

The Mythical-Ancestral Crossroads in *Changó, el gran putas*, by Manuel Zapata Olivella / *A encruzilhada mítica-ancestral em Changó, el gran putas*, de Manuel Zapata Olivella

Lucy Miranda do Nascimento*

ABSTRACT

The Afro-Colombian physician, anthropologist and writer Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920-2004) in his book *Changó, el gran putas* [Changó, the Great Whores] (1983) fictionally creates the epic of the arrival of Africans to the Americas and elaborates a detailed historical rescue of the struggles and demands of Afro-Latin Americans for more than four centuries. That said, in this article we will start from the concepts of *Encruzilhada* [Crossroads] (MARTINS, 2003; RUFINO, 2019), *Pedagogia da Cimarronaje* [Pedagogy of Cimarronaje] (MENDES, 2019) and *Afrorealismo* [Afrorealism] (DUNCAN, 2005) to understand, from paradigms centered on the black-African experience, Latin American Literature, specifically that of Afro-descendant authorship, as well as other representations regarding the subject and black epistemological contributions, commonly stereotyped and marginalized in literary and intellectual constructions.

KEYWORDS: Manuel Zapata Olivella; Afro-Latin American literature; (Afro)Epistemic crossroads; Cimarronaje Pedagogy

RESUMO

O médico, antropólogo e escritor afro-colombiano Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920-2004) em seu livro *Changó, el gran putas* (1983), cria ficcionalmente a epopeia da vinda dos africanos para as Américas e elabora um minucioso resgate histórico das lutas e reivindicações dos afro-latino-americanos por mais de quatro séculos. Isso posto, neste artigo partiremos dos conceitos de *Encruzilhada* (Martins, 2003; Rufino, 2019), *Pedagogia da Cimarronaje* (Mendes, 2019) e *Afrorealismo* (Duncan, 2005) para compreender, a partir de paradigmas centrados na experiência negro-africana, a literatura latino-americana, especificamente, a de autoria afrodescendente, bem como outras representações a respeito do sujeito e aportes epistemológicos negros, comumente estereotipados e marginalizados nas construções literárias e intelectuais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Manuel Zapata Olivella; Literatura afro-latino-americana; *Encruzilhada* (afro)epistêmica; *Pedagogia da Cimarronaje*

* Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso – Campus Cuiabá, Instituto de Linguagens, Departamento de Letras, Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, Brazil; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8168-0391>; lucy.nascimento@ufmt.br

Opening Remarks

The racial and social marginalization of Afro-descendants in the Americas, resulting from the European colonizing process, triggered socio-cultural actions to erase the Afro-cultural component, as well as the elaboration of prejudiced stereotypes towards black people, which in a way has been widespread in the literary field, to the extent that Afro-descendant intellectuals were disregarded as writers and the pejorative representation of black people in literature was reinforced. Because, even considering the undeniable and important black cultural contribution to the constitution of the American continent, the Afro-descendant subject as a producer of knowledge, literature, and culture has been concealed from the intellectual and literate sectors of Latin American societies, being placed on the outskirts of the “Literate City” named by Ángel Rama (2015) in his book *La ciudad letrada* [The Educated City] (1984). The Uruguayan literary critic exposes the role of literacy and writing in the transition from the colonial period to the moment of national formation as the passage from the literate city to the scriptural city. Thus, the literate person was the one who consolidated the order of signs, supporting the idealized construction of the city as part of the imperial unifying project, which materialized through the implementation of discourses arising from the city’s regulatory spaces. The act of writing engaged with the dominant power to legitimize it by opposing itself to orality; it was established by the ordering of signs in hierarchical laws and organizations, and the literate city joined the ordering power, serving it “through the laws, regulations, proclamations, ballots, propaganda, and through ideologization aimed at supporting and justifying it” (Rama, 2015, p. 44). The scriptural city was reserved for a small minority that disregarded the diversity of the city and other cultural expressions, such as oral, regional, native, Afro-descendant, Afro-indigenous, and other varieties derived from the Latin American ethnic-cultural intersection. There are numerous absences caused by this hegemonic project, considering the lack of mention of the names of Afro-descendant authors in Latin American literary anthologies and historiographies. The African and Afro-descendant epistemic emptying that extends to the literary studies programs of many South American universities, as asserted by the Senegalese scholar M’Baré N’Gom Fayer (2018) regarding the obliteration of the history of African and Afro-Diasporic in the academic space. Venezuelan scholar Beatriz González Stephan

(2002) says that the field of Latin American literary studies has often been qualified by adopting a Eurocentric perspective, considering that both literary production and literary criticism and history were thought starting from the premises and models established by Western Europe. Thus, the result of this evaluative exercise was the misinterpretation of our cultural practices and the silencing of certain specificities, which would design the distinctive character of Latin American processes.

Literary and intellectual productions of Afro-descendant and indigenous authors enable the decentralization of European paradigms because many black and indigenous authors set their basis in their knowledge and their realities to problematize their relations with society. Such knowledge, once obliterated, was maintained and contributed to the creation of American countries; accessing it enables new ways of understanding Latin American diversities, which reverberates in artistic and cultural manifestations, specifically in the literary ones:

Hence, the importance of reviewing the common references of diverse historiographies, including the literary one, whose complexity of reports and narratives can also educate by lack of knowledge, ignorance, or omission, not only of the relevance of the Afro-descendants, indigenous people, and others not listed here. It is necessary to offer the world a fair story of their intelligences. What is observed in the field of literature, in what is offered to knowledge, space, and episteme, is that the privileged place of writing in the Latin American colonial context is related to the triumph of politics over difference, and now it is important to know what difference thinks about politics that distances them from the world and other people (Mendes, 2023, p. 76).¹

In the wake of this reflection, the concept of *Encruzilhada* [Crossroads] brings significant contributions to the Latin American continent because, as Leda Maria Martins (2003) says, black culture is epistemologically a space for crossroads, due to the cultural diversities derived from the intersections of different existing cultures brought to the American continent. Multiethnic and multilingual crossing processes from which “varied

¹ In Portuguese: “Daí a importância de rever os referenciais comuns de historiografias diversas, inclusive, a literária cuja complexidade de relatos e narrativas também podem educar pelo desconhecimento, ignorância ou omissão não apenas da relevância dos afrodescendentes, originários e outros aqui não elencados. É preciso dar ao mundo a justa história de suas inteligências. O que se observa no campo das letras, no que se oferece ao saber, espaço e episteme é que o lugar privilegiado da escrita no contexto colonial latino-americano relaciona-se ao triunfo da política sobre a diferença e agora apresenta-se importante saber o que pensa a diferença sobre a política que as afasta do mundo e outras pessoas.”

vernacular formations emerge, some wearing new faces, others mimicking, with subtle differences, old styles” (Martins, 2003, p. 69).² The term *Encruzilhadas* regiments the understanding of this diverse dynamic of sign paths, interactions, and junctions, since the idea of *Encruzilhadas* as a concept enables the interpretation of systemic and epistemic transits that arise from intercultural and cross-cultural processes, where performative practices, conceptions and worldviews, philosophical convictions, and varied knowledge collide and intersect each other. In Yoruba/Nagô philosophy, as well as in Bantu, the crossroads is a sacred place of interventions between systems and spheres of multiple epistemologies, thus representing possibilities and confluences of knowledge, mobility, transmutability, and (re)invention. In many African and African-American cultures, the Crossroads is also the place of the deity Èṣù (Exú), the lord of the Crossroads, a dynamic principle that mediates all acts of creation and interpretation of knowledge, being the channel through which the orishas and humans communicate. In addition to connecting with the ancestors and their representations, Exú is conceived as a dynamic element of everything that exists, propelling the entire process of semiosis, production, and communication of meaning.

Exú is a symbol of great complexity and richness, which relates to male and female ancestors and their collective representations, being the dynamic constitutive element not only of supernatural beings but also of everything that exists. Thus, the logic of the intersection does not recognize only one perspective nor does it enclose the path itself, but it establishes connections, which are in line with the idea of Transculturation put forward by the Cuban ethnomusicologist Fernando Ortiz (1987) in the sense of enabling black cultures to cross, not allowing the overlapping of forms but the crossing of meeting points (Ferreira, 2019). Convergent, Luiz Rufino (2019) proposes the political/epistemological/educational project *Pedagogia das Encruzilhadas* [Pedagogy of the Crossroads], which is a way of maintaining African knowledge resignified in the African diaspora along with the rupture with the Western rational monologism that despised other epistemes considered racially invalid or inferior.

