attended more to a show or entertainment logic. However, she affirmed that sometimes it was necessary to make adjustments and change the pedagogical model to adapt to the environments and needs of the children of certain music centers. She, like Jairo Lara and Fernando Alvarez, emphasized the fact that not all groups learned at the same pace and that environments determine in many cases the speed with which children manage to appropriate the repertoires and advance musically with what lies in the guidelines of Batuta.

Yaneth's testimony pointed to the problems they had, but she proposed concrete solutions. As was said already, Yaneth proposed reducing the groups to 20 children, which has already been tried in the past and according to her, gave better musical results. On the other hand, Yaneth proposed concentrating more on the choir and less on the ensemble. For her, the choir was a more effective tool that allowed her to progress more

quickly and take ownership of the content more effectively. However, she acknowledged that it is difficult, because on the one hand, the Orff ensemble model justified the salaries and hiring of a team of people, especially at the national level, and second, because she said that what distinguishes Batuta from other music organizations in Colombia is the Orff ensemble. Despite Batuta being created as an orchestral program, the Orff ensemble, said Yaneth, is what Batuta does differently: “When someone sees children playing Orff plates, they associate it with Batuta” (Yaneth Mantilla, 2022, my translation).

Camilo Gallego mentioned that the issue of repertoires was a longstanding discussion. But for him, it was necessary that musical advances be scalable, controllable and verifiable. However, scalability, controllability, and verifiability come at a price for teachers. As many of them said, they always felt a lot of pressure to assemble their repertoires.

Nubia Sánchez was probably the one who presented it in the clearest and most convincing way: for her, supposedly the program has a social connotation, but the social aspect is relegated to the background due to the haste of preparing the repertoires, especially with new children and little ones. In order to show results to Batuta, Nubia acknowledged that she mixed groups and put together advanced children to sing along with the new ones, so that it appeared that the new ones had progressed. That is to say, the pressure was so much that she supplanted children, knowing that she was not supposed to do that. Nubia said that, before our interview, she had a heated discussion with other colleagues who, according to her, edited and produced the videos, so that they looked and sounded better than they really were. Nubia felt at a disadvantage because she

doesn't handle audio and video editing programs. According to her, some of her colleagues make her look bad in front of the academic leadership, evidencing her shortcomings and ultimately putting the continuity of her work at risk.

Discussion

At first glance it appeared that teachers had a certain freedom of choice. However, many of them said that they felt pressured to meet almost immediate repertoire preparation goals, considering that the program began in the month of February and in the month of April they had to present a first musical sample, which they had to record on video and send to their supervisor for evaluation of musical results. Batuta's internal dynamic dictates that teachers are constantly subject to evaluations by the Academic Direction. These evaluations are done in different ways: first, all teachers must record the concerts they prepare and send them to the regional management so that the regional music coordinator can evaluate them and send a report to the Academic Direction. Second, Batuta allocates financial resources so that members of the regional and national academic team travel throughout the territory visiting musical centers to verify the musical progress of the children.

This pressure to produce musical results quickly came directly from the upper management, represented by the Academic Direction. And the hidden logic is the following: despite advertising itself as a social program, what Batuta can show as result of its work is children playing music "correctly" and at a "high level." I can attest to this as a former senior official; recurrently, when I was looking to secure funds with private

institutions, as well as with municipalities or governorates, I would ask teachers to put on a show for the institution as a way to “prove” the quality of our work.

However, achieving these musical goals was not easy with children who did not know how to read music and who generally started from scratch in the program. This brings us back to what Nubia Sánchez mentioned about the always imminent need to have musical results and present a show. Keeping the proportions, this is not different from what Baker (2014) reported on Venezuela, where the “núcleos” always had a saved and prepared repertoire with which they could impress visitors. Based on the above, this seems to be a larger issue in SATM organizations at large. However, it did not really work in practice in Batuta, and some teachers mentioned that the compulsory repertoire was very complex for primary school children; and they considered it practically impossible to comply with the technical guidelines of the Orff ensemble and the choir, because the children lacked a previous musical foundation.

Again, if Batuta thinks of itself as a social program, as it recurrently states in public communications as well as internal documents, why does it have to deliver fast results? Why the rush? Clearly, there are institutional and ideological forces that operate on teachers in order to make them demonstrate success. This sense of urgency and results is what forced teachers to look for strategies such as the ones narrated by Yaneth Mantilla and Nubia Sánchez in the previous section, which is nothing more than filtering students so that the most musically proficient get a privilege spot at concerts and other public events. Again, should a social program filter its students and provide privileges on the basis of musical talent?

In a strategic planning session in 2019, I proposed the creation of repertoires that were aligned with the different Colombian territories. My argument was that considering that Colombia is a country with such different and divergent regions, there should be a repertoire for each of them, considering the musical genres that the children knew in their places of origin. I proposed that a repertoire that appealed to the tastes of children and their families could generate a greater sense of belonging for Batuta. One of the people from the Academic Direction argued that Batuta's repertoire was designed for children to get to know the different regions of Colombia through its music. This person stated that having children from the jungles of the Orinoco playing Caribbean music, or children from the Caribbean coast playing music from the Colombian Andes, was one of Batuta's great competitive advantages.

