



Naming is Dominating? Universalization of theater and epistemic silencing about Afro-Brazilian scenic manifestations

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ABSTRACT – Naming is Dominating? Universalization of theater and epistemic silencing about Afro-Brazilian scenic manifestations – By considering theater as one of the many scenic manifestations of humanity, this textual digression intends to denaturalize its universalization by placing it in the historical and cultural context of the Brazilian colonization process. Based on studies on epistemic racism and aesthetic racism, it is questioned the excluding centrality of white-western theater used in the reading of the multiple manifestations of scenic character of African matrix gestated and produced in the Brazilian diaspora.

Keywords: Theater and Colonization. Afro-popular Cultures. Performing Arts and Decoloniality. Epistemic Racism.

RÉSUMÉ – Nommer est Dominer? L'Applicabilité centralisatrice du théâtre sur manifestations scéniques afro-brésiliennes – En considérant le théâtre comme l'une des nombreuses manifestations scéniques de l'humanité, on prétend par cette digression textuelle dénaturer son universalisation en la situant dans le contexte historique et culturel du processus de colonisation brésilienne. Sur la base d'études sur le racisme épistémique et le racisme esthétique, on s'interroge à propos de la centralité excluante du théâtre blanc-occidental utilisée dans la lecture des multiples manifestations de caractère scénique de matrice africaine gestées et produites dans la diaspora brésilienne. Les études sur la décolonialité offrent un support théorique utilisé ici à travers de la révision de la littérature sur le sujet, ainsi que l'analyse du document curriculaire des licences de théâtre.

Mots-clés: Théâtre et Colonisation. Cultures Afro-populaires. Arts du Spectacle et Décolonialité. Racisme Épistémique.

RESUMO – Nomear é Dominar? Universalização do teatro e o silenciamento epistêmico sobre manifestações cênicas afro-brasileiras – Ao considerar o teatro como uma das diversas manifestações cênicas da humanidade, pretende-se, com esta digressão textual, desnaturalizar a sua universalização, situando-a no contexto histórico e cultural do processo colonizador brasileiro. A centralidade excludente do teatro branco-ocidental promove o racismo epistêmico e, proveniente deste, o racismo estético que se apresenta em diversos espaços de poder, incluindo as universidades brasileiras. Os estudos acerca da decolonialidade oferecem um amparo teórico, aqui usado por meio da revisão de literatura sobre o tema, assim como a análise de documento curricular de cursos de graduação em Teatro.

Palavras-chave: Teatro e Colonização. Culturas Afro-Populares. Artes Cênicas e Decolonialidade. Racismo Epistêmico.

The phrase that appears in the title of this article was heard by me for the first time, affirmatively, in 2019, uttered by intellectual Antônio Bispo dos Santos, also known as Nego Bispo¹. The quilombola leader associates the naming coordinated by the Portuguese in the colonial period as a taming process. According to him: “Whenever you want to tame an animal, the first thing you change is its name” (Santos, 2015, p. 27, our translation). This resource is construed by him as a domestication strategy very often employed by the Portuguese dominator in relation to pindoramic peoples: “[...] the colonizers, by replacing the various self-denominations of these peoples, imposing a generalized denomination on them, were trying to break their identities with the intention of thingifying/dehumanizing them” (Santos, 2015, p. 28, our translation).

Since then, I began to think more in depth about the assertion presented in the title of this article, but shifting it to the field of theatrical studies, especially to the areas of research intended to investigate scenic manifestations identified as being Afro-popular or simply popular². From the mobilizing provocation carried out by Nego Bispo, some other questions have gradually arisen. I share the following guiding questions that have permeated my reflective path: being one of the several scenic manifestations of the world, why is theater universalized as a hegemonic category in relation to the multiplicity of scenic phenomena that occur in the world? Is it possible — taking the Euro-white-western theater as a starting point — to achieve comprehensive and more reliable comprehensions of scenic phenomena that were structured in another cosmology, especially those related to the afrodiasporic universes? Is it necessary to have a single and conceptual word to encompass the multiple phenomena of scenic character?

