



## **Black Characters: a critical reflection about racial patterns in dramaturgical Brazilian production**

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**ABSTRACT – Black Characters: a critical reflection about racial patterns in dramaturgical Brazilian production** – The present study analyzes historical and social issues present in the process of constructing race as a classifying term as well as the consequences of a racist ideology in Brazilian dramaturgy. The racial classification produced, especially, by naturalistic scientists supported a series of paradigmatic representations present in stage during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The text proposes a critical reflection on these stereotypes and questions the hegemonic theoretical perspective within Brazilian theatre studies and practice to provoke a revision of the ways how black characters are put in paper and stage in Brazilian theatre.

Keywords: **Race. Character. Black. Theatre. Playwriting.**

**RÉSUMÉ – Des Personnages Noirs: une réflexion sur les structures raciales dans la dramaturgie brésilienne** – Cette étude souligne les questions historiques et sociales dans le processus de construction du terme *race* et les conséquences d'une idéologie raciste dans les études dramatiques. La classification raciale créée par les scientifiques naturalistes a conservé les représentations paradigmatiques diffusées dans la scène théâtrale, spécialement, dans les XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles. Alors, cette étude propose une réflexion sur les stéréotypes dans la création de personnages noirs et aussi une critique des théories théâtrales hégémoniques.

Mots-clés: **Race. Personnages. Noirs. Théâtre. Dramaturgie.**

**RESUMO – Personagem Negra: uma reflexão crítica sobre os padrões raciais na produção dramaturgical brasileira** – O presente artigo tem como objetivo destacar questões históricas e sociais no processo de construção do termo *raça* e as consequências de uma ideologia racista no campo dramaturgical. A classificação racial produzida, principalmente, por cientistas naturalistas sustentou uma série de representações paradigmáticas difundidas na cena teatral no decorrer dos séculos XIX e XX. Com o intuito de fazer provocações sobre a criação da personagem negra no teatro, o texto propõe uma reflexão crítica dos estereótipos e questiona a perspectiva teórica teatral hegemônica dos estudos da história do teatro e da dramaturgia.

Palavras-chave: **Raça. Personagem. Negro. Teatro. Dramaturgia.**

## Introduction

In recent years acting as a researcher, I have noticed a need to develop a reflection about race, racism and the Afro-Brazilian culture in the artistic field. In a first moment, this desire arises due an epistemological gap. Usually, when I question friends and academics about the absence of these discussions in the theatrical field, the predominant discourse is that, due the fact that it is a specific and recent discussion, we find few concentrated researches about this theme. As a counterpoint, I have been participating<sup>1</sup> in events, congresses and seminars and, most of time, I find an expressive number of intellectuals, researchers, black and non-black artists who search for a critical look of the theatrical and which brings a production related with the Brazilian black theatre in their history<sup>2</sup>.

What worries me is that this statement, although seeming naïve and generic, has been spread for some decades and supports a vicious cycle in the academic space: there is not any bibliographical material because there are no researchers and, thus, this is a specific theme and still did not reach a visibility due the lack of people who may be interested in investigating it. However, let's think a little more.

In the curricula of scenic arts under graduation courses in public institutions, how many or which disciplines (non-optional) are destined for the discussion and reflection about the presence of black artistic movements, such as TEN [Black Experimental Theatre]? Which theoretical perspective is present in theater history teaching? Which epistemological lines are considered *classic* within the theatrical theory?

As a professor, I have been teaching theoretical disciplines in the university course of theatre, and I observe a concentration of theories related with the knowledge produced by European countries, specifically France, England and Germany. This axis extends to Russia and, depending on the temporal cutting, to the United States of America. Thus, the epistemological gap is not present in the absence of researchers or references, but in the absence of a space that questions the very theoretical perspective adopted by universities, to the point of turning them into a priority for theatrical history teaching.

Thus, we are faced with a structural racism, which neutralizes the hegemonic presence of knowledge production. I still think that we find, in the epistemological space, a colonialist practice, which makes us repeat a historical notion starting from the colonizer glance. Then, it is not about a discussion at a personal level, i.e., which are the thematic preferences of each researcher or which are the choices of each curriculum, but it is about noticing the consequences of a single narrative concerning the theatre history or the theatrical theories.

The Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie, known for her TED [Technology, Entertainment and Design] talk entitled *The Danger of a Single Story*<sup>3</sup> highlights the importance of questioning the construction of a single history and to observe the dangers of a paradigmatic creation, in which the stereotypes of specific social groups are produced. Narrating a historical episode is to appropriate from a perspective about the past. The narrative is, thus, a position of power and, first and foremost, a perspective of a narrated fact. The impossibility to watch/listen to other narratives within the theatre ends supporting one single perspective, besides presenting the historic events in a progressive and linear manner.