This argument certainly has its merits. However, the preparation of the repertoire was not accompanied by other activities. That is, the children and teachers did not have conversations about the repertoire; therefore, they lacked a contextualization that would effectively allow them to know the rest of the country, as argued by the person from the Academic Direction. For this reason, I continue to believe that the implementation of the repertoire fell short of offering children an experience that could allow them to understand the cultural differences that exist in Colombia and get to know other cultures within the same country.

Although the importance of exposing children to different musical standards can be recognized, as Camilo Gallego said, it is also important to think of Batuta as a platform that can allow children to delve into their own musical and cultural traditions, in

order to value their own over those of others. Ladson-Billings (2009) stated that teachers should adhere to culturally relevant conceptions of pedagogy and provide spaces for students to make connections between their local, national, racial, cultural, and global identities; I argue that Batuta teachers have an opportunity to facilitate such connections for their students. It is therefore worth asking if Batuta is doing enough to give the repertoires and musical knowledge of the territories the place they deserve. Arango (2017) defended this argument in her “recommendations to work from a differential approach with the Afro-descendant population of the Colombian Pacific” (p. 137, my translation), and she is clear about not annulling the repertoires that have traditionally been worked on Batuta, but rather advocated for a greater participation of repertoires that represent the ways of seeing and understanding the world of these populations.

In the same way, Arango Melo explained the importance of teachers knowing the meaning that local music has in social life and stated that they must document and understand it, so that they can take advantage of cultural elements of every one of their regions and relate better with their students, without disrespecting traditions. It is striking that Batuta does not give the prominence it deserves to a document that was written for the organization, examining the territorial logics that define Batuta’s work. I argue that taking this approach may help students increase the levels of affective engagement with the program, which would surely increase their feelings of belonging and enjoyment (Gurgel, 2016).

Along the same lines, Baker (2021) documented how the leaders of the Red in Medellín were concerned about the perpetuation of a colonialist mentality in the choice

of repertoire for the Red, and how they advocated a more horizontal relationship between Colombian music, other popular music and European symphonic music. In this sense, the issue of the decolonization of musical processes is at the center of discussions on music education in Colombia, especially since the arrival of a progressive government in 2022, considering that many minority groups have found spaces to make visible their own existence in historically isolated and invisible territories.

Arango (2022, para. 7, my translation) said in an opinion column that currently there is “an opportunity to exercise epistemological justice and demonstrate that there is not a Colombia that travels and teaches The Other Colombia.” In that sense, it is worth asking if Batuta ensures that the repertoires and knowledge of the people in the regions are philosophically on the same level as those of other parts. Is the design of the repertoire in Batuta a way of exposing students to different musical standards or is the repertoire a form of perpetuation of colonialism and exclusion?

Here I must turn the reader’s attention to the question that I have asked throughout this document: Music education for what? What is the purpose of the Batuta’s programs? Is it a social program, or is it conventional music education? In this sense, I propose that in order to generate horizontal dialogues between people from different regions, the culture of the regions where Batuta operates should be prioritized. It is wonderful that children are exposed to different repertoires, but I argue that there should be a balance between the local and the “foreign”, providing opportunities to contextualize the “foreign” in order to reflect and really understand what the children are playing. This way, children may understand, reflect upon their own culture and value it, while engaging

with those of others. This could help Batuta to avoid what Juliet Hess defines as “superficial musical tourism” (Hess, 2013).

Rodríguez-Sánchez (2019) devoted an entire section of her doctoral dissertation on Batuta to this topic, in which she argued that defining repertoires is important for the “circulation of cohesive intangible resources” (p. 314, my translation). In other words, Rodríguez-Sánchez affirmed that the songs that the children of Batuta sing develop tolerance, the capacity for dialogue, and reconciliation. However, Rodríguez-Sánchez did not really offer empirical evidence for her position, so it appears somewhat idealistic. Does a child from the Caribbean region develop tolerance and the capacity for dialogue and reconciliation simply by singing a Bambuco or any other musical genre from the mountains of Colombia?

Rodríguez-Sánchez also argued that Batuta’s music creates a contrast with the musical genres that the children hear in their environments, such as *reggaeton*, *rancheras* and *vallenatos*, “which have content related to sex, drug trafficking or spite, oriented towards a promotion of relationships based on the exercise of unequal power” (p. 315, my translation). Although it is true that some vallenato, reggaeton, or ranchera songs have that type of connotation, it is also true that these are cultural expressions based on poetry and popular lyricism, so much so that Batuta has obtained licenses to perform representative songs of *vallenato* music and has performed tribute concerts to the music of Mexico, whose most representative genre is the ranchera. Is the role of an organization like Batuta really to create a hierarchy of musical genres, marginalizing or excluding some of Colombia’s most widely consumed musics?

Again, why not allow students and teachers to choose the music that they want to perform together, in a democratic exercise, so that they can be more motivated to attend and participate? With this in mind, I see an opportunity to use music with negative connotations to promote dialogue and reflection with the children. If instead of trying to move children away from the music of their environments with the argument that it is dangerous for them, Batuta were to allow students to perform such music while also reflecting and dialoging about the implications of the lyrics, I believe that Batuta could promote reflection exercises more aligned with its social ends. This is in line with Baker's (2021) proposition of using reggaetón to prompt students to compose good lyrics or to study genres that have been initially despised by social elites and have then gone on to become national symbols in Latin America, such as tango or samba (p. 184).

