



***Crossing... transatlantic cycles:* dramaturgy, Candomblé and ritual**

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ABSTRACT – *Crossing... transatlantic cycles: dramaturgy, Candomblé and ritual* – The present work reflects on the expanded dramaturgical conception of an acting black poetics entitled *Afrocênica*, immersed in the AFRO(en)CENA Collective, through the scenic experiment *Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos*. The concept of expression in the ritual scene is discussed, outlining the notion of a dramaturgy in cycles, inspired by the worldview of Candomblé Congo-Angola. It is intended to contribute to the expansion of epistemologies within the scope of black performance, especially in the investment in new scenic writings that take into consideration the horizontality of the black scene based on the traditional social ritual production of the Bantu.

Keywords: Black Performance. Candomblé Congo-Angola. Expanded Dramaturgy. Tradition and Contemporaneity. Performing Arts.

RÉSUMÉ – *Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos: dramaturgie, Candomblé et ritual* – Le présent travail réfléchit sur la conception dramaturgique élargie d'une poétique noire en pratique intitulée Afrocentric, immergée dans le Collectif AFRO(en)CENA, à travers l'expérience scénique *Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos*. La notion d'expression dans la scène rituelle est interrogée, alignant l'idée d'une dramaturgie en cycles, inspirée de la cosmovision du Candomblé Congo-Angola. Il est destiné à contribuer à l'expansion des épistémologies dans le champ de la performance noire, notamment dans l'investissement de nouvelles écritures scéniques qui contemplent l'horizontalité de la scène noire à partir de la production rituelle sociale traditionnelle des Bantous.

Mots-clés: Black Performance. Candomblé Congo-Angola. Dramaturgie Élargie. Tradition et Contemporain. Arts du Spectacle.

RESUMO – *Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos: dramaturgia, Candomblé e ritual* – O presente trabalho reflete sobre a concepção dramática expandida de uma poética negra em exercício intitulada Afrocentric, imersa no Coletivo AFRO(en)CENA, por meio do experimento cênico *Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos*. Problematisa-se o conceito de expressão na cena ritual, alinhando a ideia de uma dramaturgia em ciclos, inspirada na cosmovisão do Candomblé Congo-Angola. Pretende-se contribuir para o alargamento de epistemologias no âmbito da performance negra, sobretudo no investimento de novas escritas cênicas que contemplem a horizontalidade da cena preta a partir da produção ritual social tradicional dos Bantu.

Palavras-chave: Performance Negra. Candomblé Congo-Angola. Dramaturgia Expandida. Tradição e Contemporaneidade. Artes da Cena.

To evolve thinking

Thought is movement for Exu. When he has enough, he offers. While he offers, he takes. He simultaneously strengthens and weakens, empowers and impoverishes. Exu is an ancestral *mandinga*¹ eager to seduce [humanity] (Oliveira, 2007, p. 165, our translation).

As a force for integrating coming and going, I beseech you *Pambu Nzila*, sacred spirit of the crossroads, lord of the paths of us the adherents of Candomblé of the Congo-Angola Nation, to foster thought, to turn and stitch what has already passed, intertwined with what will come, so that to-day we are strengthened in our artistic paths, expressing ancestry throughout the world.



Image 1 – *Sakulu Mpembê!*: shaking the body before the Nkisi Mpemba, the sacred spiritual breath.
Source: Photograph by Cris Lima from Scenic Experiment Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos, Centro de Cultura de Porto Seguro (Porto Seguro Cultural Center), Porto Seguro/BA.

When investigating dramaturgy in its conceptual expansion, I envisage a piece of *madrasto* – a fabric used to manufacture commonly worn ritual garments, sacred garments. The fabric helps create the aesthetics of the liturgy and the social organization of the community in Candomblé. It is a resistant fabric, but which can be quite easily unraveled, if that is the intention. It is also used for various purposes, including spiritual cleansing, to free the body of a person who seeks balance in their sacred paths. In ritualistic processes, at some point a piece of this fabric can be used to agglutinate

evil energies, and at the conclusion it is torn by the *Nganga* (priest) who conducts the ritual. The tear allows us to see the entire weave of the fabric opening up, fraying to the edge: and along with this tearing, the person's body is rid of a negative burden that had been acquired.

In the following days, this is how I came to understand expanded dramaturgy, which tears the membranes of the Aristotelian drama amalgamated by coloniality, allowing new dramatic expressions to be aligned in contemporary drama, thus removing the colonial burdens, as argued by researcher Luiz Rufino (2019). I observe the recurrence of many Black performances built through a dramaturgy supported by narrational matrices – a concept investigated by researcher Iris Maria da Costa Amâncio (2014)² – which maintains ancestry in the face of the unscheduled transatlantic crossing. This need to speak with the mouth and the entire body strengthens the protagonism of Black people's discourse as the core of dramatic expression. This discourse, which begins in the mouth, takes root throughout the body, revealing a dramaturgy of the body, by the body and for the communication of the body with the world – which according to the Bantu worldview of *Muntu* (person) is integrated into the world, without body-mind binaries impregnated by whiteness.

To move between the possibilities that *Pambu Nzila* offers us in his epistemic-methodological crossroads, in this study I evoke the discussion about scenic representation and expression, as well as the dramaturgy built in cycles within the ritual and circular scenic performance.

