



Performance and Ancestral Heritage: what does Bakongo cosmology teach about black Brazilian childhood?

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ABSTRACT – Performance and Ancestral Heritage: what does Bakongo cosmology teach about black Brazilian childhood? – Through African and Afro-diasporic references, it is proposed a reflexive exercise on Black children and their performances. Based on studies about Bantu-Kongo cosmology, an approach to Bakongo childhood is sought to provide an understanding of the performances of black Brazilian childhood, relating them to the preservation of African civilizational values. It is concluded, considering ancestral heritage and a cosmological notion of circular time, that Brazilian Black children, through performance, are able to bring together past and present, ancestral and living, renewing memory and keeping the values of Afro-Brazilian civilization alive.

Keywords: **Black Children. Bakongo Cosmology. Ancestral Heritage. Children and Performance. Performance.**

RÉSUMÉ – Performance et Ascendance: qu'enseigne la cosmologie Bakongo sur l'enfance noire brésilienne? – A travers des références africaines et afro-diasporiques, il est proposé l'exercice de réflexion sur les enfants noirs et leurs performances. À partir d'études de la cosmologie bantu-kongo, une approche de l'enfance bakongo est recherchée pour comprendre les performances de l'enfance noire brésilienne, en les mettant en relation avec la préservation des valeurs civilisationnelles africaines. Il est conclu, à la lumière du concept d'ascendance et de la notion cosmologique de temps circulaire, que les enfants brésiliens noirs, à travers la performance, sont capables d'unir passé et présent, ancestraux et vivants, rééditant des souvenirs et gardant vivantes les valeurs civilisatrices afro-brésiliennes.

Mots-clés: **Enfants Noirs. Cosmologie Bakongo. Ascendance. Enfant Interprète. Performance.**

RESUMO – Performance e Ancestralidade: o que a cosmologia bakongo ensina sobre a infância negra brasileira? – Por meio de referenciais africanos e afrodiaspóricos, propõe-se o exercício de pensar as crianças negras e suas performances. A partir de estudos sobre a cosmologia bantu-kongo, busca-se uma aproximação com a infância bakongo para dar a compreender as performances da infância negra brasileira, relacionando-as com a preservação de valores civilizatórios africanos. Conclui-se, à luz do conceito ancestralidade e da noção cosmológica de tempo circular, que as crianças negras brasileiras, por intermédio da performance, são capazes de unir passado e presente, ancestral e vivo, reeditando memórias e mantendo vivos valores civilizatórios afro-brasileiros.

Palavras-chave: **Crianças Negras. Cosmologia Bakongo. Ancestralidade. Criança Performer. Performance.**

Introduction

In this text, we seek to discuss black children as performing children, basing our discussion on the notion of Kindezi, presented in the work of Fu-Kiau and Lukondo-Wamba (2000), to problematize the performative experimentation of black children as the presentification of African civilizing values and, also, as an important contribution to think about Education and the fight against racism.

In a previous research (Pereira, 2021), we already comprehended kindezi as a very old community education system on the African continent, whose performance was fundamental in the battles against European colonization, enabling adults to prepare for the impending struggles, without causing social damage to children (Ani, 2000). We sought to understand how this system worked, how bakongo children lived their educational process with their peers and older people, and how this understanding could contribute to reflect on the education of children in Brazil, especially black children, in the necessary dimension of providing them with an anti-racist education.

We consider that thinking about the bakongo childhood (of the Kongo people) is relevant for all Brazilian researchers who seek to understand childhood: the Bantu peoples are part of a significant contingent of enslaved humans brought by force to Brazil and, more than we know, their traditions were part of the construction of our culture and nationality. Accordingly, we cannot think of Brazilian childhood without thinking of the contributions of African cultures, in this case specifically the bantu-kongo (bakongo) cosmology.

As pointed out by Nei Lopes (2021), we need to understand the extent to which our understanding of African contributions to what we are today, as a nation, has been greatly curtailed, having in consideration that

[...] the denial of the cultural importance of the Bantu segment in the formation of Brazil despite this segment, due to anteriority of its presence and the large number of its entry into Brazilian ports, for more than 300 years — in addition to its forced dispersion throughout almost the entire national territory — [...] having been the one that most influenced the formation of the Brazilian civilization and of others in the Americas (Lopes, 2021, p. 9, our translation).

