



Afrotempos: creation and displacements in *Mesa Farta*, by the Pretagô group (Porto Alegre, Brazil)

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ABSTRACT – Afrotempos: creation and displacements in Mesa Farta, by the Pretagô group (Porto Alegre, Brazil) – This article, which is part of a doctoral research, reflects on some cosmogonic aspects of Exu, a Yoruban orisha, and his relations with the spectacle *Mesa Farta* ('Plentiful Table'), by the theater group Pretagô (Porto Alegre-Brazil). The mythic-philosophical foundations that constitute knowledge of African origins are discussed; scenic strategies developed in the process of creation, that organize a way of thinking about scenic practice itself, based on assumptions distanced from Eurocentric theatrical and performative notions, are identified. It appears that the notion of *afrotempo* ('Afro-time'), conceived as a Black strategy for relating to the creation process managed by the group's artists, enables new approaches to doing and inscribing Black ethics and philosophy in the field of performing arts.

Keywords: **Exu. Black Theater. Performance. Afroreference. Afrotempos.**

RÉSUMÉ – Afrotempos: création et déplacements à Mesa Farta, par le groupe Pretagô (Porto Alegre, Brésil) – Cet article, qui s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une recherche doctorale, réfléchit sur certains aspects cosmogoniques d'Exu, un orixá yoruban, et ses relations avec le spectacle *Mesa Farta*, de la troupe de théâtre Pretagô (Porto Alegre-Brésil). Les fondements mythico-philosophiques qui composent la connaissance des origines africaines sont discutés; Les stratégies scéniques développées au cours du processus de création sont identifiées et organisent une manière de penser la pratique scénique elle-même, basée sur des hypothèses éloignées des notions théâtrales et performatives eurocentriques. On voit que la notion d'*afrotempo*, conçue comme une stratégie noire de relation au processus de création géré par les artistes du groupe, permet de nouvelles approches du faire et d'inscrire l'éthique et la philosophie noires dans le champ des arts du spectacle.

Mots-clés: **Exu. Théâtre Noir. Performance. Afroréférence. Afrotempos.**

RESUMO – Afrotempos: criação e deslocamentos em Mesa Farta, do grupo Pretagô (Porto Alegre, Brasil) – O presente artigo, que faz parte de uma pesquisa de doutorado, reflete sobre alguns aspectos cosmogônicos de Exu, orixá iorubano, e suas relações com o espetáculo *Mesa Farta*, do grupo de teatro *Pretagô* (Porto Alegre-Brasil). Discutem-se os fundamentos míticos-filosóficos que compreendem o saber de matrizes africanas; identificam-se estratégias cênicas desenvolvidas no processo de criação que organizam um modo de pensar a própria prática cênica, desde pressupostos distanciados das noções teatrais e performativas eurocentradas. Verifica-se que a noção de afrotem-

po, tramada como estratégia negra de relação com o processo de criação agenciado pelas(os) artistas do grupo, possibilita novas abordagens do fazer e do inscrever uma ética e uma filosofia negras no campo das artes cênicas

Palavras-chave: **Exu. Teatro Negro. Performance. Afroreferência. Afrotempos.**

This article presents some constitutive aspects of the spectacle *Mesa Farta*, by the *Pretagô* group¹, with Black cosmological perspectives from the mythical foundation of the orisha Exu. The reflection is part of a doctoral research entitled *Afrotempos: criação, deslocamentos e produção de vida nas artes da cena* ('Afro-times: creation, displacements and production of life in the performing arts') (Conceição, 2023), which dealt with the creative methods of Black performers and how they experience practical work and attribute meaning to it, based on the poetics of their processes and works. The general aim of the research was to reflect on the escape strategies from the capture of modernity carried out by these artists through their performative practices.

Semi-structured collective interviews were carried out, inspired by the models proposed by Valdete Boni and Sílvia Jurema Quaresma (2005), and also by Jean-Claude Kaufmann (2013). These interviews were conducted online during the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, the research proposed the cosmovision of the orisha Exu as a methodology, supported by some inspiring vectors for the bets and approaches: the dimension of the *crossroads* (artistic paths, choices, operating vectors); *communication* (interviews, conversations, observation of the works-narratives); *contradiction-ambivalence* (dialectic of the theoretical and practical frameworks); and *dynamism* (movement and context of the works, displacement, creation, fiction).

From these vectors, the constituent principles of a methodology that was itself a strategy of escape, performance, were signaled. Thus, a way of working circumscribed by a twofold desire were chosen; on the one hand, seeking to eradicate the methodological problems present in more traditional research approaches, such as structural models that are applied from marked places (observer/ observed). On the other hand, trying to show the plot of a path of relationship or *data production* inspired by the Black mythical foundation itself.

By starting from this bet, in the case of *Mesa Farta*, my relationship as a member of the group and director of the spectacle was able to soften the boundaries between research object and researcher, distancing me from traditional scientific research methods. This relationship, built on collectivity and joint exchanges in a creative process, has its own particularity when it comes to the productions of Black artists, confronting the very paradigm of Euro-referenced research. In this way, I assume my position as a researcher in a field and with an object from which I am not distanced. Based on this perception of inseparability, of a Black creative coexistence, the aspect to be addressed in this article refers to the strategy of creating the spectacle as the operative mode of a practice of resistance to racism, taking Black mythical-ancestral references as presented in the conception of the Pretagô group's work. In this way, by highlighting such strategies, a way of perception about the creation process is highlighted, that adduces to a Black creative time in the performing arts, a time of speculation and investigation, arranged by a collective experience, assured in the subjects, in their individual repertoires, organized in a collective experience, constituting the notion of *afrotempo* ('Afro-time') as an ethical and aesthetic reference to think about the art produced by Black artists.