Afrocênica³: principles of Afrodiasporic work

Other black researchers have sought to outline overviews of Brazilian Black Poetics and their modes of engendering and resilience. *Afrocênica* arises here as an opportunity to organize an acting Poetics. From the outset, it is important to think about the very concept of Poetics, as defined by Pareyson (2001, p. 11, our translation):

An art program, declared in a manifesto, in rhetoric or even in the very exercise of artistic activity; it conveys in normative and operative terms a certain taste, which, in turn, is the entire spirituality of a person or of an era projected in the field of art.

Pareyson makes no distinction between the forms of subjective expression involved in artistic expression. Evani Tavares reiterates the notion of poetics as a synthesis of the expression of a people, ethnic group, city or group of people who are in tune to the same frequency.

In forms, discourse, desires, a black poetics is built that is as complex and diverse as its matrix of inspiration. This poetics, as could not be otherwise, spread throughout all parts of the Diaspora. And its geographical, historical, cultural and/or social distances fostered a rich variety of expressions and possibilities recognizing different particularities (Lima, 2010, p. 234, our translation).

Even today, popular imagination conceives of Africa as a country with a unified culture. Researcher Evani Tavares Lima (2010) situates at the center of the discussion the maxim of cultural plurality, which directly relates to the poetic possibilities of Black diaspora. There is no single Black Poetics, but several poetics that vary according to the particular and territorial processes of each artistic production. From this perspective of Black Poetics, preference for a particular language can be seen recurrently in traditional African drama, which is articulated in a hybrid manner, considering idiomatic expressions and proverbs as a form of discourse in performative depth, and the interlocutor is responsible for completing the meaning and re-elaborating speech in light of the affirmation of Armstrong Idachaba Aduku (2018, p. 3):

Language in traditional African drama is expressed in the traditional speech convention of proverbs and idioms, virtually every African community employ the use of proverbs and idioms in their narrative. Proverbs and idioms in language embellish the dramatic dialogue and convey deeper meanings and essence, most times with deep philosophical meaning⁴.

Sub-Saharan African societies have their own philosophy and do not need to borrow from the colonizer's discourse that is inconsistent with their worldview. In addition, being an *object-in-question* shifts the place of speech to circumscribe Afrodiasporic poetics in the global discourse of the thinking of Black artists, as suggested by John Pepper (2007, p. 22):

Much of the new art seeks to shift the diaspora from the position of an individual-who-speaks to become an object-in-question. It thus has the potential to provide a crucial vision of the current global condition. However, such a perspective has its own international borders.

Despite the issues raised, John Pepper pursues the idea that we, Black descendants, are the core of our production. This shift from “individual-who-speaks” to “object-in-question” reverberates in this research as a field of artistic production, which creates a particular African and Afro-Brazilian grammar in light of the *escrevivências*⁵ of each artist, which is a concept created by writer and researcher Conceição Evaristo (2007)⁶, from the intersection between life and work.

This same relation pointed out by Pepper aligns with the construction of a dramaturgy in the *Afroçênica* full of personhood from the acting people, their histories, their ancestral repertoire, thus building a dramatic passage that starts in the body in relationship with the world. What is presented is not scenes about black people, but rather the dissolved barriers between Art and life in performance and their movement in continuum.

Taking this into consideration, I investigate the concept of *Afroçênica* and its working principles, which provoke the acting person into the process of scene construction: Crossroads Principle, Horse Principle, *Nginga* Principle and Azuela Principle. These are inspired by the mythical and philosophical tradition of the Bantu, in Africa, who arrived in Brazil and organized the Candomblé of Angola, in the exercise of their language *Kikoongo*. Regarding *Afroçênica*, it cannot be said that we deal only with Theater, or Dance, but with the twisting of the ways of thinking and doing typical of sub-Saharan African people, connecting the aesthetic expressions in an event. According to Professor Leda Maria Martins (1995, p. 100-101, our translation):

The songs, the rhythm of the percussion instruments, the dance, the gestures, all the movements of the body, the cultural myths combined on the scene capture the rhythmic pulsar of the ancestral black experience, engendering a harmonious perception of the body and spirit.

This twisting of elements and symbols confers a cross-cultural nature and a strong connection with the sacred. The symbolic references (present in the traditional imagery), together with the corporal repertoire of each acting person, in relation to the mystical force evoked through the ancestry present in Candomblé Congo-Angola, intend to outline a Brazilian Black Descendant Poetics that promotes a repertoire of epistemological *macumba-gens*⁷, inspired by the worldview of Bantu philosophy, to re-signify life in the diaspora.

This integrated form of the scene is inspired by the expressions present in social rituals of the Bantu people: weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc., which occurred without separation from what is dance, music, body, sacred objects. Everything that constitutes the ritual translates into a single expression. Therefore, I observe that, from the point of view of these traditional Bantu social expressions, dramaturgy does not obey the basic criteria of “drama composition,” as proposed by researcher Patrice Pavis (2008, p. 113). The dramaturgy approaches a structure that underlies the ritual, organizes a changeable structure, completely dependent on the relations of those involved (internal and external), but does not define them. When analyzing a *Jamberesu*⁸, I can see a definite basis of the beginning of the ceremony, we sing for *Nkosi*⁹, then follow an order from *Minkisi*¹⁰, but the development of the celebration does not comply with an inflexibility in the sequence of events, which leads me to understand this behavior as cycles of action. Bringing this to the universe of dramaturgy, these dramatic actions circulate among themselves, but manage to maintain some independence in scenic performance. The dramatic actions that organize the scenes are totally dependent on the horizontal relations between music, the dilated expression of the bodies of the acting people and the public, the lighting, the smells, the shaking of the clothes and the mythical force urged.