In the previous section, I mentioned the arguments that Camilo Gallego gave from the point of view of academic direction about the need for programs to be measurable and about the need for teachers, individually, not to make decisions contrary to pedagogical logic. Undoubtedly, these arguments in favor of a certain rigidity in the choice of the repertoire have a certain logic. Leaving open the possibility for teachers to freely choose the repertoire is a risk that an entity the size of Batuta cannot assume, especially in light of considerations regarding the copyright of the works that are prepared and performed in public. Batuta is exposed to an enormous risk if it uses works without the permission of the authors, and for that reason, it is important for the organization to have a control system that guarantees that it uses works that are in the public domain, or that it obtains the proper licenses. However, the teachers' testimonies indicate that something is not

working well. The focus on curricular and pedagogical consistency—in other words, on matters of music education—appears to reduce the appeal of the program to participants, according to the teachers, which clearly diminishes Batuta's efficacy as a social program.

Conclusion

What can be done to resolve the issue of repertoires, given that both the academic leadership and the teachers have compelling reasons to insist on their positions? A solution may lie with the teachers themselves. Many of them are excellent arrangers and composers, who know their cultural surroundings and their students. Although some of them write songs and give them to Batuta, the organization does not have a specific resource to formally hire teachers for this work; therefore, ways could be found to encourage teachers to write original music and license it to the organization. For this to work, Batuta would have to commit to freeing time from administrative tasks or look for ways to rearrange their schedules. The figure could be, for example, an exclusive license for a specific timeframe, with the work returning to the teachers after a period of time, so that they can exploit it commercially afterwards. That way, teachers would have an incentive to write more actively for the organization.

Another solution to the issue of the contextualization of the repertoire that worried teachers so much could be based on the proposal of Arango (2017) for Afro-Colombian populations. This could be applied to music from all over the country and Batuta could create regional repertoires: one for the Caribbean region, one for the Pacific region, one for the Andean region and one for the Orinoco and the Amazon.

Additionally, I assert that it is of utmost importance that Batuta give teachers the opportunity to participate in the process of choosing the repertoire. Batuta could achieve this by creating a repertoire committee made up of teachers from the different territories, so that based on their experience and knowledge of the different environments in which Batuta works, they could create a list of songs, rhythms, and pedagogical strategies that attend to the needs and difficulties that teachers state they have. Arango's (2017) proposition offers a good starting point, and it could be expanded to the entirety of the territory. This could soften the rigidity of the model that the organization currently has, in which teachers must comply with a set of methodological standards. In that sense, it is worth asking why a musical organization focusing on socially oriented results have a set of methodological standards. I always had the feeling that teachers were neglected from the decision-making processes, because they did not participate in the Academic Committee, nor did they have spaces to offer input on academic issues. A committee of the nature that I propose could help to repair this historical error.

In the years that I was in Batuta, I never witnessed a serious discussion on the question of repertoires and the philosophies that should guide their implementation. In reality, everything was left to the discretion and opinion of the people of the Academic Direction. However, as I was able to verify during this research, teachers have always had complaints and observations, which have clearly been ignored by the Academic Direction. Batuta has not created strategies that include the opinions of teachers in this regard; therefore, I argue that this should be one of its focuses for adjustment.

It is also worth proposing that Batuta consider using a student-centered approach

as proposed by Guzzetta (2020), in which students can participate more actively in choosing and preparing the songs that they will work on throughout the year. What the teachers told me, and what I was able to verify in my visits to the music centers, is that the classes are rushed, trying to insert all the elements that the teachers must teach in a space of less than an hour and a half. Everything is rushed and a bit forced, with little time for reflection, analysis, or real student empowerment. It is paradoxical that Batuta, for the reasons that I already explained in previous chapters, has changed the focus from symphony orchestras to Orff ensembles, but that it, nevertheless, maintains the philosophy of fast growth, fast musical results, and fast musical samples that is so embedded in SATM programs, especially the ones focused on classical symphonic music. Focusing on students' needs and interests could help Batuta to slow down and re-focus its attention to what is important: its students.

Based on his research experience in the Red in Medellin, Baker (2022) proposed new routes for the field of SATM based on concepts of sustainability. In this sense, Baker affirmed that “perhaps what are needed are instead principles, concepts, or symbols that may be appropriated and adapted by each community or program, maybe even each individual, and unfold through bottom-up processes of collective construction” (p. 378). However, for that to happen in the case of Batuta, it would be necessary to reengineer the entire pedagogical model, towards one that allowed time for the processes to naturally settle. For this, Batuta must stop, take a breath and, as they say in Colombia, “give time to time,” so that it is the teachers, together with the children, the work teams, and the parents, can help build a better version of Batuta.

Both in the classes that I was able to visit, and in the descriptions that I obtained from the teachers, there is no noticeable rejection or repulsion towards the classes; however, it is evident that, for many of the children, the Batuta class is one more in the routine of classes they have during the day. There is no real engagement with the classes, at least not by the majority. This can be verified with the high dropout rates in the program: if the students really enjoyed the classes, they would not drop out or at least, not at the levels that they do at Batuta.

For this reason, it is worth proposing that Batuta changed or adjusted its strategy to one that sought that students make music autonomously and, in the process, enjoyed what they did. Green (2016) argued that students can achieve higher levels of motivation and consequently become more applied and dedicated when they enjoy greater autonomy in the music classroom. In this sense, Silverman (2013) argued that “students are most apt to learn music listening effectively and enjoyably when afforded democratic and creative opportunities to express their beliefs about the natures and values of the musics they decide to select, experience, and discuss critically” (p. 7). This of course means that Batuta would not only have to allow its students and teachers to participate in the selection of music, but also adjust its pedagogy so that students and teachers could have conversations, analyze, and foster critical discussions.