Discussions about Black practices and performances in the field of performing arts have been pointing to fruitful paths supported by experimentation and new conceptual and methodological propositions. The crossroads of knowledge in the performing arts, understood here as a "meeting point of different paths, which do not merge into a unity, but continue as pluralities" (Anjos, 2006, p. 21), provides elements, propositions, research, processes that have been articulating Black corporealities and their subjectivities as creators of new epistemes, methodologies in their processes.

Taken by different approaches, conceptions, contexts and realities, Black research in the area reveals a consensus that articulates the inseparability of the body, cultural modes and their collective practices in the making of theater. While Black corporealities, their knowledge and thematizations, carry and tension a Black African time "impregnated with Life Force" (Oliveira, 2006, p. 52), with its reflections and graphs of a time also "full of ancestry" (Oliveira, 2006, p. 52), such research points to ways of producing relevant knowledge in the area, which organize ethics, aesthetics and politics

of/on the stage. Practices in Afro-referenced research have exemplified ancestral mythical figures and their links with the instances of these performances. It is possible to notice this incidence in articles published in the area, such as Exu and performativity in the *terreiro* (Silva et al., 2022), body dramaturgies and their relationship with the *batuques* (Silva; Rosa, 2017), theatrical staging from *candomblé* (Barbosa, 2021), dramaturgy, *candomblé* and ritual (Ferreira, 2023).

In the confrontation with hegemonic views, epistemic paths, inserted at the crossroads of Black knowledge in the performing arts, unveil and deepen discussions in the field, without abandoning scientific rigor in proposing methodologies, approaches and theorizations. In this area, the propositions of *afrotempo* are inserted as a destabilizing epistemology, amalgamated in the intrinsic relationships between Black ancestry, myth, ethics and creation, corroborating studies in the area, strengthening and tensioning the production of knowledge in the scene.

Mesa Farta

Mesa Farta ('Plentiful Table') is a spectacle created by Pretagô, a theater group founded by Black artists who research the representation and representativeness of Black subjectivities in the arts, founded in 2014 by undergraduate Theater students at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. The group has a variety of inspirations, which are experienced in a very intuitive and, at the same time, radical² way, in their processes of creating spectacles. The artists, who have different backgrounds, although they have a university education in common, immerse themselves in different creative strategies in the group's different processes, thus bringing an improvisational and experimental character to the creations of the spectacles.

Since its foundation, the group has developed its work (spectacles, performances, workshops, courses, debates) independently, without funding or sponsorship. As a way of organizing and producing, the group has established partnerships with other artists, groups, entrepreneurs and institutions in order to bring its projects to fruition. It was no different with *Mesa Farta*, which was only possible thanks to a virtual donation campaign organized by the members to raise funds for the production.



Image 1 – From left to right: Manuela Miranda, Bruno Fernandes, Laura Lima, Silvana Rodrigues Record of the creation process of *Mesa Farta*, Pretagô group. Casa de Cultura Mário Quintana, Porto Alegre-Brazil. December 2019. Source: Photo by Anelise De Carli.

The creation process took place between November 2019 and February 2020, with a frequency of three rehearsals of three hours each, during the week. The rehearsals took place at the Casa de Cultura Mário Quintana (CCMQ)³, in the center of Porto Alegre, and the preview of two performances took place in the second half of February 2020, as part of the Porto Verão Alegre⁴ festival. After the two performances in February, the group would resume rehearsals in March, with the aim of completing the premiere season on weekends in April of the same year. However, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the global Covid-19 pandemic, caused by the new coronavirus (Sars-Cov-2)⁵, which meant that the entire chain of cultural workers was immediately affected, with the cultural sector being the first to have its activities interrupted.

According to the creators, the spectacle arose from various individual and collective desires. The collective desire was for the group to create a new spectacle, since the group had not embarked on a creative process since 2017. During this period without creations, and even with occasional performances of the group's other works, all the members agreed on the need to start a new process. The creation of this work was also intended to produce data for doctoral research in the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Cênicas at UFRGS. The paths opened up by the relationship with concepts

of Black matrices, from the relationship with texts, lectures and speeches by researchers, as well as films, music and performances, were articulating the desire to create *Mesa Farta* as a possibility of putting these notions and their meanings into practice.

Mesa Farta s performed on an Italian stage and lasts approximately 70 minutes. The original cast is made up of the actresses Laura Lima, Manuela Miranda, Silvana Rodrigues and the actor Bruno Fernandes, members of the Pretagô group. In performances where substitutions were necessary, the actresses Camila Falcão and Kyky Rodrigues, also members of the group, were on stage. The spectacle's dramaturgy was made up of 16 autonomous scenes, with no sequential connection between them. In this way, collective scenes were created, also imagetic, without text, and other collective scenes that resulted from improvisations themed with trigger elements such as a) orishas; b) family lunch c) white genocide. These collective scenes were interspersed throughout the script with monologues taken from classic texts of Euro-Western dramaturgy, such as *Medea* by Euripides, *Dona Rosita solteira* by Frederico Garcia Lorca, *A vida é sonho* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Medeamaterial* by Heiner Müller. Since its inception, the group has built its dramaturgies on personal stories, individual and collective experiences, mixed with other stories, texts and memories. In the case of *Mesa Farta*, we also work with classic Euro-referenced texts.

There is no fixed set structure, just objects: two rectangular tables that in some scenes form a single table, connected by a system of latches; four white dolls that are attached to the warp by a system of pulleys so that they fall to the floor in certain scenes. In addition to these, there are other objects such as cutlery, books, glasses and food, which are consumed on stage. There are visual projections on the cyclorama in the background and two microphones with pedestals on each foreground side of the stage. The soundtrack, created by musician João Pedro Cé and myself, unlike the group's other spectacles, is recorded with electronic mixes, sound beats mixed with rhythms such as *funk carioca*, rap, rhythm and blues, hip-hop and effects triggered live when the actresses and the actor speak into the microphones.