This whole perspective is organized so that the political discourse experienced reflects on the problem of racism in our society. It is mirrored by the ideas of the Teatro Experimental do Negro - Experimental Black Theatre (TEN), spearheaded by Abdias do Nascimento (2004, p. 13, our translation), we aspired “[...] a theater that would help build a better, effectively fair and democratic Brazil, where all races and cultures were respected in their differences, but equal in rights and opportunities”.

These provocations were experienced through the Research and Extension Project Collective AFRO(en)CENA, at the Universidade Federal do Sul da Bahia (UFSB), Jorge Amado campus, Itabuna/BA. At the time, after a selection, the group was composed of university students from several programs, not only Arts, and people from neighboring municipalities. A scenic collective with a black acknowledged proposal, thinking of Candomblé as an inspiration for a contemporary training of artists in scenic performance. The project selected 30 individuals from at least seven municipalities near Itabuna, leading to



the creation of a scenic experiment entitled *Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos*, in which I designed the staging and dramaturgy.

The entire process of setting up the scenic experiment with the Collective AFRO(en)CENA was based on a collaborative approach – not only for the idea of networking with an academic staff involved in the formation of the Collective students, but for the autonomy in the dialogue at the time of creation. As a Theater Director/Professor/Priest, I provoked the Collective with creative triggers to the process that stimulated my writing, presenting a design for the intended aesthetic and political discourse. The dramaturgic architecture of this experiment was also open to contributions. The nodal point started from an expanded dramaturgy in independent cycles that cross to outline a single scenic ritual in a circle, integrating those who watched the event.

Regarding this, I note here the *Jamberesu*, public ritual of Candomblé Congo-Angola designed to celebrate some particular deity. However, for us, Bantu, it is impossible to praise only one *Nkisi*, since we understand each other as collectivity and communion in community (*Ubuntu*). Thus, in order to thank the *Kisimbi*, for example, freshwater deity, I need to thank the land that gives me sustenance, and thereby summoning to the circle *Kavungu*¹¹, *Nzumbaranda*¹²; still, it is necessary to thank the *Nkisi Kitempo*¹³ for the good weather, for the good and bad times, for the atmosphere that protects us; clap for the fire, dancing with *Nzazi*¹⁴ and *Matamba*¹⁵ in the center of the shed, so that we bear in mind the warmth of existence, the vibrant life. Thus, we, descendants of the Bantu, understand our relationship with the natural world, in this common twist, from the perspective of difference. The singularities of each *untu* (person) matter here so that we have a strong, diverse village, but with interests common to all.

From the point of view of scenic performance, in *Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos* the audience was able to follow the beginning of the cycles through objects that fulfilled this function. In the first one, women wash a piece of fabric on the floor, alluding to the act of washing clothes. On the fabric, it is written the cycle and its name. In the second cycle, paper boats were delivered to the public, preparing the spectators for the crossing. The third cycle is presented through three agate basins, ancestral object used in the initiation rituals to take care of the *mutuês* (heads) of the people in the Candomblé *terreiros*. The fourth and final cycle can be seen through hoods

or sacks that are arranged on the heads of the acting people that represent the state of past and present slavery. All the objects used in the cycles are permeated with symbolism, extrapolating their real functionality, acquiring the place of scene conditioning. In other words, they *turn* the cycles, mark the instant of closing and opening a new cycle within the ritual.



Image 2 – ‘*Aê já chegou (Aê has already arrived)/Masambanganga de Kariolê!*’: song of elation for the arrival of the sacred spirit. Source: Photograph by Adeloyá Magnoni from Scenic Experiment Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos, Black Forum of Art and Culture, Salvador/BA.

The above sacred objects, in addition to turning cycles, assist in the process of changing *mukange* (mask), which will be explained later in the text. This idea is thought according to the artifacts used in the sacred public rituals in the *terreiro*, influencing the process of *turning-point in the ritual*, for example when the priest takes his *adjá*¹⁶ to voice the presence of a certain deity. When this deity communicates with the people present, a new energy is also introduced, turning the cycle.

1st Cycle: ‘Mam’etu África’ appears with the initial provocation: what is the imagination of Africa *Bakongo*¹⁷ before the colonizer’s arrival? This theme was proposed so as to enable creating the atmosphere of an Africa that lived within its original civilizational processes. The first cycle had the premise of transporting the public to the smell of an Africa beyond the amalgamated stereotypes in the white cultural universe. Considering this topic, I subdivided the Collective into small groups of four or five persons, requesting that they create scenes based on the entire corporal repertoire explored so far in the group’s training period.

In this exercise of watching the scenes, I realized that the rehearsal room reminded me of the shed of the *Unzó ia Kisimbi ria Maza Nzambi terreiro* (of which I am a priest)¹⁸ on *Kizoomba* (party). Profusion of stories arising from the movements of the *Minkisi* seated on their horses, in the body of matters (mediums, the people who turn into the saint). At that point, I understood that the relationship of the body that lends itself to representation is that of a horse, a body where the acting person¹⁹ can ride.

