



## ***Èmí, Ofò, Asé: Elinga and the dance of the Mulheres do Àse***

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**ABSTRACT – *Èmí, Ofò, Asé: Elinga and the dance of the Mulheres do Àse*** – The present study aims to discuss the notion of scenic presence based on the use of principles from African-diasporic cultural practices. The reflections presented emerge from the intersection between the development of postdoctoral research entitled *Elinga* and the performance *Mulheres do Àse*. It presents itself as discursive and structural basis the foundations of the Yoruba cosmogony *èmí* (breath of life), *ofò* (enchantment) and *asé* (vital energy) in dialogue with the concepts body-file, body-weapon, decoloniality, ritualization of the moment and scenic presence.

Keywords: **Ancestry. Decoloniality. African Diaspora. Scenic Presence. *Elinga*.**

**RÉSUMÉ – *Èmí, Ofò, Asé: Elinga et la danse de la Mulheres do Àse*** – La présente étude vise à discuter la notion de présence scénique à partir de l'utilisation des principes des pratiques culturelles afrodiassporiques. Les réflexions présentées émergent de l'intersection entre le développement de la recherche postdoctorale intitulée *Elinga* et la performance *Mulheres do Àse*. Il se présente comme base discursive et structurelle les fondements de la cosmogonie Yoruba *èmí* (souffle de vie), *ofò* (enchantement) et *asé* (énergie vitale) en dialogue avec les concepts corps-fichier, corps-arme, décolonialité, ritualisation de l'instant et présence scénique.

Mots-clés: **Ascendance. Decolonialité. Diaspora Africaine. Présence Scénique. *Elinga*.**

**RESUMO – *Èmí, Ofò, Asé: a Elinga e a dança das Mulheres do Àse*** – O presente estudo objetiva discutir a noção de presença cênica a partir da utilização de princípios das práticas culturais afrodiasspóricas. As reflexões apresentadas emergem do cruzamento entre o desenvolvimento da pesquisa de pós-doutorado intitulada *Elinga* e o espetáculo performativo *Mulheres do Àse*. Apresenta-se como base discursiva e estrutural os fundamentos da cosmogonia iorubá *èmí* (sopro da vida), *ofò* (encantamento) e *asé* (energia vital) em diálogo com os conceitos corpo-arquivo, corpo-arma, decolonialidade, ritualização do instante e presença cênica.

Palavras-chave: **Ancestralidade. Decolonialidade. Afrodiáspora. Presença Cênica. *Elinga*.**

**AGÔ: an introduction with ancestral permission to write**

*Eparrei, Oiá ô  
I fear only you  
Wind of death.*

*Warrior Carrying Firearm,  
Oiá ô, Oiá totó, hmmm  
Síkírù Sàlámi<sup>1</sup>*

**AGÔ!** A Yoruba word used by practitioners of African-based religions to ask their ancestors for permission – which they commonly do to cross the crossroads, make offerings, or move in and out of places. In Yoruba cosmogony, when we ask permission, we show respect for the elders, who preceded us in this passage through the physical world (*Ayé*) and continue their walk in the spiritual world (*Orun*). Within African matrix cultures, the word has realization power; once spoken and in contact with the energies of the universe, the word mobilizes deep levels of communication between the visible and the unseen world. We therefore ask ancestral permission to make use of the words that will complement our thinking in this article.

During the production of this text, several epistemic crossroads were crossed from body experiences developed in the postdoctoral research investigation process entitled *Elinga, a Presença Cênica: as Práticas Performativas Afrodiaspóricas e a Decolonialidade no Processo Pedagógico e Criativo da(o) Performer/Dançariana(o)*<sup>2</sup>, hereafter simply referred to as *Elinga*, as well as observations made through comparative analysis on the performance *Mulheres do Àsè*<sup>3</sup>, presented in the city of Salvador-Bahia and directed by the artist Edileusa Santos<sup>4</sup>.

The reflections developed throughout the text aim to discuss pedagogical and aesthetic decolonial possibilities in view of the potentialization of the scenic presence from the principles used by African-diasporic performative practices. These principles are based on African cosmogonies, regarding cultural expressions understood as black dances and/or black performances<sup>5</sup>, and are placed in tension with colonialist aesthetic paradigms, understood as part of a dominant imaginary in our creative processes for centuries. In other words, it is believed that as we develop a critical view of how the notion of coloniality (Quijano, 2005) acts on our productions in the field of performing arts, it becomes possible to broaden our views towards an African-referenced field in creative and/or

pedagogical processes as likely responses to the imperial monologue established by European-Eurocentric modernity (Grosfoguel, 2008).

Given the complexity of this intersection, the discussion developed here aims to address the African-diasporic performative practices observed both in the development of a postdoctoral research on scenic presence, *Elinga*, and in the performance *Mulheres do Àse*. Therefore, conceptual analogies will be made between these two African-aesthetic experiences from some reflections built in the studies on the foundations of the Yoruba cosmogony such as: *èmi* (breath of life), *ofô* (enchantment) and *asé* (vital energy), and the concepts body-file and body-weapon (Tavares, 2012), coloniality of power (Quijano, 2005) and colonial disobedience (Mignolo, 2010), ritualization of the moment (Santos, 2016) and scenic presence (Santos, 2012).

This text presents its subdivisions named by Yoruba words, as follows: in the place we normally find the word introduction, we chose the term Yoruba *agô*; next we have the word *èmi*, which points us to a possible understanding of the non-separation between artistic languages in the performative practices of the African matrix; then we have the word *ofô*, focusing on drawing analogies between African-referenced creative processes and the notion of de/coloniality, in addition to addressing the activities developed in the *Elinga* investigative process; and, finally, the use of the word *asé* brings the approach of the performance *Mulheres do Àse*, under the bias of the ancestry and the strength and power of the *Ialorixás* in the construction of African-Brazilian memory.