Exu killed a bird yesterday with the stone he only threw today: afrofuturism, disorder and new beginning

In the face of what many people perceive as the apocalypse, the letters of this text hover. I am rehearsing the thought that flies and leads to the translation of the fingers that punch the letters on the keyboard in the attentive exercise of finding a way to unlearn the archive where I am. An archive that tells the history of the world exclusively from the colonial, proslavery perspective of extreme violence and continuous exploitation, which keeps the lives of Black people imprisoned in this narrative. According to Hartman (2020, p. 4), “The archive, in this case, is a death sentence, a tomb, an exhibition of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhoea, a few lines about the life of a prostitute, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history”.

To think of the archive as this historical document, which governs the endless production of violence and the deprivation of the humanity of Black people, raises an inexorable question for these subjects: how (is it possible) to escape this violence? In the case of the work produced by Black artists, and more specifically in the creation of the spectacle *Mesa Farta*, this question was the determinant of how the process unfolded. In the same way that the group developed aesthetic and linguistic research in its spectacles – its own way of creating – it realized the need to radically change its inspirations, choices and already established paths, in a way that corresponds to the racist and homogenizing expectation that characterizes, so to speak, a unique theme and aesthetic that Black artists should create. In a way, by launching themselves into a new challenge, through a new process, they were able to reveal another way of telling their own stories, escaping colonial expectations, held to an artistic market that already anticipated the aesthetic elements addressed in the group’s spectacles in previous works.

The Yoruba proverb that makes up the title of this section presents temporal displacements that lead me to think about broad and diverse ways of dealing with the processes of creating the spectacle, and which gave shape to my doctoral research. In it, we can highlight some points that I present as a fictional mode, but also as a way of thinking about and experiencing what I have been calling *simultaneity*. The idea of simultaneity is directly linked to Black subjectivities from their experiences in the Brazilian diaspo-

ra. It conditions the particularity of thinking about the Black body from various possibilities, two of which, directly linked as structural consequences of anti-Black colonization, I mention and stress: the concomitance of the state of pain in the face of colonial trauma and its relationship with all processes of resistance and reinvention, which create possible ways to, even in the face of violence, organize life production strategies (Conceição, 2019).

The experience of simultaneity also speaks to the past of colonization that continues to be updated in Black bodies and other racialized bodies through the cognitive plantation (Mombasa, 2020), which suspends the very idea of time when it reaffirms the awareness that the plantation as a physical geographical place is also recovered as an ontological, philosophical, anthropological way of constructing a now. In these relationships, the author says

[...] marked as it is by the dispossessive phenomenon of slavery and the continuity of anti-Black violence in the period following the formal abolition of the slave plantation camps, the Black experience necessarily calls into question the apparently transparent notions of agency and consent. It is true that the forms of coercion have been updated and that we have migrated from a system of total captivity to one of fractal captivity, in which violence affects us in other ways, thus constructing forms of asymmetry internal to the diagram of blackness that make it possible, on a collective level, for our death and our success to be concomitant (Mombaça, 2020, p. 6).

In this way, we can see that all the efforts of the colonial categories operate as capturers of the subjectivities of Black people. While colonial memory reactivates the violence, Black presences re-operate ancestral technologies, that is, a series of creative and inventive relationships, as strategies for survival and re-creation. African and Afro-Brazilian subjective and cultural repertoires and frameworks are home to spells and magic that make it possible to de-capture and escape from hegemonic domains. Escape can be understood in a radical way, as it initially destroys the colonial meaning of language, as a process of liberation. By reconnecting with ancestral incantations and foundations, whiteness is contested. Throughout the creation process of *Mesa Farta*, it was observed that by establishing a temporality for the performance organized around the desires, dreams, reveries, nightmares, ghosts, and mysteries narrated by the cast itself, the racial identity of the Black individuals themselves was not necessarily the determining factor for conceiving the scene as an eternal re-

sponse to racist violence. In *Mesa Farta*, the fiction of race is put to the test by another fiction. The radical Black imagination, which, according to Grilo (2021, p. 1), “[...] seeks a flowing generation of dissident perceptions in opposition to the hegemonic vision that exiles melanized bodies from this world” serves in the spectacle as a safe place for the reorganization of subjectivities in freedom to become a theme of the scene or not.



Image 2 – Kyky Rodrigues (replacing Silvana Rodrigues). Source: Photo by Thalles Matos.

The intimacy of everyday life, in this sense, takes on a radicality and discursive power intrinsic to the scene, in which performing herself, without corresponding to the expectations of the regiments of the colonial scene and time, corroborates the act of producing images and gestures from her own memories, of pleasure, delight and relaxation. In the scene, called *Strawberry pie* (Image 2), the actress prepares a strawberry pie, her favorite sweet, with strawberries, whipped cream, sponge cake and sugar. In the background, on the cyclorama, images of the actress as a child are projected in animation, creating effects as if she were flying and observing the adult actress, calmly preparing what she likes to eat the most. The power of shared intimacy reinforces the discourse that seeks to promote positive images for Black women in their existence, enigmatic, disruptive or, as Grilo (2021, p. 3) states, in the search for what she calls *alumição* the “[...] act of unraveling the beauty of things through experiences impregnated with something wonderful that suddenly touches and enchants, demanding from us an appreciation for life through the senses of the soul, skin, touch, smells, tastes and sounds”.

In the search for a narrative that deviates from the hegemonic concrete, Black epistemes are drawn in their collaborative practices, established at the junction of bodies and ideas supported by the mystics and myths present in the body-space-imagination plot in *Mesa Farta*. The poetics inscribed in these encounters of texts, speeches, gestures, scenes, shows a frontier, hybrid scene, other territories and spaces-times or, supported by Luiz Rufino's *Pedagogia das Encruzilhadas* (Pedagogy of the Crossroads) (2017, p. 109),

[...] born in the in-between, in the gap, on the bias, it is enchanted by the foundation of the lime peel, it is an effect of crossing that provokes displacements and possibilities, responding ethically to those who historically occupy the margins, and snatching away those who insist on feeling the world through a single tone.