The presented questions drove the expansion of a study that incited in me a process of denaturalization that even led to a critical visitation to my own training as an artist, professor and researcher in Theater. In an attempt to reach the complexity of the issue, paths crossed in various areas such as arts, de/colonization, language, body, epistemic racism, discussion of the popular and the Afro-Brazilian, theatrical training. To begin the development of my digression, I present a roadmap synthesized in three points and then a brief historical panorama concerning theater to position the conceptual field on which I am based: a) Theater with its historical and political

affiliations is only one of many human manifestations of scenic character; b) The use of Theater as a universal reference, in a relation of power, in relation to the other human manifestations of scenic character, is not a coincidence. It is the product of a historical and political project associated with a dominant, racist elite; c) Epistemic racism causes scenic references of Afro-Brazilian and indigenous cultures to be, in general, manipulated or excluded from institutional public policies, including university curricula.

Let us proceed initially with the historical contextualization.

Origin of Theater in Brazil: colonizing purposes and poetics

Considering the official institution of artistic making in Brazil, historiographical writings contain the scenic practice referenced in the first contacts between the Portuguese and the native peoples in the sixteenth century, and this practice already demonstrated the intent of domination with the evident purpose of converting the indigenous peoples. Records in letters and written documents from the time the first Portuguese arrived in Bahia, in 1500, show the introduction of music and dance in Catholic religious meetings and acts. However, the literature specialized on the subject shows the arrival of the Jesuits in 1549 as the milestone of the arise of theater in the Portuguese colony in America. It is with the official coming of the Society of Jesus, sent by the Crown, that the missionaries strongly exploited the artistic languages for catechizing purposes, because:

The Jesuits, who, as is well known, also learned the theatrical technique in their order of study, greatly favored the indians' gusto for singing, dancing, mime and oratory, also harnessing their customs, masks and impressive plumages to create and enrich a theatrical production with the purpose of catechesis (Cacciaglia, 1986, p. 6, our translation).

Through the texts staged at the time, with most of the authorship credited to Jesuit José de Anchieta (1534-1597), theater has in most of its works the epistemic character of the colonizing project:

The previous paganism of the life of the foresters, with their reprehensible customs, is stigmatized in the light of Christian good and morals. [...] finally, good and evil, saints, angels and other protective names of the Church are faced with the demonic forces, a varied court of devils bearing the names of enemy indians (Magaldi, 2001, p. 17-18, our translation).

Theatrolgist Sábato Magaldi (2001, p. 20, our translation) even affirms that “theater was also a form of prayer,” qualifying this artistic practice as something beneficial, since a prayer, a priori, is characterized as a sacralized conversation with a supreme deity, in the case of Jewish-Christian peoples, with God. The author does not question, however, the contradictory character of the use of theater, supported by religion, and its violent process of colonial domination, since in these circumstances the actions strongly assaulted certain human groups — indigenous and, later, black people —, and the very Christian principles announced in the guiding book of Catholics, the Bible. In addition to the religious association, the public performances took place in close relation with the governmental command, being also a way to celebrate the arrival of religious and administrative authorities to the places of conquest.

Analysis of plays and documents of the period provide us the evidence that the priority colonizing plan was the possession of the territory, in addition to the control or extermination of local cultures. The means used for accomplishing that included explicit strategies of extreme violence and other strategies, sometimes, no less violent, but concealed in scenic representations that were attractive, humorous and pleasant to be watched.

The Jesuit dramaturgy followed a Manichean structure that favored one of the opposing sides located in the representation of the good, following the perspective of the Catholic power. In general, the enactments that had a realistic character took place in outdoor spaces, using nature as the setting of the scene, with natural lighting, or, when they happened at night, they were lit with resin torches. In the performance, together with the missionaries, children and indigenous people were sometimes part of the cast, with dialogues and soliloquies in Portuguese, Spanish (Castilian) and Tupi, as informed by historian Mario Cacciaglia (1986). Regarding the staging of *Diálogo sobre a Conversão do Gentio* [Dialogue on the Conversion of the Gentile], which took place in Espírito Santo in 1583, prepared by Manuel da Nóbrega to celebrate the coming of Fathers Cardim and Gouveia, the historian says:

The indians themselves were the actors, and a chorus of naked and mottled children cheered the spectacle with war cries and unbridled dances. Other indigenous boys danced and sang pastoral songs to the rhythm of violas,

tambourines and flutes. It lacked not even the Anhangü character, that is, the devil, played by Indian Antônio Pires, who aroused the enthusiasm of the indigenous people with his games and somersaults. Cardim observes that this character could not be absent in Indian festivals (we cannot fail to see the similarity to Harlequin, also originally diabolical) (Cacciaglia, 1986, p. 9, our translation).