Based on the above, I argue that implementing Green’s (2016) model of using informal music learning practices and Guzzetta’s (2020) model of giving students freedom for organizing themselves in small groups to compose, arrange, and improvise, may help teachers with many of the issues that they stated in this research. This points

more to a Community Music model, building the resources, needs, desires, and abilities in the room, rather than working with a fixed, top-down curriculum. Clearly, there are greater complexities in a large program like Batuta. However, trying to find a middle ground between the standardization needed in such a large program and a community music ethos could help.

The above does not mean that Batuta should erase everything that they have been doing, considering that they have acquired this knowledge over a period of more than 30 years. In this sense, Arango (2017) was emphatic about not eliminating what Batuta already did in terms of teaching Colombian music, but she proposed that differential elements be included in order to prioritize the music of the Afro-Colombian people from the Pacific Coast. I adhere to her proposition, and I am not suggesting that Batuta stops teaching music from every part of Colombia; however, a greater prominence to the music of the specific region should be prioritized, and elements and activities other than just rushing through repertoire should be included in the curriculum. This could help to create what Hess (2019) called a multifaceted pedagogy of community, in which students not only play what the Academic Direction of Batuta deem is good for them, but also engage with each other at the classroom level, while connecting with the songs' sociohistorical contexts, as well as getting to know others through their musics.

The "creative project" is a step in the right direction. For the first time, Batuta's students are exercising their agency and working on creation. However, I argue that it is not enough. If Batuta really wanted to implement a student-centered pedagogical process, it has all the tools, equipment, infrastructure, and resources to do so. However, it would

need to take a step back and re-orient its self-imposed demands for growth and spectacle. As some teachers suggested, working with 35 students is far too much for a single teacher to handle and be able to offer students the chance to be creative. It is important that Batuta seriously consider reducing the number of students that attend its classes. This of course involves a greater conversation, not only inside, but outside with its stakeholders and financiers. Certainly, it will not be easy to convince financiers to reduce the number of children while keeping the same financial resources, but it is worth starting to try to move away from the large numbers game in which it has allowed itself to be drawn and to place more emphasis on quality of experience and less on quantity of participants. The Orff ensemble, due to its ease and versatility, presents a great opportunity to allow students to learn from themselves, to create, but above all, to take control of their musical learning. However, it is impossible for 35 children to do this at the same time with a single set of plates.

I am proposing that Batuta leave aside its orthodoxy in terms of pedagogy and repertoire and give its teachers more autonomy, so that they can, at the same time, translate that into more student empowerment. I argue that it is absolutely necessary for Batuta to create a committee of teachers from all regions, who can make contributions with a regional and local perspective, and that it should establish a pilot project for the development of a student-centered model, in which they can work with teachers creating and adjusting the repertoires and which includes other activities, such as discussion, improvisation, and arranging. Batuta is in urgent need of an update of its conventional, top-down, inherited from El Sistema, and a shift towards more contemporary,

empowerment-focused notions of music education. Teachers might then become less instruments of policy dictated by management, and more facilitators of participants' learning and enjoyment.

Chapter 11

Music and social transformation in the headlines

The first half of 2023 was probably the most convulsed time in Colombia's recent history for the music and music education sector. In January, the president of Colombia, Gustavo Petro, commenting on a visit by his wife Verónica Alcocer to the headquarters of El Sistema in Venezuela, announced the creation of the "Colombian orchestral system linked to the educational system" (@petrogustavo, 2023, my translation). This plan, which was further elaborated in speeches and interviews, generated considerable debate on the appropriateness of such a model to Colombia. The music sector, led by a group of intellectuals, regional musicians, and music teachers from different regions, self-organized in an unprecedented way to insist on being heard by the government (Arango, 2023; Hernández Serrano, 2023). As a result of pressure from many different actors in the music sector, the Ministry of Culture was obliged to organize numerous meetings to explain the project announced by the president, to listen to the different criticisms that were made of it, and to create some working groups with civil society to build and coordinate the different initiatives that were taking place in the field of music (Cultura, 2023).

Meanwhile, and independently, a new Music Law was being processed in the Congress of the Republic, which sought to "recognize, promote, and strengthen the Colombian musical ecosystem" (República, 2013, my translation). Although the

aforementioned law did not deal directly with the issues of the system announced by the president, a project of this nature would permeate the entire musical ecosystem of the country, given the enormous economic, infrastructure and human resources that it would need. Therefore, the Music Law, without expressly mentioning it, had a direct relationship with the orchestral project that the Petro administration was seeking.

The name chosen by the Colombian government for its most important musical program is *Sonidos para la Paz*, translated as *Sounds for Peace*. This program would be added to the already existing *Plan Nacional de Música para la Convivencia* [National Music Plan for Coexistence], to Batuta's *Sounds of Hope*, and to other similar ones that operate in Colombia. Just by reading the names of these different projects, the instrumentalization of music education in this country can easily be inferred. Given all the critical research into SATM programs in recent years, the elusiveness of tangible social results, and the high-profile scandals that have emerged from *El Sistema* (such as politicization, corruption, and sexual abuse), it is remarkable that the government held up the Venezuelan model as an inspiration and proposed to use it to solve structural problems in society. Also noteworthy is that the president of Colombia announced the creation of his musical education program with a visit to Venezuela by his wife, together with the then vice-minister of culture, Jorge Zorro. The same thing happened in 1991, when the wife of then-president Cesar Gaviria visited Venezuela and then sent Manuel Cubides to observe *El Sistema* in order to replicate it in Colombia. The way history repeated itself was perplexing, given that Batuta had been obliged to abandon the Venezuelan model, recognizing that it would not work in Colombia. But this time there

was a different response: many influential voices in the cultural sector started to ask critical questions and embarked on uncomfortable discussions.