So, it is necessary to understand the act of narrating itself, because there is a space of power within it. As stated by Edward Said (1994, p. xiii): “The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them”.

Within the dramaturgy scope, the most emblematic point is the construction of black characters and it will be through this problematic that this article will develop. In the first section, I will make a historic and social presentation of the term, to contextualize the scientific construction and social dimension of the racial category. Subsequently, I will direct for a reflection on the dramaturgical field. In a dialogue with the notes of Leda Maria Martins (1995) and Miriam Garcia Mendes (1982), I introduce some paradigmatic notions presented on the Brazilian black character, specially from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the last section, I present some points that I consider relevant to think about concerning the challenges of a contemporary dramaturgy that realizes, in a cri-

tical manner, the ideological marks and policies spread by the scientific racism and disseminated in dramatic representations.

### Reflections Regarding the Racial Issue

To perform the discussion regarding the construction of the term “race”, I will use as reference two books from the researcher and professor of Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Kabengele Munanga (2004; 2012). Considering that it is a theme with several investigations in the human science field, I choose for this article Munanga’s writings because the author problematizes the racial classification created by the naturalist Carl von Linné (or Linnaeus), and it will be starting from this that I will make some reflections about the racial ideals immersed in the black character representation in the Brazilian dramaturgy.

According to Munanga, the word “race” is derived from the “Italian *razza*, which, in turn, came from the Latin *ratio*” (2004, p. 17), but as a concept, this term operated in the natural science to categorize or catalog the living creature’s diversity. From his studies, the author states that the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries presented an expressive number of researches concerned with classifying the humankind, mainly influenced by Enlightenment thinkers. The main epistemological claims of this historical period focused into a progressive conception, reinforcing the racial paradigms of superiority and inferiority.

According to Munanga (2004), Linnaeus’s classification was highlighted. In a general manner, the division proposed by the scientist is that humankind was presented in four races: American, Asian, African and European. To justify his thesis, some criteria were established, such as the skin color and the shape of the skull, the nose and the lips.

For Munanga (2004), the most decisive criterion in this qualifying stage was, in an initial analysis, the skin color; the other criteria were subsequently added with the goal to *improve* the human races division. Below, I highlight an excerpt where the author underlines the ideological position of the neutralist scientists:

Had the neutralists from the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries limited their works only to the classification of human groups per the physical characteristics, they certainly wouldn’t had caused any problem to humankind. Their classifications

would be kept or rejected, like what always happened in the scientific knowledge history. Unfortunately, since the beginning, they assumed the right to rank, to establish a value scale among the races (Munanga, 2004, p. 21).

The most emblematic will be the period described by the author, in which the race category is supported on the deterministic neutralists theories. From the races' ranking, the neutralists highlighted the inferiority as an intrinsic aspect to some human species and, not coincidental, the superiority was destined to the European – as it can be seen below in the racial classification proposed by Linnaeus:

**American**, whom the classifier himself describes as dark, choleric, bigheaded, freedom lover, governed by the habit, having a painted body. [...] **Asian**: yellow, melancholic, governed by opinion and prejudices, wearing wide clothes [...] **African**: black, phlegmatic, governed by his boss' will (despotism), greasing the body with oil or fat, his wife having a pending vulva and, when nursing, breasts become soft and elongated [...] **European**: white, sanguine, muscular, ingenious, governed by laws, wearing tight clothes (Munanga, 2004, p. 25-26, author's emphasis).

It is remarkable the excess of adjectives for the *European* in a counterpoint to the derogatory terms used for other races, especially the *African*, described as: *lazy* and *negligent*. Besides, what the neutralist called *American* can be understood as a first reference to the American Indian, and the Asian is generically presented, indicated by the yellow color.

This racial classification from Linnaeus has become a reference for other researchers and, over the centuries, science had an important role for the maintenance of a hegemonic racial knowledge. The Enlightenment theories, in the search of social progress, ended reinforcing the black's stigma in society, establishing them as a non-developed part of society.

According to the quoted author, black people were generally described by their "sexuality, nudity, ugliness, laziness and indolence" (Munanga, 2012, p. 30). In fact, laziness and virility were striking characteristics in the postulate of scientific racism. Both in Linnaeus's classification and in the scientific notes of the time, like in the dramatic literature, the black's image reference was created from a discourse of the lazy black, the one who does not want to work or work little or, yet, from the hypersexualization of the bodies, highlighting virility for men and seduction for women.