The dramaturgy was structured in acts, following a European scenic logic, resembling the plays of Portuguese Gil Vicente, the tragicomedies, the sacred-medieval representations, with use of small dialogues, sometimes issued in rhymed verses, addressing martyrdom and exaltation of saints, miracles, sin and salvation, condemnation of so-called pagan practices, and modeling of behaviors determined by the Church and the Crown. In the textual structure, supported by protagonists and antagonists, the indigenous people played the role of rivals, representing the evil to be fought in figures such as Guaixará, king of the demons, and his minions Aimbirê and Sara-vaia, and zoomorphic figures from the indigenous mythology, demonized by the Jesuit creators in names such as Urubu, Tautarama, Jaguaruçu, and Caburé. Playing the roles of redeemers of “sinners,” in the representation of the good, the texts and scenes were given characters such as: angels, saints, the government, Christian believers, and converted indigenous people (Cacciaglia, 1986; Prado, 1999; Magaldi, 2001).

The introduction and development of Western theater in Brazil by the Jesuits forged a poetics structured in texts, practices and stagings that responded to the intentional purposes of catechization. Thus, in a long and complex historical journey, a certain scenic culture was officially affirmed in Brazil under the auspices of the Western dominator. There was the institution of a theatrical framework that dialogued directly with the ideological line of the colonial period. Without a radical break with the colonizing project, the hegemonic theater, placed in its institutional officialities, continues to reproduce characteristics of the poetics of origin, for example: spectacles organized according to a binary dramaturgical opposition; performances primarily supported by the textual structure; the scenic centrality in relation to the passivity of the audience and the low criticism about the processes of domination associated with colonization, such as racism, patriarchy, and cultural elitism. According to Professor Leda Maria Martins (2020, our translation), “Theater was one of the most powerful weapons of conquest,

domination, exclusion and usurpation against enslaved peoples in the Americas, be them indigenous peoples, forest peoples, or black peoples”.

By referencing the catechetical activity of the Jesuits as a landmark of the origin of theater in Brazil, there is corroboration of the Eurocentric and racist character of the colonizing project that centralizes its parameters in the reading and definition of the other scenic cultures. Reality is fictionalized by issuing an informational and conceptual legitimacy that determines, through a single cultural signifier, all the other histories, landmarks and manifestations of existence that moved bodies, created corporal gestural meanings, functionalities and applicabilities in rites and epistemes of scenic nature. In being established as the only point of origin, the white-western-European culture erases the other scenic existences conducted by multiple groups, which are subordinated by a structure that favors the protagonism of opposition and elimination and/or domination of the *other*.

We enter the discursive field of identity policies that not only affirm differences, but also problematize the use of classifications based on games of privileges and oppressions, after all, according to Tomaz Tadeu Silva (2000, p. 91, our translation): “Those who have the power to represent have the power to define and determine identity”. Jurema Werneck (2005, n.p., our translation), a black physician and activist, recognizes, in turn, that “[...] the capacity to name things speaks of a situation of power. That is, of a possibility of ordering the world according to one's own, singular bases, from individual points of view and through collectivities, entire peoples. That is a position of privilege”.

In the colonizing process, European centrality became the first reference for the qualification of persons, behaviors, poetics, ethics, a system that is organized so as to privilege those who represent it. Theater becomes the identity reference, universalized and centralized, in order to be the evaluation parameter for the other scenic cosmologies, especially those practiced by black men and women in Brazil. This constitutes an ideological incongruity, as many of these pieces of knowledge were gestated and/or practiced in a position of confrontation and resistance to the colonizing model. Thus, they function as if the Afro-Brazilian manifestations of scenic character, for example, became the “other of the hegemonic ego in power” (Farias; Maia, 2020, p. 578, our translation) represented by theater.