One of the main concerns of civil society was the Eurocentric nature of a model such as the one proposed by the president. In different forums, opinion columns in the press, and many other scenarios, the subject was discussed. The discussion even came to occupy space in the most important Spanish-speaking newspaper in the world, *El País* of Madrid, with an article entitled “El mal paso de Gustavo Petro con el sector cultural que lo apoyó” [The wrong step of Gustavo Petro with the cultural sector that supported him] (Oquendo, 2023), in which the journalist explained the fear of the music sector that a program of this nature would be detrimental to local musical practices.

All of the above shows two sides of the same coin. One side is that on the part of some government actors and other organizations, the orthodox discourse on SATM programs continues to run deep, and the propaganda apparatus for programs inspired by *El Sistema* continues to be effective; thus, governments continue to consider it a good idea to implement projects of this nature, despite the lack of evidence for their effectiveness. The other side of the coin is that, in Colombia at least, opposition to these programs, based on serious and independent research, has spread in many sectors of music and music education, which demand the implementation of grassroots programs that arise from the communities, and that take into account their worldviews and local musical practices. In other words, the issue has ceased to be a topic of discussion for a few specialists and has moved to the national and even international stage. All this is encouraging, because it means that the serious and diligent criticism of the SATM sector,

at least in the case of Colombia, has had a positive effect. That is, spaces have been created to discuss and think about a more effective, down-to-earth, and community-centered model of SATM.

I recognize that there are many overlaps and parallels between the findings of my study and Baker's (2022) study on the Red in the city of Medellín. In that sense, this dissertation can be interpreted in two ways: One, as a case study on Batuta on its own. In that way, I hope that this dissertation may help to thinking about Batuta and identifying opportunities of improvement through the analysis of the teachers' experiences. The other way of interpreting it, considering the many parallels with Geoffrey Baker's work, is with the larger international field of SATM in mind. I hope that framing it with this scope, may contribute to the discussions that were taking place in Colombia at the moment of the publication of this dissertation, and hopefully, in other parts of the world as well.

In this study, I have tried to be faithful to the suggestions, proposals, and observations of Batuta teachers about the program. I fully understand that, at first glance, this study may seem overly negative, but I hope that with a careful and in-depth reading, this perception can be defeated by a more optimistic reading. As the chapter conclusions indicate, my intention is a constructive one; my aim is to discuss problems in order to move towards solutions. I hope that the experiences and proposals of teachers, narrated in these pages, can serve for the improvement of Batuta, but also for the SATM sector more broadly. In the same way, I hope that these testimonies can serve to enrich the public discussions that took place in Colombia during 2023 and that will surely continue to take place in different parts of the world, while the SATM sector seeks to expand, in some

cases, but also to rethink and reorient itself in others.

From the beginning, this dissertation focused specifically on documenting the experiences, suggestions and comments of current Batuta teachers. Although I conducted interviews with former teachers, former administrative assistants, and former psychosocial professionals, as well as informal conversations with Batuta employees other than teachers when I visited music centers, I did not focus on the experiences of these people within the institution — and although those testimonies provided me with even more context, I did not include them in the presentation of results. I did this with the specific goal of not fragmenting the testimonies and the analysis of the results. However, this opens the way for further research into the experiences of groups other than teachers and, thus, to enrich this important discussion. In the same way, it is important to explore testimonies from students, families, directors of the schools where Batuta operates, administrative assistants, psychosocial professionals, and all those who in one way or another make it possible for this type of program to operate locally. As Baker's research in Medellín revealed, these different constituencies may have quite distinct views. All these voices are important, but it is ordinary teachers who often get left out of the picture, as reports tend to focus on the views of program leaders and beneficiaries.

This dissertation explored the experiences of teachers and found that they had specific observations about working with victims; they revealed a lack of institutional clarity and coherence around social goals and the difficulties of pursuing those goals when they have musical targets that must be met. In the same way, they expressed their concerns and ideas about the design and implementation of the repertoire, and they made

suggestions about their training in general, as well as their training sessions. The teachers presented their suggestions to attend to the difficult socioeconomic situations of the children and their families, and they detailed the difficulties they face to implement the Batuta programs in the terms that are described in the documents, revealing how they end up financing activities of the programs. It is therefore worth thinking about future research that explores these issues with the aforementioned interest groups. Deeper knowledge of the opinions and concerns of children, their families, schoolteachers, and other people — and not just gathering superficial comments to justify the status quo — would serve to design better and more effective programs.