Exu, rather than inverting, messes things up, confuses, crosses: crossroads. It transgresses insofar as it proposes crossings, and in confusing, dissolves the unilateral, hegemonic, exclusive vision. Exu is many, he is open paths, he is a source of life, and he is a mouth. A hungry web of knowledge that is experienced in the most different possibilities, flavors, smells, colors, sounds. With mistakes and successes in a game in which the dynamics and rules are constructed in the game itself, which beckon towards a territory of experimentation. Like an oceanic continuum. Our secrets are in the ocean. The sea holds our memory and our strength. The mere inversion may presuppose some analogy of simple exchange, of substitution, but still in a Western binary relationship. Black magic reveals an authorial plot: one of destabilization (destruction of the colonial concrete), the establishment of the crossroad as a field of multiple possibilities and which connotes the power to choose paths. Freedom is imagined in this attempt, restoring freedom to the colonized body from which a new episteme emerges. Exu is brokenness, antidote and cure. It is a break with colonial logic.

One of the constituent elements in the relationship Exu-world, deliberated in continuous movement, establishes possibilities connected to the sense of transformation and questioning the status quo. By questioning reality, provoking conflicts, erasures, chaos, we are establishing some relationship with Exu's ethical principles. Especially when dealing with the very idea of transformation as radicalism, insofar as the destruction of matter can promote the movement necessary for change and, therefore, a new begin-

ning. In one of the opening scenes of the spectacle *Mesa Farta*, included in a block we call the *prologue*, that is, the opening, the beginning, we are already announcing, from its starting point, an end to this world:

We are here, on the table. On the table. On the table. We are rebelling and destroying everything that once dared to decide on us at this table. The contracts are all here. All here. All here. And we are going to tear up, burn, destroy all those that do not humanize us and we are going to create, sign and give faith to new contracts that favor us and dignify us! (Mesa Farta, 2020).

The table, a real, imaginary and imagined object, a scenic element and metaphorical arranger of the spectacle's narrative, takes on the very dimension of the world, operating as the place belonging to those who hold power. The table takes on the metaphorical meaning of power, being itself the recipient of the papers and documents that organize the time and conduct under which we live. By taking the table as this emblematic, bordering place, the scenes that take place throughout the spectacle refer to this object and make it both material and immaterial. The table, as a metaphor, establishes a shift from the position of the speechless subject to the one who can speak, from the powerless subject to the one who holds power, from the hungry subject to the subject who has plenty. The table is then presented as a place of a Black becoming, of imagination. The table here possesses the ambivalence and movement of Exu, as it is itself a crossroads, a dwelling place and the principle that causes these movements/displacements. The table could be an object that reorganizes time.



Image 3 – Tearing up the contracts. From left to right: Camila Falcão, Laura Lima, Bruno Fernandes, Kyky Rodrigues (2023). Source: Photo by Thalles Matos.

The title *Mesa Farta* brings a metaphor made in a *crossroad*⁶ way, in simultaneous and ambiguous waves. Initially, it corresponds to the object table, full of food. Metaphorically, the *mesa farta* ('plentiful table') is an image that represents the desire for abundant life, prosperity, positive experiences, *axé* – the vital power. On the other hand, it can also be understood as a place, a time, or even a space that is nonconformist, rebellious, in a state of refusal. Metaphor is understood and composed here as ambiguity, sensuality and deterritorialization of/in language, as "[...] a process of twisting, in which something is said about the real at the same time as it is said in another way, making the familiar strange, in other words, aiming for another, virtual reality" (Gauthier, 2004, p. 133).



Image 4 – From left to right: Silvana Rodrigues, Laura Lima, Manuela Miranda, Bruno Fernandes, in *Mesa Farta* (2020), Pretagô group. Teatro Renascença, Centro Municipal de Cultura Lupicínio Rodrigues, Porto Alegre-Brazil. Source: Photo by Anelise De Carli.

In the second scene of the spectacle, its title appears projected on the cyclorama in the background (Image 4), in which the actors answer, in front of the audience, the question *what is Mesa Farta (plentiful table)?* The question, asked during rehearsals, was a device for the cast to assign different meanings to these words and make possible a scene that would reveal to the audience the imaginative and inventive capacity of the cast, given that their individualities and personalities are in evidence, insofar as there are no characters: actresses and actors narrate and perform themselves. Rather than a single, fixed, categorical definition, what is presented as a scene is a field

of possibilities, plural, undefined, in process. *Mesa Farta*, according to the cast, could be many things, or even none of them

Silvana: Mesa Farta is working, working with what you like, not because you have to, but because you like it. Mesa Farta table is a beautiful sunset after a day of heavy rain. It's a fresh rain, it's a rainbow, it's a bird nesting right in front of our house, our door. Mesa Farta is Rihanna releasing a new album with 12 new tracks and a 13th bonus track. Mesa Farta is dancing at a party until all the lights come on.

Bruno: Mesa Farta is the triumph of imagination over reality. It's being able to talk about whatever you want, whatever you think of the world, but always taking two steps forward. It's a table, bountiful, full of delicious food, snacks, sweets. It's the *sonho*...

Laura: *sonho* of strawberry, *sonho* of cream, *sonho* of chocolate...

Manuela: *sonho* of hazelnut cream...

Silvana: a dream that come true.

Laura: it's a good job...

Bruno: paid vacation! It's a meal voucher card, that is topped up every month...

Silvana: it's health insurance...

Manuela: dental insurance...

Silvana: it's undergraduate, master's, doctorate...

Bruno: post-doctorate...

Laura: it's summer, sun, beach...

All of them: yes, the beach!

Manuela: Mesa farta is the milk, the delight, the pleasure. It's getting down on all fours and becoming the table itself. Mesa Farta is not imprisoning us in the retinas...