This racial perspective, legitimated by science, invades other instance of the society and influences the medical studies, generating a series of problematics that consolidated a derogatory vision of black people in society, besides leaving historical marks and psychological problems. When associating the moral and ethical values to the morphological characteristic, the belief in the racial inferiority, preached by the determinism, produced a negative and prejudiced reference in what being black is concerned. This understanding has a vital importance to realize the racism's effect in the Brazilian society, as added by Munanga (2012, p. 33), “[...] with these theories about the black's physical and moral characteristics, the legitimization and justification of two institutions are marked: slavery and colonization”.

As already said, the skin color becomes the main criterion for the classification of humankind into races, and science, consequently, legitimates in this discourse the need to govern certain races. Hierarchy, this way, is justified by a discriminatory polarity: superior races in one side and inferior races in the other.

I emphasize once again that Linnaeus's framework is guided by a *biologizing* vision; within this perspective, the biological factors determine the social, cultural and psychological behaviors of individuals. Thus, certain individuals present specific ethical behaviors, turning them naturally good or bad, according to the racial classification. So, this is the racist ideology basis – in Munanga's words (2004, p. 24):

[...] a belief in the existence of naturally hierarchized races by the intrinsic relation between the physical and moral, the physical and intellect, the physical and cultural. The racist creates the race in a sociological sense; the race in the racist's imaginary is not exclusively a group defined by the physical traces. In their mind, race is a social group with cultural, linguistic, religious and other traces considered by them as naturally inferior to the group to which they belong.

In scientific researches, this race conception has justified a lot of theories about development and human relations. The challenge of these theories occurred only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the discovery of genes and the complexity of genetic codes. The skin color becomes an insufficient criterion, since the scientists discovered that: “[...] only less than 1% of the genes that constitute the genetic heritage of an individual is implied in the skin,

eyes and hair color transmission” (Munanga, 2004, p. 20). Such discovery refutes the main paradigm created: the skin color cannot be a humankind classification criterion; thus, the definition of race itself starts to be questioned. Besides, Munanga (2004, p. 20-21) adds that:

The comparative research also led to the conclusion that the genetic heritage of two individuals belonging to a same race can be more distant than the ones belonging to different races; a characteristic genetic marker of a race, although with less incidence, can be found in another race.

According to the data presented by the author, the fragility of the *race* category is reinforced through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When deepened in the genetic studies, science refutes its previous theories and realizes the impossibility to frame individuals in a same racial classification, since the genetic codes present themselves completely different and, consequently, cannot define the psychological behaviors and even less justify the social and cultural attitude.

The anthropologist also explains that:

Some anti-racists biologists even suggested that the race concept should be banned from dictionaries and scientific texts. However, the concept persists in the popular use and in works and studies produced in the social science field. These, despite agreeing with the current human biology conclusions on the scientific inexistence of race and unserviceability of the concept itself, justify the concept’s use as a social and political reality, considering race as a sociological construction and a social category of domination and exclusion (Munanga, 2004, p. 22-23).

Although science itself had challenged the legitimacy of the theories produced in the previous centuries, the inferiorization discourse spread in the social imaginary, being disseminated in other research fields. In Brazil, for instance, with the influence of the eugenicist movement, it was intended to exclude the so-called inferior races from society. Researcher Marcia das Neves (2008, p. 243) contextualizes:

Since the proclamation of the Republic in our country, there was a concern with the immigration related with the population formation. The idea to form a whiter people was part of the Brazilian elite thought, which believed, among other things, on the ‘extinction’ of the ‘inferior’ elements through the progressive mix with selected immigrants.

This ideological attitude to turn the Brazilian population whiter became known as *whitening* (Neves, 2008). In the political scope, some measures were taken with the intention to ensure the exclusion of the so-called inferior races. To deepen into such question, the author quotes Thomas Skidmore's studies about the "whitening theory" (Neves, 2008, p. 243). According to Neves:

[...] the idea of whitening set off from the assumption that the white race was superior to the others and accentuated in the [19]30s, transpiring in articles from different constitutions, in decrees-law, in law projects [...] (Neves, 2008, p. 243).

The search for a white Brazilian population, or as close as possible to the white profile, was one of the whitening theories goals. Although this theory is not adopted anymore in terms of legislation, it is necessary to observe the social stigmas that were left, such as: the naturalization of a phenotypic standard for certain professions, or yet, the ideal of feminine aesthetics, supported by the search of a racial beauty that is specifically white.