Appendix List

Appendix A: Interviews and other data sources

Pseudonym	Date	Perspective	Medium	Activity
Keyla Sarabia	17 May 2022	Teacher	In-person interview	Initial informal interview
Ricardo Sánchez	17 May 2022	Teacher	In-person interview	Initial informal interview
Fernando Alvarez	18 May 2022	Teacher	In-person interview	Initial informal interview
Vanessa Zapata	23 May 2022	Teacher	Zoom interview	Initial informal interview
Jacobo López	24 May 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Isabel Costa	25 May 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Rocío Navas	26 May 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Jairo Lara	27 May 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Yaneth Mantilla	27 May 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Helena Rey	27 May 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Andrés González	31 May 2022	Teacher	Zoom interview	Initial informal interview
Jazmín Andrade	1 June 2022	Teacher	Zoom interview	Initial informal interview
Susana Nieves	2 June 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Karen Daza	2 June 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Jorge Torres	2 June 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Centro Musical del Norte – City of La Giralda	17 June 2022	Music Center	In person visit	Site observation
Camilo Gallego	22 June 2022	Former Teacher/Batuta senior official	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview

Carlos Viveros	22 June 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Jorge Benavides	23 June 2022	Former teacher	In-person interview	Initial informal interview
Sebastián Sánchez	25 June 2022	Teacher	In-person interview	Initial informal interview
Institución Educativa del Caribe - City of Lagunas	14 July 2022	Music Center	In-person visit	Site observation
Nubia Sánchez	19 August 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Institución Educativa Superior – City of Santa Clara	01 September 2022	Music Center	In-person visit	Site observation
Institución Educativa Superior – City of Puerto Nuevo	07 September 2022	Music Center	In-person visit	Site observation
Javier Díaz	20 September 2022	Former teacher	Google Meet interview	Initial informal interview
Jairo Lara	21 September 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Follow-up interview
Rocío Navas	22 September 2022	Teacher	Google Meet Interview	Follow-up interview
Nubia Sánchez	22 September 2022	Teacher	Google Meet Interview	Follow-up interview
Group of former psychosocial professionals	23 September 2022	Group of 5 former psychosocial professionals	Google Meet Group interview	Informal interview
Vanessa Zapata	28 September 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Follow-up interview
Institución Educativa Superior – City of Santa Clara	03 October 2022	Music Center	In-person visit	Site observation
Keyla Sarabia	04 October 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Follow-up interview
Jorge Torres	04 October 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Follow-up interview
Andrés González	05 October 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Follow-up interview
Adolfo Jaimes	07 October 2022	Former Teacher	In-person interview	Informal interview

Helena Rey	18 October 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Follow-up interview
Jazmín Andrade	19 October 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Follow-up interview
Jacobo López	19 October 2022	Teacher	Google Meet interview	Follow-up interview
Ricardo Sánchez	03 December 2022	Teacher	Phone conversation	Follow-up interview

Appendix B: Informal Interview Protocol / Initial Questions

Time:	Date:
Interviewer:	Interviewee pseudonym:

Brief description of role: Introductions – Who I am and how participant was chosen.

- (1) Restate purpose, context, and intended uses of interview; (2) assure anonymity and confidentiality; (3) Assure participant of the freedom to interrupt, clarify, or criticize a question during the interview; (4) express gratitude; (5) Ask for questions.

-
- Please tell me a little bit about your background, your experience as a music teacher and anything else that you may find relevant or interesting about you.
 - Can you please describe your tasks at the organization? Maybe provide an overall description of the activities that you must perform on a day-to-day- basis?
 - Can you please describe the social and cultural environment in which you develop your day-to-day activities? You may include the neighborhood, the school, the town or any information that comes to your mind that you think can provide a good description of the place in which you work.
 - Can you describe the internal dynamics of your team? How do you divide the work between the social, musical, and administrative tasks that your team needs to perform?
 - Can you describe your relationship with your regional management and how is your communication with them? Do you have recurrent meetings? How do you receive and implement guidelines and how are they measured?
 - How are students chosen to participate in the program? For how long do you think they stay in the program on average?
 - How often do you see your students? Do they participate actively or passively in the implementation of the program?
 - Can you describe your relationship with the Academic Direction of your organization? How is your repertoire chosen and how do you implement the guidelines?
 - How do you think your work affects your community? Do you think it is important that the students participate in the program and why?
 - What are the major challenges that you face in your day-to-day activities? How do you mediate them?
 - Can you describe your overall interaction with the local authorities? Do you interact with them on a regular basis? Do you ask or get support from the office of the major or any other authority at the local level?
 - If you were in a decision-making position, would you make adjustments or significant changes to the program or would you leave everything as it is?

Appendix C: Follow up Interview Protocol

Time:	Date:
Interviewer:	Interviewee pseudonym:

Extended explanation of partial results: Explain to participant the themes that emerged during the first stage and ask for answers and proposals from interviewee for each emerging theme.

- (1) Restate purpose, context, and intended uses of interview; (2) explain each theme, ask if participant agrees or does not agree with each of the themes and ask for specific proposals, suggestions, or solutions from interviewee. (3) reassure anonymity and confidentiality; (4) Reassure participant of the freedom to interrupt, clarify, or criticize a question during the interview; (4) express gratitude; (5) present each theme.

-
- Most teachers manifest different things about repertoire: that it is too rigid, that it is foreign to their environment and children do not relate to it, that it is too easy or that it is too complicated. Can you offer comments about this and suggestions on how to approach the issues with repertoires?
 - Many teachers have mentioned that they make personal sacrifices: they chip in money for specific issues of the music centers, work longer hours or do things that are not in their job descriptions. Have you done such things? Can you offer solutions?
 - Many teachers have mentioned how the socioeconomic situation of the children affects their performance in class and makes it difficult to accomplish goals. Do you agree with your peers who suggest this? What, in your view can be done to solve these issues?
 - Most teachers value the training sessions in a positive manner. How can Batuta maximize the benefit from those training sessions?
 - Most teachers have mentioned the difficulties of working with victims. Can you elaborate on that?
 - Let's read Batuta's mission and vision statement. Can you explain what it implies at the local level? Can you explain what you understand and what you have to do to accomplish that mission and vision?