Rufino details the importance of his proposal, which is political, poetic, and ethical, and acts epistemologically against what he calls the colonial charge, which is the

² In Portuguese: “variadas formações vernaculares emergem, algumas vestindo novas faces, outras mimetizando, com sutis diferenças, antigos estilos.”

coloniality of power that remains as a device that restricts, denies, and makes invisible other ways of knowing and being for the maintenance of European hegemony. The analytical perspective of the *Encruzilhadas* makes it possible to recognize the knowledge of cracks and borders—those that contradict the unique logic. Therefore, conceiving the *Encruzilhadas* concept for understanding the world from the potentialities of Exú and its power of mobilization and transmutation are ways of fighting all forms of absolutism because the power of the Encruzilhada is the intersection, which is the movement as Exú himself. *Encruzilhadas* is related to the history of black-African people and their descendants in the Americas, which was at all times, from departure to persistence, marked by the crossing. The crossing of the Atlantic and the crossing between Africans of different ethnicities incarcerated in slave ships, as well as the cultural crossing between black people, indigenous people, and Europeans in American lands, the *Encruzilhadas* engenders the crossing point of re-elaboration of identities in new spaces and other forms of surviving, where freedom did not exist.

However, the condition imposed on black people, of enslaving their bodies and subjectivities was not passively accepted, due to the countless strategies and struggles they carried out to free themselves and preserve their traditional knowledge, even if recreated far from their origins, as in the case of *Cimarronaje*. The word *Cimarronaje* derives from the Spanish word *Cimarrón(a)*, commonly used to designate a wild animal not domesticated or fleeing from the colonizers' properties. And finally, we have the meaning that developed during American colonialism to designate the enslaved who escaped from the settler's property and took refuge in the hills, searching for freedom. Considering the colonial relationship between Spain and Latin American countries, we consider that the first connotations are used to treat animals always in the sense of savagery and/or as a deviation of conduct; thus, the meanings are to explain that or those that do not follow what is established by the dominant determination. Similarly, the black subject, enslaved in the American colonies, was interpreted as an immodest animal for rebelling against his owner, since he was understood as a commodity and not as a rational being. Despite the unfavorable explanations that the *Cimarrón* term brings together in the Eurocentric scope, the fact of being a *cimarrón* means an act of resistance, which was essential for the survival of the African people and its epistemologies on the Latin American continent. In the proximity between literature and anthropology regarding

Cimarrón, there is the publication *Biografía de un cimarrón* [Biography of a Cimarrón] (1966) by the Cuban writer Miguel Barnet (1940). It deals with the transcription of the report of Esteban Montejo, a 104-year-old man who testified to Barnet about several moments in his life that were crossed by important historical facts such as the enslavement, its abolition, and his participation in the war for Cuban independence, among other socio-cultural aspects involving the black African presence in Cuba. Esteban describes the time he lived in the *barracones* (*senzala* or slave quarters), the cruel punishments by the masters, and his decision to become a *cimarrón*:

I never forgot the first time I tried to run away. This time I failed and was enslaved for a few more years for fear that they would put me in chains again. But I had a *cimarrón* spirit above me that wouldn't budge. And I kept quiet so that no one would betray me because I was always thinking about it; it surrounded my head and did not leave me calm; it was like an idea that never went away, and sometimes it even mortified me. Old niggers weren't friends to run away together. Women, even less so. Cimarrones were few. People were fearful of the mound. They said that if one escaped in any way, he would be captured. But for me, this idea gave me more turns than the others. I always had in mind that I was going to like the mound. And he knew that the field to work in was like hell. No one could do anything for themselves. It all depended on the master's words (Barnet, 2018, p. 33).³

The *cimarrón*, when escaping from the farms individually or in groups, organized a free society, built within the forests or in the mountains, which favored its defense and the obtainment of its own maintenance resources. Collective organizations that were consolidated in several Latin American countries, each with its own lexicon and peculiarities, represented a space of resistance and freedom. Confluent, Álvarez Filipich (2019) details that in Venezuela, these groupings were known as *cumbes*; in Colombia, as *palenques*; in Jamaica, in the English Caribbean and in the southern United States, they were known as *maroons*; in São Domingo and other parts of the French Caribbean, the

³ In the original: “A mí nunca se me ha olvidado la primera vez que intentó huirme. Esa vez me falló y estuve unos cuantos años esclavizado por temor a que me volvieran a poner los grillos. Pero yo tenía un espíritu de cimarrón arriba de mí, que no se alejaba. Y me callaba las cosas para que nadie hiciera traición porque yo siempre estaban pensando en eso, me rodeaba la cabeza y no me dejaba tranquilo; era como una idea que no se iba nunca, y a veces hasta me mortificaba. Los negros viejos no eran amigos de huirse. Las mujeres, menos. Cimarrones había pocos. La gente le tenía mucho miedo al monte. Decían que si uno se escapaba de todas maneras lo cogían. Pero a mí esa idea me daba más vueltas que a los demás. Yo siempre llevaba la figuración de que el monte me iba a gustar. Y sabía que el campo para trabajar era como el infierno. Uno no podía hacer nada de por sí. Todo dependía de las palabras del amo.”

term was *maronage*; in Cuba and Puerto Rico, as *cimarrones*. In Brazil, they were known as *mocambos* and later *quilombos*; a well-known example is the *Quilombo dos Palmares*. Some settlements of *cimarrones* were built in territories inhabited by indigenous people, constituting a space for both coexistence and resistance for other marginalized subjects. Abdias Nascimento (2009) explains that in 1590, a group of enslaved people fled to the middle of a forest located where the States of Alagoas and Pernambuco are currently located, in Brazil, establishing the *Quilombo dos Palmares*. At first, the group was small, but it eventually became a community of about 30,000 Africans. They organized the first government of free Africans in Latin America, consolidating themselves as the Palmares Republic, a territory belonging to all who worked there collectively; they resisted 27 wars organized against them by the Portuguese and Dutch. Palmares existed from 1595 to 1695, and Zumbi, of Banta origin, was its last king. The word *quilombo* does not mean escaped slave, but rather fraternal and free reunion, coexistence, and existential communion; historian Maria Beatriz Nascimento says that the *quilombo* was “[...] a place where freedom was practiced, where ethnic and ancestral ties were invigorated” (1979, p. 17 apud Nascimento, 2009, p. 204). The *quilombola* organizations were a unique human and cultural affirmation of Africans in integrating the practice of freedom. In them, they were able to take charge of their own narrative, which led to the concept of *quilombolismo*, coined by Abdias Nascimento, a term that represents both an anti-racist socio-political possibility and a proposal for the construction of a society inspired by *quilombos* and African cultures. It is an action that promotes the social emancipation of black people because it is based on their own history and fights official discourses that depreciate the black African legacy.

Alongside, *cimarronaje* in Hispanic-American countries represents not only the escape of the enslaved from the farms, but also a way of promoting spaces of freedom in the American context and, at the same time, recreating their own identity. In this sense, it is articulated to what Walter Mignolo (2008) regards as identity in politics as a decolonial thought because the racially inferiorized identity that was imposed on Africans by the colonizer made them operate means to free themselves, thus becoming *cimarróns* and constituting, together with other marginalized, an economic and political system that coexisted along that of the dominant ones during the colonial period. The marginal condition of the Afro-descendant engendered decolonial positions and actions, such as

that of the *cimarrón*, called by the colonizer as “undisciplined/untameable/insolent” because it practices its epistemic disobedience. In his study on cultural *cimarronaje* and African Latin American identity, researcher Franklin Miranda Robles (2011) explains that Afro-Latin American culture is created and (re)created through the constant process of conflict and contradiction of cultures in a Latin American colonial context, which is not of exclusive syntheses, syncretism, or hybridization but heterogeneous, which is neither autonomous nor assimilated nor blended harmoniously. The African Latin American identity demonstrates the constant reconstruction of an African cosmogenic matrix through a dynamic of resistance and conflicting appropriations of the cultures (Western and indigenous) with which it has historically met. African-Latin-American heterogeneity not only explains one’s own identity and a means of articulation with others, but also makes it possible to think of totalities as a nation, region, or subcontinent, formed by pluricultural dialogues, with Afro-descendants being a fundamental part. Thus, the exercise of *cimarronaje* represented an authentic and effective way to achieve freedom and cultural permanence because, in it, the African imagination was recovered, to be reworked together with the American multiplicity in a different and once more resistant identity.

