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THE DECOLONIAL DEBATE: EXPRESSIONS O DEBATE DECOLONIAL: EXPRESSÕES

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Abstract

This article aims to highlight contemporary Afrocentric visualities from the Global South as decolonial forms of resistance. To achieve this, it will be essential to analyze a portion of the poetic repertoire of the Bahian teacher, curator, and artist Ayrson Heráclito. The artist's becoming-ritual is relevant in combating the stigmas left on transatlantic diasporic black populations. Simultaneously, it is necessary to understand the violence practiced during the period in which enslaved bodies were racialized, culturally superimposed, socially subordinated, and demonized for belonging to religions of African origins, by mechanisms arising from colonial domination. The main objective is to demonstrate at what point his aesthetic-political poetics breaks away from the Western hegemonic thought, maintained by Eurocentric colonialism, through the aesthetic-performative experiences he proposes. The qualitative methodology is carried out through the observation and analysis of the visual and poetic elements of his work. The result problematizes the consequences left by the colonial domination processes, and how these can be addressed by decolonial poetic expressions. Therefore, his artistic production made it possible to articulate thoughts that promote the rupture of structures attempting to confine black bodies in conditions that limit their ways of living and being in the world. Thus, Afrocentric visualities become essential in the process of healing and reversing the epistemic, cultural, and symbolic violence to which we were and continue to be subjected since the colonial period.

Keywords: Art-Axé, Visual *Orikis*, Directory, Decoloniality

1 Introduction: Before you enter, àgò

A What we have been able to advance and achieve in terms of political and civil rights, in a necessary power redistribution, which the decolonization of society is the presupposition and starting point, is now being destroyed in the process of reconcentration of the power control in world capitalism and with the management of the same people responsible for the power coloniality. Consequently, it is time for us to learn to free ourselves from the Eurocentric mirror where our image is always, necessarily, distorted. It is time, finally, to stop being what we are not. (Quijano, 2005, pp. 138-139, our translation)

Before starting this investigation, it is necessary to ask for àgò. The word àgò means permission, according to Beniste (2021). The term is also used in Candomblé to ask permission from ancestors. In 2022, the Pinacoteca of São Paulo held an exhibition featuring works by Bahian visual artist Ayrson Heráclito. The exhibition, titled "Ayrson Heráclito Yorùbáiano", presented themes on the African diaspora, *Yorùbá* culture, and Afro-Brazilian religiosity. The assembled works form a narrative set that dialogues with rituals, mythologies, and elements of nature present in the liturgies of the Candomblé cults. The religion, developed in Brazil and practiced in the state of Bahia, inherited the religious and philosophical practices brought by enslaved Africans and adapted to the new environmental conditions. It is the religion of the deities worship: *inquices*, *orixás*, or *voduns*, beings who represent the strength and power of nature, as well as its administrators (Kileuy & De Oxaguiã, 2015).

Art-Axé, as used by Heraclitus to define his poetic action, aims to promote healing through ancestral knowledge, transmitted through decolonial creative performative actions called *Orikis*. *Orikis* are defined by Idrissou (2020) as a living word made up of orally transmitted African memories and worldviews. *Orikis* are also considered an art of the word because they have essential traces of ancestral culture and oral tradition. In *Bori*, the expressions of ways of life and traditions can be considered, according to Idrissou (2020), as a means of transmitting knowledge. Thus, besides questioning the position of hegemonic Western art, they also contribute to reversing the processes of symbolic erasure committed since the diaspora.

Based on testimonies, interviews, curatorial texts, photographs, and videos published on online platforms, this article proposes an analysis of a portion of the symbolic repertoire of visual artist Ayrson Heráclito related to the photographic installation *Bori*. In Candomblé, *Bori* is the ceremony that connects the *Orixá* to a person's head. The reflection presented here is not only about the aesthetic and political intention of the artist. *Bori* is fundamental for us to understand the interruption processes of stigmatized conceptions about black people, as well as his contribution to creating new images for these bodies.