Appendix D: Informed Consent – Official Document

Project Title **STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINE OF MUSIC AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION A study of teachers working for Batuta in the Caribbean Coast of Colombia**

Project outline

The purpose of this research is to perform an ethnography in which the experiences of a group of teachers who work in socially oriented music programs in the Caribbean region of Colombia will be studied. My research questions are the following: What are the intentions, motivations, and expectations of music teachers working for Batuta? How well prepared are these teachers for achieving Batuta's goals? What are the musical, social, administrative and philosophical challenges that they face in their daily activities? How might Batuta function more effectively? You have been invited to participate in a study conducted by Camilo Andrés Puche, as part of his doctoral dissertation in Boston University. As a subject in this research, you will be asked to participate in the activities that are specified in the following table.

Activity	Duration	Participant role.

Once the research is completed, all data sources, notes and documents will be destroyed. The research data will be gathered solely by Camilo Andrés Puche and they will only be used in the context of the present research.

Risks and benefits

There may be associated risks for your participation in this research. Due to the nature of the questions in the instruments and the observation of your classes and other activities by the researcher, you may experience some discomfort or anxiety. Despite the fact that the subjects of this research will participate under complete anonymity, there is a risk that your identity may be discovered and therefore your answers or positions on certain issues may put you at risk. Your participation in this project is voluntary, therefore, you have the right to opt out at any moment. There are no direct benefits to you, however your participation in this research project allows you the opportunity to contribute to the reflection and deliberation of the groups of teachers about the way that music education is practiced in the context of your organization; the opportunity to make an important contribution so that projects of this nature may implement strategies for their improvement.

Payment

There is no payment associated to your participation in this research project.

Data storage and confidentiality protection.

Your identity and any other information that may identify you will not be revealed in any public presentation of this research study. The information will be coded and the researcher will use pseudonyms to protect your privacy. Every data source will be kept in a safe place at the researcher's residence. The data will be stored in Boston University's One Drive.

It is important to state that since the researcher will use WhatsApp to communicate with you, Meta Platforms, Inc. will have your data because WhatsApp is a Meta company.

Time

This research project requires a maximum participation time of 7 months. The approximate time of each of the required activities is specified in the first section of this document.

A list of the people or groups who may review the study records for purposes such as quality control or safety (e.g., the Institutional Review Board at Boston University, federal and state agencies that oversee or review research, Central University Offices)

Use of results

The project's results will be presented in the form of (a) doctoral dissertation (b) lectures and conferences, national and international meetings (c) academic journal articles (d) book chapters and/or I books.

If you have questions, please contact Camilo Puche by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]. You may also contact Dr. Geoffrey Baker at Geoff.baker@rhul.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I can read and comment on the document titled Easing the pain: Teaching music in war-affected areas of the Colombian Caribbean.
- I have the opportunity to formulate questions regarding the purposes and procedures of the study.
- My participation in this study is voluntary. I can opt out or not participate at any moment, without any future damage.
- The principal researcher may retire me from the study according to his professional judgement.
- Any information that derives from the study, which may personally identify me, cannot be disclosed without my explicit consent.
- I express my consent to participate in the project with my signature

RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE: _____

[REDACTED]
Phone Number: [REDACTED]

DATE:

Appendix E: Informed Consent – Spanish Translation

Título del Proyecto

STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINE OF MUSIC AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION A study of teachers working for Batuta in the Caribbean Coast of Colombia

Descripción del Proyecto

El propósito de esta investigación es realizar una etnografía en la que se estudiarán las experiencias de un grupo de profesores que trabajen en proyectos musicales con enfoque social en la región Caribe de Colombia. Las preguntas de investigación son las siguientes: ¿Cuáles son las intenciones, motivaciones y expectativas de profesores de música que trabajen para Batuta? ¿Qué tan bien preparados están los profesores para alcanzar las metas de Batuta? ¿Cuáles son los retos musicales, sociales, administrativos y filosóficos que los profesores enfrentan en sus actividades diarias? ¿Cómo puede Batuta funcionar de manera más efectiva?

Usted ha sido invitado a participar en un estudio conducido por Camilo Andrés Puche, como parte de su disertación doctoral en la Universidad de Boston (Boston University). Como sujeto de la investigación a usted se le solicitará participar en las actividades que se especifican en la siguiente tabla.

Actividad	Tiempo de Duración (aproximado)	Rol como participante
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Una vez completada la investigación se destruirán todas las fuentes de datos, notas y otros documentos relacionados. Los datos de la investigación serán recogidos únicamente por Camilo Andrés Puche y serán utilizados únicamente en el contexto del proyecto previamente estipulado.