Confluent, Rogerio Mendes (2019) and Jesús “Chucho” García (2020) reason that the *cimarronaje* did not end when the *cimarrón* escaped, but was completed with the creation of the *Palenques*, *Cumbes* and *Quilombos*, where African ancestry was resumed and lived in community. Being the first heterogeneous nucleus from which the African-Latin-American culture was built because, on the one hand, it refers to slavery and its consequences through the processes of struggle for the end of colonizing domination, and, on the other hand, it legitimizes identity reconstruction considering its historical complexity and its multiplicity in a constant cultural process of self-assertion and transmission of its knowledge through the *Pedagogy of Cimarronaje* through exchanges and re-elaborations at a permanent socio-cultural crossroads. Thus, when the African subject executed an act of *cimarronaje*, he preserved his ancestral knowledge, which was remembered and transmitted by oral tradition because “[...] in the complexity of their oral textuality and in the oral reading of memory, the African rhizomes inseminated the

European symbolic body and impregnated the lands of the Americas” (Martins, 2021, p. 208).⁴

Ancestral knowledge preserved by *cimarronas* practices was passed on orally as an ancestral heritage between generations during centuries of dominant impositions that practiced epistemic racism. This knowledge symbolizes what García (2020) regards as *Afro-epistemologies*, which are the perceptions and wisdom that African peoples and their descendants have about themselves as a collective construction of knowledge without being mediated by outsiders. Thus, *Afro-epistemology* is an episteme centered on the African subject, and it is relevant to reflect on its persistence on the American continent since it did not fit the canonical pattern. Persistence that was only possible through the practice of transmitting ancestral knowledge defined as *Pedagogia da Cimarronaje* [Cimarronaje Pedagogy] (Mendes, 2019; García, 2020), which means a mechanism of daily pedagogical practices and techniques for the Afro-epistemological dissemination and preservation of various African cultural codes, such as the beating of drums, the braiding of a hairstyle, the preparation of a meal, among other knowledge disseminated through sophisticated methodology. It is the *Pedagogia da Cimarronaje* that disseminates the Afro-epistemologies that have been conserved and innovated in all their diversity; valuing them collaborates so that the Latin American can know and acknowledge themselves from a cultural heritage that is also African; in addition, it collaborates in the deconstruction of the discourse that reduces the African Latin American and his contributions to primitivism, stereotypes, and fetishism. For Mendes (2019), the *Pedagogia da Cimarronaje* is an action that teaches us to see *cimarronaje* beyond the physical spaces of *Palenques* and *Quilombos* to glimpse this educational process of building a *cimarrona* intellectuality that has its own paradigms and knowledge. *Cimarrones* are organic intellectuals who have preserved their Afro-epistemologies, since the “concept of *cimarronaje* is no longer related to black people who resist because they flee to refer to black people who resist because they think” (Mendes, 2019, p. 64).⁵ Thus, from these referenced Afro paradigms, we will focus on the book *Changó, el gran putas*

⁴ In Portuguese: “na complexidade de sua textualidade oral e na oralitura da memória os rizomas africanos inseminaram o corpo simbólico europeu e engravidaram as terras das américas.”

⁵ In Portuguese: “conceito de *cimarronaje* deixa de estar relacionado aos negros que resistem porque fogem para referir-se aos negros que resistem porque pensam.”

[Changó, the Great Whores] (1983) to reflect on the African Latin American and its (Afro)epistemological contributions in the American crossroads space.

1 *Changó, el Gran Putas: Mythical-Ancestral Crossroads*

In 1983, Manuel Zapata Olivella published the book *Changó, el gran putas*, considered by many researchers as the author's greatest work. Indeed, its breadth is gigantic, both for the theme it addresses and for its extension. The first edition has 528 pages dedicated to the narrative of the secular epic of the African diaspora in the Americas. The story embracing more than 500 years of history begins when Africans were brutally uprooted from their lands, families, and peoples, dealing with the misfortunes suffered by them on the slave ship, as well as their arrival as slaves/merchandise in the colonies, and continues with the first battles for the survival of the black *cimarrones* in Cartagena, going through the Haitian revolution and the independence process in American countries until the struggle for civil rights of Afro-descendants in the United States. Zapata entangles such historical events with African mythology and Yoruba religious tradition, which makes the work characterized by its hybridity and authenticity (Ortiz, 2001).

The first part, *Los Orígenes* [The Origins], begins with the epic poem *La tierra de los ancestros* [The Land of the Ancestors] followed by two subchapters composed in prose called *La trata* [The Treat] and *La alargada huella entre dos mundos* [The Enlarged Footsteps between two Worlds]. This part focuses on African worldviews and Yoruba orishas, conceptions that will command the plot of the narrative as the arrival of Africans to the Americas takes place due to the orisha Xangô purpose for his children, which will result in the *American muntu*.⁶ Titled *American Muntu*, the second part deals with the resistance movements of the enslaved in the colonies and the birth of Benkos Biohó, a *cimarrón* leader who founded and led the Palenque de San Basilio in Colombia. Part three, *La rebelión de los vodús* [The Rebellion of the Voodooos], is inspired by the black revolution that took place in Haiti, highlighting historical names such as Makandal,

⁶ In the Bantu language, the word “muntu” means person and is pluralized by the word “bantu”. The writer Zapata Olivella explains that this concept is more transcendent because it is interconnected with other beings and elements in the coexistence of different periods.

Boukman, Dessalines and Henri Chistophe, self-proclaimed king of Haiti. *Las sangres encontradas* [The Bloods Found] tells about the Latin American struggles for independence and the participation of Afro-descendants in this process. It also talks about some historical characters of the independence movement, such as Simón Bolívar, José Prudencio Padilla, Aleijadinho and José María Morelos. The fifth and last part, *Los ancestros combatientes* [The Combative Ancestors], addresses the revolutionary civil rights movement organized in the United States by the historical characters Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey and the fictional female character Agne Brown.

The piece *Changó* is regarded as an epic by critics because there are in its structure some elements referring to this genre, such as the narration of important facts for society, the mention of historical characters, and mythological references. However, the Afro-Colombian carries out transgressions to the form of the Greek poetic genre, insofar as he mostly composes it in prose and exalts African cosmogonies, either by resorting to Yoruba mythology, or by portraying the protagonism of African Americans and their struggles, in which the image of the European white man does not have the centrality of glorious and heroic actions, but rather is called *Loba Blanca* [White Female Wolf] and represents barbarism and violence throughout the epic narrative. The narrative (re)creation metaphorizes the crossroads as a nodal point of intersection and possibilities in which there is a transgression of the canonical standard so that the reader, navigating the reading, has another understanding of the trans-African saga and its importance in the socio-cultural constitution of both man and the American continent, as the writer warns in his opening letter about the pertinence of his epic narrative:

Now embark on the reading and let Elegba, the path opener, reveal to you your future steps already written in the Tablets of Ifá, even before you were born. Sooner or later you had to face this truth: the history of the black man in America is as much yours as that of the Indian or that of the white man who will accompany him to the conquest of freedom for all (Zapata Olivella, 2020, p. 31).⁷

⁷ In Spanish: “Ahora embárcate en la lectura y deja que Elegba, el abridor de caminos, te revele tus futuros pasos ya escritos en las Tablas de Ifá, desde antes de nacer. Tarde o temprano tenías que enfrentarte a esta verdad: la historia del hombre negro en América es tan tuya como la del indio o de la del blanco que lo acompañarán a la conquista de la libertad de todos.”

We outline in this introduction that reading is a mythical ancestral journey elaborated in a transposition of times, in which Elegá (Exú), will simultaneously open the paths/readings and intermediate the communication between worlds. Symbolically, it indicates a possible return for the reader to know and acknowledge their origin, enter other possibilities, and follow other paths. As mentioned before, the first part of *Changó* begins with verses that declare the origin of the *American Muntu* and the exile of African peoples to America. In the epic poem *Los orichas Deja que cante la kora* [The Orishas Let them Sing the Chorus], Ngafúa is the narrator who invokes the ancestry of his father *Kissi-Kama* to sing the long story of the *navigating Nagó*:

Hear ye the ears of the Muntu, hear ye!
Hear! Hear! Hear!
Ears of the Muntu, listen!
(The kora laughs
cried the kora,
its sister strings
will narrate a single song
the story of Nago
the tragic journey of the Muntu
to the exile continent of Changó)
(Zapata Olivella, 2020, p. 39, author emphasis).⁸

His singing is accompanied by a stringed instrument called *Kora*, which incorporates in its strings the pains of his ancestors. Ngafúa sings that there is a voodoo hidden in the *Kora*, an ancient pain of someone who cries the pain of mothers when they lose their children, the pain of the orphans. The singer, in the following verse, resorts to orishality so that the drum voices give life to his words and warm them so that it is also an inspiration, bringing the grace that revives his singing and dries the tears of the women set aside from their husbands, and orphans of their children. Subsequently, Ngafúa recalls the creative force of the supreme God *Odumare Nzame* (Oludumare), from the creation of the world and the orishas, who represent the unbreakable link between the living and the dead. We realize that the *cimarrone* subversion occurs insofar as the initial structure of the epic poem is used to represent African cosmogonies and worldviews, since, as Santos (2018) states, Zapata exchanges the exaltation of the Greek gods for the exaltation

⁸ In Spanish: “¡Oídos del Muntu, oíd!/ ¡Oíd! ¡Oíd! ¡Oíd! ¡Oídos del Muntu, oíd!/ (La kora ríe/ lloraba la/ kora,/ sus cuerdas hermanas/ narrarán un solo canto/ la historia de Nagó/ el trágico viaje del Muntu/ al continente exilio de Changó).”

of the black African gods, so that the epic chants commonly accompanied by Greek instruments, such as the lyre, are harmonized by the *Kora* in *Changó*.