Bruno: Mesa Farta is sex, is pleasure, is that delightful shiver.

Silvana: Mesa Farta... is theater (Scene II, spectacle Mesa Farta, 2020. Archive of Grupo Pretagô).

In this sense, the metaphor is located in the impetus of unpredictability, rupture, of the change, of the end, "as emergence of a still unknown meaning" (Gauthier, 2004, p. 133). We can think that the title of the spectacle, rather than centralizing a single idea that synthesizes or defines what the fable to be told might be, can offer us a complex, entangled, multiple relationship to be discussed. Each of the three layers of meaning pointed out here can make up the vectors of one of Exu's symbols, the three-pointed phallus. Based on these metaphors, the different texts and their varied meanings, we can compose layers that cohabit and thus dilate the imag-

es – multiple possibilities that the spectacle’s narrative establishes by refuting a single understanding in the cast’s speeches.

Here I propose a relationship with Exu, reflecting him as a philosophical idea that opposes colonial matrices and cosmovisions of intelligibility (Areda, 2008), or as “[...] the creative protomatter and from its effects that all and any form of mobility and creative action are unleashed” (Rufino, 2015, p. 1). I try to think of other forms and constructions of perceptions for experiencing existence in the world in the creative processes based on Exu, from his destabilizing power, which acts and transforms reality in a deviant movement, thus committing to a rewriting of the world in which we live. According to Rufino (2015, p. 2),

Exu, as an orisha, is understood as a cosmological principle. In this way, it is through his figuration and effects that the Nagô cultural complex understands the explanatory principles of the world regarding mobility, paths, unpredictability, possibilities, communications, languages, exchanges, bodies, individualities, sexualities, growth, procreation, ambivalence, doubts, inventiveness and cunning.

This foundation, which establishes chaos in order to organize, is configured in creative possibilities to establish the knowledge and conditions for the creative act in the process of creation. It can also serve as an instrument to put the world and the things of the world into perspective or, rather, to feel and look at them, specifically in this case, artistic works and their creative processes. If Exu is the agency of chaos, of that void that can become the initial place, we could take him as a support for questioning the world, questioning the arts, questioning the categories of knowledge. Thus, to commit to Exu is to commit to the unknown, to experience in its deepest sense, guiding the creation. When we think of him as a philosophical matrix, we see him, according to Yoruban thought, as

[...] the poem that comes to enigmatize the existing knowledge in the world. Exu does this excellently by establishing doubt, uncertainty, by throwing us into the crossroad. This last term is one of the symbolisms of his domains and powers; the crossroads both presents us with doubt and possible paths. However, there are some issues between what is present in Yoruban cosmology and what has been re-signified here in the Atlantic. These knots, tied in the coming and going of the courses of the African diaspora and in the complexities of colonial daily life, set the tone for the issues surrounding the

formation of Brazilian society and the presence of African wisdom reinvented here (Rufino, 2015, p. 2).

Such approximations between Exu, poem, movement and the meanings of a humanity point to deviant paths for approximations with some scenes of the spectacle, which start from a title, or a name, or a determination.

In the first scene of the spectacle, when the curtains open, we see the actresses and the actor standing close to each other, in a static image, gradually moving together, like breathing and pulsing in unison, moving apart and coming closer together. Gradually they point to a certain point in the space and then point individually to various points. When we see these movements, it is possible to associate them with the different paths pointed out as Exu's crossroad. This confirms that, rather than a single path, the narrative will be presented in multiple ways, with different approaches. It also confirms the very reflection of the group's path choices, which are not organized, in the scene and in their lives, according to a sequential, Western time.



Image 5 – From left to right: Manuela Miranda, Bruno Fernandes, Laura Lima, Silvana Rodrigues, in *Mesa Farta* (2020), Pretagô group. Teatro Renascença, Centro Municipal de Cultura Lupicínio Rodrigues, Porto Alegre-Brazil. Source: Photo by Anelise De Carli.

Here, the location in an ordinary time-space disappears in this first interlocution with the work, based on how it defines itself. Although the

word definition and its harsher, more analytical meaning are not what this text wishes to affirm, the possibility of arguing for a work starring Black artists, which is articulated and defined by them, makes it essential that the ability to name oneself is part of the process. To place oneself, to determine oneself, can be seen as a possible way of deviating from colonizing belonging. Thus, the very sense of definition here plays another role in fiction, separated from the structuring sense and approaching a rupture of linguistic meaning, in which, within the design for which the meanings of the work are intended “[...] that colonial redemption, from a certain perspective, failed and that the crossings of the *tumbeiros* (slave ships) codified the ocean as a crossroad” (Rufino, 2015, p. 2).

Naming the spectacle *Mesa Farta*, based on its metaphorical constitution, becomes a first strategic move: slipping out of the capitulations of reason. To escape from the hegemonic gaze that questions and imprisons the modes of Black creation in a single category. Promoting deviation, not responding to expectations, establishing escape routes are, in Black creative processes, spaces of freedom. After all, as hooks (2018, p. 103) points out, “it is not easy to name our pain, to theorize from this place”. I allow myself, in dialogue with the author, to assert that, beyond the pain, it is also not easy to define and navigate one's identity based on our experiences and references, without, in some way, conforming to what is established and expected of us, Black individuals. In the case of *Mesa Farta*, breaking expectations in relation to a possible operating mode of language and aesthetics developed in previous spectacles, refounds the creative potential, amalgamated in the becoming, which is uncapturable thought and gesture.