We turn our attention to the Bantu peoples and cultures¹ so we can find analytical keys, clues that enable us to better understand Brazilian black childhood, its ways of being and being in the world, since we understand these children as heirs of the Bantu tradition, as they experience in their communities some of the millennial principles that accompany these peoples throughout history. As pointed out by Lopes (2021, our translation), based on the ideas of Theophile Obenga (1985), for the Bantu people: “[...] The idea of beauty is indissolubly associated with those of good, life and truth. Thus, in all of Banta Africa, it is beauteous that which is good, alive and true, and which carries within it a tradition of ancestry, which creates and divinizes it.”

From this perspective, the beauty of living well relates to being *with* ancestry while truly acting to maintain this relation. Quotidian and collective behaviors consolidate the essential learning for social life, or the ways of being and being in the world that consist with the cosmological values of Bantu-Kongo societies (Fu-Kiau; Lukondo-Wamba, 2000; Santos, 2019). In this text, we are based on African and Afro-Diasporic references to conduct the exercise of speaking/thinking about childhood. Not any childhood, but a black childhood unbeknownst to many: the bakongo childhood. With this movement, we seek to approach our interpretations of children in Kongo cosmology, as systematized in Bunseki Fu-Kiau's writing, and then point out a path in which, given certain contexts, despite the persistence and sophistication of coloniality and racism, black children – and even non-black children – in Brazil continue to have experiences derived from African civilizing values, often described by Azoilda Trindade (2005) as Afro-Brazilian civilizing values. Next, we will approach research on/with black children, adopting an approach that goes against “limited perspectives as to the potential of black children,” as stated by Silva and Noguera (2020, p. 190), when they observe that a significant number of publications in the fields of education and psychology “are based on the relation between these children and the various nuances of racism” only.

We present a brief contextualization about the solar time that moves the bantu-kongo thought systems, so that we can converge in the meanings of person/human being/muntu: understanding what the human means within the bakongo culture enables us to think about childhood within a field of

meanings that are different from those in which we are commonly situated in Western culture, associated with the invention of childhood as a social construct connected to the processes of bourgeoisie ascension and school invention, as Ariès (1981) points out, or even to the propositions of Childhood Sociology, presented by Sarmiento and Gouvea (2008) and Sarmiento and Vasconcelos (2007). It also enables us to understand the efforts to value childhood and understand other modes of being and learning from it.

Muntu: the human being in Bantu-Kongo cosmology

The bakongo are part of what was constituted as a large linguistic, historical and cultural group called bantu, a set of African societies that share the same linguistic trunk, since their origins in the first millennia before the common era (Fourshey; Gonzales; Saidi, 2019); today they are located in a large territorial expansion of the continent, covering the countries of Central, Central-Western, Eastern and Southern Africa (Munanga, 2009). The languages of this group reflect “[...] the organization of a philosophy of the human being, of the human collectivity and of the relationship of these beings with nature and the universe” (Cunha Junior, 2010, p. 26, our translation). They also have a common root, *ntu*, used to name the human being (mu-ntu, singular; ba-ntu, plural); therefore, “These languages were designated as bantu by Western linguists” (Munanga, 1996, p. 58, our translation).

According to Tiganá Santana Santos (2019, p. 122, our translation):

The term muntu, in Kikongo language, with variants such as mutu and ntu, in other Bantu languages, means ‘person’. Mu-ntu indicates ‘inside the head’, ‘by head’, ‘what manifests and/or is, by the head’. The concept of person, among the bantu-kongo, is fully associated with the conception that the head (ntu) determines the ‘human mode of being’.

Consistently, Nei Lopes (2005, p. 23, our translation) presents a notion of *muntu* in which the person is “the vital force realized, existing, pulsing” in the world. This force, in turn, assumes the responsibility for (and maintenance of) all life in the universe, in the physical and spiritual world. Thus, all beings possess their own life force, and it is attributed the “supreme value of existence” (Lopes, 2005, p. 24, our translation). Therefore,

human beings are both spiritual and material/physical beings, as they are not only endowed with intelligence but also with an intense life force.

In addition, human beings are involved in a cyclical temporality, whose similarities with the coming and going of the Sun are not mere coincidences: everything that exists, has already existed and still is to exist must undergo processes of birth, maturation and death. Just as the solar cycle, which does not end, but is renewed with each new dawn, human beings live an eternal state of transformation, in which death is not necessarily the end of life, but a passage, which leads to another mode of existing. According to Fu-Kiau (2001 apud Santos, 2019, p. 20, our translation): “[...], To an African *muntu*, the dead are not dead: they are just beings living beyond the wall waiting for their probable return to the community, to the physical world (*ku nseke*).” In this sense, based on the Bantu-Kongo cosmology presented by the author, the human being is considered the very materiality of the Sun on Earth, which continuously rises and sets.