When singing, Nfagúa performs a performative ritual that reconnects him to the memory of those who preceded him. Thus, his voice carries the legacy of the voices of his ancestors, such as his father Kissi-Kama, who was also a *griot* and passed on to him this traditional knowledge that is invigorated and updated at every corner, as the writer expresses: “I am Ngafúa, Kissi-Kama’s son./ Give me, father, your image-creating voice,/ your voice so often heard in the shadow of the baobab” (Zapata Olivella, 2020, p. 39).⁹ Following this line, in the case of expressions of African roots, Leda Maria Martins explains that each song, due to its performative character, has its proper time and place, and the sense of the word and its power of action depend a lot on its execution, and “[...] knowing how to activate the energy of the song, the vibration of the voice, and the gestural movements is needed for the full efficiency and capacity of the song in the production of the senses.” (Martins, 2021, p. 81).¹⁰ Therefore, the way and place in which *Kissi-Kama* intoned his singing as a *griot* is an artistic performative creation that aesthetically elaborates the ancestral memory in a mixture of sensations, rhythms and energies to which Ngafúa wishes to reconnect himself to, to give the same ritual significance to his singing. Since it is of paramount importance that ritual language emphasizes the power of the spoken word and its power of action because the word has its own power and can produce a beneficial or evil effect according to the intention and dignity of those who vocalize it, such as Ngafúa wishes to invoke in his singing:

*Ancestors
shadows of my elders
shadows who have the good fortune to converse with the Orichas
accompany me with your voices and drums,
I want to give life to my words.
Come closer footprints without footsteps
fire without wood
food of the living
I need your flame
to sing the exile of the Muntu
still asleep in the sleep of the seed.
I need your joy*

⁹ In the original: “Soy Ngafúa, hijo de Kissi-Kama. /Dame, padre, tu voz creadora de imágenes, / tu voz tantas veces escuchada a la sombra del baobab”.

¹⁰ In Portuguese: “[...] saber acionar a energia do canto, a vibração da voz e os movimentos gestuais é necessário para a plena eficiência e capacidade do canto na produção dos sentidos.”

your song
your dance
your inspiration
your weeping (Zapata Olivella, 2020, pp. 41-42, author emphasis).¹¹

The invocation of Ngafúa as an ancestral cultural trait incorporates values, epistemologies, and interpretations that rescue symbolic elements for the African tradition, such as the image of the Baobab, a large tree originating in Africa shrouded in a strong mystical aura (Lopes, 2011); because it is under the shadows of the leafy Baobab canopies that the community gets together to counsel with the elders and to listen to the narratives of the *griots*.¹² For Eduardo David de Oliveira, the meeting under the Baobab canopy represents an epistemological space where one learns and teaches, that is, a place where Baobab Pedagogy is carried out, a learning that arises from both information and experience and does not separate the said from the lived, the theory from practice, a wisdom not linked to the academic field, and that is usually carried out in African daily life.

Another symbolic element rescued is the presence of percussion instruments that are played along the songs of *griot* Ngafúa. Simas (2020) explains that in many cultures the drums tell stories and have their own grammars, which often express what the word does not reach. People taught in the percussion knowledge learn the appropriate beatings for each deity, because there is a sophisticated pedagogy of the drum composed of the silences of the speech and the responses of the body. This energetic representation resounds in Ngafúa's singing, due to the importance this instrument has as a manifestation of Axé (*Áse*),¹³ because in African rituals the music is vibratory and guided by the modalities of rhythmic performance in which percussion instruments are essential (Sodré,

¹¹ In Spanish: "Ancestros/ sombras de mis mayores/ sombras que tenéis la suerte de conversar con los Orichas/ acompañadome con vuestras voces tambores,/ quiero dar vida a mis palabras./ Acercáos huellas sin pisadas/ fuego sin leña/ alimento de los vivos/ necesito vuestra llama/ para cantar el exilio del Muntu/ todavía dormido en el sueño de la semilla./ Necesito vuestra alegría/ vuestro canto vuestra danza vuestra / inspiración vuestro llanto."

¹² Researcher M'baré N 'gom (2003) talks about the *griot* for the African tradition because it is a multifaceted individual who plays a primordial role in sociocultural relations because he is the guardian of institutionalized memory, considered an advisor, messenger, and wise person by the community.

¹³ Term of Yoruba origin that, in its philosophical sense, means the force that allows life's accomplishment, ensuring dynamic existence, enabling events and transformations. Among Yorubans (*áse*), it means law, command, or order—power as the ability to accomplish something or to act on a thing or person. Lopes, Nei. *Enciclopédia brasileira da diáspora africana*. Selo Negro Edições. Kindle Edition.

2017). Thus, one can see in the construction of Ngafúa's song one of the peculiarities of the African aesthetics intrinsic to the beating of the drum because

it is a unique verbal expression, where the extrinsic rhythm, like that produced by the *tantan*, is valued as a mnesic trait and marked by the ability to arouse emotion on both psychological and magical levels, thus becoming emotion, i.e. a movement of communion of man with the cosmic forces (Queiroz, 2012, p. 32).¹⁴

In *Changó*, narration is conjugated in both first and third person, which demonstrates the high level of language and technique of the Zapatian narrative, since Ngafúa stages the mediating voice between the worlds of the living and the dead, between the past, present, and future. In addition to being the *griot* of preambular epic chants, Ngafúa is the one who establishes at other times the contact between men and the orishas, carrying out the function of messenger and priest of Ifá. The multifaceted aspect of Ngafúa and its presence in several episodes temporally distant for centuries represents a subversion of the chronological time determined by Western optics, since there is no narrative linearity but a continuous temporal flow in which past, present, and future are shuffled into a structure boosted by ancestry. Ngafúa is configured as a narrator linked to a narrative time prior to him, but that simultaneously constitutes and is inserted in him, because “the narrative voice, articulated in the evanescent moment of enunciation, presents the narrated and the ancestral narrators, and also singularizes the current performer” (Martins, 1997, p. 63),¹⁵ thus intoning an individual voice that is also collective due to its ancestral legacy.

It is appropriate to say that ancestry is of inestimable relevance in an Afro-referenced conception; according to Martins (1997), it can be understood both as a philosophical principle of African civilizing thought as a means by which Life Force emanates throughout the cosmos, understanding that the Life Force, for African philosophies, is responsible for the visible and invisible lives existing in the universe and that all beings have their own Life Force arising from their ancestors. Ancestral time is

¹⁴ In Portuguese: “uma expressão verbal diferenciada, onde o ritmo extrínseco, a exemplo daquele produzido pelo *tantã*, é valorizado como traço mnésico e marcado pela capacidade de despertar a emoção tanto no nível psicológico como no nível mágico, tornando-se assim *e-moção*, isto é, movimento de comunhão do homem com as forças cósmicas.”