The skin color has become a stigma in the Brazilian territory. By stigma, I mean the naturalized racial reference concerning the skin color, in which these ethical-moral values were included. The historian José D'Assunção Barros, in his work *A construção social da cor* [The social construction of color] (2012), speaks about the slavery system and the Brazilian colonial period as instances of stigmas production, based on a derogatory vision regarding the skin color. The skin, aside from bringing deterministic scientific discourses, assumes a social character and reveals a position of power and status.

Despite the increasing number of studies referring to the non-scientific validation regarding the term *race*, it is still possible to identify deterministic discourses that survive in the social imaginary, in which, according to Munanga (2004), the fictional races may seem to resist. So, the race category begins to appear like "[...] domination and exclusion category in the contemporary multiracial societies" (Munanga, 2012, p. 15), because it brings political and ideological elements.

In the literature, these stigmas will also be used to describe and represent the black as an antagonistic to the white. In the hegemonic history of the Brazilian theatre, we will note, in an initial moment, the total absence

of the black character; in other words, the black person is not represented in stage. It will be from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on that this type of character will enter the scene, defined by a colonial optics, specially by the neutralists thesis.

### **Naturalism in the Theatrical Scene: discussions about the black character construction from the racial paradigms**

In the previous section, the discussion was based on social and racial constructions, having the 18<sup>th</sup> century scientific researches as the main target. At this point, my intention is to allow the following question: how do the racial constructions appear in the artistic field? In other words, to what extent Linnaeus's racial categories invade art and subsequently produce artistic expressions supported on a racial hierarchy notion?

I highlight two aspects referring to the black character in the Brazilian dramaturgy: the first one is the invisibility, the absence of black characters; the second one is the representation and description of a black character created on the molds of an inferiority racial paradigm or sexual fetish.

With respect to the invisibility, I quote an excerpt from a book by Zeca Ligiéro, a researcher and professor of Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO). According to the author:

There is a restrict number of black characters in the Brazilian dramaturgic literature. Since the initial instances, they emerge in the skin of slaves, servants and messengers without a voice. Sometimes they sketch coarse expressions, answering to the orders given by their superiors, bosses or lord of slaves (Ligiéro, 2011, p. 292).

It seems to me that the heritage from the neutralist Linnaeus survives in this kind of Brazilian dramaturgy described by Ligiéro, in which it is possible to observe, directly from the black characters' description, a direct association between psychological behaviors and physical characteristics carried with stigmas and with a doubtful ethical attitude. I point out that the quoted author approaches the black's role in the dramaturgic production of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In another part of his text, he emphasizes:

In the first decades of the 20th century, the Brazilian theatre was still characterized by the light comedy, the *burletta* and the *vaudeville*, whose musical scenes have the black presented as stereotyped types. Among those types there was the 'rascal' – the good-life and procrastinator – and the *baiana* –

the sensual woman with an easy life. Both became examples of anti-family characters because, in these sketches, they were interested in the ephemeral aspects of life: smoking, drinking, gambling, dancing and enjoying the carnal pleasures (Ligiéro, 2011, p. 298).

Before this period, black characters were not present in the texts or were still constructed per a dominant colonial vision, being represented by the slave figure. Concerning this, the researcher from Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Professor Leda Maria Martins (1995, p. 40), states:

[...] until the initial decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the presence of the black character defines a limit situation, the *invisibility*. This is translated not only by the scenic absence of the character, but also by the dramatic construction and fixation of a deformed portrait of the black person. The scenic representation molds that create and convey this image is supported by a vision of a Eurocentric world, where the other one – in this case, the black – is only recognizable and identified through an analogy with the *white*, who is staged as a universal, integral and absolute subject.

In accordance with what is said above, the invisibility happens in the absence of a powerful black character that ruptures with the inferiority behavioral standards, constructed from a dominant and colonizer white vision. I understand, from these references, that the invisibility in the Brazilian dramaturgy in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be understood in two senses: the total absence of black characters and the presence of racist stereotypes, reinforcing paradigms of subservience or virility.

When the black character starts being noticed as a society member, it emerges in the theatrical scene, still representing a slave. Thus, the black character representation will now occur based on racial paradigms – because of the creation of characters that reflect racial stereotypes, disseminating an understanding of inferiority or virility, both represented by their ethical and non-trustable behavior and the manner of acting in search of advantages, setting up a kind of an image reflection of the black character created by the racist ideology within the fictional space. This situation will be modified with the emergence of theatrical groups, social movements that will claim an affirmative black, non-stereotyped identity.