This process can be illustrated through the *Dikenga dia kongo*, or bakongo cosmogram, defined by Tiganá Santana Santos (2019, p. 127, our translation) as a “[...] interpretative map of the world and events, of the existential reality of all things that are.” In addition to illustrating the paths traversed by the Sun, going from the dawn to the peak of midday, then from the sunset to the midnight sun, through the cosmogram we are introduced to a true portal that leads us to another time. Distinct from kronos in its origin and experience, “the Kongo concept of time described here,” in the letters of Fu-Kiau (1994), “is deeply rooted in our worldview, our cosmology [that of Kongo]”: it is an alignment between *musoni*, the moment of conception, when ideas have their first flash of light, when it is not tangible, physical, the moment of reaching the peak in the spiritual world (*ku mpemba*), its yellow color is associated with knowledge; towards dawn we arrive at *kala*, birth, when it is time to become, to be, it is when life emerges in the physical world; at the apex of this is *tukula*, when maturity is effected and great deeds happen; and, finally, we have *luvemba*, the deadly stage in which everything ends, a moment in which one crosses to the other side of the wall, the spiritual world, it is when great transformations occur and new cycles can commence (Fu-Kiau, 2001 apud Santos, 2019).

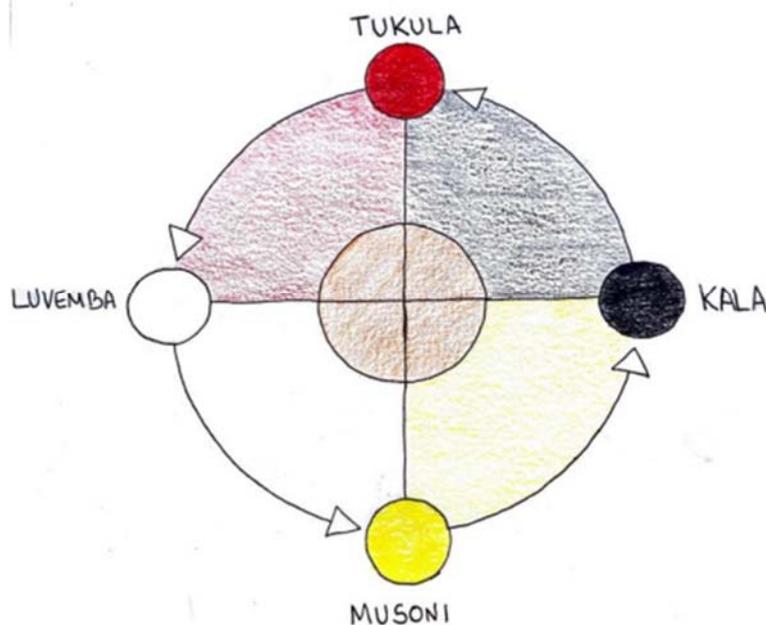


Figure 1 – Dikenga dia kongo: bakongo cosmogram. Source: Pereira (2021).

In this sense, we perceive the fundamental contribution of *dikenga dia kongo* (Figure 1) to the understanding of Kongo thought, since it registers a cosmic dynamics in relation to the world and life, in addition to establishing a notion of temporality that occurs in cycles. That is, everything that is, everything that exists, is put in circularity, in a dynamics of eternal transformation, for “nothing in the daily life of Kongo society is outside its cosmological practices” (Fu-Kiau, 2001 apud Santos, 2019, p. 34, our translation). In their course of development, *muntu* are constantly assimilating the reality in which they find themselves, transforming it while transforming themselves. They live and relive countless different situations, accumulate experiences, lessons, stories and memories, leveraging beginnings and reworking ends, because nothing arises in *ku nseke* (physical world) without having gone through *ku mpemba* (spiritual world) and vice versa.

As the human being is immersed in these cosmological practices, we can narrow our perspective to think about children in the light of this solar dynamics. According to the peoples of Kongo, every child born gives body and physical form to a new living Sun. As realized vital force (Lopes, 2005), the child-*muntu* begins their cycle in this world, the physical world, from the moment of birth, which is the dawn of a life, the moment of coming to

light, as illustrated by Fu-Kiau and Lukondo-Wamba (2000) in *Kindezi: The Kongo art of babysitting* (Figure 2):