Exu as a route of escape and poetry

To think of the figure of Exu as an escape route includes the possibility of understanding the governing principles of Black worldviews as movement, dialectical contradiction, a vital principle that is uncapturable and incoherent in the face of all the sophisticated methods, strategies and knowledge of appropriating Black subjectivities, a creative and distributive power that operates beyond the religious principle. The translator, the act of translation, and translation itself, guardian of the house of the future (Silva, 2015). A Black ontological foundation, it is based as a becoming, at

the same time as it tensions and undoes hegemonic structures and coloniality through enchantments. Exu is anti-binary, Exu is anti-capitalist patriarchy founded by the Western self. As such, Exu can be taken here as a path under construction, as a field open to possibilities or even as an eternally spiraling place: streets and corners, life and death, crying and laughter, eternal beginning and end detached from skin or representation. He flows, diverts, bewilders, entangles, and dismantles the linguistic and language indoctrinations that dominate. Disorganizes matter and space-time in order to reorganize and disorganize again. Experimentation, in this sense, of freedom and the exercise of justice: escape route from the status quo. Escape as freedom. Escape that anarchically undoes the/in the language.

It is possible to bring Exu closer to the idea of rupture and reinvention of Black narratives. In the act of re-inscribing his narrative, in which positive information is written, destabilize the stigmas placed on the body and new ways of being in the world are articulated. The imagery of this construction, the poetic form in which these elaborations are inscribed, harbor the transgressive act of adhering to a commitment to emancipation in the poetry of bodies. In this sense, it seems important to me to look back at some brief relationships with the experience of Black poetry, carried out by poets who, in their acts of writing, create and recreate meanings for the experience of being Black. In poetry, as Conceição Evaristo (2011, p. 9) says,

The poetic word is a way of narrating the world. Not just narration, but, above all, the revelation of the utopian desire to build another world. Through the poetic word, therefore, what the world could be is inscribed. And, by longing for another world, poetry reveals its discontent with a previously established order. [...] For certain peoples, especially those who have been colonized, the poem becomes a place of transgression. Through poetic creation, a new authorship can be given, as well as another interpretation of history to an account that previously only bore the stamp of the colonizer.

According to the author, poetry is an anti-colonial act if we think about it in the context of the performance. Writing poetry, creating a spectacle, entering into an artistic creative process, can liberate the written narrative (the spectacle, the performance) and those who write (create, invent). It is a double, simultaneous movement. The experience of creation can also give other meanings to the narratives that have been put forward, like a brokenness, a gaze from the subalternized body, the gaze to which the crea-

tion of the spectacle *Mesa Farta is* committed. As an example, we can see in the poetic work of current artists the power with which narrative inscription transgresses official narratives and reinvents the meanings of expressions and words. We can think of the experience of *fleeing or escaping* as an emancipatory act. The positivized notion of escape recurs in the historical processes of the Black experience, from the colonized image of the Black fugitive, who fled, to the decolonized view of the Black man who freed himself. This relationship is also present in Black poetry. The relationship of time can also be highlighted when we look back at the legacy of a past struggle for emancipation, as a legacy for the experience of the present.

A nossa Classe Média
Ainda tá na Idade Média
Sigo sem fazer média
Por isso sou acima da média
Nego Drama, não
Nego em Ação
Tocando o Terror nos Comédia

Eu sou frio, grosso, rude
Sem sentimento e calculista
Qualquer B.O, nós resolve na pista
Eu sou tipo inverno russo
Vou acabar com esses nazista!

Nos deixaram à própria sorte
Não deram nem um biscoito
Morrem de medo da vingança
Hoje nos veem e ficam afoito
Sexta feira 13 é teu dia do azar
Desde maio de 1888

[...]

Na primeira resposta
Os bico já se assusta
Chupa!
Eu não vou abaixar a cabeça pra nenhum filho da... p*ta
E tu? Sabe quem eu sou?
Então me escuta

Bruno Negrão, senhor
Bisneto daquela preta
Que no engenho do teu bisavô
Deu fuga

[Excerpt from the poem *Bisnetos*] (Bruno Negrão, 2018)⁸.

In this poem, we can see the transgression of the sense of flee, of escape. Escape as a simultaneous possibility of being, of resisting, of forging oneself free, of reinventing oneself in movement. In this way, Exu's poetics can perform the function of escaping racist stigmas and can offer the possibility of constructing moving identities. Exu as escape/freedom from a colonizing imposition. Escape from the hegemonic real that constructs other equivalent reals. In *Mesa Farta*, it can give meaning to the abandonment of its own way of constructing dramaturgy, which is totally authorial, so that, freeing itself from this prison, it can even take classic European texts as a basis for scenes. This is done in four scenes of the spectacle, in the form of monologues, focusing on the relationship between the actresses and the actor and the words written by European playwrights.

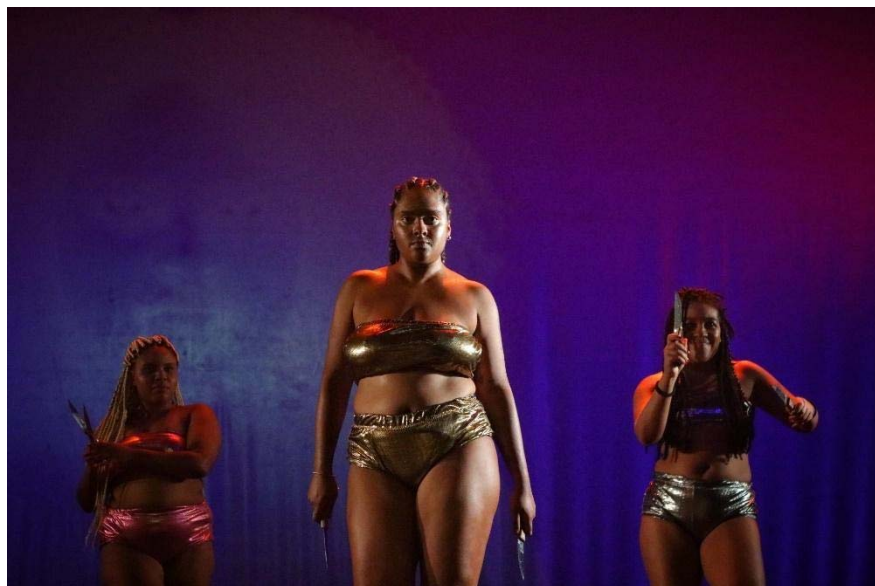


Image 6 – Manuela Miranda (center) as Medeia, Laura Lima (left), Silvana Rodrigues (right). *Mesa Farta* (2020). Source: Photo by Anelise De Carli.