To describe better these representations in the theatrical field, I quote another reference, Miriam Garcia Mendes' book, *A personagem negra no tea-*

*tro brasileiro* [The black character in the Brazilian theatre] (1982), in which the historian presents a mapping of dramatic works from the main Brazilian playwrights from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Martins Pena (1815-1848), Joaquim Manuel de Macedo (1820-1882), José de Alencar (1829-1877) and Arthur de Azevedo (1855-1905), to quote a few.

Beyond invisibility, Leda Maria Martins states that the black character represented in this period was defined by an *unspeakability*, according to the author: “[...] unspeakable because the lines that constitute it are generated by its own default, reducing it to an alienating body and voice, conventionalized by the Brazilian theatrical tradition” (Martins, 1995, p. 40). Therefore, there is a narrative production within the theatre from the colonizer’s perspective, and it will be this glance that will present (and represent) the black character in the Brazilian dramaturgy.

It is interesting to highlight that the very notion about characters suggests us a political-ideological aspect. According to Renata Pallotini in *A construção da personagem* [The construction of the character] (2013, p. 15), the character is defined as the imitation or “[...] the recreation of fundamental traces of a person or persons – traces selected by the poet, according to his own criteria”. So, it is necessary to investigate, in an analysis, which paradigms are being (re)produced within the fictional space.

When I emphasize the ideological and political elements, I search for a strangeness position before the neutralized dramatic representations in the Brazilian stages. Thus, the rascal and virile black, or the exotic *mulatta*, are figures carried with paradigms and signs that spread the skin color stigma, guided by the scientific racism, as we already seen.

The striking representation that emerges in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the *slave*. Restrict to his condition, the black person will be represented as an extra in the Brazilian stages, like a part of the society. Without voice and dramatic spotlight, the black character, as stated by Mendes (1982), appears in Martins Pena’s comedies in a generic and stigmatized manner. According to the author, in “*O inglês maquinista*, black people barely appear, even as extras (1982, p. 174); however, in “*O cigano*, the presence of the black character is sharper, however with little importance” (Mendes, 1982, p. 174).

The historian points out a series of dramatic works in her book (Mendes, 1982) in which the black character is reduced to the social condition.

Consequently, slavery is presented as something intrinsic to the black people, without questioning the context and slave condition imposed by the colonialist system.

The black characters, even when appearing with more defined outlines and with a certain dramatic intensity, announces their social condition and justifies their dramatic action through this. For instance, in *Mãe* [Mother] (1859), by José de Alencar, Joana, the black character, is seen over the play as “[...] kind, servant, compliant with her duties, devoted to her master to the extent to sacrifice herself for him, not only because the fact that she was his mother, but also because it was from her nature” (Mendes, 1982, p. 178).

It is important to question this *natural* aspect. As I have been mentioning in this article, the naturalization process is linked to the biologic-deterministic comprehension that, for me, exempts the historical and political responsibility of the colonization processes. The notion that this person is *naturally* inferior is the ideological mark of a scientific theory that legitimated such condition; therefore, from such theses and arguments, such racial policy produced a series of discriminatory discourses.

In the theatrical field, the naturalism appears in the characters’ discourses and in their way of acting within the plot. In the book *A linguagem da encenação teatral* [The language of the theatrical performance] (1998), Jean-Jacques Roubine forges a criticism to the neutralist movement, which brings a deterministic vision regarding the character, putting it as a biological product (natural) and, consequently, marked by the familiar heritage (heredity). It is recurrent, in performing texts of this period (or even in bourgeois texts of this period), the presence of a character definition from biological and naturalized ideals, such as in Ibsen’s *A doll house* (1979)<sup>4</sup>.

Roubine’s criticism to the neutralism is in the representation of a progressive world. According to Roubine (1998, p. 25):

Antoine’s work may correspond, in the theatre, to the accomplishment of the capitalist dream from the industrial capitalism: the conquest of the real world. Scientific conquest, colonial conquest, aesthetic conquest... The original ghost of the naturalist illusionism is not anything but this omniscient utopia, which is proposed to proof that we dominate the world reproducing it.

I insist on this aspect because a historic problematic lies here. In my readings and studies about the black character in the Brazilian theatrical scene, I have observed the urgency for a *denaturalization* process or, even better, to strange, discuss the comedy characters' models and to question the figurative presence of the black character in the drama. Researchers such as Leda Maria Martins and the studies from Miriam Garcia Mendes present a concern for the Brazilian dramatic production and reveal the presence of a racial discourse permeated in the dramatic representations.

So, the issue that remains is how to subvert these racial stigmas in the theatrical field? The challenge is urgent and, beyond the thematic question, the contemporary playwrights and artists also deal with the tensions from their own dramatic structures.