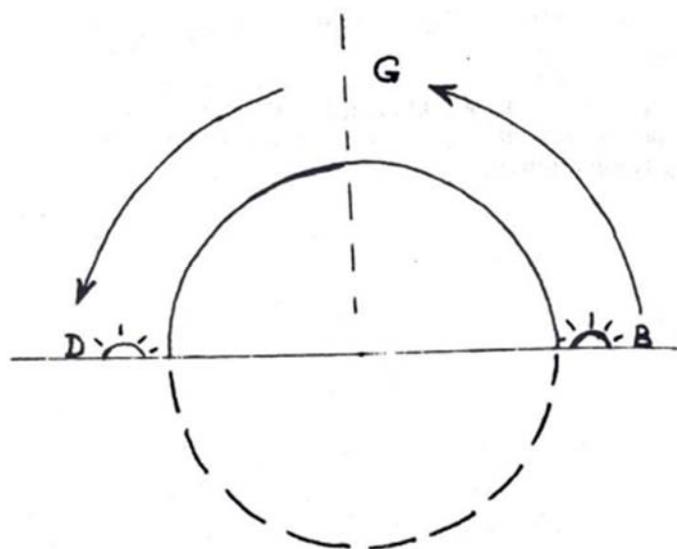


Figure 2 – Illustration available in the work *Kindezi: the Kongo art of babysitting*.
Source: Fu-Kiau and Lukondo-Wamba (2000, p. 6).

At point B we follow the dawn, the moment when the Sun rehearses the light of day with its first rays of apparent light, this is when the child takes their first breaths in the physical world, the birth. Going towards position G, we follow their steps towards growth, it is the moment of maturity and achievements, to position oneself firmly in the world. And, finally, point D represents the end of the day at sunset, the moment conducive to the greatest changes, when, after a long journey, one takes the path that leads from old age to the invisible: death is equivalent to moving towards “beyond the wall” until it is time for a new dawn (Fu-Kiau, 2001 apud Santos, 2019, p. 20, our translation).

Black children, performances and values

As the *mntu* is in an eternal state of transformations and changes, the bakongo cosmology invites us to reflect, especially in this case, on black African and Afrodiasporic children. Whether through the warmth emanating from within, through the daily comings and goings, or the constant movements, we understand that the birth of a child can still represent a living Sun newly arrived in our communities. The word *mntu*, according to

Henrique Antunes Cunha Junior (2010, p. 26, our translation), evokes a notion of person that is constituted by the “body, mind, culture and, mainly, by the word,” understanding, in this context, the word “[...] as a guiding thread of its own history, of its own knowledge of existence.” Because the spoken word, uttered, also represents a powerful knowledge, according to Leda Maria Martins (1997, p. 146, our translation):

[...] the word is the respiration, breath, diction, happening and performance, index of wisdom. [...] It becomes a happening not because it is crystallized in the archives of memory, but mainly because it is reconfigured in the performance of the singer/narrator and in the collective response.

Accordingly, we propose the exercise of thinking about children from the bakongo perspective, seeking to trace possibilities to read the remnants of this infant being that endure, as memory or stem cell, in Brazilian black childhood: that which breathes in the cracks, in between cultures, in the tradition of shared knowledge in the territories where African ancestry remains alive, through orality and other Afro-Brazilian civilizing values (Trindade, 2005; 2014), songs, dances, spirituality. The Brazilian black childhood living on the streets, in games, at the crossroads, in ciranda, in jongo, in tambor de mina, in ointments, in capoeira, in the free dance of a body that kept memory. We are here observing an afrodiasporic corporeality that, as pointed out by Júlio Tavares (2020), is endowed with a grammar through which it writes its narrative and, in this writing, performs. A childhood that gives/lends the body so that this writing takes shape, happens.

The child-muntu is only a life in relation to ancestry, whose memory can establish links between past and present, in a body that defies time and space, because it illuminates and is the source of life itself – just like the Sun that brings light to days and warms life on Earth. They perform in the world because they share the experience of being in communion with ancestral values and principles, they perform because their being does not (re)cognize spatial boundaries or age limits, as they, in being the living ancestry, the existing vital energy, may be older than the old one that accompanies them. Given its importance, it is not by chance that the education of children in the Bakongo culture is taken as a community responsibility, a commitment shared by all members of a community.

As the children are situated as an important and essential part of the social body of a community, education is then organized in such a way that childhood can be actively involved in community life – which cannot be perceived in a universalized manner, at the risk of being permeated by an implied understanding that *community life* concerns only adults or those initiated into traditions.