In this case, the discussion should focus on the issue of representation in two senses: in the concrete instance of reality, it establishes the social power to designate and to be for the other; while in the scenic fictional setting, it is associated with an extra-reality perspective, emphasizing a view of scenic manifestations as a simulacrum. In the studies focused on the theme, this concept, which so much characterizes the dominant Western theater, assumes a centrality in the perception of scenic phenomena. The French expert on twentieth century theater and author of the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du théâtre à travers le monde*, Michel Corvin, refers to a definition of this art he studied by emphasizing words such as: simulacrum, fiction, plausible lie, illusion. According to him: “The word is magic, it makes the thing by saying it. From absence, from nothing, from creators, it generates fiction”³ (Corvin, 2008, p. 1339-1340, our translation). However, the researcher shows the cultural territory on which he is based, demarcating it as the western theater. As pointed out by Professor Michel Albin (1998), this operative concept refers to the thought of fiction, of an action parallel to reality. According to him, representation constitutes the essence of the theatrical work, being done to and for this end. This operational idea of Western theater appears as divergent in some other cultures and in its forms of scenic manifestation. Martins (2020, our translation), in analyzing phenomena of the Bantu culture, says that: “In the scope of these practices there is nothing that is parallel to the real. In the context of the Bantu manifestations the act of doing is. It does not represent, it is. The word is, the dance is”.

In examining scenic manifestations produced outside the institutional axis, we realized that some studies promote a search for the European cultural framework in equivalences that often do not exist in Afro-popular scenic phenomena. Categories adopted in analyses explore elements such as representation, dramaturgy, scenography, costumes, makeup, that is, fundamentals that are part of theater and not necessarily of the other scenic organizations. There is a modeling characterized by the constant search for theatrical equivalents in scenic organizations that are not constituted with the operating principles of this system. According to Congolese philosopher Bunseki Fu-Kiau:

One cannot dance easily in a borrowed wrapper [N’lele ansômpa ka utominanga makinu ko]. It is wrong for a system to try to manipulate or impose

a way of thinking on other systems. Such attempt only worsens relations in the world, a confirmation of the total lack of knowledge in the area of tying (coding) and untying (decoding) in life itself [kânga ye kutula mu luzîngu] (Santos, 2019, p. 57, translation by author).

This observation, indicated by the Congolese philosopher, is pointed out by the Nigerian researcher Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí as a recurring practice in Western culture. Regarding her studies on gender, she states that: “[...] one cannot assume that the social organization of one culture (including of the dominant West) is universal or that the interpretations of the experiences of one culture explain another” (Oyěwùmí, 2021, p. 39, our translation).

Theater — as it is presented in most institutional spaces — is the universal reference in relation to the other practices of representations/presentations, being often used, especially by researchers, to name any and all forms of scenic phenomena existing in different cultures and territories. Raised to the totalizing category, it is widely used to designate what is built outside the European-White-Western spectrum. This theater situated as a central reference and ethnocentrically has as its model the Aristotelian construction created according to the “textual tragedy isolated from its ritual and Athenian context,” as stated by French professor Florence Dupont (2017, p. 4, our translation). This Westernized, Aristotelian theater, universalized and propagated in power structures over the other cultures of the world is designated by the above professor as contemporary panaristotelianism and it has a direct relation with the “invention of staging and modernity”. According to the researcher:

[...] contemporary panaristotelianism will appear as a recent phenomenon and not as the result of a long uninterrupted tradition anchored in the Athenian theater. Quite the contrary, Aristotelianism seems to have progressively colonized European theaters as they ceased to be ritualized and codified practices, even if they were no more than social rituals (Dupont, 2017, p. 17, our translation).

I include this observation in the discussion so as to evince a recurring issue in the field of studies focused on Afro-popular cultural practices. We often perceive this universalization in the naming of other modes of staging applied in academic research. The universalized white-western theater ends up being, in many intellectual actions, the measure for readings of Afro-

Brazilian scenic practices, establishing relations that reveal the status of power over the other scenic cultural practices.

Like the generalizing naming, a establishment of parallels is commonly explored in which the elements of theater are used to endorse the *other* Afro-Brazilian scenic manifestations, such that we locate denominations in research results, such as the *dramaturgy of Cavalo Marinho, the open-air theater of Lambe Sujo and Caboclinhos, the makeup of Nego Fugido*, the parade of a Samba School named as an opera, among others.

The use of words circumscribed to the field of theater in naming other scenic systems dialogues with what professor and artist Tiganá Santana discusses in this regard. According to him: “[...] Words can bring in themselves a complete conceptual world, which includes other ways of thinking, understanding and inhabiting the universe that surrounds us. Through words, we learn to read the world” (Rodrigues, 2020, our translation). Tiganá Santana informs us that, according to Congolese philosopher Fu-Kiau, language is the “[...] most important instrument of human beings for cultural communication and social learning of patterns and behavior” (Rodrigues, 2020, our translation).