The aim is to identify their symbolic materiality and to understand how they contribute to combating the processes of epistemic and cultural suppression, promoted by the colonialism imposed on black communities and their descendants during slavery. Thus, it is proposed to illustrate in a comparative-associative way, through the reading of the repertoires present in the images of the *Bori* series, the relationship between artist and artwork, within the modern cultural context in which they are inserted. In this way, it will be possible to analyze how the elements present in the work were used to achieve the aesthetic, political, and performative intention of the artist, through visual metaphors representing chants and invocations to the *Orixás*, referred to as visual *Orikis*.

To do this, we will need to understand Quijano's (2005) view on the relationship between contemporary colonial power and Western hegemonic rationality. Then, we will analyze the strategies used in the processes of epistemicide of African peoples and their descendants (Santos, 2009). Next, we will present part of Taylor's (2013) performance on forced incorporation and overlapping of cultural repertoires. Subsequently, we will observe how the practices of maintaining Eurocentric colonial thought can be exposed and combated nowadays. Finally, we will demonstrate the possibility of reversing and reclaiming spaces through aesthetic-political actions (Rancière, 2005) inspired by Afrocentric worldviews, which Sodré (2017) translates into an anti-hegemonic decolonial thought.

2 Without Exu, nothing can be done

While browsing the internet, it is not difficult to come across the *Bori* series. The photographic installation was conceived in the space of the Pinacoteca of São Paulo. Even without knowing who produced it and what its meaning is, one soon can realize that the photographic series has something enigmatic and familiar to Afro-Bahian cultures. It is a set of twelve images, arranged on the floor in the shape of a wheel, supported by metal structures deviating from a certain conventional museographic pattern. The setting is a contemporary art gallery. The fact that the works do not occupy the walls already indicates an intention on the part of those who placed them there, either to provoke some kind of reflection or to exhibit a stance contrary to the traditional ways of hanging paintings.

In addition to the structure itself, what draws the most attention is its composition. The themes depicted in the images feature black individuals seemingly lying down, with calm and conscious expressions. Their faces are turned upwards, and their heads are surrounded by foods that are part of Bahian daily nutrition. So how is it possible for something to be so close yet so distant at the same time? Foods such as yams, okra, acarajé, corn, popcorn, beans, and peanuts, consumed daily at home or on street corners, were now riddles and symbols to decipher.

For sacred reasons, such secrets cannot be fully revealed. They belong to the religious knowledge of Candomblé, which even many practitioners take years to access. Therefore, it is possible to think about what caused me this questioning and why these images still arouse such strange feelings. Heráclito, in addition to *being Ogã*, a position he held within Candomblé, is a researcher, art curator, and university professor. Even so, he remains difficult to grasp fully.

After observing the creative process of the performance *Bori* (Pinacoteca de São Paulo, 2023), I realized that the composition was, in fact, a foundation. It is an ancestral knowledge and teaching, incorporated by a person belonging to the Candomblé culture, transmitted through the performative ritual and photographs. *Bo* or *Ebó* means offering and *Ri* or *Ori* means head, so *Bori* translated can be understood as an offering to the head. In Candomblé, *Bori* is the ceremony that connects the *Orixá* to a person's head, who, by offering flowers, evokes them; following the example of *Yemanjá*, a female *Orixá* considered the mother of all heads. The *Orixá* represents a force of nature that governs each person's life, while the *Ori* is the person's connection to their *Orixá*.

Ayrson Heráclito and his work are inseparable. His repertoire clearly shows his political intent driven by issues of the African diaspora and the consequences left by coloniality to the enslaved and their descendants. Moreover, it also addresses issues related to modernity, such as citizenship, social inequality, and poverty. All of these are consequences of a state model built with the blood and sweat of black individuals. Nevertheless, this system still maintains colonial structures that deny our rights and reinforce negative historical-imagetic conceptions about us.

The desire to investigate him further increased gradually upon understanding that we are alike, contemporaries, children, and descendants of African communities. However, although we belong to the same Bahian territoriality, we are distant in some aspects. Through Heráclito's work, one can see the fissure, "a cut-out of times and spaces, of the visible and the invisible, of the word and the

noise that defines, at the same time, the place and what is at stake in politics as a form of experience." (Rancière, 2005, p. 16, our translation). This kind of sensitive aesthetic-political sharing disrupts colonial thinking, causing a sort of damage (Rancière, 2005) to conceptions of a culture historically stigmatized and denied from the colonial period to modernity.