### ***ÈMÍ*: the driving force of presence in African matrix performance practices**

The word *èmi*, in the Yoruba language, means the breath of life, spirit, sometimes translated into Portuguese as breath. The semantic proximity of the relationship between the term breath and the notion of breath of life is marked in the Yoruba cosmogony by the air that circulates in our body and the production of energy that keeps us alive. That is, *èmi* is the driving force of the human being, which proves our presence in the physical world (*Ayé*). However, it is important to emphasize that the Yoruba language is a tonal language and the change of the graphic accent in the same word transforms

its meaning and produces a necessary musicality for its semantic understanding, as will be seen throughout the text with the word *èmi*.

In the context of *Elinga*<sup>6</sup> research, the term *èmi* is understood in association with two other terms: *ofô*, which is enchantment, that is, a blow of air from the mouth before it comes to be a word uttered; and the term *asé*, which is the materialization of the word energy said to expand throughout the universe. This triad is part of the foundations of the Queto's *Candomble* (Nago nation) and the philosophical underpinnings of cultural expressions of African origin, which reiterates the power, the force present in a word before it is spoken.

The thesis defended in the aforementioned research is that, by reconfiguring the approach determined by *Candomble*'s religious knowledge to think the body, we can expand in the context of the performing arts the interrelationship between the *èmi* – *ofô* – *asé* triad, in order to enhance the idea of scenic presence. The use of traditional and secular African diaspora principles in creative processes in the performing arts opens the field for discoveries of other pedagogies of presence developed in light of the notion of colonial disobedience (Mignolo, 2010).

In *Elinga*, we follow this perspective by dialoguing with the idea of *transcreation*, a term coined by Haroldo de Campos when dealing with the translation of poems from one language to another, which in our investigations is widely applied to the understanding of the production of corporealities and, consequently, of the production of scenic presence. The application of the concept of *transcreation* is made from the reconfiguration of the triad, as well as from other African-diasporic practices developed during the research.

Considering that the reflections made in this study start from the fusion of these three African-referenced foundations of *Candomble*, that is: the internal force/spirit (*èmi*), the intention/enchantment (*ofô*) and the materialization of this vital force (*asé*), the concept of scenic presence is studied in *Elinga* as being associated with the expression Yoruba *èmi wá*<sup>7</sup>, which means I am present/I am here-now. The potentialization of the *èmi wá* is marked by the individual connection of the scene artist with its ancestry, intentionality and its spatiotemporal relations during movement. That is, the *èmi* corresponds to this artist's relationship with his ancestry,

with a unique way of organizing his breathing; in short, a continuous connection between the inside and outside of the scene artist's body. During this process of respiratory organization, intentionalities (*ofô*) are generated for the movements that happen in this *here and now* of the scene. The moving body establishes sensory-affective relationships with the environment and produces an energy field that materializes as *asé*.

We ask readers to make a quick comparison between the conceptual discoveries of the American philosopher John Searle in his research on language through twentieth-century speech acts and intentionality<sup>8</sup>, and the power of the spoken word as an ancestral and mystical action in African cosmogonies, as explained earlier. For Yoruba culture, the power of action of words when spoken out of the mouth is part of ancient learning, and is defined by faith. Therefore, such power of action stems from the relationship with the ancestry and intentionality of the person who utters the words. Searle, in the context of his research, in addressing the nature of intentional states, states that "[...] awareness of conditions of satisfaction is part of *conscious belief* or desire since *intentional content* is internal to the states in question" (Searle, 2002, p. 31, emphasis added). That is, it is in the belief and intentional references inherent to the proponent of the action that the conditions exist for the performance of the act. Thus, we can see that the artist's condition of presence of the scene is directly related to the intentional force (*ofô*), from the organization of the internal energy (*émí*) that eventually materializes through the movements (*asé*). Therefore, with the proposed comparative analysis, the intention is to highlight that the traditional knowledge of the African people spread in the diaspora process has been perpetuated for centuries, through the resilience and resistance of *asé* women as we will see later, while the American researcher came to address the topic only in the twentieth century.

Well, when talking about the use of the reconfigured *émí-ofô-asé* – or rather, *transcribed* during the *Elinga* research, the intention was that the participants could experience the production of scenic presence from the notion of enchantment generated by the triad. However, this conception of presence production should not be practiced in a displaced manner, outside the founding principles that govern the cultural practices of African matrix, in which artistic languages are understood in their integrated form.

The fusion between these artistic languages, their connections with everyday life and the mythologies of African ethnic groups constitute a particularity of these performative practices, as the Congolese philosopher Bunseki Fu-Kiau (2001) has shown in his research. During his investigations into the performative practices of African matrix, Fu-Kiau, grounded in the Bakongo<sup>9</sup> cosmogony, observed that the body is a device of fluency and presential expansion that materializes in the cultural artistic manifestations under the sentence drumming-singing-dancing (Fu-Kiau, 2001). The integration of these artistic languages at the moment of performance locates the way of interpreting the world of this ethnic group of Bantu origin and helps us to understand the importance of the conjunction of these languages as potentializing mechanisms of the presence of the performer/dancer during performances, whether thinking creative or pedagogical processes in the performing arts.

For centuries these ritualistic, religious, socio-cultural and artistic devices have been used in an interconnected way. We dare to say that there is a political dimension to this African and African Amerindian way of thinking about art and the world. Perhaps it is this hybrid format, so fashionable in dance and contemporary performance in the twenty-first century that has helped to perpetuate these practices to the present day. Once again, counting on the understanding of our readers, we would like to make a collective provocation in this part of the text. Aren't the traditional African-Brazilian artistic practices and their processes of *transcreation* possible foundations for a national contemporary art?! Well, let's continue our journey through the African diaspora universe and its poetic *mandinga*.