Also considering the game of manipulation through naming and invisibilization, we can see that, at other times, institutionalized theater also rejects the association of its field of study with Afro-popular celebrations, defining very clearly what is of the order of art and what is of the order of the popular, of the people. Thus, there is the demarcation of a distance defined by differences, but, above all, affirming spaces of power that translate into fields of knowledge validated and legitimized in school curricula, in public policies, in programs for incentives and funding with different values in their destinations, which place *theater* (western-white-aristotelian) as the first reference in relation to the popular games and to the Afro-Brazilian scenic manifestations of popular nature.

Thinker Lélia Gonzalez (1988, p. 70, our translation), regarding the language, observing the invisibilization in relation to the marks of Africanization in Brazil, points out: “Needless to say how much all this is covered by the ideological veil of whitening, is repressed by Eurocentric classifications such as ‘popular culture,’ ‘national folklore,’ etc., which minimize the importance of the black contribution”.

Often, the afro of the popular is discarded in its enunciation, promoting an erasure of its African cultural matrix, becoming folklore, national, Brazilian, popular, regional, traditional. With this procedure, there is a risk of annihilating the web and the tensions that involve power, affirming epistemic racism and aesthetic racism. By highlighting the matrix reference in the use of the term Afro-popular, there is the presentation of an intention to manifest the aspects of cultural invisibilization to which are subjected quilombola communities, peripheral communities, communities of small towns forgotten by the economic and governmental centers of the country.

Regarding samba, content creator Thiago André (2019) provides an appropriate illustration to this discussion:

With the rise of Getúlio Vargas and the dictatorship in the Estado Novo, samba is co-opted by the State to constitute a set of measures that sought to give Brazil a unique national identity. For that New Brazil that was born modernized in the 1930s, primitive and low-culture practices were no longer suitable. That is, African culture. We want samba, but not Africa or the Africans. Once again, Brazil, as a nation, sought social harmony by celebrating the mixture of races, while systematically erasing any cultural trait that was not white.

It was through white subjects who bought the authorship of lyrics and melodies from black authors, with the elimination of percussive instruments and sounds typical of batuque, with white voices/bodies as enunciators of black creation, that samba became popular in Brazil with a wide national reach, but for that it needed to be “domesticated, whitened, unAfricanized” (André, 2019).

The Afro-popular, from the perspective of the current and active colonizing project, is constituted as the exotic other, secondary in the scene, or thingified in their body cosmologies as an object of research to be conceptualized by the intellectual reflective practice, largely represented by researchers linked to universities, carried out by members that are external and/or stranger to the milieu under investigation. In order to break with a practice of domination, it is necessary a commitment that surpasses the structural mechanisms of training of artists, professors and researchers associated with the Performing Arts, since this knowledge is practically discarded in most of the undergraduate and teaching degree programs in the area⁴.

The practices of Afro-Brazilian matrices were (and still are), mostly, categorized as non-art, defined in intellectual settings with broad designations such as: folklore, primitive, popular culture, traditional knowledges, cultural practice, or cultural performance. Even though they consist of performances based on recognizable artistic languages, Afrodiasporic expressions are seen as an exotic *other* by most of the institutions that promote the arts, whether of an intellectual order (such as universities) or of a cultural order (secretariats and representations of public administration) and even by artists.

According to some female thinkers and some male thinkers, categorizing the various practices of staging as theater is to determine — based on a center of power, that is, on the Aristotelian-European model — the definition of the other. This proves, to a large extent, an authoritarian action, as it generally deprives itself of its own cultural context of performance, enthroning the aesthetic and conceptual postulates of the universalized European theater as the point of origin and the other scenic manifestations as subaltern derivatives.

Establishing a reference of Aristotelian theater as a single interpretative measure for a black-Brazilian cultural practice sounds like an action of whitening through rational scientificization or of black matrix invisibilization, subjugating its postulates to a hegemonic model. In addition to the possible directions announced, the submission of the black culture of scenic character, transfigured by a white-aristotelian filter, can reveal an intentionality of validation by the academic intellectual criteria. According to African-American professor Patricia Hill Collins (2019, p. 145, our translation): “Each discourse, each new proposition must consist with a set of existing knowledge accepted as true by the group that controls the interpretative context”.