Riesgos y Beneficios

Pueden existir riesgos asociados a la participación en este estudio. Debido a la naturaleza de las preguntas de los instrumentos aplicados y a la observación de sus clases y otras actividades laborales por parte del investigador usted puede llegar a sentir algo de incomodidad o ansiedad. Por otra parte, a pesar de que los sujetos de la presente investigación participarán bajo la reserva del anonimato, existe un riesgo de que su identidad sea descubierta y por consiguiente sus respuestas o posiciones sobre algunos temas puedan ponerlo a usted en riesgo. Su participación en este proyecto es voluntaria: tiene el derecho de retirarse en cualquier momento. No existen beneficios directos por su participación en este proyecto de investigación, sin embargo, este proyecto le permitirá a usted lo siguiente: la oportunidad de contribuir a la reflexión del cuerpo docente sobre la forma en que se entiende y se practica la docencia musical en el contexto de su organización; la oportunidad de hacer un aporte importante para que proyectos de este tipo puedan implementar estrategias de mejora.

Remuneración

No hay un pago asociado a su participación en este proyecto de investigación.

Almacenamiento de datos para proteger la confidencialidad

Su identidad y cualquier otra información que lo pueda identificar no serán reveladas en ninguna presentación pública del estudio. La información se codificará y el investigador utilizará pseudónimos para proteger su privacidad. Todas las fuentes de datos se mantendrán en un lugar seguro en el domicilio del investigador.

Es importante mencionar que, dado que el investigador utilizará WhatsApp para comunicarse con usted, Meta Platforms, Inc. Almacenará su información, dado que WhatsApp es una compañía de Meta.

Tiempo

El tiempo de participación de su parte que requiere el proyecto es de máximo 7 meses. El tiempo aproximado para cada una de las actividades requeridas se especifica en el primer apartado de este documento.

Uso de los resultados

Los resultados de este proyecto se presentarán en forma de (a) disertación doctoral (b) ponencias a congresos, encuentros o reuniones nacionales e internacionales (c) artículos para revistas indexadas (d) capítulos de libros y (e) libros.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta, puede contactar a Camilo Puche al teléfono [REDACTED] o al correo electrónico [REDACTED]. También puede contactar al Dr. Geoffrey Baker al correo geoff.baker@rhul.ac.uk.

DERECHO DE LOS PARTICIPANTES

- Puedo leer y comentar el documento titulado Easing the pain: Teaching music in war-affected areas of the Colombian Caribbean.
- Tengo la oportunidad de formular preguntas respecto a los propósitos y procedimientos del estudio.
- Mi participación en el estudio es voluntaria. Puedo decidir no participar o retirarme en cualquier momento sin perjuicio futuro alguno.
- El investigador principal puede retirarme del estudio de acuerdo a su discreción profesional.
- Cualquier información que se derive del estudio que me identifique personalmente no podrá ser divulgada sin mi consentimiento explícito.
- Con mi firma expreso mi decisión de participar en el proyecto.

FIRMA DEL INVESTIGADOR: _____

Teléfono: [REDACTED]

FECHA:

Appendix F – Observation form

Observation Field Notes #:	# of teachers:	Site:
Date/time:	Observer:	Setting:

- # of participants – Teachers/students/staff
- Participant description
- Activities/processes
- Notable quotes:
- Comments on issue questions:

Appendix G: Timeline of key events in Batuta

The following timeline is extracted from Duplat (2021).

July 4 th 1991	Colombia issues a new and updated Political Constitution
Year 1991	Colombia's first lady promotes de creation of Batuta as an El Sistema Inspired program and obtains support from the government as well as the private sector for the funding of the organization. Batuta is created as a mixed organization, funded by private and public resources, but governed by private law.
September 22 nd 1991	Batuta's Foundational concert in Bogota. Batuta starts operating from an office in the "Palacio de Nariño", the Colombian presidential house.
Second half of 1993	A national orchestra is formed and the first national tour is performed, playing works by Schubert and Beethoven.
1994	Batuta's headquarters move out of the presidential house to a private office.
1994	The Red de Solidaridad Social (Social Solidarity Network) is created by Colombian Government. This is an organization that was in charge of implementing Colombia's social policy, especially regarding care for victims of the conflict. Batuta would later get a large percentage of its financing from the Red de Solidaridad Social.
1995	Due to budgetary constraints, Batuta starts moving away from the Symphonic model and moving towards a more cost-effective Orff ensemble model. (p. 51)
2001	Signature of agreement with the Red de Solidaridad Social (Social Solidarity Network). Project is called "Déjate Tocar por la Música" (Let Yourself be Touched by Music). Project seeked to "implement a pedagogical model for the socialization and psicosocial recovery through musical practice with 210 children from displaced families" (p. 67).
2004	The first group of psychosocial professionals starts working for Batuta looking for ways to work with families of the children.
2005	"Déjate Tocar por la Música" (Let Yourself be Touched by Music) is expanded nationally.
2011	Issuance of Law 1448, called the Law of Victims and Land Restitution. Under this legal act, in the year 2012, the program "Déjate Tocar por la Música" changed its name to "Música para la Reconciliación" (Music for Reconciliation) (p. 112).
2012	Batuta created the Social Management area, increasing the importance of social work by hiring a larger team of social workers.

Appendix H: Timeline of events of dissertation

February 7 th , 2022	Access requested to Batuta's executive president.
February 7 th , 2022	Access granted.
February 16 th , 2022	National academic director communicated teachers about the research.
February and March 2022	Researcher contacted teachers independently to arrange meetings for interviews.
May 17 th and 18 th , 2022	Performed first rounds of personal interviews with teachers who were attending a training session in the city of Barranquilla.
May through August 2022	Performed initial informal interviews.
September 2022	Started coding and sorting data.
September through December 2022	Performed follow-up interviews.

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