Thus, the idea of the *Horse Principle* arises as the pinnacle of creation. It is the instant in which this body lives the state of receiving this energy, which, at that moment, is superior to its own. Energy is a *mukange*, a mask in the sense of the object, which is placed on the face of the acting people, radiating a certain attitude in this body, moving it to the scene. *Mukange* is the sacred mask for the Bantu, representing the *Nkisi* in the days of *kizoomba*. The *Nkisi*, in possession of their horse's body, come to the public in certain robes and, instead of the face, a *mukange*. It does not define a human form, it expresses a force.

***Mukange*: the expression in the Ritual**

This research brings forth to the *Afroçênica* pot the discussion on the conception of 'expression' in the sphere of the Black Ritual Theater, to the detriment of 'representation,' through the approach to the cult of *Mukanges* (sacred masks). On the representation of the real in the ritual, Evani Tavares Lima (2010, p. 226) presents the thought of Muniz Sodré (2005, p. 10, our translation), who leads me to think about this relationship between *mukange* and the real: "[...] the ritualistic repetition exhausts the whims of essentialization of any real, the ritual makes it impossible to decline a principle of identity". *Mukange*, as an artifact of the sacred, composes a complex signifier in its cult for the *Bakongo*, because it distances the idea of the real from its appearance, in addition to shading the identity of the horse (of the child of a saint) that receives this deity. The lack of commitment to the real directly affects the principle of identity, since it relates identification and individualization. The dilution of identity can be represented in a bucket filled with water, to which we add, for example, orange blossom water, to prepare a ritual bath. I cannot say that there is only water in the bucket, or just orange blossom water. Both are present, but do not confer individualization. From the point of view of dramaturgy, individual-

ization drew a scenic moment, relating the body of the acting person, in performance within the mythological repertoire, to the witnesses around it.



Image 3 – ‘*Kisimbiê, Kisimbi é mona ame!*’: infinite purity is my daughter! In other words, it is inside me.
Source: Photograph by Adeloyá Magnoni from Scenic Experiment *Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos*, Black Forum of Art and Culture, Salvador/BA.

The *Nkisi*, using their *mukange* in a public appearance in the *terreiro*, they are situated in the energy set to which they have affinity – in the case of *Kisimbi*, the strength of freshwater –, juxtaposed to the body of the medium, watering down the principle of identity. Even if we have two *Kisimbis having rum*, that is to say, dancing publicly during the ceremony, each of them will have their own body and energy repertoire, because we deal with different sacred bodies and forces, although the ancestral lineage of the *Nkisi* is the same. We, Bantu, worship the force of nature, without a commitment to the human representation of that force. Therefore, by worshipping *Kisimbi*, I worship the strength of freshwater, rivers, lakes, waterfalls. There is similarity between these forces, but there is no equality. Rivers are not the same. *Kisimbis* will be distinct.

The repetition of the use of *mukange* whenever *nkisi* comes to earth on feast days, among other things, helps us understand the need to repeat to remember. These spins help to perpetuate the cult and history of these Black people and their worldview. On stage, the acting person can use a *mukange* whenever the ritual requires a politicized discourse, not to forget the land that



sprouted. This dramatic strategy stands out especially in the writing of poetic discourse politically engaged with issues concerning racism.

At the moment of the performance of the acting person with their *mukange* rooted over the body, there does not necessarily need to be identification of the public in its expression. *Mukange*, in the scenic sense that I propose, can resemble the archetype of an animal, a force of nature, a mythical entity or a human person. This is because *Afrocênica* does not align with the notion of character in the conception of the Western Theater. Regarding this relationship, Patrice Pavis (2008, p. 285, our translation) problematizes:

The actor is clearly separated from their character, they are only their performer and not their incarnation to the point of dissociating, in their performance, gesture and voice. The entire sequence of the evolution of western theater will be marked by the complete inversion of this perspective: the character will increasingly identify with the actor who embodies it and transmute themselves into a psychological and moral entity similar to other men, an entity that is in charge of producing in the spectator an effect of ‘*identification*’.

The persona, according to Greek Theater, also means mask. It fulfills the function of representing a force, entity, without the need of identification with the human. The increasing approach of the persona to the actor/actress blurs this relationship, bringing the actor/actress closer to a deep psychological sense, being called a character, as Pavis points out. This notion of character is not interesting for this research, because — considering the *Nkisi* a force of nature that approaches a human force so that we can better understand it — it would not be possible to understand the representation of a *Nkisi* in its sense of psychological depth, for example. *Nkisi* is beyond psychological identification and understanding, because it is not a deity who had earthly life. It takes faith and the whole body to understand. Therefore, when wearing the mask of a *Nkisi*, for example, the acting person does not commit to identification, they lend themselves to the scene to express that mask. It is worth remembering that this inspiration in the Bantu worldview confirms the idea that the character translates into singularity, while the scenic expression in *mukange* is related to the notion of archetype, of sublimation of an arc of similarities in existence.

Nguunzu: dramaturgy in cycles in the scenic experiment 'Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos'

The architecture was erected in four essential cycles. These four cycles are part of the larger circle, which is the overall scenic set. The circulation of the planet itself follows a rotation in itself, so that it can rotate over the Solar System. Thus, scenic architecture is created under the inspiration of the existence of life, in a *continuum*, which is not exhausted by death, but transcends it in ancestry. To this end, the ritual begins with the hot breath of the chanted words of the anthem *Pembelê*²⁰.