After the first contact with the visual *Orikis*, there is no turning back. In an attempt to understand them better, it was necessary to resort to the archives: websites, blogs, social networks, interviews, magazines, and articles, to unveil part of the symbology laden with secrets from the religion, which many only know superficially or mediated by the Christian lens. Yes, one cannot speak about Exu, one of the main *Orixás*, without touching on this subject. Now, those born and initiated into a devout Christian family, in which monotheism is taught from childhood, tend to reject Candomblé and other African-derived religions.

The Eurocentric West, possessing a vast pantheon of deities and myths, gave rise to the abyssal thinking that kidnapped us and forced us into the crossing and slave labor. Every Wednesday and Sunday, many are taken to Christian temples. These places are considered strongholds of peace and the pursuit of divine love. Within them, we are introduced to the figures of God and the Devil, and also the main differences between them. Through their liturgies, meetings, books, chants, and stories, one learns how each one looks and acts.

In the Western collective imagination, Jesus, the son of God, who was born predestined to die to give us a second chance, is always white, kind to children, and respected by animals. The contradiction lies in the fact that the way Jesus is represented has a very strong resemblance to the God of the slaveholders, responsible for the deaths of so many people. The Devil, on the other hand, is the divider, separator, and dualist. The angel cast out of heaven answered to the name of Satan and was imprisoned and cast down to the earth, spreading evil and falsehood, becoming its prince. He led men to worship him, opposing God. The being of light, which Ezekiel describes as so beautiful, became proud and plotted to rise above the angels to take the Creator's place. His desire caused him to fall and with him others. On earth, the fallen angels became demons under his leadership.

The Devil in the Christian Bible is associated with a dragon. It is a roaring lion and sometimes appears beautiful and kind to deceive men and tell them about its life. Such fallen angels were often associated with the beliefs of the dominated. Since then, their deities have been demonized and seen by many as something bad, such as Exu. He represents the two worldviews discussed here. On one hand, there is the vision of the Western Church of the nineteenth century, which, in the words of Father Bauduin, a member of the African Missions Society of Lyon and a missionary on the Slave Coast, was "the chief of all evil geniuses, the worst of them and the most feared, is Exu, a word that means the rejected; also called *Elegbá* or *Elegbara*, the strong, or *Ogongo Ogó*, the genius of the knotty staff." (Prandi, 2001, p. 48, our translation). This happened because

[...] Exu "has a susceptible, violent, irascible, cunning, coarse, vain, indecent character," so that "the first missionaries, astonished by such a set, assimilated him to the Devil and made him the symbol of all that is wickedness, perversity, abjection, and hatred, as opposed to the goodness, purity, elevation, and love of God." (Verger, 1999, as cited in Prandi, 2001, p. 47, our translation)

It turns out that "Exu symbolizes the procreated, not the procreator. Its communication dynamizes the erotic search, hence the symbolic developments or liturgical reinterpretations that associate this entity with the multiple paths of eroticism" (Sodré, 2017, p. 215, our translation). The single Christian worldview of the nineteenth century, which separated soul and body and attributed evil to the other, has been reiterated by some religions born from Eurocentric Western Christian thought since then. According to Quijano (2005), this is a consequence of the formation of a new power pattern, which originated the social classification of the world population according to the mental construction of race. The domination strategy was conceived from the Americas' discovery and overcame colonialism itself.

Through colonial (racial) homogenization processes, such as forced catechization, traditional peoples have had their culture subjugated and demonized, and their forms of symbolic production of knowledge and meanings repressed. The consequence of the Eurocentric model adoption by the dominant groups in Latin America led us to live in an idealized "Europe", forming the basis for the colonial nation-state development, which caused the epistemic death of enslaved peoples. According to Quijano (2005), this was the

consequence of the biological association of enslaved black individuals with a natural inferiority situation in relation to the dominator, who held control of the means of production of meaning and capital. Such a structure persists and follows the Western Christian pattern associated with progress and power logic.