¹⁵ In Portuguese: “a voz da narração, articulada no momento evanescente da enunciação, presentifica o narrado e os narradores antepassados, mas também singulariza o *performer* atual.”

riddled with countless floating identities that colors the patterns printed on the fabric of existence, so it is not a time in a straight line since “it is a time that recreates itself, because memory is only a mechanism to enter the ancestry that has the current time as a reference” (Oliveira, 2021, p. 214).¹⁶ In this sense, the narrative is elaborated so that time runs in a spiral way, which converges with what Martins (2021) conceives as spiral time, since ancestry is segmented by curved and recurrent time, a spiral that returns and transmutes, “a time ontologically experienced as contiguous and simultaneous movements of feedback, prospecting, and reversibility” (Martins, 2021, p. 52).¹⁷ Spiral time is the result of several connections with the cosmic movement, which, in a retrospective and prospective dynamic, inserts all beings and all things. The imminent coexistence of past, present, and future denotes a complex ancestral ontology in which time turns back and forth, composing the spiral present, which is made up in the Zapatean narrative in various ways. One of them is the presence of phrases and verbs of different tenses in the same syntactic construction in order to break the conventional linearity of time, as demonstrated in a literary fragment in which Ngafúa invokes Elegba:

Listen to my story
yesterday’s story
paths of return
not yet walked
forgotten stories of the future
future stories of the past
is the unborn echo
of tomorrow without beginning [...]
(Zapata Olivella, 2020, pp. 64-66).¹⁸

Another is the reappearance of characters such as Ngafúa, Sosa Illamba, Nago, and others, in different episodes distanced by centuries, breaking the chronological order and the Western conception of finitude, being placed in multiple temporalities as floating in concomitant spaces. The writer also makes use of some names and terms in a reiterative way, such as the first name Domingo and the terms *ekobio* (companion) and

¹⁶ In Portuguese: “é um tempo que se recria, pois, a memória é tão somente um mecanismo de acesso à ancestralidade que tem como referência o corrente.”

¹⁷ In Portuguese: “um tempo ontologicamente experimentado como movimentos contíguos e simultâneos de retroação, prospecção e reversibilidades.”

¹⁸ In Spanish: “Escucha mi relato / historia del ayer / caminos del regreso / no andados todavía/ historias olvidadas del futuro / futuras historias del pasado / es el eco no nacido / del mañana sin comienzo [...].”

semilla/kulonga (seed), which, even when repeated in the narrative, do not necessarily refer to the same subject or object. However, they are linked by the spiraling ancestral conception. In the space of this reflection on the narrative representation of spiral time, we think of the creation of the American *Muntu* (American man) as one of these spiral resources, given that the Life Force emanating from the justice spark of the Xangô Orisha is (re)born in those designated as libertarian leaders and *Cimarrones*, in a spiral movement in which everything goes back and forth because the ancestral energy continues to remake and rework itself. That converges to what the philosopher Kimbwandènde Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau puts as a lesson learned from Congo's cosmology about force in motion, which is: "I am going back and forth being around the center of the vital forces. I am because I went and (re)went before, in such a way that i will be and (re)be again" (Fu-Kiau, 1994, *apud* martins, 2021, p. 36).¹⁹

These are some of Zapata's narrative strategies to rescue traditional African elements and their reverberation in the Latin American continent as a mythical-ancestral return, in such a way that its spiral construction dates back to ancestral time that moves discontinuously, non-linearly, in spiral time.

2 Crisscrossed: Kulonga Chispa-Sol-Xangô and the American Muntu

Ngafúá, in his mythical poem, brings the account that "Changó" (Xangô), son of "Yemayá" (Iemanjá), known as the war Orisha and inventor of lightning and thunder, prepared two of his best gladiators, Gbonka and Timi, so they became warriors. To the first, Changó handed his powerful sword that cut off the head and tail of the lightning, and to the second, he gave the cunning of war and the shine of his spears. And along with his army and his trained captains, the valiant god of war managed to unify the kingdoms of Niger. Ngafúá says that jealousy, like a scavenger vulture, deposited harmful envy in the heart of the warrior orisha, so that he, blinded by his greatness, envied his two faithful generals to the point of devising the perverse strategy of facing them in a deadly duel.

So, Orunla, the lord of life and death, undid the tragedy, and Orno Oba, the first and only immortal man, pronounced in several places against the hated Chango so that he

¹⁹ In Portuguese: "Eu estou indo-e-voltando sendo em torno do centro das forças vitais. Eu sou porque fui e re-fui antes, de tal modo que eu serei e re-serei novamente."

would be expelled from the “Imperial Oyo” and the noble Gbonka would be crowned. The Orisha, impregnated by pain, restrained his fury, took the injury, and condemned his subjects to exile in a distant country. Chango also determined that the “Muntu” condemned to exile would become responsible for freeing himself from the tyrannical wars of the blond-haired “Wolves”; the Orisha became later a “*Padre-Fuego-Sol*” [Priste-Fire-Sun] when he was repelled by the lava of the volcano, returning daily to the realm of mortals to contemplate the effort of the exiled *Muntu*. In a dream, Ngafúa deciphers among lightning the fiery words of the curse of the Changó orisha, who designated for exile those who had risen against him and expelled him from the abode of the gods.

However, Changó reveals to Ngafúa that the same place of exile for the African Muntu will also be a crossroads that will engender a new being arising from the ethnic crossing between indigenous, Europeans and Africans:

Eia! Eia! Eia!
The cruel
the blind
curse of Changó!
“But America
womb of the Indian,
virgin womb violated seven times by the She-wolf
fecundated by the Muntu
with her blood
sweats
and her screams
- revealed me Changó-
will give birth to a child
black child
a white child
Indian son
half earth
half tree
half wood
half fire
by himself
redeemed.”
Eia, son of the Muntu!
Freedom
freedom
is your destiny
(Zapata Olivella, 2020, p. 59).²⁰

²⁰ In Spanish: “¡Eía! ¡Eía! ¡Eía! / ¡La cruel/ la ciega/ maldición de Changó! / “Pero América/ matriz del indio,/ vientre virgen violado siete veces por la Loba/ fecundada por el Muntu/ con su sangre/ sudores/ y sus gritos/ —revelome Changó—/ parirá un niño/ hijo negro/ hijo blanco/ hijo indio/ mitad tierra/ mitad

The detailing of the mythopoetics reported by Ngafúa is necessary to understand how Zapata Olivella takes possession of the myth to define exile as Xangô's punishment for his descendants. While it is extremely symbolic insofar as the writer thinks about the origin of the "American Muntu" based on two concepts: one of Yoruba origin, which is the deity Xangô, and the other is the term "Muntu," of Bantu origin, which allude to the two largest African ethnic groups brought to Latin America. The *Chango* Orisha, Xangô or *Ẹ̀ṣàngó* in Yoruba mythology is the orisha son of Iemanjá and Orungan, venerated as the god of war, fertility and dance, he is the owner of thunder and the governor of justice, his symbol is the two-bladed axe called *osé* (oxé) and is greeted by the expression *Káwó Kábièsilẹ̀ Ẹ̀ṣàngó*. According to Prandi (2001), he would have been one of the first kings of the City of Oio (Oyo Imperial) that mastered most of the Yoruba region, which made his cult largely widespread in Africa.

While Muntu means "person," "human being" and its plural is the word "bantu," meaning "people"; however, the meaning goes beyond this understanding, as Zapata explains:

The concept implied in this word transcends the connotation of man, since it includes the living and the dead, as well as the animals, vegetables, minerals, and things that serve them. More than beings or people, material or physical, it alludes to the force that unites man in a single knot with his ancestry and descent immersed in the present, past and future universe (Zapata Olivella, 1983, p. 514).²¹

In the societies of the Bantu group, a pregnant woman is the bearer of an incumbency full of strength and energy, for generating the genetic continuity of old irradiations in a new form. Therefore, the whole community awaits the arrival of this new muntu, because this new individual is considered the dawn of the living sun, and, according to the energetic charge that was passed on to him in his conception, he may be "[...] endowed (or not) with the potential for innate self-regeneration of each human being,

árbol/ mitad leña/ mitad fuego/ por si mismo/ redimido"/ ¡Eífa, hijo del Muntu!/ La libertad/ la libertad/ es tu destino.

²¹ In Spanish: "El concepto implícito en esta palabra trasciende la connotación de hombre, ya que incluye a los vivos y difuntos, así como a los animales, vegetales, minerales y cosas que le sirven. Más que entes o personas, materiales o físicos, alude a la fuerza que une en un solo nudo al hombre con su ascendencia y descendencia inmersas en el universo presente, pasado y futuro."

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which constitutes the Life Force, circulating as electricity throughout its body.” (Fu-Kiau *apud* Lopes; Simas, 2020, p. 29).²² So, it is possible to allude the Banta Afro-epistemology to the Zapatean narrative creation of “Muntu,” given that metaphorically it is conceived by the energetic understanding of Bantu thought that enchants the Yoruba power of the Xangô orisha, i.e., of being a warrior and a righteous, at the same time, intertwined with nature and everything that exists in it as an animated or inanimate being, maintaining the inseparable connection with ancestry, the root, the basic, and structuring principle. The symbolic image of the Bantu people of the newborn as “living sun” alludes to Chango’s transformation into “Padre-Fuego-Sol” in Zapata’s plot. Metonymically, this new “Muntu” is the spark that manifests the mythical-ancestral identity of this warrior orisha for freedom and justice on the American continent.