*Elinga* artistic research is built on the *ipádê*<sup>10</sup>, which are the meetings in which the creative processes based on knowledge of African-Brazilian culture are developed in connection with the individual artistic and/or academic research of each participant involved in the process. That is, the researchers<sup>11</sup> from the UFBA Dance School Postgraduate Program participate in the postdoctoral research cooperatively in order to establish crosses to solve a collective problem: the potentialization of the scenic presence.

Thus, the choice of a knowledge study conception that is also action makes the researchers contribute to the definition of new types of demands and use of this knowledge, as well as to the transformation of the situation

in which they are inserted. Therefore, we chose the methodological strategy of action research – term coined by Michel Thiollent (1986) to define studies in which the researcher is directly involved, inserted in the game. According Thiollent (1986, p. 14):

[...] action research is a type of empirically based social research that is conceived and carried out in close association with an action or the resolution of a collective problem and in which researchers and participants representing the situation or problem are involved cooperatively or participatively.

In action research we do not work on others or to others, but always with others, which leads us to a position regarding the notion of reception and production of presence inspired by cultures of African origin: the scenic actions happen in the relational connection between the subject of the scene and each participant of the event. Note that the methodological choice of action research dialogues directly with the concepts developed in the research, considering that one of its main aspects of the methodological strategy proposed by Thiollent (1986) is to consider that the object of investigation is not constituted by people but by the social situation – which in *Elinga* corresponds to the scenic actions and their relational natures.

The recent theoretical reflections developed in this postdoctoral research on the importance of these African-diasporic principles in the production of presence made us realize the effects of the action of coloniality on our bodies. These effects will be discussed in the following topic, that is, the consequences of these findings will be presented and some examples of exercises that served as stimuli and were *transcreated*, re-signified from the theoretical-practical paths in the course of *Elinga* research.

### ***Ofó: knowledge that enchant, conflicting perspectives at the crossroads***

It is from the enchantment that knowledge becomes dynamic and hitchhikes on the wings of the wind... (Luiz Simas; Luiz Rufino, 2018).

As already seen in the previous topic, the expression *ofó* brings the power of enchantment before its materialization into vital energy, *asé*. The proposal presented in the elaboration of this text deals with the production of presence through the notion *èmi wá* (I am), as opposed to the

homogenization of epistemics and aesthetic patterns determined by Euro-Western axioms. Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, Ramón Grosfoguel are some authors who advocate the need to exercise epistemic disobedience (Dignolo, 2010) to understand and act against the dominant effects of coloniality in Latin America. From the concept of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2005), these Latin American intellectuals think of a decolonial action aimed at transforming the systems of domination and exploitation of the current colonial power matrix of the modern-colonial-patriarchal-capitalist world-system (Grosfoguel, 2008). Quijano (2005, p. 121) observes that:

Indeed, all cultural experiences, stories, resources and products also ended up articulated in a single global cultural order around European or Western hegemony. In other words, as part of the new pattern of world power, Europe has also concentrated under its hegemony the control of all forms of control of subjectivity, culture, and especially of knowledge, of the production of knowledge.

The Peruvian sociologist demonstrates how the effects of coloniality act on “the control of all forms of control of subjectivity” and consequently on cultural production, raising questions. How to circumvent, disobey the aesthetic rules about the notion of the production of scenic presence elaborated from a Euro-Western perspective for several centuries? Wouldn't it be in *ginga*, a place of cultural resilience, in short, in the body game of the subordinate a possible answer to this relationship of colonial rule? In search of possible ways to answer these questions, I establish intersections with other authors.

Let us observe, therefore, the perception of the carioca anthropologist Julio Tavares about the use of the body as a place of contestation during the slave period. According to this author, the body of the black enslaved, as an act of resistance, manifests itself, speaks before he uses the vocal apparatus (Tavares, 2012). This body-file with stored knowledge is a device that affronts coloniality. This thought corroborates our reflections on presence, when Tavares states that the “acoustic images” pronounced by the subordinate body were established in the sociocultural space before the black became aware of his corporeality. According to Tavares (2012, p. 54):

Making existence possible requires us a mastery and awareness of the body, the first place of existence, with and in which I am in the world able to live



the lived present. This is how I take care of the body as a place that gives access to my self, either through dramatic situations, or through work (bodily action and effort), social action or artistic creation.

For this researcher, to exist is to be aware of the body as the first place of our knowledge, of our place in the world. In this sense, the body of the African population brought as a slave commodity to the Americas has become the fundamental element of communication, resistance and response to suffering in the face of violent situations, produced by the hostile and inhuman condition that the European colonists treated them. Thus, only through the conscious mastery of the body-file and its presential force, enchantment and ancestral memory, could these human beings, as slaves, enhance their body energies as an instrument of resistance and liberation. Thus arose the body-weapon (Tavares, 2012), as of someone who rocks steps in the *capoeira*, who dances the samba, who plays tricks, someone who plays dancing, who kicks with a laughter, who sings praying, who plays the drums while bleeding, who reverences the orishas resignifying themselves, but above all, those who make themselves a fundamental device of the decolonial struggle. We draw attention to the importance of the triad *èmi, ofó, asé* in the commented actions because it was from the internal force, faith and materialization of these cultural experiences that the presence of the black body resisted and produced the possibility of a knowledge-emancipation (Santos, 2019).

Ultimately, the performativity of the religious ritual, *Candomble*, when viewed from the perspective of decoloniality, demonstrates in its internal organization the resistance and resilience of these traditional African-diasporic practices. We deduce, then, that these bodies-files preserved this ancestral force brought from overseas, as researcher Julio Tavares also states (2012, p. 91): “It was up to the body to ensure, through daily life, the inheritance of what was lost”. This body, which is the place of the event, “[...] thus acquires the function of archiving and, along with oral tradition, constitutes a source that inscribes the inheritance of the African-Brazilian population” (Tavares, 2012, p. 91). In the artistic-cultural manifestations of African matrix, the artistic languages (dance, theater, music, storytelling etc.) are not presented separately. This pluri-expressive characteristic carries meanings that led us to think of the scenic presence based on these fundamentals. We also note the fact that the division of these languages is

part of a colonialist policy based on Western, Judeo-Christian cultural paradigms aimed at destroying this ancestral knowledge through epistemicidal strategies, as stated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2019).