In this context, an ethical commitment to the valorization of human life in its completeness is established in the process of helping the young *mntu* to become integrated with the community in a reciprocal dynamics with intense exchange of vital force, through which, at the same time, different relations are established in favor of a notion of shared humanity: children teach and learn from one another (and are encouraged to do so), and also do so with adults of different ages, or with old people experienced in the most varied subjects (Fu-Kiau; Lukondo-Wamba, 2000).

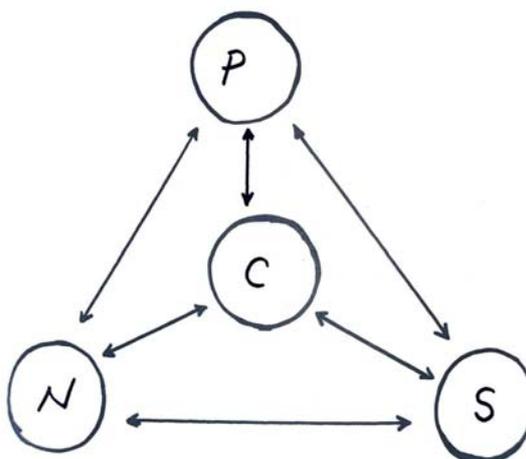


Figure 3 – Illustration available in the work Kindezi, the kongo art of babysitting.
Source: Fu-Kiau and Lukondo-Wamba (2000).

In continuous movements, through comings and goings, children are at the center of this community organization (Figure 3), relating to their family members (P), caregivers (N) and the community as a whole (S). Every day childhood is invested with a feeling of unity that Fu-Kiau and Lukondo-Wamba (2000, p. 1) describe as a powerful energy that “binds people and warm them up”² (p. 17), consolidating to the small Sun an exciting life experience, in which togetherness is “a shared spiritual thing for the betterment of community survival”³ (Fu-Kiau; Lukondo-Wamba, 2000, p. 19).

This community organization around children ensures that they circulate between different local institutions, where they build and develop knowledge from the place where they live, with/in/about the territory: the *sadulu* is the place where children live their daily experiences of discovering the world and everything that surrounds them. According to Lowden (2000), “[...] *sadulu* (practical place of learning) which encompasses the world of the child, unconstrained by physical walls”⁴. Therefore, it is not the physical structure of schools, for example, but an entire community available for care and learning. Here again we find a correlation with the Brazilian black childhood of the so-called peripheral communities, of the *terreiros* where the traditions of African spirituality persist, where the Brazilian black childhood is, to some extent, educated and cared for by everyone: in the communities where an older child passes and collects each child to go/return to/from school or squares; in the *terreiros* where, in the long late nights, while the rituals are conducted, the children feed, participate, sleep and wake up under the care of everyone.

The reports of Fu-Kiau and Lukondo-Wamba (2000) demonstrate that the *sadulu*, where the children met their caregivers (*ndezi*), was different in several aspects from daycare centers and preschools as we know them. Not only because of the absence of industrialized toys, or with excessive pens and sheets of paper, but mainly because of the possibilities of integrating the community into educational processes. The education had an oral and practical character, based on experiences built in daily life (Fu-Kiau; Lukondo-Wamba, 2000, p. 16, our translation). It was also common for children and their caregivers to circulate freely around the territory, to collect flowers, herbs and fruits, having the opportunity to learn about the insects and animals that lived in the surroundings. This dynamics made the educational processes itinerant, therefore in motion, according to the *ban-tu-kongo* cosmological principles. It was, therefore, “[...] a school in motion, where the children of the community not only know their *ndezi*, but where they also learn by doing” (Fu-Kiau; Lukondo-Wamba, 2000, p. 16, our translation).

We understand that, amid plays, games, stories and songs, children learn to name their reality, exploring the complex unity of the world in relation to themselves, as they can reflect on and process meanings about every-

thing that surrounds them, about their feelings and their being on the ground that they step on. In Brazil, these spaces are those in which Afro-Brazilian civilizing values constitute everyday principles and behaviors, as we can see in the work of Vanda Machado (2019), who, in narrating her experiences in favor of an Afro-Brazilian epistemology for education, situates herself into the daily life with the children of the Ire Ayo project at the Ile Axe Opo Afonjá terreiro, in Bahia. In her company, the children circulated around the territory and learned from what happened on their daily lives. Similarly to the bantu-kongo sadulu, the author's experience also illustrates itinerant educational processes, that is, in motion. Just as in the sadulu, where moving around the territory provided the possibility of experiencing new happenings, in the terreiro, located in Bahia, the author advises “[...] as to the fact that, when least expected, there is a new happening in the field, which warrants much attention so the opportune moment to experience creative actions is not lost” (Machado, 2019, p. 98, our translation).