Theater as the center of the scenic universe and the academic epistemic racism

Focusing on the academic setting, these issues are more associated with places of power located in institutions than directly with those acting, players, who perform popular rituals of enactment, and, to them, in general, the naming is particularized in relation to the functionality requested

by the experience itself and not exactly in the negotiations calculated through mediations with knowledge and structures external to the space of performance. The lack of further evidence is in the curricula of undergraduate Theater programs at Brazilian universities, which ignore or allocate a very limited space to Afro-Brazilian scenic knowledge that is built outside the conceptual and historical basis of Western theater.

The evidence provided regarding Afro-Brazilian issues is not restricted to the thematic order, as it is not only about discussing the inclusion of afro-referenced contents that function closely to the dominant theatrical aesthetic order.

The curricular analysis serves here as a means for demonstrating the theatrical hegemony that, apropos, is reflected in other operating pedagogical instruments, such as the faculty training and its selection mechanisms, which do not allow the entry and permanence of female and male masters of popular cultures as female and male professors. The goal is to broaden the discussion in order to also problematize the absence of plural modes, techniques and forms of scenic practices that distance themselves from the dominant theatrical framework.

Regarding a critical observation on academic training in theatrical interpretation in Latin America, more specifically in Bogotá, Colombia, researcher María Fernanda Sarmiento Bonilla (2016, p. 4639, our translation) argues that:

[...] it is common to see art professionals who only see, create and feel according to the European or American vanguard of the moment. Thus they cultivate a colonial feeling of submission to these hegemonies. Therefore, they are unaware of the processes, creations and notions that are developed without Western references, but with influences from our popular cultures and traditions.

Being, at times, separated from the artistic field by the very institutionalized setting, which has colonizing ideals in its origins and affiliations, I argue that the exclusion and non-recognition of Afro-Brazilian cultural phenomena in the academic theatrical milieu can also be an expression associated with the universalist mode that inferiorizes, invisibilizes and assassinates other scenic epistemes, specifically those of an Afrodiasporic nature. Naming what is of the popular context as theater is to place on the

same level the white-aristotelian art and body practices arising from black cultures, which, to a large extent, arise and exist in the so-called popular classes. Is that of interest to theater? How? Is inclusion only effected according to the criteria of domination?

There are two points of tension that are also located within the theater institutionalized by the academia: first, the denial of the existence of different forms of *artistic* expressions, which are not legitimized by the white-western criteria and which operate in other cosmoperceptions (own and diverse organizational systems that involve movements, chants, dances, enactments, etc.). That is, the epistemic racism that is expressed in the absence — in the curricula, in the methodologies, in discarding masters of games as teachers. The second point concerns subjugation: theater does assume the existence of these *others* provided they are subjugated to the canonical construct of theater, the westernized one.

By examining the curricula of undergraduate Theater programs of Brazilian universities, this finding is quite evident. The scenic scope arising from African and Afro-Brazilian cultures is negligible — if not absent.

I take as an example the curricula of undergraduate programs of the Universidade Federal da Bahia (ETUFBA) Theater School⁵, whose two undergraduate programs (Theatrical Interpretation and Theatrical Direction), in addition to its Theater Teaching Degree Program, lack curricular components that address themes outside the hegemonic order⁶. Afro-Brazilian poetics, as well as indigenous themes, are largely ignored, affirming a certain “epistemic hegemony” functioning with “an alleged universality,” as stated by Lílâ Bisiaux (2018, p. 645), who proposes as a counterpoint: decentralization, deuniversalization and relocation of artistic forms.

Considering the Pedagogical Project, the epistemological framework operating at the UFBA Theater School is located in a set of knowledges related primarily to European cultures. This configuration is exposed in its main guiding document, the curriculum, which elects, mostly, bibliographic references of white-European authors with contents and methodologies that show a scenic knowledge based on the dominant theatrical culture. As a consequence, the curricular construction shows the absence of a poetic-pedagogical construct based on popular, black and indigenous epistemologies⁷. After all,

as stated by Nilma Lino Gomes (2018, p. 227, our translation): “[...] coloniality operates, among other mechanisms, through curricula”.

A dialogue can be established with the thought of Portuguese professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos when it comes to the sociology of absences. According to him: “[...] non-existence takes the form of residualization, which, in turn, has, over the last two hundred years, adopted several designations, the first of which was the primitive, followed by others such as the traditional, the pre-modern, the simple, the obsolete, the underdeveloped” (Santos, 2002, p. 287, our translation).