Following this line of reasoning, we deduce that for the materialization of the ancestral information brought by the body-file there is a mental state that acts during the production of corporealities. That is, the transgressive behavioral stance of African ancestors in the condition of enslavement was determined by faith and the struggle to survive, so that the conviction during the execution of a liberating action was directly related to their potential capacity for accomplishment and credibility with the other. In other words, when we think about the ability of the performer/dancer to be *present*, to potentiate his *emi ewá* (I am), at the moment of a scenic event, we compare his/her behavior to that of a performer of *capoeira*, which should be in a state of constant attention, even if one is just clapping hands in the circle.

The studies we are conducting are defined by the ability of the performer/dancer to believe in his/her power of enchantment (*ofô*), his/her ability to convince during the materialization of movements that generate psychophysical actions concurrently with the production of his/her presence on the scene. John Searle (2002, p. 37), in problematizing the nature of mental states and physical phenomena with regard to the concept of intentionality, states that, "Beliefs, fears, hopes and desires [...] are intrinsically intentional". The American researcher reinforces the need for the relationship between the production of subjectivities and intentionalities in order to achieve a certain result regarding physical phenomena. In other words, the performer/dancer's ability to be enchanted is directly connected to his/her ability to generate corporealities. We deduce, then, that this ability will consequently influence the production of his/her presence on the scene.

In laboratory studies done during the creative processes<sup>12</sup> of *Elinga* research, we realize that a body in motion, intentionally committed to emotional states caused by actions inside and outside this body, can produce what we call *localities* (Santos, 2016), which is the ability of the scenic artist to move in a force field demarcated by the subtle transitions of the singing/telling<sup>13</sup> – dancing-drumming sequence in interface with the *emi-ofô-ase* setential triad. In other words, the artists/researchers who

participated in the research tried exercises that had as their initial place the breathing (*emi*), which determined the intensity of the movements. From ancestral songs, movement cells were produced and the movements were successively transformed into actions. The actions generated the *oriki coreocênicos*, myth-stories with the body, vocal, rhythmic and visual elements intrinsically connected to the research proposal that is the enhancement of the scenic presence.

The individual success of this operation, in theory, enhances the presential expansion of the scene artists and establishes what we understand as the ritualization of the moment<sup>14</sup> (Santos, 2016), the ontological realization of the irreversible here-now throughout the existential encounter between all the bodies present in that particular scenic event. The ritualization of the instant is, therefore, the ability of the performer/dancer to dilate their immersion in the creative process during the moment that recreates reality. Thus, we seek to generate a spatiotemporal opening between the subjective field and the objective field of the scene artist at the moment of this artistic experience, in which the potential of the scenic presence is intended. The intention is to establish a degree of concentra(c)tion that mobilizes through ancestral memories other possibilities of access to a poetic, choreoscopic evocation.

Well, these laboratory practices, *ipàdê*, are based on psychophysical exercises<sup>15</sup> created by the researcher, in line with the methodological proposal presented, the action research. The exercises have breathing as their structural foundation. Breathing is understood in this process as the starting point, the vital element, the breath of life, for the production of any bodily manifesta(c)tion. Rhythmic divisions are practiced with Yoruba words and ancestral chants. Body movements and displacements have as their initial operation, to practice physical immobility. Before any voluntary movement, there is a point of immobility. This study aims to investigate body addictions, involuntary movements, called in this research as *colonial parasites*. The purpose is to identify non-voluntary gestures that contribute to the dispersion of the performer/dancer scenic presence. These exercises are long lasting and require a lot of concentration on the part of the participant. In the phase of displacement in space and in the production of gestures, the following movements are used: reconfigured *capoeira* movements, *capoeiraction* based on *ginga* and body game, samba syncope,

orishas dance gestures and other playful expressions of Brazilian popular culture. During the creative process participants are advised to demarcate the floor with circular shapes, triangles, dashes, tribal designs, arrows etc. This way of locating in space indicates how space should be used when relating to whoever sees them, that is, to reception. These demarcations are called *localities*. In general, they are inspired by African-Amerindian body designs, the geometric shapes of African fabrics and the chalky spots of the *caboclos*. As dramaturgical support of these creations, autobiographical information, *itans*<sup>16</sup> and *oriki*<sup>17</sup> are used. The mixing of this knowledge, of these African-Brazilian epistemologies, as a fundamental source of research on scenic presence, *Elinga*, was called *caboclagem performativa*. The production of individual scenic materials developed in creative processes is called *oriki coreocênico*. When these scenic materials are presented as political interventions in public, open spaces such as squares, streets, and crossroads, we call *transnegations*.

Some productions developed during these creative processes are reported below. After four months of meetings, each artist-participant, based on the proposed exercises and his/her research, was able to develop a solo performance, his/her *oriki coreocênico*. These creations were presented collectively in two performative actions<sup>18</sup>, *ipàdè1* and *ipàdè2*, at the semester shows of the UFBA Dance School (2018.1 and 2018.2). During the III Black Forum of Art and Culture (FNAC) held in Salvador, Bahia, some of these exercises developed in *Elinga* research were used in a performance workshop called *Êmi Wá: Corporeidades e Transcrições Performativas*. In this workshop, we used the principles of the triad *émì, ofó, asé*, associated with creative processes that emphasized the production of scenic presence. In the creative process of this workshop, some performative actions, *transnegations*, were generated, which were made in the garden of the UFBA School of Fine Arts. The way these spaces are occupied by the bodies of the artists/performers, the scenic presence from ancestral principles, the direct relationship with the public define the political character of these transgressive actions. One of the characteristics of this type of performative intervention is its political, transgressive and decolonial character.

