

*EXU: THE LANGUAGE AS A CROSSROAD IN BLACK
DIASPORIC CULTURE(S)*

Alex Pereira de Araújo, Doctor by PPGMLS of UESB

A cosmological principle, because it was the first to be created, Exu presents itself as the creative protomatter, whose expansive and unfinished character makes possible the appearance of all other creations.¹ He is the animating principle of existence and in everything there is Exu. The crossroads is its space-time and this fact would explain why “black culture is a crossroads culture”.² But, incarnated in Afro-diasporic practices in the Atlantic bands, Exu not only vigorously maintains his multifaceted power, showing that colonial redemption did not obtain the expected result, but also shows that its everyday meanings in the African Black Diaspora here in the Americas they are the result of battles, negotiations, authoritarianism, power regimes, violence, transgressions, silencing and alliances experienced in the colonial dynamic, as Luiz Rufino reminds us in his book *Pedagogia das Encruzilhadas*.³

It is from these considerations that I would like to start this discussion about language as a crossroads, immediately trying to say that without a crossroads there is no language and without language there is no Exu. In other words, Exu is language, the language of languages! And as a language, Exu does not translate. But, if anyone dares to translate their untranslatableness, they will be affected by their tricks in a game of crossroads where “the principles of mobility, transformation, unpredictability, exchanges, languages, communications and every form of creative act are evoked.”⁴ And those who are given the power to know, those who are

¹Rufino, Luiz. Exu e a pedagogia das encruzilhadas: sobre conhecimentos, educação e pós-colonialismo. In.: VIII Seminário Internacional *As Redes educativas e as Tecnologia: Movimentos sociais*. ProPED, UERJ, junho de 2015.

²Martins, Leda Maria. *Afrografias da memória: o reinado do Rosário no Jatobá*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1997.

³Rufino, Luiz. *Pedagogia das Encruzilhadas*. – Rio de Janeiro: Mórula Editorial, 2019.

⁴Idem. *Pedagogia das Encruzilhas*. *Revista Periferia*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 10, n. 1, p.74, jan/jun., 2018.

not authorized, can never reveal their secrets. Only what Exu allows is revealed to have the dimension of his strength and potency.

Therefore, it is evident that we are not dealing with the same meaning that the term language has in the structure and systems of thought in the Western world, guided by the metanarratives that express, materializing, the Socratic-Platonic model, popularized by the theology of the doctors of the Holy See and by its Protestant variant. So, one might ask: what language is this? Does it have something in common with the Western model?

As an expression of the cosmivision of black culture, this language subverts the entire order of the Western model, which is composed of binarisms whose schema fragments language into: verbal and non-verbal language, language and speech, text and discourse, linguistic and extralinguistic, pragmatic and stylistics, syntax and semantics, phonology and phonetics, etc. Therefore, it has its own pedagogy whose paths point beyond the limits of the dominant logos, because of its crossroads.

It is through her that Exu speaks and makes us speak. It is for this reason that “we attach fundamental importance to the phenomenon of language”.⁵ And in the case of a hierarchical society like the Brazilian one, in which there are many difficulties to mobilize its members around the common struggle for their own transformation, as Kabengele Munanga⁶ observes, the epistemology that comes from Exu appears as an opening for the path the overcoming of the colonial necropolitics⁷ that was maintained and updated in the state program called “Brazilian Racial Democracy” under the mask of Gilberto Freyre’s “mestizaje” and the Brazilian modernist movement.

However, if this state project has failed and continues to fail, even in these times when discussions on decolonization processes are in vogue throughout the American continent, it becomes more than necessary to respond to this model that uses necropolitics in that “killing or letting live constitute the limits of sovereignty”.⁸ And this response should only be guided and consecrated to the life and respect for the racial and cultural diversity of the peoples that make up a large part of the national States in the Americas, subverting the way in which sovereignty has been exercised through the control over mortality, above all, of black popula-

⁵Fanon, Frantz. *Pele negra, máscara branca*. Tradução de Renato da Silveira. – Salvador: EDUFBA, 2008, p. 33.

⁶Munanga, Kabengele. *Rediscutindo a mestiçagem no Brasil: identidade nacional versus identidade negra*. 3ª edição – Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2008.

⁷This term is used by Achille Mbembe to name what is the ultimate expression of the power of sovereignty that has the capacity to decide “who should live and who should die”. He presents this nomenclature in place of the biopolitics used by Michel Foucault, mainly in his course *Il faut défendre la société*, taught at the Collège de France between 1975 and 1976.