These reasons can be projected as answers to the ignorance or contempt in relation to the scenic rites of Brazilian Afrodiasporic matrices both in the curricular structure and in the pedagogical projects of undergraduate and teaching degree programs of Brazilian educational institutions, here highlighting the ETUFBA programs. The path of professional training in theatrical art has a common core that usually addresses content such as the history of theater based on European time frames, dramaturgy related to literary genres and mostly European authors, vocal and body techniques systematized by relevant Western artists and, practically, the absence of Brazilian references, especially of Afrodiasporic practices and poetics⁸. We can infer that the ideological path of the artistic and pedagogical training in Brazilian universities is through Western theater, based on European or American theater, even if this cultural designation is abstracted and suggested as a universal whole. However, we cannot dissociate this apparent aesthetic and territorial unconcern from its historical and political character. After all, if theater is just another of the scenic manifestations, why is it chosen as a hierarchical reference for the others? It is necessary to denaturalize positions based on colonizing models, especially in academic training institutions that function as multipliers and builders of ideas that affect society. The curriculum is a way, even if not exclusive, to foster emancipation. After all, as argued by Janet O’Shea (2018, p. 759, our translation): “By rethinking our curricula, we can rethink and reformulate our work so as to supplant colonial models of exploitation and appropriation”.

Disagreements and encounters of knowledges in the Performing Arts: final considerations

Among possible namings and dominations, questions and paths, an extensive discussion has been built in Brazil about an interpretative review of our history from the perspective of studies on decoloniality. Theater, step by step, has been building specific reflections interrelated with anti-racism and other social agendas that shift expression thoughts to more plural poetics and ethics.

With universities providing greater access for admission of quilombola and indigenous students, there is also a claim for belonging in the curricular and didactic epistemic and aesthetic representations, because the guiding documents still show an obedience to the European canons. According to Professor José Jorge de Carvalho: “We should expand our theoretical canon, from the first semester of the undergraduate program, for the formation of a multiepistemic space” (Lima; Jaime, 2010, p. 208, our translation). Through the experiments carried out in several Brazilian universities with the Encounter of Knowledges,⁹ we have experience that can be considered as reference for theater programs and operate in what Lîlâ Bisiaux (2018, p. 654, our translation) points out as a “double shift, aesthetic and epistemic”.

The curriculum, in this case, is only one of the elements that are part of the complex university gear. Nilma Lino Gomes (2018, p. 235, our translation) says that “[...] it is only possible to decolonize the curricula and knowledge if we decolonize the perspective on the subjects, their experiences, their knowledges and how they produce them”. Acting from a decolonial perspective is to base one's life on attentive observations, ruptures, experiments, creativity, and critical view. In the field of multiple cultural practices gestated in counter-hegemony we find a plurality of scenic existences. Radically dialoguing with Afro-Diasporic and indigenous cultures can lead the theater in the academic milieu to places more consistent with the multiple reality that constitutes Brazil, separated from dominations that are expressed in epistemic namings and erasures.

Notes

- ¹ “Antônio Bispo dos Santos, aka Nego Bispo, was born on Dec 10, 1959, in the Berlingas River Valley, formerly Papagaio settlement, now municipality of Francinópolis/PI. He is a farmer, trained by craft masters, resident of Quilombo do Saco-Curtume (São João do Piauí/PI). Political activist and militant with a significant role in the quilombola social movement and in the movements of struggle for land, Nêgo Bispo is currently a member of the State Coordination of Quilombola Communities of Piauí (CECOQ/PI) and of the National Coordination of Organization of Quilombola Rural Black Communities (CONAQ). He has complete elementary education and is part of the first generation of her mother's family who had access to literacy. He has a great gusto for poetic writing, because from an early age he needed to develop his ability to translate the feelings, wisdoms and experiences of his relatives and neighbors into the written language of the letters. Poet, writer and intellectual who prefers to be called the reporter of knowledges, he is the author of numerous articles and poems, in addition to the books *Quilombos, modos e significados* (2007); and *Colonização, Quilombos: modos e significados* (2015). He was also a guest professor and master of the *Encontro de Saberes* project at the University of Brasília.” Source: Saberes Tradicionais UFMG. Available at: <https://www.saberestradicionais.org/antonio-bispo-dos-santos/>. Accessed: Jan 21. 2022.
- ² The term “popular” is quite complex and because of such nature it has fostered a series of studies and reflections. It is used here as a reference to knowledges produced by black groups and cultures as practices of resistance and maintenance of their ancestral existences. The affirmation of the Afro-popular is a choice that aims to evince the racist and colonial marks directed to communities historically subordinated, primarily, by the categories race and class, without disregarding its complexity and the webs of power that surround it. French historian Roger Chartier (2002, p. 49, our translation) presents reflections on the term when he says: “Knowing if what is created by the people or what is destined for it should be called popular is, therefore, a false problem. It is important, first of all, to identify how different cultural figures intersect or overlap in practices, representations or productions”.
- ³ In the original in French: “Le mot est magique qui fait la chose en la disant, qui engendre à partir de l’absence, du néant, des créateurs de fiction” (Corvin, 2008, p. 1339-1340).