In this sense, all creative processes developed from the principles used in *Elinga* research are carefully observed from the perspective of presence production. That is, how each performer/dancer uses his/her body during

the transient and winding states between the *èmi-ofó-ásé*, three phases in which the corporealities are created and the localities are produced. As it has already been emphasized, it is important to understand that every pre-movement architected within the body, *èmi*, takes shape from the principle of intentionality, *ofó*, and generates actions that materialize through the *ásé*. These operations must be understood as part of a ritualization of the moment, which is personalized by the ancestral history of each of these artists as being-in-the-world. It should also be emphasized that the approaches in the theoretical-practical field, as well as the corporal exercises, the ancestral songs, employed during the meetings, *ipàdé*, are *transcreated*, re-signified, as already mentioned in previous paragraphs, so that there is no proximity with what happens inside the *terreiros* during a religious ritual of African matrix.

We emphasize that the use of nomenclatures linked to the rituals of *Candomblé*, *Umbanda*, *Capoeira* and other practices of African origin that appear in the present study is a decolonial-oriented political-pedagogical strategy to engender principles of African philosophy and African-Brazilian cosmogonies in the field of the arts, particularly dance, theater and performance, as opposed to a taxonomic hegemony based on Eurocentric colonialist paradigms.

That said, we return to reflections on nonverbal codes as the foundation for a transgressive body that fights against mechanisms of colonial domination. The presence of the black body on the scene and its empowerment through the use of *transcreated* foundations of African-diasporic cultural practices are a political and aesthetic position of disobedience to the colonialist, racist and subalternizing paradigms that still exist today in the Brazilian artistic territory. In this logic, we observe once again that sociologist Anibal Quijano, by detecting, denouncing and coining the concept of coloniality of power to demonstrate the reconfiguration of the principles of colonialism and their effects today, complements the thinking of Julio Tavares and corroborates our research in commenting on the legitimation of power relations from the idea of race.

In America, the idea of race was a way of giving legitimacy to the domination relations imposed by conquest. The subsequent constitution of Europe as a new id-entity after America and the expansion of European colonialism to the rest of the world led to the elaboration of the Eurocentric

perspective of knowledge and, with it, the theoretical elaboration of the idea of race as a naturalization of these colonial relations of domination between Europeans and non-Europeans (Quijano, 2005, p. 107).

By performing simple exercises based on body immobility, practitioners begin to notice some bodily addictions such as itching, finger crazes, not staring at one point, lip bites, spasms, non-voluntary movements that go unnoticed on a daily basis. We then find that these dispersal elements, *colonial parasites*, contribute to a near total loss of focus in relation to the body's positioning in space, when we were motionless for a few hours, with our eyes open, fixing a point, attentive, only with the production of our internal sounds and their relation to the external noises of the environment. We deduce that our presence, at this moment, is impregnated with aspects that do not allow us to access our body-file, contaminated with *colonial parasites* – body vices, dispersive elements that prevent the potentialization of the performer/dancer scenic presence. This discovery raised at least two questions: 1) What elements are these that, when we are in action, dancing/performing, become invisible during the repetition of the movements, but weaken our scenic presence even if we are virtuous in performing them? 2) Why in some performative practices of African matrix does the condition of immobility become a state of constant attention?<sup>19</sup> In the theoretical field, we find indications from other scholars about a possible control of our subjectivities based on colonialist assumptions.

The identification of *colonial parasites*, body vices that act as a kind of cognitive shielding in our bodies, was an indispensable tool for the development of the conceptual apparatus of this academic research in the arts under the methodological principles of action research. The conception that the black and/or indigenous body is a generator of ancestral knowledge in the act of producing presence must be understood as an affirmative action against colonialism and its epistemicidal policies, spread by a Euro-centered pedagogical hegemony that for centuries dictates the paradigms to think and produce presence in the field of performing arts in Latin America.

Having said that, we resort once again to Tavares' considerations about the body as an expressive power that responds to the effects of coloniality through the creation of a gestuality established during the

psychophysical experience itself and its ancestral memory. According to this author:

It means to consider the body as a synthesis/text that emits, in nonverbal language, the messages archived from the experiences that have been daily life and that, through the cines of corporeal memory, were fixed in the situation in which that particular movement was registered. That is, the body gives us the gesture expressed in nonverbal language with that movement that was created and elaborated in the production of its experience (Tavares, 2012, p. 51).

In the pedagogical and creative processes of *Elinga* research, as well as in the performance *Mulheres do Àse*, commented below, this knowledge was used as a kind of political postulate that should be disseminated to other generations. Thus, continuing our reflections, we will draw some comments on the performance *Mulheres do Àse* in order to align thoughts that relate ancestry, matriarchy, black woman, African-diasporic poetics, *Candomble* and production of scenic presence.

### ***Asé: ancestry and matriarchy as places of resistance***

When you don't know where to go, look back and at least know where you came from  
(African proverb).

We could not speak of scenic presence in *Elinga* research without reflecting on the mystery of life (*èmi*). It is fascinating to think about how this knowledge has crossed many generations reproducing from body to body through dances, songs (*orins*), tales (*itans*), poems (*oriki*), music, gastronomies and other symbolic goods. Leda Maria Martins (1997), a researcher from the state of Minas Gerais, in Brazil, defined as oraliteracy this form of knowledge transmission from body poetics and oral poetics. Just like *Exú*<sup>20</sup>, known as the orisha of communication, this knowledge has cheated time and has embedded itself in the dynamic principles of the body-file, the ancestral body, and traveled to the present day.

The matriarchy has always played the founding role in the creation of *Candombles* in Brazil, so that without the presence of *Ialorixás* there would be no construction of some of these knowledge listed throughout the text and transmitted orally by centuries, the body movements of orishas dances

and other African diaspora symbologies, preserved to this day by *Asé* women.