The death discussed here is not only about the physical body. Epistemicide, as understood by sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, is the process of invisibility and knowledge erasure not accepted by Western knowledge. For him, abyssal thinking is the mode of colonial operation that subsists structurally in the modern Western model and remains constitutive of the exclusionary political and cultural relations maintained in the contemporary world system. This structure divides social reality into two different universes, understood as Global North and Global South, always trying to suppress one side, in which:

Everything that is produced as non-existent is radically excluded because it remains exterior to the universe that its own conception of inclusion considers as the Other. The fundamental characteristic of abyssal thinking is the impossibility of co-presence on both sides of the line. This side of the line prevails only to the extent that it exhausts the field of relevant reality. Beyond it, there is only non-existence, invisibility, and non-dialectical absence. (Santos, 2009, pp. 23-24, our translation).

What strikes us is the lack of need to specify which side he refers to. It was precisely this duality that inaugurated the concepts of race, gender, and belief that resulted in the "ability to produce and radicalize distinctions." (Santos, 2009, p. 24, our translation). What Boaventura de Sousa Santos advocates is the opposite. He proposes an ecosystem that considers a greater diversity of knowledge as other truths, which can be conceived beyond Western science and other types of non-Christian liturgies, such as African-derived religions, among other artistic, cultural, and social experiences, such as those present in Heráclito's poetics. His work proposes the dilution of the visible and invisible lines that prevent us from occupying our place and exercising our science, philosophy, and art. A small sample of all our potential denied and made invisible by colonialism.

Therefore, through Afrocentric poetics, possibilities of healing are proposed. A request to Exu and the opening of new paths, as this kind art promotes, according to Quijano (2005), a power redistribution in which decoloniality is central. Through it, it is possible to see all the inventive potential of our culture, without forgetting that capital remains in the hands of those responsible for our suffering as well as for maintaining modern colonial domination structures that govern society.

2 The Visual *Orikis* repertoire

Most of the information reported about *Bori*, so far, has been conceived through reports in which the artist talks about his creative process, as well as other sources such as curatorial texts and scenes from the performance. But even if you have never seen his works in person, it's possible to revel in their meanings. In conversations with members of some Candomblé nations in the city of Cachoeira, Bahia, and the observation of the photographs taken during the live performance (see Figures 1 and 2), it was possible to understand that such symbols have great potential in the transmission of knowledge through the gestures performed.

What is seen impacts both the observers and the people who lent their heads and bodies during the ritual, since "we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, cultural agency, and the choices one makes." (Taylor, 2013, p. 17, our translation). This concept is a means to understand how contemporary Afrocentric poetics can contaminate the hegemonic cultural repertoire. It has material and symbolic elements, that can transfigure established colonial imaginaries that need to be erased, transgressed, and reprogrammed.



Fig. 1: Image of the *Bori* performance. Source: Ayrson Heráclito's personal collection, 2022.



Fig. 2: Image of the *Bori* performance. Source: Ayrson Heráclito's personal collection, 2022.

Carried out between 2008 and 2022, *Bori* managed to cross the traditional field of art, overcoming the contemplative model that sacralizes Eurocentric symbols. A good exercise is to think of the artistic process as a living, embodied material repertoire within the artist, a person possessing a body endowed with knowledge and practices of Afro-Bahian culture and the terreiro (ritual space). This materiality can be seen in the days leading up to the performance, in which Heráclito goes to the open-air market to choose and prepare the food, negotiate prices, and carry out the preparations before offering them to the deities. These are routine habits and customs that are part of his artistic and personal repertoire.

The knowledge and care with the arrangement of food around the heads are immediately perceived in *Bori's* photographs, as shown in Figures 3 and 4, captured by the artist as part of the performative act. Perhaps his poetics is a way of showing us where we truly came from, highlighting our community's potential. It may also be another path to explain that our preferences for certain foods are a way of serving and pleasing the *Orixás*.



Fig. 3: Image of the *Bori* performance. Source: Ayrson Heráclito's personal collection, 2022.



Fig. 4: Image of the *Bori* performance. Source: Ayrson Heráclito's personal collection, 2022.