To continue the reflection, I highlight that the black character in the theatrical scene deals with the tension within the dramatic structure and the historical-social tension. So, following up, I will address the structural questions that are relevant to dramaturgy.

### **On Afro-Diasporic Dramaturgies and The Text's Central Position in the Theatrical Scene**

In general, the Brazilian theatre, which followed the French theatre molds, focused on the text as the main aspect of the scene. For centuries, the hegemonic tradition understood the text as the theatre's backbone, passing through several movements along history, having symbolism and naturalism as highlights, for instance. It is also in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the moment for transformation of the European theatrical scene occurs, bringing the director figure as the main rupture in the end of this period. The environments' power acquires an emphasis for the naturalists, who bring great scenarios to the stages and, through Émile Zola's notes and André Antoine naturalists practices, configure a closure of an invisible wall, the fourth wall.

With so many structural concerns, the dramaturgy, as well as the theatre, presented ruptures that are easily found in theatre history books nowadays. The theatrical changes and the search for a *mise-en-scène improvement* are the main historical facts portrayed in this period at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the text's service, theatre consolidated a tradition that many students of theatre called *textcentrism*. If outside the stages the black person

figure was subjugated to a racial hierarchy, within the theatrical space that character presented very specific traces – reproducing, as already mentioned in this article, the scientific discourses related to the racial inferiority and superiority.

In this period, the text's status acquires a central position. According to Roubine (1998, p. 50):

[...] in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the performing art demanded the support of a good text. Concerning the performing art, it used, improved and even invented techniques, each one being a way to view, materialize, face an action, situations, characters, whatever had been previously imagined by a writer.

With the text being a hegemonic element for the theatrical scene configuration, the black characters' absence in the theatrical texts also implies their absence in the stages. As stated by Roubine (1998, p. 45), in another moment: “[...] the problem with the text's place and function within the scenic realization is less recent than what is usual to imagine and, beyond and above the aesthetical considerations, it represents an ideological value”.

In the contemporaneity, I have been noticing that the black character will face at least two challenges within the theatre: the first one is to claim for their space as a dramatic *persona* – and for this, playwrights will use their own dramatic rules to (re)present an affirmative and non-stereotyped black identity<sup>5</sup>.

Although the contemporary dramaturgy, in studies such as from the German theoretical Hans-Thies Lehmann (2007), had questioned the dramatic structure limits and raised an intense discussion about the post-dramatic, I observe that the Brazilian black dramaturgy still needs to create effective and protagonist roles in which the black character subverts a theatrical historic guided by characters full with social paradigms that were constructed by a colonizer bias: the rascal and virile black, the exotic *mulatta*, the domestic black person (servant and obedient). That way, we will find black writers who adopt a dramatic structure to deal with themes that are relevant for the Afro-Brazilian culture and history, presenting a political bias with the intention to question the stigmas produced by the racist ideology.

The second challenge is to face its own dramatic structure, but in the opposite side of a Eurocentric perspective – i.e., understanding the theatrical art in its connection with chanting, dancing and religiosity.

Departing from this last challenge, I will highlight that the theatrical hegemonic tradition, when considering the text as a central element, excluded other eastern and African artistic practices. Defined as body arts, or classified as eastern, tribal and African *dances* (like Kabuki, Noh Theatre and *Orixá's* dance, for instance), they are separated from the theatrical scope, although they are assumed as spectacle. Though Victor Turner, Richard Schechner and even Eugenio Barba, with the Theatrical Anthropology, enable an opening for the understanding of the performing arts, they are theories that lie on a certain intellectual axis<sup>6</sup>. The provocation I make at this moment involves what is tangible for the hegemonic theoretical theatrical production. I do not want to suggest a geographic determinism with this statement, but I want to discuss the need to rethink the theoretical perspective adopted in the theatrical field.

Somehow, the question I outline here is the one announced by Chimamanda Adichie, but that is now adapted to the theatrical context: to what extent the theatrical hegemonic built a single notion regarding the theatre conception itself?

The text's central presence in the scene creates classifications around the performing work, also defined by the laws of drama. It turns out that, when automatically classified, the drama's laws refuted an entire Afro-Diasporic artistic field, denying it as art. It is in this field that perhaps the greatest contemporary tension resides, because, if on one hand we have the need to (re)see the black character represented within a dramatic structure, on the other hand, the very understanding of the dramaturgy would start to be overhauled whereas the dramatic hegemonic invention expelled a plural notion about theatre, related both to the ritual and to the strategies of resistance.