The performance *Mulheres do Asé*<sup>21</sup> – *Ritual Performance* introduces us to the political, cultural and spiritual strength of these *Asé* women who for several generations preserve their cultural traditions against the oppressive and subalternizing policies of the European colonizer. To ensure the maintenance of important foundations of African traditions, which were passed on to them orally by their elders, these women kept secret<sup>22</sup> teachings that would later be whispered as religious foundations in the ears of young people interested in starting out in the *Candomble* culture. They are mostly women<sup>23</sup>, who in the future would take control of the *terreiros/roças*, places where the ritual of *Candomble* is performed. To the best of our knowledge, any decision, religious or otherwise, made within the *terreiro/roça* must be communicated to the *Ialorixá*. Perhaps this centralizing behavior of these priestesses is part of the socio-cultural preservation strategies of the African traditions that crossed the *great calunga*<sup>24</sup> and reached the Tupiniquin lands.

Let us move on to a comparative analysis between the notion of scenic presence, *èmi wá*, and the presential power of the cast of this show. The other focus of our observations is the dynamics related to the process of *transcreation* of the symbols used in the *Candomble* ritual employed in the montage of the scenic event. Thus, we invite the reader to allow themselves enter the universe of Ritual Performance *Mulheres do Asé* with their sensory-affective field opened in order to experience, through imagination, a scenic material that mobilizes us by the subtlety of their actions, or even for the beauty of body movements that exude a kind of brotherly, selfless love.

The scenic space is organized with two small stands inside, that is, where the actions of the artists of the scene take place. The viewer, therefore, has the option of positioning him/herself within the scenic space or in the audience, with a frontal view of events. The possibility of another point of view, beyond the condition of space organization in the Italian stage format, is an important factor to understand that this alternative is part of a political and sociocultural choice incorporated into the scene from the cast and director's experiences with African matrix rituals. The use of space in a circular form during African or African diaspora rituals reinforces the idea of a conception of the universe that legitimates itself in relation to alterity.



Some subtle codes mark the movement of the dancers/performers. Would it be a greeting to begin with? A license request to the ancestors? The fact is that gently, sweetly and, why not say maternally, under the energy of the great mother *Iemanjá* we are *initiated*, invited to participate in this *Mulheres do Àse* ritual. The elements of the rituals of African-based religions are elegantly symbolically on the scene as a mark of Brazil's black cultural heritage. The symbolic power of the forces of nature invades the environment: the skin of the hands of the musician/performer seeks another skin, that of the leather of the percussion instrument; the sound of stones washed by dancers/performers in water basins and defined by a faint limelight also awakens our ears, and the clink of beautiful bracelets slides sonority into the arms of these women. In short, all the elements move our imagination to a temple-time of the *Asé*, this vital energy that has crossed centuries to inhabit our feelings and invade our senses.

During the performance, the lightness of the movements draws in space a language characterized by the power of the *ancestralized* female in the bodies of the dancers/performers. Sometimes a waddling, a swaying swing remind us of *capoeira* and its peculiarities, as if it showed dancing a body-file that is at the same time a body-weapon, in a war dance as Tavares (2012) warns us. The plastic beauty of the actions throughout the performance is accompanied by a soundtrack that sets us in the script of the ritual we are experiencing. A ritual that is not *Candomble*, even because we believe this is not the intention of this scenic project. However, we are wrapped in an imaginary cloak and sensorially drawn into an aesthetic statement full of affection and plunged into the waters of spirituality.

In the setting, sheets of paper are transformed, folded, crumpled into a folding game that reminds us of oriental origami art. The leaves are huge and from them come turbans, scarves, dresses and other objects symbolic of African-Brazilian culture. Pieces of colored fabrics are also reconfigured, their colors matching the dancer's/performers' trousers and apparently indicating the colors of some orishas, possibly revered by each.

The production of presence and movement of the artists on stage generate a gesture that is configured by a constant game with these symbols and by the direct relationship of the dancers/performers with the spectator, who exercises, through this creative game of construction and de/construction of African-referenced symbols, the place of co-author.

Musicians also participate in scenes moving around the space singing or playing their instruments. At one point, one of the musicians plays with the dancers/performers who represent the children's spirits, *erês*, while playing a wheeled xylophone.

When we realize it, we are emotionally enveloped by the bodies of the dancers/performers who offer us hugs, gift us with stones, beaded necklaces, or wrap us in colorful fabrics. The energy emitted by the bodies of these artists who dance, sing, count and play their instruments transports us to a unique, symbolic and spiritual-filled sensory-affective universe. This affective approach allows us an aesthetic experience that, in a way, dialogues with some reflections developed in this text regarding the production of scenic presence and *transcreation* of cultural expressions of African matrix to the contemporary scene.

In this sense, we understand that the production of scenic presence in *Mulheres do Àse* provides a field of analysis based on the concepts elaborated in the research presented in this article and defined by the sentence: *èmi-ofô-ase*. During the performance, we realize that in the bodies of the dancers/performers the breath of life (*èmi*) is symbolically marked by the *ginga*, the syncopated movements which, in turn, is lulled by a charming sound environment. These bodies also become enchanted (*ofô*) and materialize by their corporealities through the vital force (*ase*).

In this way, we witness the strength of the black woman and the resistance of the *Candomble* matriarchs in the bodies-file of these dancers/performers, who become poetic weapons against the chauvinist and racist oppression of the Brazilian elite. Tavares's notion of body-weapon takes on another meaning without losing its political reason. It is no longer the body of *capoeira*, which, against its subordinate condition, delivers deadly and traumatic blows in search of freedom, but it is a vigorous body covered by the freshness of maternal love and the vigor of the orishas.

On a screen positioned at the bottom of the stage at approximately three meters from the floor, images of *Ialorixás* from various *Candombles* from Brazil are projected. They dialogue with the dancers/performers, who stop to listen to them each time the image of one of them appears on the circular screen, a very representative form in the spatial organization and philosophical construction of cultural expressions of African origin. It is

from this space/canvas that the *Ialorixás* send messages to everyone present at the event, tell us, enchant us and sing what it is to be a woman of *Asé* and *Àse*<sup>25</sup>.

