ARQUITECTURAS AFROLATINAS
AFRO-LATIN ARCHITECTURES
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TAPETE
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Abstract

This paper presents a historical and critical analysis to better understand and value the architectural heritage of the African-descendant culture in Latin America and the Caribbean within its diversity and geographical distribution, which is stated here as an inseparable element for the understanding of Latin American

architecture. The research methodology consists of literature and imagery review, field research, and publications, which allow (a) updating the state of the art on this subject, which is absent in the architecture and urban planning literature, (b) mapping Afro-Latin settlements and architectures. The objective is to conduce to an understanding of the African architectural heritage in Latin America and awaken possible memories of these spaces. Therefore, it seeks to strengthen the inclusion of the Afro-Latinity in the debate of Latin American Architecture: quilombos and terreros, among other representations built by Afro-descendant communities that underlie mutual support with native peoples, for the architectural and cultural recognition of these territories. The discussion might contribute to South-South dialogues in policy-making, planning, and land management approaches that can safeguard Afro-Latin communities and territories from racial discrimination and strong pressure from the real estate market (in the city) and the extractivism (in rural areas) of the continent. Research results show that modernity-coloniality is historically masculine, white, and metropolitan, excluding and subalternizing women, Black and indigenous peoples, those who live differently.

Keywords: Afro-Latin Architectures, Afro-Latin Architectural Heritage, South-South Dialogues, Architectures of Alterity

Arquitecturas Afrolatinas | Afro-Latin Architectures

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1   Introduction

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, Latin America and the Caribbean received approximately five million Africans through the slave market. The enslaved African people were originally from various regions that now correspond to the countries of Angola, Congo, Mozambique, Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Senegal among others. This gave rise to three major cultural matrices – Yoruba, Bantu, and Ewe Fon (Seppir, 2013). These communities were characterized by civilizing standards of African genesis that consist of community life, mutual aid, reciprocity, and a subsistence family economy. Continuously subjugated to the violence of the slave system and post-abolition racism, which endures to this day, the Afro-descendant communities today form a population of approximately 200 million in the subcontinent alone, half of which are Brazilian (IBGE, 2018).

Over time, ancestral worldviews, knowledge and practices are perpetuated, generation after generation, which make these territories and architectural expressions an important heritage that is turned invisible and increasingly threatened[1]. Oppression and resistance, in the same manner as historically in Africa: first pre-capitalist feudal states, then the European colonialism and slavery. Nowadays, the racial discrimination, pressure from large international economic agents and land concessions continue to exploit people and the common good through extractivism, infrastructuring, intensive and transgenic monocultures, hydroelectric power plants and real estate pressure (Veríssimo, 2015). Nevertheless, as Boaventura Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses argue, this historical legacy of domination and discrimination carried out until today by the hegemonic epistemology of the North, is accompanied by complex processes of resistance and struggles, turning absences into emergencies, through the ecology of knowledges, towards the epistemologies of the South (Santos and Meneses, 2010).

The research methodology consists of literature review concerned with the decolonial studies, such as Anibal Quijano and Walter Mignolo; post-colonial authors like Franz Fanon and Achille Mbembe; the libertarian thought of Paulo Freire and Milton Santos; and images (photographs, engravings, drawings, maps) found in Paul Oliver, Pierre Verger, Fábio Velame, Sandro Bruschi, among other. We carried out fieldwork for

colaborative mapping with Afro-descendant communities in Brazil, El Salvador, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Bolivia.

Seeking to understand Afro-Latin spatial marginalization, crossing theory with the field, the study revieled that dispersion, since pre-colonial times in Africa, was the population's strategy to escape environmental change and external political disturbances. The dispersion to remote places was a cyclical process of reinvention of ancient traditions, based on the principles of struggle, resistance and self-sufficiency close to nature and its regenerative cycles. Spatial resistance through the development of decentralized autonomous populations, involving the appropriation of land for domestic space and the spontaneous organization of neighborhoods and villages, was the spatial strategy to protect the population from consecutive crises.

Attempting to design a South-South dialogue between the evidence from Africa and the Afro-Latin context, the following research hypotheses emerged: (a) in the same way that the Mozambican people, in a scenario of crisis and external oppression, adopted a strategy of spatial resistance seeking refuge in remote locations, not only for survival and freedom, but also for the preservation of forms of collectivity, close to nature, Afro-descendants spontaneously respond in the same way - spatial resistance, based on shared ancestral knowledge; (b) would a cartography of territories and architectures of ancestral resistance developed by Afro-descendants dispute the prerogatives of power and recover historical rights to land and nature?

2   Theoretical tracks

Under the auspices of modernity, a complex cleavage system structures social relations, based on systems of belonging and hierarchization (Santos, 2006). Furthermore, many of the subalternization processes that underlie modernity are directly connected to the system of economic production to which contemporary architecture is subjected. The production of meaning in architecture, therefore, is regulated by the same modernity / capitalism binary. Therefore, cultures and architectural practices outside the hegemonic standard are destroyed, made invisible, hidden or inferiorized, denying its relevance, existence, and preservation. This means that the right to memory, to territory, and the right to have rights are also withdrawn.