If we search for other perspectives related to the theatre's history within the African diasporic context, we will find a possibility to comprehend body gestures and movements with ethical attitudes in the non-verbal elements, but also crossed by aesthetic aspects immersed in diasporic cultural practices. The black person, in an imposed condition, created stra-

gies to survive and resist the dominant system. These strategies pass from the creation of structures, non-verbal codes, to artistic-cultural practices, such as dance, singing and drumming. Thus, the resistance strategies, besides being understood as transgression acts, became ways to act, ritualize and face the colonial system.

Concerning the resistance act, the researcher and professor from Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), Júlio Tavares (2012, p. 81), states: “[...] resisting implied a strategic action related with the body and turned it into the major point of reference before the exterior world”. The body, as will be defended by Tavares, becomes a file and a weapon. And here, I open a space to dialogue with the author. If we consider the complexity from the corporal practice, present in capoeira and *Orixá's* dance, we will notice a range of movements, codes related to the African mythology, the ancestral knowledge and the need to survive in a territory that imposes the colonizer language and culture.

The need to resist and the search for reconnection with the cultural practices claimed from the African continent compose, in my point of view, a complex African diasporic dramaturgy in the Brazilian territory, in which art, religiosity and political action interlace. Quoting Tavares once again, the body will be a powerful element. In the author's words: “[...] the body becomes the owner of a system of signals with which it aims to symbolize the world from corporal gestures and movements, as well as from the energy emanated from it” (Tavares, 2012, p. 83).

With the theatre being a space for the encounter and search of corporal practices that transmute the meanings that are immersed in the daily routine, I dare to say that, at this point, the artistic and cultural practices created from the diasporic context are political actions, ways to act in the world, ethical and challenging answers to intervene and transgress the imposed colonial knowledge. They also bring to us theatrical aspects to be investigated, constituents of a resistance dramaturgy.

### Final Remarks

In this paper, I searched for a critical perception regarding the black character construction and, for this, I highlighted widespread neutralist scientific studies, specially over the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The racial paradigms justified

the scientific racism and produced numberless stereotypes in the social imaginary, reinforcing the skin color as a criterion to classify and legitimate attitudes as well as ethical and moral conducts.

The polarization – inferior and superior – produced by Linnaeus's racial classification table supported a way of thinking on the society and justified the colonial position concerning exploitation and slavery of several ethnical groups from the African continent. Another aspect, which was discussed over this text, is the need to review the theatre's history, focused on a single narrative.

In the theatrical field, the developed problematic was about the stigmatized representation, supported by racial standards that justify and/or limit the black character performing action to the condition imposed by the slavery system. Also in the theatre field, I believe that the challenges of an Afro-Brazilian dramaturgical production are found in the urgency to deconstruct and construct references that present the black character as a powerful dramatic element while, at the same time, it is necessary to face the limits of a performing structure.

Over the article, I insisted on the ideological question that crosses the black character's representation. I believe that this point brings into discussion the need to rethink the theatrical art as a political space, which produced characters historically marked by a naturalist heritage. As stated by Leda Maria Martins (1995, p. 43):

Through these continuous marks in the dramatization of the black *persona*, the theatrical conventionalization repeats a knowledge discourse that proposes itself as truth. And it is like knowledge and truth that this discourse moves the structuring and modeler power of the Brazilian racial relationships, legitimating the social domain practices statute within the characters' statute.

The author's statement dialogues with the issues raised in this text, in which the representation of paradigms in the theatrical scene reinforces a series of derogatory meanings, defining the black character place and voice in the stage, besides defining a social condition. Therefore, understanding the theatre as a place for creation of images, a space of representation, it is necessary to try creating other meanings, manufacture other semantics for this black sign produced by the Brazilian dramaturgy. The author also alerts to

the “[...] negative significance value for the black sign” (Martins, 1995, p. 43). These derogatory values, mentioned in the representation scope, constitute an objectification process of the black sign, turning it into the product of hegemonic discourses.

In this sense, I agree with Leda Maria Martins (1995, p. 43) when she emphasize that “[...] the black people’s line never is their true voice and, even less, their discourse”. Thus, it will not be by chance that artists, intellectuals and militants will claim for the space to talk in theatres, that is, to remove the black character from the “unspeakable” zone – to use the author’s term (Martins, 1995). It is about realizing the power of the dramatic and historic narrative production.

Over the text, I made considerations and approaches about the neutralist theories produced in the scientific field and the neutralist movement that invades the theatrical performance. This perspective guided a lot of theatrical theories about the staging, confusing – sometimes – with other historic theatrical movement, the realism. In a general way, my questions walked into a perception regarding the black character stigmatization. This is a crucial point for the discussion in the theatrical field about the racism effects, deepen as an integral topic about the theatrical perform and theories.