Between orality and writing, these *Ialorixás* blow us other epistemologies based on ancestral knowledge. In the publicity material of the show, director Edileusa Santos comments on the importance of the socio-cultural performance of these women of *Asé* in the formation of an African-Brazilian identity:

The performance of the lives of women who work in the matrices of African religions are symbols of resistance, belief, faith, and *àse*, both in the past, present and future. It was through faith to Orisha, *Inquice*, *Vodum* and *Caboclo* that these women had the ability to reinvent and assert themselves! It is based on this universe that the performance *Mulheres do Àse – Performance Ritual* is presented and seeks to express the struggle, resistance and feelings of these women. Above all, it aims to express and reaffirm the relevance and role these women play in the construction of Brazilian culture and society<sup>26</sup> (Edileusa Santos, 2018).

The word *Elinga*, which, as already said, means action, also represents the ancestral power capable of initiating political actions, and in the present case title a research that has as its background the concept of scenic presence. The expression *èmi wá*, taken from the Yoruba language, is used as an operational concept that unites the Fu-Kiau triads with those elaborated in the *Elinga* research. In the political context, the notion of presence can be understood as the power of resistance and resilience represented by these *Mulheres do Àse* who resist, dance, fight, sing and play their instruments to teach us the ancestral knowledge of other women and men belonging to the various African cultures that were brought into slavery to the Americas. To understand the symbolic power of these women's energy, let's see what Juana Elbein dos Santos states in her book *Os nagô e a morte*, commenting on the *terreiro*'s most precious content, the term *àse*:

It is the force that ensures the dynamic existence, which allows the happening and the becoming. Without *àse*, existence would be paralyzed and devoid of all possibility of realization. It is the principle that makes the vital process possible. Like all forces, *àse* is transmissible; it is conducted by material and symbolic means and it is accumulable. It is a force that can only be gained through introjection or contact. It can be transmitted to objects or humans (Santos, 2018, p. 40).

This is the force that the priestesses carry in their filing bodies. They bring the vital energy, *asé*, of women designated by destiny, *odu*, to transmit to young practitioners the culture of *asé*. The initiates should, when *Ebomis* or *Ialorixás*, pass the foundations of *Candomble* to other women in the process of initiation, i.e. continue the ancestral cycle. From this perspective, it is not possible to think of the notion of scenic presence developed in this postdoctoral research without locating the vital energy of *asé* materialized in the notion of *èmi ewá*, presence, and its poetic *transcreation* to scene, and without considering the intersections with their realities cultural, aesthetic, political, religious and artistic. After all, in African-based performative practices, these languages and cultural representations are not understood separately, remember?

The thesis presented in this paper is that the production of scenic presence from these African-based cultural practices must be understood as a political act of resistance, a decolonial action in the field of performing arts. After all, for many years we have followed the Euro standards referenced in our creative processes. It is important to emphasize that what we defend as proposition in this text is not restricted to the use of African-diasporic, African-Amerindian, finally, African-Brazilian themes, in our performances, an important aspect, but that does not necessarily question the structural bases of scenic performance. The argument put forward here is based on the idea that there are alternatives other than those already known and imposed as universal by Euro-American global, neoliberal, colonial, patriarchal and racist capitalism. As Ramón Grosfoguel states,

Subaltern knowledge has been deleted, omitted, silenced and/or ignored. [...] Subaltern knowledge is that which lies at the intersection of the traditional and the modern. They are hybrid and transcultural forms of knowledge [...] they are forms of resistance that reinvest meaning and transform the dominant forms of knowledge from the point of view of the non-Eurocentric rationality of subaltern subjectivities, thought from a frontier epistemology. [...] The analysis of the world-system needs to decolonize its epistemologies, taking seriously the subaltern side of colonial/periphery difference, workers, women, racialized/colonized individuals, homosexuals/lesbians and anti-systemic movements participating in the process of knowledge production (Grosfoguel, 2008, p. 136).

To conclude this experience propagated by the energy of the words and the charms of ancestral knowledge that circulate in our bodies, I thank my elders.

Save Makota Valdina and Mãe Stella de Oxóssi!

Adupé!!!

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Oriki to Iansã* by Síkirù Sàlámì, translation by Antonio Risério (2012). For more information see References.
- <sup>2</sup> This research is being developed by the author of this article in the Postgraduate Dance Program of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA). The project was awarded a CAPES scholarship, when it was selected in the public notice PNP/D/CAPES/PPGDANÇA/UFBA, in 2018. The supervision is from Professor Amélia Conrado.
- <sup>3</sup> The way the performance's director and creator chose to spell the word *àse*, with an accent on the letter “a”, was respected with regard to the title of the performance. Although they mean the same thing, throughout the reflections developed in the text we will keep the accent on the letter “e”.
- <sup>4</sup> Dancer, teacher and choreographer, Edileusa Santos was a member of the *Odundê Group*, created in the 1970s by teacher Conceição Castro. For more information about the group, see the work of Setenta (2008), listed in the references.
- <sup>5</sup> Aware of the conceptual complexity of naming these practices, we chose these two terms and put them in the plural because we understand the diversity of African matrix cultures that fused into the African diaspora process.
- <sup>6</sup> In the Umbundu language, of Bantu origin, *elingá* means action. It is one of the most widely spoken Bantu languages in Angola, originally from the Ovimbund peoples living in the central mountains of Angola.
- <sup>7</sup> The Yoruban expressions *èmi* (I am) and *émí* (spirit or breath of life) are associated with *èmi wá*: I am present. It is important to realize that *èmi*, I am, is spelled without the last accent and therefore differs from *émí*, spirit, breath of life.
- <sup>8</sup> Intentionality is a concept retrieved from the Greeks by the German philosopher Franz Brentano in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Brentano was the founder of

the psychology of the act, which aimed to define the status of consciousness directed towards or about something. Searle accepts Brentano's condition on the concept of intentionality and expands it into relationship with the world. For the American philosopher, an intention – as well as beliefs and desires – is a kind of intentional state. For more information, see the book *Intentionality* (Searle, 2002), published by Martins Fontes, listed in the references of this article.