In the book, the birth of *Muntu* is narrated in the first person by *Nagó*, the one chosen by *Elegba* (Exú) to accompany the *Muntu*. In the narrative, all those chosen by *Elegba* have a sign on the body depicting two serpents, a mark that is also in those who bring the righteous spark of Xangô, becoming an ancestral recognition for the black African community, regardless its ethnicity, because the one who owns it is considered a chosen one. The chosen *Muntu* is born in the sea in the midst of a violent storm, among water and fire, and the seed of the living is received by *Yemanyá* and *Changó*; his mother *Sosa Illamba*, weakened by childbirth, gives it to *Nagó* to protect him, so the two cross the sea guided by *Elegba* and for nine days were fed by the salt of the waves. Upon sighting the coast, *Nagó* reports that indigenous women awaited *Muntu* at the beach to breastfeed him, and *Muntu*, protected by the orisha which is the mother of fish, swam alone like a fish searching for the new destination that *Changó* has assigned for him. In this symbolic narrative context, the first seed is born and spread on American soil and originates the *American Muntu*, as prophesied by *Ngafúa* in his first songs:

Let us listen to the voice of the wise
the will of the Orichas riding
the body of their horses.
Today we learn the millet
the sacred seed
in the navel of mother Africa
so that it dies

²² In Portuguese: “[...] dotado ou não do potencial de autorregeneração inato de cada ser humano, o qual constitui a Força Vital, circulando como eletricidade em todo o corpo.”

to rot in her womb
and be reborn in the blood of America
(Zapata Olivella, 2020, p. 42).²³

The second part of the book, called *El Muntu Americano*, deals with the birth of *Benkos Biohó*, narrated by the character *Domingo*, another one chosen by *Elegba*. It says that after seven days in labor, *Potenciana Biohó* gives birth to her son, but, like *Sosa Illamba*, she dies and returns to the kingdom of the ancestors. During childbirth, *Domingo*, who is also a Babalorisha, wishes to know the fate of the *Muntu* about to be born, so he consults the game of “nueces de cola,” a kind of nut. In the sacred ritual performed by Domingo, the invisible shadow of Ngafúa appears and speaks through the mouth of the Babalorisha:

Hear ye, ears of the muntu! hear ye! Here the avenger is born, the arm of fire is already with us, the doll that will escape from the crickets, the tooth that shatters the chains. Hear ye who hear me! Hear ye who bring to this life the children of the muntu. Listen: the protégé of Elegba brings the blood of a prince. *He is born among us, he will be our king.* Elegba's protégé will be baptized with the Christian name of Dominic but we will all call him Benkos, *because Benkos is the name of the great-great-grandfather king who sowed his kulonda.* Raised in the house of Father Claver he will rise up against it. *He will die in the hands of his enemies but his magara, breath of other lives, will revive in the ekobios who rise against the master* (Zapata Olivella, 2020, p. 133, our emphasis).²⁴

When constructing the metaphor of the *American Muntu*, the writer brings the names of historical characters that merge themselves into the mythical-ancestral universe, such as the *cimarrón* leader Benkos Biohó (mid-XVI–1621) and the Spanish Priest Pedro Claver (1580–1654), thus performing a questioning re-reading of the historical past and weaving an innovative image centered on black-African contributions. In the mythical-ancestral construction of the *Muntu*, on many occasions Zapata uses the word “semilla”

²³ In Spanish: “Escuchemos la voz de los sabios/ la voluntad de los Orichas cabalgando/ el cuerpo de sus caballos./ Hoy enteramos el mijo/ la semilla sagrada/ en el ombligo de la madre África/ para que muera/ se pudra en su seno/ y renazca en la sangre de América.”

²⁴ In Spanish: “¡Oíd, oídos del muntu! ¡Oíd! Aquí nace el vengador, ya está con nosotros el brazo de fuego, la muñeca que se escapará de los grillos, el diente que destroza las cadenas. ¡Oigan los que me oyen! Oigan ustedes que traen a esta vida los hijos del muntu. Escuchen: el protegido de Elegba trae sangre de príncipe. Nace entre nosotros, será nuestro rey. Protegido de Elegba será bautizado con el nombre cristiano de Domingo pero todos lo llamaremos Benkos, porque Benkos se llama el tatarabuelo rey que sembró su kulonda. Criado en la casa del Padre Claver se alzará contra ella. Morirá en manos de sus enemigos pero su magara, soplo de otras vidas, revivirá en los ekobios que se alcen contra el amo.”

(seed) to compare with the idea of formation (foundation, fertilization), which builds a foundational myth based on ancestral wisdom. In the aforementioned literary fragment, Ngafúa, in his premonitions, says that *Benkos*' great-great-grandfather sowed his *Kulonga*, which in Bantu language means the physical and spiritual seed with which an ancestor auspices the birth of a creature by sowing it in his mother's womb (Zapata Olivella, 2010), i.e., the great-great-grandfather predicts the future of *Benkos* emanating the ancestral burden of reign for him. Alongside, Ngafúa says that even after the death of the leader *Benkos*, his *Magara* will reborn in those who rebelled themselves against the oppressor, and *Magara* is the breath of life, intelligence, the spiritual force that intervenes in the biological formation of the human being.

At this point, we can draw a parallel between the analogy of the seed and the traditional knowledge of the West African ethnic group, the Dogon, because for them, the principle of life and reproduction starts in a seed, a philosophy that is interpreted by the idea of Seminality. As previously stated, for the Bantus there is a Life Force that emanates energy to the whole world, which correlates to the thought of the Dogon who think of existence based on vibration, energy, and emanation, an energetic materiality in a spiraling motion of the germinal conception as a life reproducer. For the Dogon, the cosmological and cosmogenic understanding of existence is based on the seed *Kizi Uzi* or *Digitaria Exilis*, which means "[...] the small thing," so that "this seed, triggered by an internal vibration, breaks the capsule that surrounds it and arises to reach the most remote confines of the universe" (Dieterlen; Griaule, 1959, p. 141 *apud* Oliveira, 2019, unpaged).²⁵ The small seed is simultaneously the smallest part of the universe and the whole universe, as it spreads and germinates all the planet. Therefore, we deduce that the knowledge of all the Dogon who understand the seed as an origin through the vibratory force, perhaps was one of the many Afro-epistemological possibilities in the Zapatean narrative construction, as well as the Banta and Yoruba epistemes.

²⁵ In Portuguese: "esta semente, acionada por uma vibração interna, rompe a cápsula que a envolve, e surge para chegar aos mais remotos confins do universo."

3 Zapatean Narrative and the Potential of Exú

Regarding the Afro authorship works, the Costa Rican writer of Afro-Caribbean origin Quince Duncan (2005) explains that they are productions in which the Afro-descendant author uses an internalized perspective on his or her ethnicity. Because they are their own compositions, with symbols and myths that do not correspond to canonical definitions, and fit into a new literary trend, which Duncan calls *Afro-realist*. He elaborates on Afro-realism as a literary current that does not make use of the predominant traditional literary references, does not evoke Greek myth or folklorism, is not black literature, nor is it magical realism, being a new expression that allows an Africanizing subversion.

The Costa Rican writer exposes that the Afro-realist current has six basic features, namely: the effort to restore the African American voice through the use of Afrocentric terminology; the claim to African symbolic memory; the informed restructuring of the historical memory of the African diaspora; the reaffirmation of the concept of ancestral community; the adoption of a perspective centered within the subject; and the search for and proclamation of African identity. It is noticeable that *Changó* aesthetically elaborates many of the highlighted *Afro-realist* aspects, in view of the way he constructs a narrative that values the black-African identity and calls for it as a contribution to Latin-American socio-cultural formation. The restitution of the voice of the black subject is made from the narrative centrality in African cosmogonies, in which several elements are incorporated, such as: myths; spirituality; the African terms; the singer/griot narrator; musical instruments and sacred objects; i.e., an Afro-epistemological legacy evoked as inspiration in the construction of the work.

Regarding the claim of African symbolic memory, Duncan asserts that *Chango's* preambular poem dealing with the American Muntu is a way of highlighting the Banta heritage on the American continent. It is also worth adding the influence of Yoruba spirituality through Xangô Orisha in this Yoruba epistemological construction of the American man (Santos, 2018). There are other ethnic groups that Zapata Olivella makes a point of mentioning, such as the Ashanti, Wolofs, Sereres, Carabalis, Mandingas, Congos, Fulas, etc., going against the official discourse that reduces and encompasses this ethnic-cultural diversity in the term “black,” architected in a logic that depreciates both

the subject and African knowledge in relation to supposed white superiority. Zapata reaffirms the ancestral concept by referring to and expanding the sense of the word *ekobio*, which regiments what Duncan regards as the consciousness of the ancestral community in its entirety, both historical and geographical, and encompasses both the African continent and the territories inhabited by Afro-descendants, alongside their worldviews and afro-epistemologies. In the same way, it is due to the metaphor of the American Muntu with the image of the “seed/kulonga,” as an African ancestral energy that spreads in the Americas.