Travessias begins the ritual begging for peace, in the instant the world is made and water is spread by the women with their jugs, *buzanguês*²¹ and hoists. *Pembelê* also fulfills the function of evoking the presence of these *Minkisi* in *Ntoto* (earth), because only then is it possible to cross with the blessings of the sacred. Nevertheless, this anthem, when blown in the wind, creates an ambiance that raises the spectators from the seat and absorbs them into the scenic experiment.

2nd Cycle: 'Travessar – nascidos do porão' [Traverse – born from the basement] is based on the expression of the perverse process of uprooting the bodies of men and women from their motherland in Africa, forcing them to live in a regime of social death, erasing any trace of existence in fullness with their natural world.

It was one of the most difficult cycles to express, because it instilled in the Brazilian population (mainly in schools) the imagery that black people quietly accepted slavery, at the expense of the native people.

In one of the improvisations, a farewell scene appeared for the entrance to the slave ship. It was a short, simple scene, but it attenuated the process of suffering in the proposed imagery. It provided the possibility of farewell – an event that we know did not exist. This improvisation inspired the writing of the Prayer to *Kalunga*, a poem that became a scene as an act of spiritual preparation for the crossing.

During the colonization in Brazil, one of the first acts of moral erasure of the black person was the baptism to Catholicism, changing the original names of Africans, replaced with names of Catholic saints. This process, among other issues, chose the Catholic religion as official, preventing the

black person from practicing their cults at the *Minkisi/Orixás/Voduns*. This maxim led the *Bakongo* and other people to resilience, creating an association of Catholic saints with the *Minkisi/orixás/vodus* and, more than that, creating brotherhoods entering the Catholic universe, so that they could gather together, discussing the issues of the black people and the maintenance of the worship of their gods and goddesses, as stated by the researcher Marta Moreno Vega (2002, p. 156, our translation):

Under the mantle of the Catholic Church, Africans and their descendants also developed societies of mutual help, brotherhoods among men and among women, called ‘cabildos’ in Cuba and ‘brotherhoods’ in Brazil, which allowed them to reconstitute African practices with the aesthetic iconography integrated to the cult of the *orisás*.

Therefore, prayers were incorporated into African cults, in the process of reframing in Brazil, as an exquisite strategy for the perpetuation of cults to deities from Africa.



Image 4 – ‘Falei, falei, falei no abrir da boca/Falei no abrir da boca/Vou falar no abrir da boca’ (‘I spoke, I spoke, I spoke in the opening of the mouth/I spoke in the opening of the mouth/I will speak in the opening of the mouth’): a song that affirms the need for speech as guidance, counseling. Source: Photograph by Victor Hugo Sá of Scenic Experiment *Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos*, Tenda do Teatro Popular de Ilhéus, Ilhéus/BA.

The idea of a prayer is a way of afrographing our transcultural history, a product of the Catholic and indigenous interferences reframed in Candomblé. Bantu worldview believes that *Kalunga*, the sea, is the great mother deity of mysteries. Those people who cross this place are lost in infinity. We

tried to say this text with the sound effect *reverber*, letting the voice of actress Claudia Rodrigues echo, multiply, as if her voice represented all the men and women there disposed, thrown, huddled, in suggestion to the text. The music of this scene had a powerful melodic strength, merging the tears that constitute the idea of cycle, knitting together the ritual.

The farewell, which is doubly set to music by the voice of Claudia Rodrigues and the soundtrack of Banda Gira (a musical group of university students that emerged in the course of the research project during the training courses of the Collective), inspired the acting people to create small relationships of families that go astray. It was possible to see messages, caresses, last declarations of love, apologies for quarrels, reconciliations, despair and the certainty of sailing in the curdled blood that *Kalunga* would lead.

This second cycle adopts the Principle of *Azuela*, the need for relationship through speech, what is sung, what is claimed with the mouth and with the whole body:

The principle of *Azuela* exercises the importance of speech for Africans and this worldview is experienced in the daily life of the terreiro. Speech is so sacred that it should only be used accurately. Thus, *Afroçênica* uses only the indispensable text, the text of moral effect, an essential discourse, escaping the maxim of the West that anchors existence in an unbridled need to speak, even if one does not understand why (Ferreira, 2019, p. 251, our translation).

3rd Cycle: Silêncio do invisível [Silence of the invisible]. This cycle begins by bringing the triad 'deculturation, invisibility and silencing,' which Vanda Machado (2002) points out about the erasure of the black person in the schooling paths. Within this project (colonial), first the cultural and identity references of the people are removed, the name is changed and situated in another conception of spirituality, averse to them; as a result, one remains absent from oneself, being socially invisible and their voice silent; the coffin is opened so that social death is completed with total silencing.

In this regard, the Cameroonian philosopher and professor Achille Mbembe presents the perspective of necropolitics as a social supremacy of whiteness, as it holds control of lives. Those who control more lives have more power. Further in the summary of his essay, such thought is highlighted when the author

[...] assumes that the maximum expression of sovereignty lies, to a large extent, in the power and ability to dictate who can live and who must die. Therefore, killing or letting live constitute the limits of sovereignty, its fundamental attributes. Exercising sovereignty is exercising control over mortality and defining life as the implantation and manifestation of power (Mbembe, 2016, p. 123, our translation).