- <sup>9</sup> Bantu ethnic group living in a wide range along the Atlantic coast of Africa, from southern Gabon to the Angolan provinces of Zaire and Uige, through the Republic of Congo, Cabinda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. They are the third largest ethnic group in Angola.
- <sup>10</sup> The term *ipádè* in Yoruba means encounter.
- <sup>11</sup> Some mostly black undergraduate students also attended the meetings.
- <sup>12</sup> These studies were done during the *ipádé*, meetings, in 2018, in the classrooms of the UFBA Dance School. The meetings had a workload of 6 hours per week.
- <sup>13</sup> In *Elinga*, counting and singing can happen together or separately as one more element. It is important to say that these languages vary depending on the scenic proposal. A simple whistle or an onomatopoeic sound can be understood as a tale-chant.
- <sup>14</sup> This expression was used by researcher/teacher/performer Renato Cohen in a minimized way in one of his writings. Upon discovering it, I decided to add it to my reflections on scenic presence. I note that at the time my studies were in dialogue with the notion of *presence* of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. The notion of *ritualization of the moment* was associated with the notion of *Dasein* (*Ser-o-ai*), erroneously translated in Brazil as *ser-ai*, due to the French version *être-là*.
- <sup>15</sup> These psychophysical exercises are created by the researcher and performed together with the practitioners/participants in the *ipádé* (meetings).
- <sup>16</sup> Yoruba myths that speak of orishas.
- <sup>17</sup> *Oriki* can be broadly understood as a literary genre, a poetic form used by the Yoruba people to define the world. However, within the Yoruba cosmogony, the term is part of a complex network that underlies the worldview of this ethnic group. In the etymological sense, *Ori* can be translated by head and *Ki* by greeting. At some point in this text, it will appear the term *oriki*

*coreocênico(s)*, coined by this researcher to define the scenic compositions created during the creative processes of postdoctoral research. It is important to emphasize the hybrid character of these productions that combines, mixes dance, theater, visual arts, music and new technologies in a single scenic event. This condition is also detected by the author of this article in the performance *Mulheres do Àse*. This is a fundamental feature of African cultural expressions and of African diaspora.

- <sup>18</sup> Ipàdél presentation link: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjHWmrc-V2I&t=12s>>.
- <sup>19</sup> In *capoeira*, the participation of those who are in the circle is of constant attention, even if we are not the two players in the middle of it. The music, the actions, the *mandinga*, the movement, those who arrive, those who arrive leave require from those who are in the circle a complete state of readiness. Something can happen at any time and everyone on the tour may have to respond promptly. Physical risk is evidence that forces us to be aware, even if we are in a condition of immobility, that is, only present. To present oneself is to produce localities continuously.
- <sup>20</sup> *Exú* is the orisha who reinvents the memory of time. *Exú* is the orisha who killed a bird yesterday with the stone he threw today. According to Juana Elbein dos Santos (2018, p. 41): “*Exú* is the principle of differentiated existence as a result of its function as a dynamic element that drives it to propel, develop, mobilize, grow, transform and communicate”. Due to his transgressive force, *exú* was satanized by the Catholic Church, so we have to reconfigure his role in the imagination of Brazilian culture. *Exú Mojubá! Laroyê Exú!*
- <sup>21</sup> Technical and artistic file of the performance *Mulheres do Àse*: General Direction, Conception and Scenic Screenwriting: Edileusa Santos. Choreography Assistant: Agatha Oliveira. Creator Interpreters: Sueli Ramos, Tânia Bishop, Sandra Santana, Fatima Carvalho and Sonia Gonçalves. Musical Direction: Alexandre Espinheira, Gilberto Santiago and Luciano Salvador Bahia. Original Soundtrack: Alexandre Espinheira, Gilberto Santiago and Sarah Fernandes. Musicians: Alexandre Espinheira, Gilberto Santiago, Sarah Fernandes and João Victor. Poem: “Voices, women” Conceição Evaristo. Video Testimonials: Mãe Stella de Oxóssi, Mãe Beata de Iemanjá, Makota Valdina, Ebomi Nice de *Yansã*, Ebomi Vanda Machado, Ya Dagan Dinah and the Sisters of the Irmandade da Boa Morte.

- <sup>22</sup> In the *terreiros*, *asé* places, the concept of secret (*awô*) and the mystery of the orishas are kept under lock and key. To know the religious foundations of practices of African origin we have to live the daily life of these *terreiros* or *roças*, as they say in Bahia.
- <sup>23</sup> Although we know of the existence of the *Babalorixás* (*Pais de Santo*), this position in the *terreiros* was, and we believe that it still is, predominantly occupied by women.
- <sup>24</sup> Simply put, *great calunga* is the way the Bantu people call the sea, which divides the physical world from the spiritual one. A cemetery is known as the *small calunga*.
- <sup>25</sup> I make a pun here with the two graphic forms *aséláse* to demonstrate the strength and vital power of these women in the Yoruba tradition and the choice of performance title. The term *áse*, thus spelled in the Yoruba language, a tonal language, should have a period under the letter “s” and another point under the letter “e” that indicates the bass or treble sound of the marked letter. The acute accent, in this case, remains in the letter “a”. In the adaptation to Brazilian Portuguese we find two spellings: *axé*, the most popular, and *asè*, less known; This last spelling is an attempt to approach the spelling of the Yoruba language.
- <sup>26</sup> This material was written and sent for dissemination of the show, being kindly provided by the director Edileusa Santos, in 2018.

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