Considering the theoretical perceptions put forward in relation to *Changó*, we perceive a confluence between them regarding the resumption of historical events in order to fictionalize them, based on other approaches, reinterpreting them. Zapata enlists a contradiction or another discourse in relation to the hegemonic truths imposed, mainly, on black Africans, which is carried out through a transgressive writing that seeks to free itself from the euro standards referenced in a dynamic of crossing, conflicts and (re)creation. Zapata’s transgression implies *cimarronaje* as an act of safeguarding Afro-epistemologies and reworking them in the American context, based on intersections with other knowledge. Its narrative construction takes place through the appropriation of canonical forms and their Afrocentric aesthetic transmutation. Transgressive breaks allow the reader to access other knowledge concealed by the hegemonic perspective, as Zapata himself states in *Changó*’s introduction:

Whatever your race, culture or class, do not forget that you are stepping on the land of America, the New World, the dawn of the new humanity. Therefore become a child. If you encounter strange ghosts-word, character, plot-take them as a challenge to your imagination. Forget the academy, the verb tenses, the borders that separate life from death, because in this saga there is no other trace than the one you leave: you are the prisoner, the discoverer, the founder, the liberator. (Zapata Olivella, 2020, p. 37).²⁶

²⁶ In Spanish: “Cualesquiera que sean tu raza, cultura o clase, no olvides que pisas la tierra de América, el Nuevo Mundo, la aurora de la nueva humanidad. Por lo tanto hazte niño. Si encuentras fantasmas extraños—palabra, personaje, trama—tómalo como un desafío a tu imaginación. Olvidate de la academia, de los tiempos verbales, de las fronteras que separan la vida de la muerte, porque en esta saga no hay más huella que la que tú dejes: eres el prisionero, el descubridor, el fundador, el libertador.”

The reader becomes a navigator in the saga of Africans and their descendants in America so that he can (re)discover himself as a (African)Latin-American subject, which is reinforced in the aforementioned letter to the reader, in which Exú, as a mediator of the acts of creation and interpretation of knowledge, is who opens the way/reading and establishes communication between the reader (man) and the deities (orishas/ancestors). Manuel Zapata Olivella, as a keen researcher of African religious traditions and knowledgeable of the multiple potentialities of Elegba (Exú), offers to this orisha important functions in his narrative, such as some previously mentioned regarding the invocation of Ngafúa for Elegba to open the paths for the African *Muntu* in his crossing; Elegba's role as conductor of Nagó in the Americas; and the body sign that those chosen by Elegba had. The various presences of Elegba/Exú in the narrative show the multiplicities of Exú and his dynamic skills and power of accomplishment. In this regard, it is pertinent to highlight the importance of Exú pointed out by Juana Elbein, who says that each one has their own Exú, an individual Exú, because "[...] if someone did not have their *Èsù* in their body, they could not exist, they would not know that they were alive, because it is mandatory for each one to have their individual *Èsù*." (Santos, 2002, p. 131).²⁷ Thus, Elegba's imprint on the bodies of those chosen in the narrative metaphorizes their powers of transformation and, simultaneously, reconnected them to the sun-spark-xangô, the ancestral spark of libertarian and transgressive commitment.

In addition to the fictional presence of Elegba/Exú in the plot, we perceive its influence as a dynamic principle in *Changó's* narrative construction, which is aesthetically done in several ways, due to the very sign multiplicity of this Orisha, which is fundamental to any and all creative acts (Rufino; Simas, 2019). It is through Exú that movements and communication take place, which allows man to reconnect with the guide-gods, body-ancestors and, at the same time, reactivate memories in those who invoke ancestry for the persistence of African knowledge. One of the manifestations of Exú as aesthetic performance in *Changó* happens by the way Zapata elaborates his verbal constructions coexisting the three tenses, which makes the spiral time that refers to one of the meanings of Exú, which is the spiral movement represented by the *Òkòtó*, which according to Juana Elbein dos Santos is:

²⁷ In Portuguese: "[...] se alguém não tivesse seu *Èsù* em seu corpo, não poderia existir, não saberia que estava vivo, porque é compulsório que cada um tenha seu *Èsù* individual."

[...] a kind of snail and appears in the motifs of the sculptures and as an emblem among those who take part in the cult of Èsù. It consists of a conical shell whose base is open, used as a spinning top. The Òkòtó represents the ossified story of the snail's development and reflects the rule according to which the growth process took place: a constant and proportional growth, an evolutionary continuity in regular rhythm. The Òkòtó symbolizes a process of growth. The Òkòtó is a spinning top that rests on the tip of the cone—a single foot, a single point of support—rolls “spirally” opening itself in each evolution, more and more, until it becomes a circumference open to infinity (hollow summit) (Santos, 2002, p. 133).²⁸

Exú, as a dynamic principle of expansion and growth from a single Exú, has in Òkòtó the illustration of spiral multiplication, in which Exú is one multiplied to infinity, expressing the spiral force that can beat at the same time centrifugal and centripetal, creative and destructive. The spiral shape is a symbol of continuity, of upward and progressive movement, and Exú represents the power of the spiral, in which time can be subverted, because time is always time, with no beginning, middle, or end. In the path of this thought, the spiraling temporality in Zapata even converges with two *Orikis* dedicated to Exú. One of them says that “Exú throwing a stone yesterday, killed the bird today” (Oliveira, 2021, p. 124),²⁹ and another says that “Exú was born before his own mother” (Rufino, 2019, p. 23).³⁰ The *Orikis*’ constructions may sound disconnected, and even disconcerting if analyzed by Western linearity, however, they show the simultaneous existence of times, where everything is interconnected by ancestral dynamics. The structuring of *these* *Orikis* resembles many constructions in the course of Zapata’s narrative, as in Ngafúa’s own greeting to Elegba in the opening chants:

Elegba!
I am your echo
your creative word
the unlived history of the Muntu
let it end

²⁸ In Portuguese: “uma espécie de caracol e aparece nos motivos das esculturas e como emblema entre os que fazem parte do culto de Èsù. Ele consiste em uma concha cônica cuja base é aberta, utilizado como um pião. O Òkòtó representa a história ossificada do desenvolvimento do caracol e reflete a regra segundo a qual se deu processo de crescimento; um crescimento constante e proporcional, uma continuidade evolutiva de ritmo regular. O Òkòtó simboliza um processo de crescimento. O Òkòtó é um pião que apoiado na ponta do cone – um só pé, um único ponto de apoio – rola “espiraladamente” abrindo-se a cada evolução, mais e mais, até converter-se numa circunferência aberta para o infinito (cume oco).”

²⁹ In Portuguese: “Exu jogando uma pedra ontem, matou o pássaro hoje.”

³⁰ In Portuguese: “Exu nasceu antes que a própria mãe.”

let it begin now.
 Listen to my story
 yesterday's story
 paths of return
 not yet walked
 forgotten stories of the future
 future stories of the past
 is the unborn echo
 of tomorrow without beginning
 history of the Muntu enslaved
 by itself
 to free itself in the offspring of its children
 (Zapata Olivella, 2020, pp. 64-67).³¹

In such a way that the spiral time in *Changó* reconnects to the power of Exú as a spiral movement of expansion, which conceives the present time in a broad way, breaking with the historical linearity that flattens the present between the past and the future; thus, the present becomes only a fraction, an arbitrary clipping of expanded reality and ancestry, “[...] emerges as a continuum, a vital force and an effect of enchantment contrary to the scarcity instilled by forgetfulness.” (Rufino, 2019, p. 25).³² Zapata, by narrating the pregnancy of Africans and Afro-descendants in the Americas and highlighting the inexhaustible process of *cimarronaje* carried out by them, in a metalinguistic way, weaves his narrative as a *cimarrona* libertarian practice that subverts the referenced Eurocentric standards, which aligns with the Exú principles of transgressor, mutability, creation, and movement in a sense of denial of fixed ideas and ways of restraints that prevent the spiral expansion.