Moreover, the open-air market is a living place. In the market, the dynamics of city survival occur. It is a place of commerce, bargaining, transit of people, groups, and places that come and go in search of food, clothes, and utensils. It is where the cultivation, sales, shouting, exchange, requests, tasting, and choices of the best offerings for our home and the deities are. By observing the market's dynamics in food choice, we see that culture is presented in relationships. It acts as a way of knowing and presents its potentialities and territorialities. This is what Iqani and Resende (2019) conceptualize about identity belonging, spatial organization, cultural expressions, and the environmental relations of a given location. It is an intentional and politically selected segment that is often overshadowed by routine.

According to Taylor (2013), his works and repertoires enact embodied, performative, and gestural memory of speech and movement, dance and singing. At this moment, work and artist "convey real embodied actions. Thus, traditions are stored in the body, through various mnemonic methods, being transmitted "live" in the here and now to a real audience. Connected forms, coming from the past, are experienced as presents." (Taylor, 2013, p. 55, our translation). *Bori* is this space of exchange, where culture materializes in codes and gestures loaded with wisdom and dignity. Knowledge is transmitted through bodies in a careful, artistic, and elegant way, even for the uninitiated. A powerful, inventive, sensitive, and caring political body.

In light of this, one can see notice sad and cruel the African diaspora and colonialism were. A genocide that brought with it, according to Santos (2009, p. 33, our translation), the waste of "an immense wealth of cognitive experiences", essential knowledge for the constitution of a better, equitable, and plural nation-state. A place of power from which we have been physically and politically removed, in which we cannot make the most important decisions that affect us.

In this sense, Heráclito's Art-Axé goes against the cultural imposition initiated in the Americas during the colonial period. How? By recreating, according to Taylor (2013), practices that transgress and contaminate the performative project of the world based on the Western cultural model. His becoming breaks with the hermetic concepts used to reject traditional performative actions, such as rites, liturgies, festivals, ceremonies, and knowledge, taxing them as evil, idolatrous, and less relevant. Their political action takes revenge for the cultural and epistemic overlap maintained through existing institutions and social structures. For instance, some religious and educational institutions that fuel the inherited modern and colonialist dynamics, providing them with labor allocated in positions of work that few have the right to choose.

Moreover, Heráclito stands against the cultural and epistemic overlap that currently operates with subtlety. Where? Between the lines of institutionalization that prevent us from occupying certain spaces, such as art galleries, the presidency of the republic, or even a good position in a multinational company. Maybe that's not even the main issue; after all, we need the true means to produce and live in our own way. These are the conventional ways of controlling, enslaving, torturing, and killing us forever.

Therefore, beyond speaking about these pains, it is necessary to seek a cure. Something that connects our image to rights, citizenship, culture, language, freedom of speech, technology, and religiosity, as well as respect for diversity, the environment, divinities, and community life. It's what his repertoire triggers. A pre-diasporic and post-diasporic worldview connected to ancestry under his own creative lens of millennia-old references and resistances, questioning the Western hegemony that has not always been in this position, because

In the course of history, there has been a change of meaning that has attributed world centrality to the European continent, more precisely to its western part. Such a paradigmatic transformation shows that Europe has not always been the center of the world and that it has taken this position for itself through ideological structures, which reached its apex in the constitution of modernity. (Maia & Farias, 2020, p. 580, our translation).

This fact highlights the strategy of domination and erasure to which we have been subjected. Bringing new visualities to the contemporary art scene and making them circulate in already established hegemonic spaces becomes a viable syncretic strategy to resignify and contaminate existing imagistic repertoires. Appropriating contemporary means of symbolic production is important and necessary for Afro-diasporic bodies to find paths away from the meanings left by colonialism.

4 The Yorubaiana Worldview

Ogã of the *Jeje Mahi* Candomblé nation, Ayrson Heráclito has the ability to transmit knowledge about inherited spirituality and ancestry. Through his ecology of belonging, a term used by Barata (2016) when referring to the dynamics of the artist's symbolic production, he proposes immersive and intense aesthetic experiences that connect, according to the artist, Afro-past, Afro-present, and Afro-future. Going back to African diasporic history from an evolutionary perspective, Heráclito seeks to heal stigmas and violence caused by slavery and colonialism without forgetting the contemporary practices of Afro-Brazilian culture and philosophical thought which, according to Sodr  (2017), are not exclusive to Greco-Europeans. As such, his art manages to overcome racial, ethnological, and iconographic barriers, contributing to the formation of an ongoing Afro-Bahian thought.