⁸Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolítica*. In.: *Arte e Ensaio* – Revista do PPGAV/EBA/UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro, n.32, dez/2016, p.123.

tions who crave racial equality, along with forest peoples. Therefore, it will be necessary to know the languages of Exu, which brings with it a conception of language that should make the knowledge of what can be taught more accessible. So, the linguistic knowledge precedes the pedagogical knowledge that, in turn, is responsible for spreading the epistemology that was formed around the worldview we inherited from black African Diaspora. It is the concept of language that lies at the deepest roots of this plural worldview, which I would like to focus on now, in this second part of this brief essay, for the reasons I have just mentioned.

With Exu, tongues spread across the land, for every time his father divided him into two hundred pieces, more tongues emerged. And this happened nine times, leading us to believe, therefore, that tongues are born with Exu, and, at the same time, they are also its crossroads and its pieces divided by the sword. All together they resemble him, having the two universal principles of masculine and feminine in an androgynous body, speaking in word and in silence. In other words, it was Exu's hunger that made him speak and that's when communication came to the world... This is another way of telling, on this side of the Atlantic, how Exu became the beginning of communication, since its mouth is the one that speaks to Ifá⁹; that is, "all the paths of Ifá speak through Exu"¹⁰, the first element to be generated. And because it carries "the speech of the forces of the world"¹¹, its speech is not direct, but being the intermediary, the channel, the transmitter, the transit, the message and the code; Exu is the one on whom everyone depends for still being the restorer of strength. Finally, "his language of it is pure metaphor: it is, at the same time, the semiotic sign and the sensitive phenomenon, the sense and the feeling. His speech is a potentiality of the semantic sense, but it is also a potentiality of the sensory senses, since Exu is outside and inside the body."¹²

In the context of abusive European colonization, it is worth noting that the linguistic relations that emerged from the experience of domination-oppression, which resulted in the Diaspora of Black Africa in the Americas, where several African peoples were forcibly transplanted to this other side of the Atlantic, occurred by the perverse and violent slavery system, characterized by objectifying those who "survived the inhuman conditions of the transcontinental sea crossing,"¹³ by depriving them of their humanity, with the contempt of Westerners who stripped them of their symbolic systems, to reinvest them in another way, that of the dominant European.

The repression of local cultural events took place both on this side of the Atlantic and

⁹The Ifá concerns the oracular tradition in Yoruba culture. Orunmilá is in charge of the Nagô oracle.

¹⁰Davet, Florence Marie. Corpo, linguagem e real: o sopro de Exu Bará e seu lugar na comunicação. *Ilha do Desterro*, v.68, n.3, p. 20, Florianópolis, set/dez 2015.

¹¹*Idem, ibid.*, p.19.

¹²*Idem, ibid.*, p. 20.

¹³Martins, *ibid.*, p.24.

on the other side. In the Brazilian case, there is a document that expresses well this *modus operandi* that reached its apex in the Pombaline period, as we can see in the excerpt below:

It has always been a maxim inevitably practiced in all nations, which conquered new domains, to immediately introduce their own language to the conquered peoples, since it is indisputable that this is one of the most effective means to banish the barbarity of their old customs from rustic peoples and to have shown the experience that, at the same time that the use of the language of the prince who conquered them is introduced in them, also roots in them affection, veneration and obedience to the same prince. Therefore, observing this prudent and solid system in all the polished nations of the world, in this Conquest there was so much practice on the contrary, that only the first conquerors took care to establish in it the use of the language they call general, a truly abominable and diabolical invention, so that, private the Indians of all those means that could civilize them, remained in the rustic and barbaric subjection in which they have hitherto conserved themselves. To banish this pernicious abuse, one of the main cares of the principals will be to establish in their respective villages the use of the Portuguese language, not consenting in any way that the boys and girls who belong to the schools and all those Indians who are capable of instruction in these matters use the language proper to their nations, or to the general call, but only Portuguese, in the form that His Majesty has recommended in repeated orders, which until now have not been observed, with total spiritual and temporal ruin of the State.¹⁴

The justifications found in this document subvert the whole order of facts, as it was the Europeans who promoted the martyrdom of Christians, throwing them into the centers of their Roman arenas to be devoured by lions, burning them in bonfires or even crucifying them. Later, it was the turn of Christians to persecute non-Christians, using the same schemes of civilizational barbarism that also sought to indoctrinate souls. In short, it was not black African peoples or Amerindians who needed to get rid of pernicious abuses; but the Europeans, as both the Romans and the Holy See forged a pernicious policy in the conquest and domination of sub-Saharan Africa and the New World, where the reality on this side of the South Atlantic was very similar to that on the African side. Here, there were several peoples that were described by Europeans as the result of two great trunks: the Tupi and the Macro-Jê that grew and expanded throughout the geopolitical space demarcated by Europeans from the ancient Roman provinces of Lusitania and Hispania. In Africa, there was the great Bantu family and

¹⁴Cf. original in: Almeida, Rita Heloísa de. *O Diretório dos índios: um projeto de civilização no Brasil do século XVIII*, Brasília, Editora da Universidade de Brasília, 1997, p. 371.

the no less numerous Yoruba or Nago family. These African fragments of Exu met here in the Americas with the Amerindian fragments. The enclosure that silenced most of them still echoes in us.