These ‘new happenings’ are still valorized and considered important in the pedagogical processes originating from black communities. When, for example, children who attend the Sopapo Poético, in Porto Alegre/RS, are invited to the center of the poetry rounds, “the sarau aims to soften the distance that the [black] child suffers in relation to their own culture” (Fontoura; Salom; Tettamanzy, 2016, p. 170, our translation). In this same dynamics, the community usually receives children “with singing and clapping to the center of the round of poetry,” as thus

[...] the Sopapo calls the children to defend their self-esteem, their potential as creators, internalizing, from an early age, the protagonism that will broaden their view on themselves as historical subjects. They start by saying their names and then tell what they did and learned that night. Those who already know how to read and write recite their poems (Fontoura; Salom; Tettamanzy, 2016, p. 170, our translation).

In this space, black and non-black children can experience something like being in the *sadulu*: a space that prepares children for community life. In our understanding, it is exactly here that lies the difference between white children and black children: through these educational processes experienced in the *Kongo sadulu*, in the *Candomblé of Bahia* or in the *Sarau of poetry from the South*, that children perform; however, this performativity of

black children carries the memory of civilizing values that echo and mean in a unique and singular way, through their corporealities and identities as black subjects in diaspora⁵. This practical and sensitive process is essential to ensure the union between the children and the social body in which they are situated (we can resume Figure 3), according to the Bantu-Kongo cosmology, since the social codes mobilized for education establish the notion of a spiritually united community, in sharing and in movement (Fu-Kiau, 2000).

To think about the bakongo child as a performer child, and by extension think about the echoes of this performativity operating in Brazilian black children, we need to talk about the body. Not about any body, but that which the Congolese child inhabits: it is not the body of the Western infant, racialized by colonialism, split and regulated by the invention of childhood, governed by school; it is a body that transits, moves and experiences – life, the world around – in freedom to feel/think. As pointed out by Eduardo Oliveira (2021), the body in African conceptions needs to be thought of as diversity, integration and ancestry: *diverse* through its biological and cultural multiplicity, *integrated*, because it is a condition for any relation and, at the same time, *conditio* that affects and fades and, finally, it is *ancestral*, because it is anteriority, *it is* ancestry (and is guided by it). In it, in ancestry, lies tradition. Thus, in a continuum of experiencing, this body can play and perform. It can be

[...] a happening that inaugurates the existence. Not only is it a collective existence: the body is the cultural form that gives form to the body. The body is, then, the Preexistent mode of existing. [...] The empty is united to the full; container to content. The body is the mediation between mystery and revelation. The body, visible, is the sign of the invisible in the body. Form and content at the same time of the happening (Oliveira, 2021, p. 124, our translation).

In this sense, when we inquire about the experiences performed by bakongo children and by Brazilian black children, we think of a performance that builds the past-present relation in the body, which is manifested in the corporeality, in the dance steps, in the facial expressions, in the intonation of the voice, in the spoken word – which is also the divine word –, in the movements around oneself and others, in the comings and goings while exhibiting samples of harmony between the ancestor and the living, consoli-

dating performances that play with the notions of time, making memories alive. Whether in the singing and clapping in the center of the round (Fontoura; Salom; Tettamanzy, 2016), or in the daily happenings that permeate the educational experience – rituals, celebrations, visits, diseases, achievements (Machado, 2019).

Thinking about children as performers is not a new proposition: Machado (2010, p. 123, our translation), discussing children aged 0 to 6 years, already invited to the understanding that “[...] children are performers of their daily lives, their actions present something of themselves, of their parents, of the surrounding culture, and also something to come.” However, we are not limiting ourselves to observing very young children (aged 0 to 6 years), as the author proposes; instead, we seek to perceive the childhood of black children based on some cosmological assumptions of Kongo origin, which, in our understanding, are consistent with Afro-Brazilian civilizing values rooted and maintained through the maintenance of memory – and tradition: circularity, religiosity, corporeality, musicality, memory, ancestry, cooperativism, orality, vital energy, and playfulness (Brandão; Trindade, 2010, p. 14). We believe that such civilizing values can contribute to various interpretations about these small living Suns that inhabit our world.