We know that this project has been replicated in a major part of the world. However, in Brazil, the enslavement process was the longest in history and, therefore, the most perverse, exterminating entire communities. This project still remains in force, reverberating today with some refinement. The Brazilian government is responsible for determining who will die or live. It is advisable to remember the environment that awaited the black person who walked in Brazil, as recalled by journalist and writer José de Jesus Barreto (2005, p. 23, our translation):

In this discriminatory and promiscuous environment, despite the massacre of cultural and family identity, distrust, between promises and whipping, pleasures and punishments, the deaf interaction was made, day by day, with molycoddling, orders, seduction, sedition, torture, lies, attachments, fear, trickery and acts of rebellion expressed in escapes, organization of quilombos, clashes and much mandiga.

The exploitation of the Black body showed the worst scenarios that our mind can reach, with regard to the conditioning of social death. This atmosphere inspired us to think of the third cycle expressing slavery in Brazil: “crystalline silence”. Exploring this universe of pain, so that we can understand who we are, where we are, and what we need to do to reverse racism. Crystal, because they could not take away from the black person the lucidity and the impetus to resist.

Composing one of the final scenes of the experiment was very difficult for the Collective. In the center of the scene, we represented enslaved bodies inside plastic bags. Around them, voices echoed, functioning like whips that stroke lash-word into that huddled group in the center of the scenic circle:

- | | |
|---|---|
| – Só podia ser essa negrinha! | – It had to be that little nigger! |
| – Crioula! | – Crioula! |
| – Sujando nossas terras! | – Dirtying our land! |
| – Maldito navio negreiro! | – Damned slave ship! |
| – Volta pro mar e se esfrega direito,
para tirar essa tinta! | – Go back to the sea and scrub yourself
properly, to get that paint off! |

- | | |
|--|--|
| – Ela era quente, mas o cabelo uma fedentina só! | – She was warm, but her hair was stinky as hell! |
| – Sujos! | – Dirty! |
| – Amaldiçoados! | – Cursed! |
| – Cadê os seus deuses? | – Where are your gods? |
| – Nada de grito. É a marca de que você é preto! | – No screaming. That's the mark that you're black! |
| – É sua sina! | – It's your destiny! |
| – João! | – João! |
| – Maria! | – Maria! |
| – José! | – José! |
| – Paulo! | – Paulo! |
| – Pedro! | – Pedro! |
| – Matheus! | – Matheus! |
| – Gabriel! | – Gabriel! |
| – Rafael! | – Rafael! |
| – Miguel! (Ferreira, 2019, p. 188). | – Miguel! (Ferreira, 2019, p. 188, our translation). |

4th cycle: 'Recomeçar?' [Start over?] is motivated by the third one, in a movement that tries to present to the public the continuity of oppression in the contemporary context. Racism nowadays has become a discourse sometimes indirect, subtle, which is only understood by those who live this oppression. The challenge of this cycle, problematizing perversion, was to make the acting people, black women, let the poison of discrimination flow from their mouths.

According to researcher Grada Kilomba (1997), the oppressive state originates from a need for the white person to understand alterity from another race, in a regime of violence. The author presents the thought of writer Toni Morrison (1992), when she treats *dissimilarity* as the need to build *whiteness* through the relationship of oppression against another race. Whiteness, oppressing the black person, is understood as different from the others:

This sentence reminds us that it is not the Black subject we are dealing with, but *white* fantasies of what Blackness should be like. Fantasies, which do not represent us, but the *white* imaginary. They are the denied aspects of the *white* self which are re-projected onto us, as if they were authoritative and objective pictures of ourselves (Kilomba, 2010, p. 10).

These fantasies are evident in the lines that echoed in this cycle. This scene was written based on research of racist phrases of Brazilian imagery, including

some brought by the members of the Collective. These phrases are said all the time, as well recalled in an excerpt from the scenic experiment:

- | | |
|---|--|
| – Que beleza exótica! | – What an exotic beauty! |
| – Para uma negra, você é até bonita! | – For a black girl, you're even pretty! |
| – Deve ser um furacão na cama! | – Must be a hurricane in bed! |
| – Mulata tipo exportação! | – Export-type mulatto! |
| – Sua pele é bem escura, parece gringa! | – Your skin is very dark, you look gringa! |
| – Nêgo de traços finos! | – Fine traits nigger! |
| – Nossa, que cabelo macio! Achei que era duro, sabe? | – Goodness, what soft hair! I thought it was hard, you know? |
| – Aquele ali é um negro de alma branca! Sempre foi diferente! | – That's a black man with a white soul! He's always been different. |
| – Negra tipo A! | – Top-notch black woman! |
| – Moreninho da cor do pecado! | – Brunette, the color of sin! |
| – Café-com-Leite! | – Coffee with milk! (Pejorative language to refer to a lighter skin tone) |
| – Marrom Bombom! | – Brown bonbon! (Pejorative language to refer to the skin tone) |
| – Namorado branco? Parabéns! (Ferreira, 2019, p. 189). | – White boyfriend? Congratulations! (Ferreira, 2019, p. 189, our translation). |

The scene that evokes the element of water was a moving moment, when *Maama Kisimbi* comes to free his sons and daughters from oppression, from the state of imprisonment of themselves, trapped in the bodies in the center of the scene. The ancestral deity of freshwater came to wash away the blood that flowed. Actress Claudia Rodrigues experienced the role of wearing the *Kisimbi* mask. It was the complex exercise of wearing the scenic *mukange*, especially in the expression of a Bantu deity, without mythological reference of earthly experience, as in the case of the Yoruba culture. This scene was created during the creative process, and then incorporated into the scenic architecture. The presence of a deity on the scene alone manages to ignite the flame of the ritual, strengthening the relation between the expression of the scene and the audience.