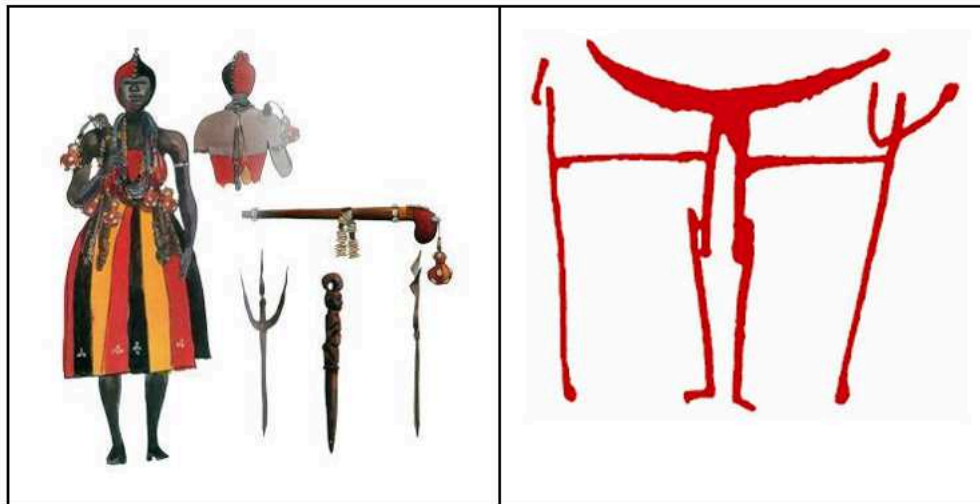
All this history of forced encounters, marked by this enclosure, symbolic violence and physical violence of the body, permeated by necropolitics, together with the cosmovision of the black diaspora in the Americas, leads me to a concept of language as the state of being of language that it expresses the spirit of a people, that is why it is sacred territory, and only those who live in its bowels and know its crossroads are able to access the cosmovision that results from the spirit of its people. When a speaker lives with two or more languages, what happens is he only has direct access to his first language and the illusion of knowing the other one well. It can even happen that one does not have direct access to either one or the other, because the two languages themselves become another language, formed from the meeting of two states of being of the language in which there is the “con-fusion” of spirits. This seems to be the case of the language spoken in the insular State of São Tomé and Príncipe, which Western linguists regard as the creole language of Portuguese.

This concept of language and the conception of language situated in the black diasporic cosmovision do not dissociate the linguistic from the pragmatic, neither this nor that of the semiotic, because it is at this intersection that language takes place, that is, it is at this intersection that speakers use it. In this concept of language, it is also considered that there are no unwritten languages, as every language is in itself the writing of the spirit of its people, which inscribes it in the universe of language through “oralitura”, that is, every language wants to present a conventional writing system, whether it uses more oral tradition to transmit its worldview, goes through the practice of oralitura.¹⁵ Therefore, we are faced with a theoretical concept that is the result of the black diasporic cosmovision found in the Americas, where the crossroads is, as in Africa, a sacred place, sometimes considered in some translations as a cosmogram in which the intermediation occurs through the mouth of Exu. Anyway, this is a notion that is not new because it was already there before being expressed here. Its use is intended for research that deals with the knowledge and traditions that populate such a worldview and others that have affinities. And, its theoretical implications are already a subject for another conversation that leads us to other crossroads.

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¹⁵The term, as Martins uses in his work *Afrografias da Memória*, is used here beyond what concerns the repertoire of cultural forms and procedures of the linguistic tradition, as it also refers specifically to what in his performance indicates the presence of a cultural trait. stylistic, mnemonic, significant and constitutive, whose event inscribes and affects the body.

¹⁶ **About the author:** PhD in Memory: Language and Society from UESB (with CAPES scholarship and PDSE scholarship in France). He graduated in Portuguese with French letters (1995-2000), becoming a Master



Representations of Exu by plastic artist Carybé

in Letters: Linguagens e Representações (2009-2011). He participated in the programs of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères): *Connaissance de la France* in 2000 and *Profs en France* (2007) at CAVILAM de Vichy (Blaise Pascal University). <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4818-0912>

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Corresponding Author: Alex Pereira de Araújo, alex.scac@hotmail.com

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