- ⁴ To this end, there was an analysis of the curricula and syllabus of the Theater programs of the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA) (Undergraduate programs in Theatrical Interpretation and Theatrical Direction and the Teaching degree program in Theater <http://teatro.ufba.br/graduacao/>), of the Universidade Federal de Sergipe (UFS) (Teaching degree program in theater <https://www.sigaa.ufs.br/sigaa/public/curso/curriculo.jsf>), and of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) (Teaching degree program in theater <https://sigaa.ufrn.br/sigaa/link/public/curso/curriculo/100832>). Accessed: Jun 5. 2022.
- ⁵ The university Theater programs in Brazil, at the undergraduate level, have as their reference of origin the School of Theater of the Universidade Federal da Bahia (ETUFBA), as it was the first unit to be integrated by a university, the then Universidade da Bahia. “The Theater School courses were free until 1963, when there was the formalization of the Theater Direction course, at a higher-education level, and the Actor Training course, at a secondary-education level. In 1983, the Bachelor's Degree in Performing Arts was institutionalized, with majors in Theatrical Direction and Theatrical Interpretation. In 1986, the Theater teaching degree program was created, with these being the three possibilities of graduation currently at the UFBA Theater School, and the Theater teaching degree program also starts to be provided in the Distance Education mode, in 2020, at 5 Bahian centers of the Open University of Brazil (UAB)” Available at: <http://teatro.ufba.br>. Accessed: Jun 5. 2022.
- ⁶ In the ETUFBA undergraduate programs there was a curricular component called Dramatic Expressions of Brazilian Folklore, in which elements of popular cultures were addressed. However, with the reform and implementation of a new curriculum, in 2004, this component ceased to exist. This is the curricular syllabus: “The course aims to transmit concepts and information about the traditional-popular modes of theater in Brazil, whether those usually called ‘folkloric’ or those called ‘popular-theater’ in more recent bibliographies. Such information will enable theater students in the transposition of these popular forms to the erudite-level theater, with its advantageous use in dramaturgy, interpretation, direction and scenography.” Research in personal collection.
- ⁷ For such observation, there were analyses of the syllabus of undergraduate courses and the current curricula of ETUFBA: undergraduate programs (2014.2) and in-person teaching degree program (2020.2), in addition to the

Pedagogical Project. The documents are available on the website of the above unit: <http://teatro.ufba.br/graduacao/>. Accessed: Jan 18. 2022.

- ⁸ Mandatory courses in the field of Theater History for three undergraduate programs of ETUFBA: undergraduate program in Theatrical Interpretation, undergraduate program in Theatrical Direction, and teaching degree program in Theater, 68 hours each. TEAA21 History of Theater in Brazil and Bahia, mandatory. Syllabus: Critical and analytical approach to the history of theater and dramatic literature in Brazil and Bahia. TEAA16 - History of Western Theater: From Classical Antiquity to Romanticism, mandatory, 68 hours; Syllabus: History of Western Theater from Classical Antiquity to Romanticism. Critical and analytical approach to the history of theater and dramatic literature in the West, from classical antiquity to the 18th century. Program content: Classical theater. Roman theater. Mystery theater and medieval parties. Renaissance and theater. Baroque theater. Elizabethan theater. Commedia dell Arte. French classicism. Romantic theater.
- ⁹ “The Encounter of Knowledges can be understood as a concrete proposal of intercultural education for formal education, capable of promoting a double inclusion: of the traditional arts and knowledges into the curriculum and, simultaneously, of the traditional masters into teaching. It is a transdisciplinary theoretical-political intervention, which seeks to decolonize the model of knowledge taught in universities”. Information available at: <https://encontrodesaberes.tumblr.com/>. Accessed: Jan 18. 2022.

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