The final scene of the scenic ritual was simple: to tell a racist action experienced, removing the *mukange*, letting the acting person speak through their identity. Before the story was shared, they said their names and hometowns. This scene is based on the principle of *Azuela*; however, the Crossroads Principle still pulses as a spectrum of the intersection of many social and cultural experiences of life patched together there:

I don't speak of the South for the South, nor as much as the North for the North. The ontic statute of the North is nothing more than a record of barbarism that is constituted at the expense of pluriversality (Ramose, 2012). I speak of the place of the crossroads marked by the reunion of the New World, the Atlantic and Europe are crossed, and at the crossroads many other paths are codified, all of which must be read and credible as fields of possibilities (Rufino, 2016, p. 67, our translation).

Cross, to cross, crisscross, twist, merge, trespass. Sew concepts, referential possibilities, open and not close. A body that is available to learn, first with itself, without losing sight of everything that the world teaches at every moment. The acting person on the scene needs to be on the road of the intersections, at the communication centers from the crossroads. It is no longer just about a perspective, but all those that run in us. *Pambu Nzila* is here evoked as a synthesizer of I-world communication.

The scenic experiment completes the fourth cycle, automatically reconnecting with the first, making the circle spin, from a perspective of continuity (which is not repeated). To this end, the resource used was to revisit the poem *De nascer África*:

De Nascer África

Antes de tudo começar...
Como começar o que já existia?
De início
Pelo começo
Primeira célula, tecido, órgão, sistema,
organismo, população
Primeiro respirar
Nascimento
Partida
Origem
O de ontem
O soerguimento
A plataforma
A Base
O Caminho
O Lugar
Caminho sempre em frente. Para frente.
Para trás é como você me vê
Rota que circula
E roda...
Roda em si e em outros
Infinita

From Giving Birth to Africa

Before it all starts...
How to start what already existed?
At first
At the beginning
First cell, tissue, organ, system, organism,
population
First breathe
Birth
Starter
Origin
Yesterday's
The uplift
The platform
The Foundation
The Path
The Place
I walk straight ahead. Forward. Back-
wards is how you see me
Route that goes round
And it turns...
Runs on itself and others
Infinite



Do fogo	From fire
Do vento	From wind
Da terra	From earth
Da água	From water
Preta	Black
Preta	Black
Preta	Black
Preta	Black
Preta	Black
Preta	Black
Preta	Black
Preta	Black
(Batem paó)	(Beat paó)
Mam'etu	Mam'etu
Mãe (Ferreira, 2019, p. 191).	Mother (Ferreira, 2019, p. 191, our translation).

This poem relates to many layers to start the scenic experiment and re-start the cyclical maintenance process. It takes the form of a 'body of words in a transatlantic state':

It is a body riddled with reminiscences of memory, a place of knowledge and identities that are perpetuated through the ages. This body, as diasporic space, can, on the one hand, be reported to the 'black Atlantic' and, on the other hand, it is [or it sees itself] reframed when it integrates with the American continent and starts to produce and legitimize its culture (Alexandre, 2009, p. 105, our translation).

Professor Marcos Antônio Alexandre refers to the body in its physical state, but I make the same allusion when I build a body of words. In this case, it is possible to say that this poem is guardian of the memory of dramaturgical architecture in *Afroçênica*. The memory of the constitution of the body in the life-death process is chanted by the mouth of actress Camila Santana, enabling each witness of this body of words to build their own repertoire.

It is still possible to think of words arranged as contractions that diminish and increase, almost disappear, but resume. This poem can be understood as the act of breathing and the mutability of this act from the emotions. Words breathe for those who read them. The exercise of writing, thinking of *Afroçênica*, should also foresee the ritual of full engagement of the body in reading, in connection with the mystical forces that coexist with us. The reading here needs to provoke the body.

Circulating



Image 5 – Photograph by Cris Lima from Scenic Experiment *Travessias... ciclos transatlânticos*, Centro de Cultura de Porto Seguro, Porto Seguro/BA. Source: Photograph by Cris Lima.

The perspective of an expanded dramaturgy, advocated here, considers the diasporic black Brazilian poetics in several areas, circumscribed in a continuous movement that intersects different expressions, pervading the performance of orality, the knowledge produced in ancestry, the relations between myth poems, projections of bodies and their political repertoires. Therefore, *Afroçênica* is simply the organization and updating of these practices, considering the cultural and ancestral imagery of the Bantu people, directly applied to a contemporary scenic performance, designed in a circular manner, whose psychological relationship is not tied to the logic of society, but to that which is credible within the scenic and ancestral relationship established in ritual.

All of this is put in a pot, in which the product of this scenic food will be served in a ritual that will transform the place into a space of eruption of the sacred, expanding this existence by the premise of the extra daily, building a symbolic space. This construction is carried out through the spectators – no longer appearing here passively, but being part of the scenic food – present in this symbolic act in defense of an anti-racist dramaturgy, which makes the black person protagonist in all their creative power.

Here there is a possibility of discussion about a way of thinking about contemporary black dramaturgy, in its recurrence and need for incursions by politicized approaches in what is said on the scenic performance, to

highlight and express silenced discourses. In *Afroçênica*, the intention is to emphasize the need for scenic expression at the expense of representation, as previously discussed. Nevertheless, this proposal for expanding dramaturgy ranges between the dramatic conception and the performative state of the scenic ritual in process. These displacements can be simultaneous, leaving room for the mystique present in the bodies of the acting people in response to the other provocations that constitute the scenic performance. The ebbs and flows trigger dramatic turns, conferring [inter]dependence between scenes.