What we propose, then, is to demarcate the specificities of a portion of the Brazilian black children, who we consider as guardians of a peculiar and fruitful mode of orality that does not favor speech (and in it the voice) as a central element of communication, only because children are in the process of acquiring the skill of writing (see Soares, 2020; Morais, 2019), but rather because in their orality they update African civilizing values (see Trindade, 2014) that coordinate and enable them to perform as an act of presence that operates knowledge production, experimentation, playfulness and transformation. In this dimension, Alcântara and Icle (2011, p. 133, our translation) remind us that the voice brings in itself a performative possibility when we think of it not reduced “[...] to the transmission of a message, but an action that transforms the one who pronounces it, as much as the one who is co-present in the performative act.”

Amadou Hampâté Bâ (2013, p. 11, our translation) points out that

To describe a scene, I just need to relive it. And, if a story was told to me by someone, my memory not only recorded its content, but the whole scene – the narrator's attitude, clothes, gestures, mime and the noises of the environment [...]. When a happening is reconstructed, the recorded film unfolds from beginning to end, in its entirety. [...] The report is made in its entirety, or it is not made. We never get tired of hearing the same story over and over again! To us, repetition is not a defect.

We understand, then, that children in contexts that show Afro-Brazilian civilizing values are usually learning with African orality and ancestry, from the perspective presented by Hampâté Bâ (2013), they tell lived/imagined stories; in this telling, they play with their corporealities: their gestures, their movements, their voices function as in a performance, where the word is enacted “[...] spatially and timelessly, agglutinating the past, present and future, voice and rhythm, gesture and singing, in a complementary way” (Martins, 1997, p. 148, our translation).

According to Paul Zumthor (2012), there are three types of performances: the *complete* performance, which requires a present body that leads the immediate and poetic act through all the sensory channels of the performer and of the receiver; the *direct vocal* performance, which occurs without the present body of the performer, received through the listening of discs or radio (as in radio plays, for example); and, finally, the *purely visual* performance, where the reader reconstructs the pleasure of the poetic through their emotions manifested by/in the body. Here we understand that the bakongo children and the Brazilian black children, in the condition of performing children, make use of the complete performance when, in telling their experiences/stories, they capture the other (real or imaginary): inviting them to follow them, relive, be with them in their *sadulu*, partaking meanings from a community perspective.

We understand that Brazilian black children, heirs of this bakongo ancestral heritage, are guardians of ancient knowledge and, to some extent, reconfigure their performances, when, for example, they are situated in African cultural contexts, where ancient civilizing practices are daily preserved: these are the spaces inhabited by the samba beats, where there are rodas [circles] of capoeira, challenges of jongo, umbigada, everyday life in Can-

domblé... Places where the Eurocentric episteme encounters resistance to its attempts to regulate the body, seize the senses and dictate rules.

Through the work of Vanda Machado (2019) and her experience in a public school located within the Ilê Axé Opo Afonjá terreiro, an African-matrix territory founded in 1910, we learned that the children's experiences involved the possibility of “taking elements from the Afro-Brazilian culture as a perspective for the formation of concepts” (Machado, 2019, p. 39, our translation). Upon realizing the tensions caused by the absence of African and Afro-Brazilian culture in school curricula, the teacher employed an epistemological study, finding meanings attributed to the production of knowledge in the terreiro, indicating that an individual – here understood as the child – can bring the past closer to the present through continuous associations, provided that “in an environment rich in symbology, terms of language, mental images and concepts” (Machado, 2019, p. 93, our translation). If we consider the space of the terreiro as something similar to the sadulu of the bakongo, through orality the community supports the maintenance of memory, and then children can tell their stories, whether they are lived or imagined, integrating themselves creatively into the world as agents of a life-oriented learning process. Thus, they perform among the colors, among the sounds emitted by the instruments and the dance steps, they perform in the communion of voices in a song or even in free and rhythmic body movements.

As pointed out by Zumthor (2012, p. 77-78, our translation):

The performer, through their orality, enables the collective reception of the work building poetry through the triad performer-text-receiver [...] the body is at the same time the starting point, the point of origin and the discourse referent. [...] It is through the body that meaning is perceived there. The world as it exists outside me is not in itself untouchable, it is always, in a primordial way, of the order of the sensitive: of the visible, of the audible, of the tangible.

Thinking that this text, in the case of children, comes from orality, the performing child expresses, through the body, their understandings, afflictions, knowledges, doubts, joys and is situated in the community to which they belong in an organic and circular, playful and transitory way, sometimes telling their experience – the text – through their performances,

sometimes getting involved with all their senses in other experiences, as a spectator who does not limit their participation only to what can be heard or watched. On the contrary, they seek to find ways to actively take part in the social dynamics. As pointed out by Fourshey, Gonzales and Saidi (2019), more than 5,500 years ago the communities of the Bantu linguistic trunk used in their vocabulary words that indicated the recurrence of active participation of spectators during community or ritualistic meetings, since participating in a performance goes beyond the silent action of only “[...] hearing the facts, but being immersed in the words, images, sounds and smells of stories or myths narrated and enacted” (Fourshey; Gonzales; Saidi, 2019, p. 155, our translation).