By working with Bahian visualities, the artist promotes new conceptual approaches between art, culture, and life. His ancestral artistic repertoire is based on a philosophy of *terreiro* that disarticulates the canons of Western art imposed by the colonial power, which disregards the artifacts and symbols of other cultures. Ayrson Heráclito's life project is derived from the Afrocentric community worldview originated in the Bahian rec ncavo region, where connections and cultural experiences of resistance and new existences exist.

The questions to be asked now are: what is the origin of this repertoire? Where did this knowledge come from and how did it resist so much violence? In this regard, what matters is understanding that such culture was brought from another continent in a devastating manner. It is pondering that all the conditions existed for it to be extinct, and yet it crossed the Atlantic Ocean, not in ships, but in bodies. Living bodies endowed with intelligence, inventiveness, imagination, symbology, languages; as well as ways of speaking,

acting, thinking, hunting, feeding, dressing, worshipping, praying, and loving. Bodies that conjecture, gesticulate, dance, sing, party, produce, trade, evoke, and also feel pain, fear, anger, bleed, cry, and are strong, courageous, and resilient.

It is important to emphasize that the answer will not be found in the usual historical framework, but rather in how these embodied knowledges are transmitted to this day. It is necessary to understand how the reiterated gestures and behaviors resisted almost four hundred years of slavery. They are "gestures, oralities, movements, and dances that enact embodied memory." (Taylor, 2013, p. 49, our translation). This proves the African culture potency present in everything we do, including our contemporary Afrocentric and decolonial visualities. Otherwise, the world would possibly be a vast Europe, a hegemonic place that has placed us in inferior positions through force and the removal of means of symbolic and material production. In this way, it was possible to develop anti-colonial strategies for the production and knowledge transmission that allowed us to convey our own moral, ethical, and philosophical questions.

An example of the transmitted ancestral connection can be seen by bringing together the repertoires of Ayrson Heráclito and Mestre Didi. Silva and co-authors (2007) report that Mestre Didi was a Supreme Priest of the *orixá Obaluaiyê cult*, son of the tailor Arsenio dos Santos and the Mother Lady, *Iyalorixá* of the candomblé house *Ilê Opô Afonjá*. Mestre Didi was an *Axipá* royal lineage descendant, one of the Ketu kingdoms founding families, in Africa, a city of the *Yorùbá* Empire, now Nigeria. In Bahia, the fact occurred from the first *Nagô* house tradition of Candomblé foundation, the *Ilê Axé Airá Intilé*, which later became *Ilê Iya Nassô*, the Casa Branca do Engenho Velho. Mestre Didi was initiated by Mãe Aninha, founder of the Candomblé terreiro *Axé Opô Afonjá*, which reveals his connection with the artist Ayrson Heráclito.

Like Mestre Didi, Heráclito is also an initiated member. *Ogã* of the *Jeje Mahi* nation, both share an Afro-worldview. This is what Sodr  (2017) refers to as *Nagô* thinking. It is a way of understanding the cosmos from a new symbolic civilizational paradigm, coming from a complex culture whose origins are distant from the Eurocentric model, organized through the accumulation of capital and the rationalization of signs. In his philosophy of the *atabaques*, he defines these civilizations as

This paradigm corresponds to a cultural complex - whose origins date back to Nigeria and Benin (formerly Dahomey) - which comprises nations known as Egbá, Egbádo, Ijebu, Ijexá, Ketu, Sabé, Iaba, Nagô, and Eyó, incorporating traces of the Adja, Fon, Huedá, Mali, Fasting, and others known in Brazil with the generic name of Jeje. In historical and geographical terms, these nations came from the Costa da Mina (an area that encompasses Benin, Nigeria, and Togo) and began to arrive at the Port of Salvador, in Bahia, at the end of the eighteenth century, as an African barter currency for the acquisition of tobacco produced in the Bahian recôncavo. (Sodr , 2017, p. 103, our translation)