This scenic possibility, presented with the foundations of *Afroçênica*, detaches itself from the secrets of the sacred [Candomblé] by the simple fact of offering the arsenal of poetic myth experienced in the rehearsal room cooked and annealed, stirred, reprocessed, shared with those who witness the dramatic actions as a scenic *ebó* (*ebó* – food). By eating this whole-body offering, one does not have Candomblé in its essence, but a spark that connects us and establishes the ritual in other dimensions. Thus, everything that is on the scene is scenic, and the desire to know the religious acts and knowledge that cannot do without initiation is protected inside the *Terreiro*.

Notes

- ¹ Translate Note (T. N.): Mandinga is related to a way of expressing oneself in the world, arbitrariness to deal with adversity, enchantment, dance, conquest. The notion of mandinga only as a spell is a racist stereotype.
- ² In her book *Teatro Angolano: dramaturgia, literatura e representação de etnicidade*, researcher Iris da Costa Amâncio (2014) points out, from the outset, the importance of the life experiences of Angolans who arrive at the scene of playwrights Domingos Van-Dúnem (1970), enhanced by director José Mena Abrantes (1990-2018), together with the Angolan theatrical group Elinga-Teatro. This scene is tailored to a strong presence of Angolan literary roots and narrative matrices, expressed in the ability to talk about the existential crossings in an Africa violated by coloniality. The author highlights the ability of the authors to bring to the scene, intertwined in the plot, experiences of oral ethnic traditions present in the traditional imagery of Angola.



- ³ T. N.: Ritual scene poetics that horizontalizes the compositional elements and stitches their relations, enhancing ancestry and circularity in the black diasporic references.
- ⁴ Original excerpt in English (Aduku, 2018, p. 3).
- ⁵ T. N.: According to a quotation from Conceição Evaristo in *Correio Braziliense*, “*Escrivência* arises from a literary practice whose authorship is black, feminine and poor. In which the agent, the subject of the action, assumes its doing, its thinking, its reflection, not only as an isolated exercise, but crossed by a collectivity”.
- ⁶ But I always say: I believe that the genesis of my writing is in the buildup of everything I have heard since childhood. The buildup of words, of the stories that inhabited our house and surroundings. Of the facts told half-voiced, of the tales of the night, secrets, stories that the children could not hear. I closed my eyes pretending to sleep and woke up all my senses. My whole body received words, sounds, murmurs, voices interrupted by joy or pain, depending on the plot of the stories. With my eyes shut, I built the faces of my real and talking characters. It was a game of writing in the dark in the body of the night (Evaristo, 2007, p. 17).
- ⁷ T. N.: This term has historically been the target of colonial violence against people of Candomblé, as a strategy of religious subalternity and deculturation. In this process of diaspora, the violent sense of 'macumbagens' is inverted to allude to the everyday experience of Candomblé, in the sense of creating energies, moving nature in its form of existence.
- ⁸ Jamberesu – rite of praise to all Minkisi. Similar to the Yoruba ‘Shiré.’
- ⁹ Nkosi – “Warrior Nkisi, explorer of the world, iron forger, helped the Bantu people in their expansion through Africa, providing conditions for the creation of tools for war and agriculture” (Ferreira, 2019, p. 70).
- ¹⁰ Minkisi – “plural of Nkisi (god/goddess)” (Ferreira, 2019, p. 237).
- ¹¹ Kavungu – Lord of the Earth, deity of the Bantu pantheon linked to earth, in its essence, place of profusion of prosperity, and healing of infirmities.
- ¹² Nzumbarandá – Bantu deity linked to the life-death cycle, related to the land that welcomes the person to transport them to ancestry. Deity of mud, of mangroves, of prosperity, of everything that sprouts from the Earth.
- ¹³ Kitempo – or Kitempo, Tempo is the lord of the atmosphere, of life time itself, of things. Patron of the Angola nation, he is the owner of the white flag.



He leads to the right path, at the right time of life. Kitempo is the force that has ensured survival and expansion of the Bantu.

- ¹⁴ Nzazi – Nkisi related to the energy of fire, magma, all the contained energy that awaits its moment of expansion.
- ¹⁵ Matamba – Nkisi skilled with fire, with the winds that lead this fire. Energy of tireless warrior. Matamba controls the strength of the winds, moves away from themselves the energy of the vumbis (spirits of people who disembodied).
- ¹⁶ Adjá – an artifact inherited by the Yoruba that is similar to a bell with a very characteristic sound to call the *Nkisi/Vodum/Orixá* to earth.
- ¹⁷ Bakongo – referring to the people of the Kongo country – it is currently the region known as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Those who were born or exalt Kongo ancestry.
- ¹⁸ Unzó ia Kisimbi ria Maza Nzambi – House of the source of the pure waters of God. Terreiro located in the municipality of Simões Filho/BA. House of the Congo-Angola nation, having as matron the deity *Kisimbi*.
- ¹⁹ Acting person – related to the borrowed place of loan of his/her body for the expression of the scenes.
- ²⁰ Pembrê – from *kikoongo* meaning “I salute you”.
- ²¹ Buzangû – sacred clay vessel for the *Bakongo* used in the cults of *Minkisi* in Brazil.

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