The remote history points, then, to a millenarian tradition that still persists on a smaller or larger scale in the daily lives of Afrodiasporic black children, although these experiences may suffer interference derived from colonialism that interrupts and/or prevents their development. Widespread in what we know as the national culture, the bakongo culture in particular, and African cultures in general, are constantly being revived and reconfigured in Brazil. This is because the child – associated with the notion of *mntu* – who moves around an eternal state of transformations and changes, when in union with their community, weaves the conductive threads of their own history, that is, of memory and meanings, of the concepts elaborated from culture, which remains alive, finally, through performance, in the rhythmic acts of singing, speaking, moving, dancing.

According to the Cameroonian philosopher Eboussi Boulaga (1977 apud Dussel, 2012, p. 75, our translation)⁶,

[...] periodicity is the substantial time of things [...] Everything is alternation, rhythm [...] Rhythm is vital [...] Rhythm produces ecstasy, the exit of self that identifies with the vital force [...] It would not be exaggerated to say that rhythm is the architecture of the being, that, for the human being of the civilization whose philosophy we expose, the fundamental experience, which escapes all the devices of the malevolent genius [of Descartes], and which remains beyond all doubt is: *Je danse, donc je vis* (I dance, therefore I live).

We are not denying with this the understanding that Brazilian black children are historical subjects, agents of their time and challenged by the specificities that the other identity markers (such as class, gender, religiosity,

etc.) confer on their course of development, but pointing out that, far beyond school experiences, the education of these children also occurs in mostly black territories, such as samba schools, terreiros, peripheral communities of urban centers, quilombos, among others, where religiosity, corporeality, orality, ancestry are coordinated, enabling their presence to be imposed and updated in performances that provide them with the opportunity to occupy centrality, exercise protagonism, in addition to producing and sharing knowledge.

An inconclusive conclusion: the challenges of allowing oneself to perform with Brazilian black children

We consider that our arguments point to an important challenge: the need to perceive and embrace Brazilian black children, heirs of the African tradition, in their insurgency, in their non-submission to the dictates of the colonialism of the body and spirit, inviting us to perform with them, inside and outside schools.

In this sense, we refer to the need to promote a decolonial rupture, by embracing black children (inside or outside school educational spaces) in the dimension proposed by Maldonado-Torres (2020), thinking about effective efforts to exit the colonial structures that still regulate our modes of being, of being able and of knowing.

We do not think this is a small or trivial challenge, but an effective struggle so our adulthood yields and be disassociated from the status of hierarchical superiority that, in Westernized cultures, affects relations between children and adults.

Thus, we launch ourselves into this pursuit: understanding children through their performances, which transform time and modify space in their gestures and songs so playful that they give life to the imaginary, but also to the ancestral memory present in the Afro-Brazilian civilizing values. This is, therefore, a pursuit of ways to enable them to fully express themselves and explore the world in which they live in their physical and/or spiritual dimension. To this end, more conditions and contexts need to be developed so black children raise their hypotheses and build, among themselves (and with us), modes of being and of being in the world that arise from ancestral heritage.

We are responsible, then, for overcoming the challenge of ensuring that these small living ancestors can *be*, distant from control mechanisms that restrict their sensory and bodily experiences on a daily basis, often also preventing their performances from being performed.

However, immersed in a cyclical time where past and present can become a single moment, the performances of black children (on the continent or in the diaspora) disaccommodate reality as we know it. By making the invisible visible, the African childhood not only accesses ancestral heritage, but *is* through it. And, more than that, it calls us to participate in this process of transformation.

Notes

- ¹ Hereinafter referred to as Bantu.
- ² From the original, in English: “[...] *binds people and warm them up*”.
- ³ From the original, in English: “[...] *that of togetherness as a shared spiritual thing for the betterment of community survival*”.
- ⁴ From the original, in English: “[...] *sadulu (practical place of learning) which encompasses the world of the child, unconstrained by physical walls*”.
- ⁵ Here, we take into consideration the concept of diaspora in the dimension proposed by Hall (2005) in order to think about the construction of multiple black identities beyond the binary conception of identity and difference, imposed by the history of traffic.
- ⁶ Work *La crise du Muntu: authenticité africaine et philosophie: essai*. 1977.

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