What the cultural complexes, now known as Candomblé nations, have in common is their Afrocentric cultural construction. Territories that were incorporated along with enslaved peoples, who brought with them, as Sodr  (2017) explains, the bodily liturgy of non-linear time, ancestral ways of doing things, which are repeated in the actions of the living bodies of their descendants. Mestre Didi is a good example of how these practices are passed down. Inheriting from his artisan father the skill with his hands used to materialize the tradition of the *Yorùbá* people through sculptures, he carries the symbology of the *Orixás* cult and the sacred entities of Candomblé. Materials such as wood, metal, sisal, bamboo, and beads make up his artistic repertoire.

Through art, they were able to transmit knowledge, customs, aesthetic, mythological, and literary conceptions, contributing to Bahian cultural formation. In this sense, Heráclito's life work can be understood as part of this repertoire. A legacy left by Mestre Didi, among others, which for centuries resisted to keep our culture alive, transmitted to their descendants through performative repertoires such as rituals, ceremonies, stories, crafts, customs, and artistic practices. It is not a matter of making comparisons between them but realizing that they were part of the same community, a worldview in which African, post-diasporic, post-colonial, and modern cultures coexist and sustain each other. The main difference between them is the aesthetic-political intention of each time.

The *Bori* performance was born together with this intention. It is not just an archival photographic record: the photographs are a kind of writing. They are social sculptures that dispute symbolic-political spaces, with signs of lives, languages, times, and movements. They carry narratives that describe events and ways of doing things that we repeat to this day. It is an incontestable proof of existence

and ancestral reference, which resisted the model of Western colonial society that tries to erase non-Western knowledge and wisdom. Heráclito presents our culture. He marks his passage with a living repertoire, through rites and offerings to the *Orixás*, stored in our minds and transmitted to our descendants, proposing a new perception of who we were, who we are, and can be.

5 Final thoughts

Bori is the key to better understanding our origins. The transmission of embodied knowledge through performative repertoires is one of the ways we have found to persist and (r)exist against colonial logic. Heráclito's performance is not only a ritualistic transference based on Candomblé practices; it is a political act. A claim of places and imaginaries, both inside and outside Western art galleries. It is a way of remembering that, even though we have been deprived for many centuries of freedom, rights, the written word, voting, education, health, housing, and humanity, we have managed to endure. Our culture has strengthened and is even more alive. His intention also brought healing, a mirror before us, reflecting our full potential, as we were enslaved, demonized, bled, silenced, plagiarized, and killed. Despite all the colonial power crushing us to this day, they failed. Their dependence on our arms has made us resurge as global powers.

In the course of writing this document, it was possible to envision a possible future for us. However, for it to happen, it is important to combat the prejudices built by the imposed hegemonic culture that tries to keep us within its structures and positions of social inferiority. These are mechanisms of power that stigmatize Afro-diasporic bodies, denying them the right to live. Thus, visual *Orikis* are ways of breaking the reiterated behaviors that subjugate us and make us doubt ourselves. The encounter with *Bori's* performance, by constructing sensitive images of our bodies, causes ruptures. By projecting onto us the ritual and ancestral knowledge of the Yorùbá culture, it reveals foundations that we often do not know. It also reveals such inventiveness, adding to our own repertoire, revealing something veiled, and showing us our own shame.

That is why I believe that Heráclito and Mestre Didi are new identity shapers. Their practices not only reproduce the practices of the *terreiro* and Bahian life but also transform them into new possibilities of the world. Through art, they fight the hegemonic colonial violence that affects us on an individual, regional, global, collective, and systemic scale, showing our inventive potential and creating new symbology and imaginaries. Their legacies can be considered decolonial practices because they directly affect the colonialist heritage, making everyone see who we really are.

Therefore, we need to claim and occupy our position in contemporary society, whether in spaces of political and academic decision-making or the production and circulation of knowledge, behaviors, and sensibilities. We must throw stones toward the colonial past so that we can reach the structures of domination and extinction left in our futures. Thus, we will not only be able to resist oppression and violence but also build new images and futures in which we can live fully.

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