This contradiction can be derived and felt by taking the contradiction itself in Exu, which moves against the central dilemma of colonization. Using excerpts from a hegemonic text in *Mesa Farta* is less about giving in to colonialism and more about overriding it, as a disobedience to the expecta-

tions created on Black artists who work against the incidences of racism and who would, as a rule, not use texts by white authors. The work carried out by the actresses and actor in their scene-monologues is, therefore, an exercise in radical freedom. Going for the unexpected, confronting and deviating from what is already known.

The poetics of Exu, for the Black experience, can take on an existential meaning, the impossibility of being captured in linguistic and bodily form, because in it there is the possibility of simultaneity, of plural meanings that dialog and build multiple dimensions of being. The ability to elaborate and reflect on these aspects presents openness as faithful to Black narratives, which escape hegemonic conditioning. There are multiple stories that tell of Black bodies in the diaspora, which take into account everything from the construction of the Black experience in the Brazilian diaspora (formed from the meeting of multiple peoples from Africa), to the worldviews of Africa, which elaborate complexity and multiple meanings.

Ruptures as freedom: the fall of the white body

Trying to escape the death statistics poses the challenge of a kind of constant invention for Black people to deal with this rule. The sensation of “escaping at every moment” from the methods of oppression also carries with it a capacity to break with what one is in order to forge another self, capable of triumphing in the face of the death sentence. Throughout the spectacle, we see white bodies plummeting from the ceiling towards the floor. The metaphor here points to a radical provocation: what if colonization subjected white people to violence? What if the world were anti-white? At the same time, the bodies plummeting from the ceiling affirm that a future for living Black people would not embrace whiteness. A radical Black imagination that exists above the white body. In *Mesa Farta*, this *afrotempo*, the fall of the white body takes place.



Image 7 – Silvana Rodrigues (background), Manuela Miranda (back). Mesa Farta (2020).
Source: Photo by Anelise De Carli.

Frantz Fanon (2008), in *Peles negras, máscaras brancas* ('Black Skin, White Masks'), analyzes the relationships in the construction of the modern world under the aegis of the invented notion of race and its disparate effects on the formulation of Black and White. For the author, the conditions of the present are tied, among other factors, to a past in which the great problem lies. He says that

[...] the problem considered here lies in temporality. Blacks and whites will be disalienated if they refuse to encase themselves in the substantialized Tower of the Past. On the other hand, for many other Blacks, disalienation will be born of the refusal to accept the present as definitive (Fanon, 2008, p. 187).

He claims the human condition. Furthermore, he proposes the breaking with the past as a possibility for freedom. The past to which the author refers to, says about the concept of inhumanity aimed at Black people. There is a critique of modern thinking and the invention of race, authored by the white man. This is the author's central criticism. Breaking free from the white man's prison would make it possible to break away from the giv-

en narrative. To be no longer Black. To be, than, a man. The idea of man presents a universality of existence. Open paths. This idea is affirmed when he says that the “[...] Black people, even if they are sincere, are slaves to the past. However, I am a man, and in this sense, the Peloponnesian War is as much mine as the discovery of the compass” (Fanon, 2008, p. 186). The author claims the right to authorship of the world. Or even, “I am a man and it is the entire past of the world that I must recover” (Fanon, 2008, p. 187).

In this relationship that Fanon presents, *Mesa Farta* radically imagines a contradiction of humanization. This invention, as a narrative, to which the author refers, has created a perverse system in which the categories have opposite destinies: for the white man, to win, and for the Black man, to be defeated. “The disgrace of the man of color is to have been enslaved” (Fanon, 2008, p. 190). By breaking with the condition of being Black, which entails imprisonment in a past of pain, the author presents a free, open, universal condition, as a man, the one who possesses humanity: “[...] if the white man contests my humanity, I will show him, by making all my weight as a man weigh on his life, that I am not this *y'a bon banania* that he insists on imagining” (Fanon, 2008, p. 190). In the opera scene, created as a radical refusal of violence based on the dynamic of Exu’s inversion, the actresses and the actor sing a satirical opera composed of lyrics that present an inversion in the world, in which colonial violence falls on white bodies, the dystopia is white.

We see dead white bodies
Dead white children
Dead white women
Every day

We see young white people dead
Dead white pregnant women
No anesthesia, dead
Screaming in pain

Dead, killed by the state,
Killed by the police,
By the city government
And the militias.

White individuals incarcerated, dead
White activists dead,
White councilwoman dead
We are all of them

We have an ongoing genocide
With a well-defined target
See the absurdity

Where is the blame?
Is it in the past?
What is your commitment?
With the transformation?⁹

The song is sung in a funeral tone, the actors are dressed in Black clothes and the lyrics are projected onto the cyclorama in the background. The final part, ‘Where is the blame?/ Is it in the past?/ What is your commitment?/ To transformation?’, presents the outcome of the questioning brought up by the scene, updating, reliving, returning to reality, marked in an impossible way. There is a counterpoint to an invented model, while Fanon, alluded to in the spectacle, uses the word ‘imagine’, that becomes revealing in terms of the constant imposition of an imagined and practiced narrative. Thus, his proposal to annihilate a Black essence concerns the destruction of an invented narrative (race) (Hall, 2020). In this sense, destabilization assumes a rupture, in which Fanon simultaneously opposes: the denunciation of the dominant/ racializing narrative; the denial of the dominant (European) narrative; the reinvention of its existence (freedom). By fictionalizing a white genocide, these norms are destabilized, like a radical game.