Closing Remarks

In the process of reconstructing black African history in the Americas, it is important that the rescue is carried out through its own paradigms as a way of deconstructing reductionist scientific models that refute the epistemological diversity of a continent crossed by the ethnic-cultural clash between indigenous, European and

³¹ In Spanish: “¡Elegba!/ Soy tu eco/ tu palabra creadora/ a historia no vivida del Muntu/ deja que termine/ deja que comience ahora./ Escucha mi relato/ historia del ayer/ caminos del regreso/ no andados todavía/ historias olvidadas del futuro/ futuras historias del pasado/ es el eco no nacido/ del mañana sin comienzo/ historia del Muntu esclavizado/ por si mismo/ para liberarse en la descendencia de sus hijos.”

³² In Portuguese: “emerge como um contínuo, uma pujança vital e um efeito de encantamento contrário à escassez incutida pelo esquecimento.”

African peoples. The Crossroads is a place of possibilities and, at the same time, refers to the Afro-Diasporic identity crossed by ethnic-cultural crossings; a place of conflicts and choices that transpose, recreate, and resist; therefore, it is a place to think about other perspectives and new propositions for the understanding of the otherness that constitute the American continent and contributed to its socio-cultural formation despite the invisibility imposed by the dominant identity process. And as a place of intersection, it is not only Afro-epistemological, nor exclusionary, nor vertical, but agglutinating, *intersecting* with original European epistemes and the other epistemes arising from the socio-cultural dynamism of transits and crossings.

It has as its main sign Exú, a dynamic principle, the one that breaks the built and “breaks the rule to maintain the rule; the one that transits the margins to give body to what structures the center; the one that innovates tradition to ensure it” (Oliveira, 2007 apud Freitas, 2016, p. 57).³³ Therefore, the *Encruzilhadas*, Exú’s place, regiments transgressive strategies such as *cimarronaje*, which erupts from the very condition of enslavement imposed on black Africans and, simultaneously, is configured as a practice of identity (re)creation of the Afro-descendants on the American continent. In this process of resistance, reformulation, and innovation, the transmission of the episteme of African roots is fundamental as a safeguard of memory, which occurs through the pedagogical action of *cimarronaje* anchored in aspects such as ancestry, orality, corporeality, and spirituality. Thus, the *Encruzilhadas* is an Afro-Diasporic dimension that brings together *cimarronaje* as a practice of conservation and transmission of Afro-descendant ethical and aesthetic values and permanent transgression.

Changó, el gran putas, is interpreted as the crossroads that rescues African myth and ancestry, both in the construction and in the understanding of the American man, that is, of the *American muntu*. Branded by the crossroads, the Zapatean narrative brings Elegba (Exú) as a dynamic element in its mythical-ancestral construction of the African diaspora and the configuration of the African Latin American. It is a transgressive narrative because, at the same time, it deconstructs and reconstructs as a practice of *cimarronaje*, in order to arrogate the presence and epistemological importance of Afro-descendants in the Americas. Zapata appropriates the language of the colonizer and the

³³ In Portuguese: “quebra a regra para manter a regra; aquele que transita pelas margens para dar corpo ao que estrutura o centro; é aquele que inova a tradição para assegurá-la.”

structure of the epic only to dismantle them and insert other aesthetic standards, i.e., the writer makes use of the *cimarron* aesthetic strategies to occupy the hegemonic epistemological territory and subvert it, expanding the horizons of the knowledge and understanding of the world. It is the potentialities of Exú, which, in addition to the plot, influence Zapata Olivella by creating the singular work that, simultaneously, breaks with the canon and history as unique and elaborates a narrative that opens paths for the recognition of diverse epistemologies and other aesthetic possibilities free from the colonial yoke, that fulfills the *cimarrón* purpose because it composes a libertarian writing for a more plural and democratic understanding of Latin America.

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Translated by *Susane Schmieg* – Susi.tradutora@gmail.com

Received May 15, 2024

Accepted April 26, 2025

Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [*Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies*] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

1. Suitability of the title for the article;

The title of the article, in its summary, manages to present the complexity and development of the article.

2. Explanation of the objective of the work and coherence of its development in the text;

The work has the merit of presenting a consistent study of one of the most

Latin American literature. It develops a study of an Afro-descendant work from an Afrocentric perspective - based on Afro-descendant and Afrocentric authors, concepts and contexts - with erudition, confidence, method and a broad command of references. He manages to develop the objectives clearly in a clear and erudite argument. It is a study that has a value compatible with the importance of the journal since it presents a study, if not original, an important contribution to rethinking the basis of a more inclusive Historiography and Literary Criticism in the 21st century.

3. Conformity with the proposed theory, demonstrating up-to-date knowledge of the relevant bibliography;

The author presents in the article a broad system of theories and concepts from Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Costa Rica and the United States, just to name a few, which are still little known by researchers in Brazil, but recognized outside it. It has the merit of making known and making visible the work of Brazilian researchers who are doing important work in making Afro-descendant cultural and literary contributions visible in Brazil and Latin America. It manages to relate and articulate meticulous and convergent argumentation with the objective of the work in the applicability of Afrocentric concepts in a work that aims to highlight an Afrocentric diachronic perspective of History and

values in Latin America. This would only be possible with knowledge of the bibliography. Here we recognize the merit of the work and its independence as research.

4. Originality of the reflection and contribution to the field of knowledge;

The major contribution of the work, although it is not the central objective of the article, is to offer consistent bases for rethinking a more inclusive Historiography and Literary Criticism based on Afro-descendant ethics and aesthetics from Latin America.

A relevant contribution to the development of other epistemic sensitivities from the global South and to promoting debate on values and more diverse perspectives on how the world feels. Thinking about and valuing local, Latin American histories and historical milestones from a South-South perspective, Latin America and Africa, based on structural data of African/Afro-descent, in the way the study was developed, is a joyous contribution to the excellence of the critical updating of the Humanities in the 21st century. The study is not a pioneer, given the development of the work of other researchers with a similar approach and bases already consolidated on the subject -- see Liliam Ramos (UFRGS), Denilson Silva (UNILAB) and Rogerio Mendes (UFRN) -- but it offers an important extension and complement to the work of the researchers mentioned. It does not present an original concept, although it has originality in the original argument on consolidated bases, promoting careful updating on the field of studies with certainty. The work is recognized as important, of excellence in its development and for this reason it is certainly recommended for publication.

5. Clarity, correctness and suitability of language for a scientific paper. The author offers the correctness and suitability of language recommended for a scientific work worthy of being highlighted. Despite the correctness of the language, there is a need to provide some explanatory notes on concepts, relationships and analysis applied to make the text more readable. The idea is to make it accessible to readers who are not specialists in the subject. It was also noted that some of the concepts and paraphrases used require direct reference to their authors. A concept such as “Transafricanía” requires a citation of its author, M’bare N’Gom, since the expression is not a simple neologism in common use among specialists. The basis of the Pedagogy of Cimarronaje, which is presented throughout the text, needs to be visible, since it develops as a foundation that is announced from the summary and construction of the work. Citations, mentions or differentiations need to be made because there are similarities in bibliographic bases, argument, structure and development of authorship with the study. I would say that the text also needs to differentiate between the Pedagogy of Cimarronaje/cimarrona thought up by García (2013/2020) and Mendes (2019) in terms of similarities and dissimilarities so that we can see, based on methodological clarity, how the authorship realizes applicability and the synthesis of these bases in the study. These and other observations, less structural, are attached to this opinion. Please consult it. APPROVED WITH RESTRICTIONS [Revised]

Rogério Mendes Coelho – Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte – UFRN, Currais Novos, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5296-7588>; roger.mendes1977@gmail.com

Reviewed on June 27, 2024.

Review II

The text presents the academic rigor expected for publication in a scientific journal. Based on current theoretical references and an in-depth analysis of the work in question, “Chango, el gran putas,” the author of the article makes strong contributions to Literary Studies in Latin America. In view of the above, my opinion is in favor of publication. APPROVED

Denilson Lima Santos - Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira – UNILAB, São Francisco do Conde, Bahia, Brasil; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4683-1902>; denilsonlimas@gmail.com

Reviewed on July 10, 2024.

Review III

The opinion is a feedback on the observations made in the previous opinion. Satisfied with the corrections, although there are a few suggestions in the text to make the work more consistent. Nothing that would make it conditional on publication. However, I would reiterate my previous recommendation on citations: if you are going to cite the author for the first time, cite, by extension, a full description of the work in question rather than the deliberate use of indirect quotations. Pointing out and describing sources is part of the methodology of a good researcher. APPROVED

Rogério Mendes Coelho – Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte – UFRN, Currais Novos, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5296-7588>; roger.mendes1977@gmail.com

Reviewed on August 12, 2024.

Editors in Charge

Beth Brait

Elizabeth Cardoso

Maria Helena Cruz Pistori

Paulo Rogério Stella

Regina Godinho de Alcântara