During the text, besides highlighting the historical-social tension, I tried to realize the structural challenges present in the dramaturgy – especially when favoring the scene’s text. In this sense, the dramatic formal aspects, based from the Aristotelian postulate of the three unities of time, space and action, promoted a theatrical debate and practice about the text’s aegis.

What I present in this article is that the black character invisibility is crossed by the absence of a theatrical representation, i.e., being in the theatrical scene as a dramatic power, and a dramatic tension caused by formal aspects, in which the dramatic structure guides a kind of staging. Thus, we would have the following tensions: (1) the invisibility of historical and dramatic narratives in the theatrical context; (2) the paradigms and stereotypes present in the black characters’ composition; and (3) the epistemological perspectives adopted in the theatrical theories.

I believe that these quoted tensions are linked to the colonization process. Thus, the concentration of historical narratives from a single perspec-

tive would set up a colonial position, in the sense to expropriate knowledges, deconstituting them from their historical, cultural and social contexts. For Kabengele Munanga (2012, p. 27): “[...] the African colonial domination resulted from the expansion of two imperialisms: from the market, which took possession of land, resources and men; from history, which possessed a new conceptual space: the non-historic man”.

Finally, in face of the social-political complexity, I understand that it still fits, within the theatrical field, investigations about the Afro-Diasporic aesthetical particularities and a visibility process regarding the theatrical theories that question the hegemonic knowledge, understanding the Afro-Brazilian history and culture as a non-transversal theme, but as an integral topic of the theatrical knowledge.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> An example was the 1<sup>st</sup> International Colloquium of the Contemporary Black in Performing Arts, performed and hosted by UNESP (Universidade Estadual Paulista) Arts Institute from March 31<sup>st</sup> to April 4<sup>th</sup> 2016. More information about how the event developed and the program, please access: <<http://coloquioafrocontemporaneo.blogspot.com.br/p/programaca.html>>. Accessed: 21 January 2016.
- <sup>2</sup> To mention a few: professor and researcher Júlio Tavares, who published *Dança de Guerra* [War dance] (2012), a material about *capoeira* in the Brazilian territory and a debate about the body and resistance strategies; professor and researcher Leda Maria Martins, with the book *Cena em sombras* [Scene in shadows] (1995); the historian Joel Rufino dos Santos, with publications such as *A história do negro no teatro brasileiro* [The history of blacks in the Brazilian Theatre] (2014); and the historian Miriam Garcia Mendes, with the publication *A personagem negra no teatro brasileiro* [The black character in the Brazilian Theatre] (1982).
- <sup>3</sup> Conference presented by Adichie in July 2009 and provided on TED platform. To watch it, please visit: <[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=pt-br](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=pt-br)>. Accessed: 21 January 2016.
- <sup>4</sup> Though, in some moments, the playwright uses a series of formal narrative strategies to problematize the social-deterministic vision of the period, it is

possible to note, in some lines of “Helmer” (Nora’s husband), a neutralist vision that he has about his wife. I also highlight that, although we may interpret Nora’s decision in the play’s ending as a rebelliousness or contestation act in face of the sexist attributions of her husband and father, in my opinion regarding Ibsen’s play, there’s a tension between a neutralist thought (in which the social and natural conditions justify the human behavior) and a possible criticism to the economic-social standards of a bourgeois class.

- <sup>5</sup> For instance, it’s the case of Cuti’s (Luiz Silva) theatrical texts, a black writer born in São Paulo who suggests a dramatic structure in his plays, presenting themes related to racism.
- <sup>6</sup> I understand that during a period of the theatre history, especially along the 20<sup>th</sup> century, theater pedagogues, such as Constantin Stanislávski, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and Peter Brook, searched for eastern and African principles in their theatrical practices to build a ritual theatre or a Theatrical Anthropology – on Barba’s case. However, it is interesting to question the use and appropriation of these practices and realize to what extent a colonial position or even a generalization of the cultural practices were kept. So-called from another moment, what I observed in some principles of the Theatrical Anthropology, is a displacement of the historical-cultural meanings of these groups, in which prevails, in a certain way, the western vision. Thus, the *Balinese theatre*, *Japanese theatre* and the *African theatre* are narrated from western narratives and practices. Although this is not within the theatrical field, I indicate the deepen and dedicate study of Edward Said in his book *Orientalismo* [Orientalism] (2007), whose contributions walk in the sense of questioning these generic narratives, constructing a homogenic cultural block.

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