The architecture valuation system produced in modernity has perpetuated a Eurocentric profile to the tectonic and theoretical references of the area. This crystallization is not accidental; on the contrary, it produces and reproduces systems of social domination that favor a particular group to the detriment of all the others. Analyzing the preservation of architectural heritage, for example in Brazil, the values on the order of the day are, as follows: 97% of the listed buildings are of colonial origin, linked to governmental structures, the Catholic Church, or the elites (Lima, 2009). There is a naturalization of the history of the State as if it were the history of everyone. The main consequence is the partial consolidation of architectural memory, excluding or subordinating the technologies, practices, and materials outside the history of the State (Moassab, 2013; Moassab, 2014). In other words, it is a precarious memory and in accordance to the one that wants to be total, under the frame of the metonymic reason of Western modernity: "the whole is one of the parts transformed into a reference term for the others [...] the metonymic reason is not capable of accepting that the understanding of the world is much more than the Western understanding of the world" (Santos, 2006, p. 98, our translation).

The preservation of heritage, under the construction of the memory of architecture in Brazil (or rather, of official architecture) has produced, on the contrary, the non-existence of practices are deliberately divided by the unique criteria of truth and aesthetic quality that are dictated by modern science, such as the case of building and spatial African, and Afro-descendant, knowledge. From this perspective, this paper argues argue that it is essential to politicize the discussion about valuation and production of meanings in the area, with a view to a reconstruction of memory and references in architecture that may include a greater diversity of building practices, equally important and significant.

The authors strongly believe in the power of memory as a possibility of emancipation. Therefore, it is essential to rebuild it from a critical perspective. Likewise, the Afro-Latin Architectures vídeo is based on an epistemological approach focused on the autonomy and the emancipation of subalternized peoples, in dialogue with authors who denounce the Western project of modernity. Thus, the main authors that guide us are, on the one hand, the critical perspective of Eurocentric modernity of Boaventura Sousa Santos (2005; 2006; 2007), Aníbal Quijano (2005) and Walter Mignolo (2005) and of racial colonial domination by Frantz Fanon (2006) and Achille Mbembe (2001). On the other hand, we consider the libertarian thought of Paulo Freire (2006) and Milton Santos (2001).

Starting from the works of Franz Fanon, Boaventura Sousa Santos, Aníbal Quijano, and Walter Mignolo, this study incorporates the fruitful debate on the historical reconstruction of modernity that creates the abysmal line that separates the zone of being, from the zone of non-being. Also, the overcoming of the Eurocentrism

within science, in research able to engage in the construction of an epistemic centrality from the South. Likewise, particular solutions are sought, for the deepening of democracy and human rights. These authors also add central elements on colonial domination, as an indiscernible part of the European project of modernity. More specifically, on colonial rule, this study seeks important contributions from Frantz Fanon and Achille Mbembe. The first has a seminal work on the implications of class, ethnicity, culture, and violence in the anti-colonial struggles of the 20th century, fundamental for cultural and postcolonial studies.

Beginning with "The Damned of the Earth" (2006), a book from the early sixties, Fanon shows that the colonial and racist society, necessarily generates a racist language. This is the fundamental approach to understanding architecture as a semiotic system that permeates the senses of the built environment through its own language and grammar. In turn, Mbembe is one of the most prominent African intellectuals in debating the topics of the academy, in particular, about Africa, based on what he points to as fantasies and fears derived from the colonial regime. The author shows that such statements do not reflect the reality of the continent; on the contrary, they are the result of projections based on guilt, denial, and the compulsion to repeat them.

From Freire, the study obtained the theoretical and methodological contribution of his educational proposal aimed at the liberation of poor countries, with a view to the empowerment and emancipation of populations in situations of poverty or subordination. Under this contribution, collaborative methods to map the "terreiros" and quilombos from which we obtained our images were developed. At the same time, the study appropriated the critical spatialization around the concept of territory, by Milton Santos, in order to understand that design practices and the resulting built environment, its spatial organization, and distribution. These are a part of the spatialization of both culture and connections between humans and nature, those that are intertwined with power disputes and conflicts over access to land.

3   Final remarks

The video Arquitectura Afrolatinas was exhibited at the XX International Biennial of Architecture and Urbanism of Chile in 2017. The work results from a synthesis of several research works and outreach projects carried out at the Federal University of Latin American Integration - UNILA, under the MALOCA research cluster, and was coordinated by the authors of this text with the participation of several students (Veríssimo and Moassab, 2017). With this video, UNILA was the only Brazilian public university chosen in the academy category, integrating the selection of 200 projects out of almost 500 submitted, from nearly fifty countries.

his study presents the production of Black architectures and territories of the South, from a broad perspective of human rights. Preliminary research results demonstrate that the modernity-coloniality of the land occupation of Latin America is historically masculine, white and metropolitan. That is the world-system that excludes and subalternizes women, Black and indigenous people, all of those who live differently the land, public policies and human rights.

The central questions that this study continues to reach out, are: what is the design for the architectures of this century? What are the differences, similarities, continuities and ruptures with the current oppressive model? This video proposes a reasoning on how a contemporary historical-political context, starting from Latin America, in dialogue with the Africa and the African diaspora of the Global South, might collaborate with an architectural perspective of alterity. Despite the fact that five years have passed since its release, the discussion about Afro-Latin Architectures, as well as all the architectures of the South, becomes vital to overcome the increasing violence and threats caused by Western modernity that the pandemic has made more undeniable, to follow the tracks towards a post-abyssal world.

Team

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[1] Few exceptions are the Quilombo dos Palmares in Pernambuco, Brazil, and San Basilio de Palenque in Bolívar, Colombia. Both cases demonstrate their nature of resistance against oppression and subjugation: fleeing mistreatment and abuses of slavery, they developed dispersed settlements in rural areas. Classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2005, San Basilio de Palenque has over 3,500 inhabitants who preserve

the language (Palenquero Creole: fusion between Spanish, Bantu and Kikongo), traditional medicine, dance, gastronomy, economy and education and probably the forms of housing construction.