The final scene of the spectacle, a banquet where actresses and actors celebrate their existences, taste food, toast and rest in front of the audience, is like a moment of reorganization of an order, which, as Exu teaches us, foreseen by chaos and movement, moves towards its reorganization. From this simultaneous opposition, which acts at cross-purposes, comes the possibility of freedom, in the spectacle. In fact, another important issue in this liberation becomes known: the dispute over the narrative, over authorship. The freedom that Fanon pursues and that *Mesa Farta* performs concerns

the right to invent oneself, to create oneself. Autonomy over one's own existence, over the creation of one's own existence.

Final Considerations

It is interesting to think that the constitutive elements of the spectacle *Mesa Farta*, based on their enunciations, give rise to new meanings based on the speculative freedom of the bodies and, therefore, the possibility of speech coming from these bodies that live and tell, which brings the capacity of reason closer to the body. Only free, in *Mesa Farta*, can one speak. The body, the acting and the staging in *Mesa Farta* are taken as the protagonists of a new narrative: one that experiences the process of their own lives in such a way as to also experience a radical imagination, in which the body and speech are themselves enunciators. This is where both a Black artistic stance and ethic emerge, alongside other epistemes.

Breaking with the past does not mean denying it, but it does mean taking a stance *on* it and no longer *under* it. What is at stake is the possibility of framing the creation of the artists of the spectacle *Mesa Farta* with inventive ways of thinking about the scene in order to escape the hegemonic conditioning of the performing arts. By experimenting/ inventing/ imagining worlds free from the expectations of the art market, which expects predictable themes for Black artists, these artists subvert themselves, relearning their own behaviors and taking them to radicalize the processes and scripts from which they were trained. By elaborating the notion of *afrotempo* as a technology for seeing the world simultaneously and focusing on the process, one confronts racism not only as a unilateral response but also imaginatively disentangles from its impacts on/in the creative process. In *Mesa Farta*, we see a path where process and scene, inseparable by their mysteries, confront and destabilize the ordinary time in which we live, thus pointing to new possibilities to think/ perform the scene: simultaneously resisting deaths, refusing them.

Notes

- ¹ More information can be found at <https://www.grupopretago.com>. Accessed on: June 2, 2023.
- ² The radicality mentioned here refers to what is rooted in our Black bodies from our experiences and repertoires and which comes to the surface in the processes of creation.
- ³ A cultural space in the city of Porto Alegre named after the nationally known poet who lived in the building when it was still a hotel (Hotel Majestic). The CCMQ is a public structure administered by the Secretary of Culture of the State Government of Rio Grande do Sul. More information can be obtained at <https://www.ccmq.com.br>. Accessed on: June 2, 2023.
- ⁴ Porto Alegre's traditional performing arts festival, which takes place during the summer months. More information can be found at <https://www.portoveraoalegre.com.br>. Accessed on: July 11, 2023.
- ⁵ Source: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2020-03/organizacao-mundial-da-saude-declara-pandemia-de-coronavirus>. Accessed on: June 2, 2023.
- ⁶ For the sake of understanding, the idea of a crossroads is taken here not as a hybridizing process or one in which the cross is the exclusive result of the meeting of different ideas, but, on the contrary, “as a meeting point of different paths, which do not merge into a unity, but continue as pluralities” (Anjos, 2006, p. 21).
- ⁷ Translation note: the word “*sonho*”, which means “dream”, is also the name of a very popular Brazilian treat, often sold in bakeries. It consists of a sweet fried dough that is rolled in sugar after cooling, which gives it a slightly crunchy exterior. The inside is soft and airy, traditionally filled with milk jam, but some *sonhos* are filled with guava paste, chocolate, sweet cream, or even hazelnut cream. In this excerpt, the word *sonho* is used in an ambiguous way, meaning dream and/or the Brazilian treat.
- ⁸ Translation note: when translated, the poetry loses its metrics and rhymes; this poetry brings terms, slangs and references (such as Nego Drama and Nego em Ação) that need to be punctually addressed for better comprehension. For those reasons, the translator chooses to keep the original on the text. An approximated translation is: Our Middle Class/ Still in the Middle Ages/ I ain't tryna please/ That's why I'm above average/ Negro Drama, no/ Negro in Action/ Causing

chaos among the jokers // I'm cold, thick-skinned, rough/ Heartless and calculating/ Any trouble, we handle it in the streets/ I'm like a Russian winter/ I'll put an end to these Nazis! // They left us to our own fate/ Didn't even give us a crumb/ They're afraid of the revenge/ Today they see us and get all dashing/ Friday the 13th is your bad luck day/ Since May 1888 // [...] // In the first answer/ The snitches are already scared/ Suck it!/ I won't bow down to any motherf*cker And you? Do you know who I am? Then listen to me // Bruno Negrão, sir/ Great-grandson of that Black woman/ That from your great-grandfather's sugar mill/ fled.

- ⁹ In the original: Vemos corpos brancos mortos/ Crianças brancas mortas/ Mulheres brancas mortas/ Todos os dias // Vemos jovens brancos mortos/ Gestantes brancas mortas/ Sem anestesia mortas/ Gritando de dor // Mortos, mortos pelo estado/ Mortos pela polícia/ Pela prefeitura/ E as milícias/ Brancos encarcerados mortos/ Ativistas brancos mortos/ Vereadora branca morta/ Somos todas elas// Temos um genocídio em curso/ Com alvo bem definido/ Vejam o absurdo // Onde está a culpa?/ Está no passado?/ Qual seu compromisso?/ Com a transformação?

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Availability of research data: the dataset supporting the results of this study is published in this article.

This original paper, translated by Thuila Farias Ferreira, is also published in Portuguese in this issue of the journal.

Received on April 2nd, 2023

Accepted on September 18, 2023

Editor in charge: Gilberto Icle

