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Image [modified]: Antonio Obá, *Acts of Transfiguration: Disappearance or Recipe for Making a Saint*. Performance. Photographed by Francisco Moreira da Costa at *Antonio Obá: (In)corporações*, curated by R. Conduru, 2016.

Amplifying syncretism: Antonio Obá's dialectical conception of Brazil

Ampliando o sincretismo: a concepção dialética do Brasil de Antonio Obá

Nicole Smythe-Johnson*

ABSTRACT

Antonio Obá (b.1983) was born and grew up in Ceilândia, a dormitory town thirty kilometres outside of Brazil's capital, Brasília. Though this may not seem like an especially significant biographical detail in considering Obá's work – other writers, for example, have focused on the artist's race and devout Catholic upbringing – I argue that this foundational fact of Obá's upbringing and experience is more telling than first impressions suggest. This paper posits Brasília and Ceilândia as stand-ins for a more general dynamic that structures Brazilian identity and nationhood. That violent and generative dynamic – which occurs between a range of other symbolic pairs of concepts, such as black and white, rich and poor, formal and informal, progress and stasis, sacred and profane, European and African, and so on – is Obá's focus, thus "syncretism" emerges as an important term within his practice. The paper offers readings of two of Obá's performances – *Atos da transfiguração* – *desaparição ou receita de como fazer um santo* (2015) and *Malungo: Rite for a Black Mass* (2016) – as well as an accompanying installation, *Malungo* (2019), as examples of the syncretic dynamic or dialectic that runs through much of Obá's work.

KEY WORDS

Afro-Brazilian. Religion. Syncretism. Performance Art. Installation.

RESUMO

Antonio Obá (n.1983) nasceu e cresceu em Ceilândia, uma cidade-satélite a trinta quilômetros da capital do Brasil, Brasília. Embora isso possa parecer um detalhe biográfico insignificante ao se considerar o trabalho de Obá – outros escritores, por exemplo, focaram-se na raça do artista e em sua educação católica devota – eu argumento que esse fato fundamental da formação e experiência de Obá é mais revelador do que as primeiras impressões sugerem. Este artigo considera Brasília e Ceilândia como substitutos de uma dinâmica mais geral que estrutura a identidade e a nacionalidade brasileiras. Essa dinâmica violenta e gerativa – que ocorre em meio a uma gama de outros pares simbólicos de conceitos, como preto e branco, rico e pobre,

formal e informal, progresso e êxtase, sagrado e profano, europeu e africano, e assim por diante – é o foco de Obá; assim o “sincretismo” surge como um termo importante dentro de sua prática. O artigo oferece leituras de duas performances de Obá – *Atos da transfiguração* – desaparecimento ou receita de como fazer um santo (2015) e *Malungo: Rito para uma Missa Negra* (2016) – bem como uma instalação que a acompanha, *Malungo* (2019), como exemplos da dinâmica sincrética ou dialética que permeia grande parte da obra de Obá.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Afro-brasileiro. Religião. Sincretismo. Performance. Instalação.

Antonio Obá (b.1983) was born and grew up in Ceilândia, a dormitory town thirty kilometres outside of Brazil’s capital, Brasilia. Though it could be argued that this is not an especially significant biographical detail in considering Obá’s work – other writers, for example, have focused on the artist’s race and devout Catholic upbringing – I would argue that this foundational fact of Obá’s upbringing and experience is more telling than first impressions suggest. Not only because the artist continues to live in the area and teach at a public school there, even as his profile in the Rio-São Paulo-centred Brazilian art world has steadily grown, but also because Ceilândia’s symbolic position in the narrative of Brazilian modernity and national identity seems to deeply inform Obá’s practice.

Founded in 1970, the dormitory town, or satellite city as it is known in Brazil, was intended to house the occupants of informal settlements, referred to as *invasões* (invasions in Portuguese), that had developed on the borders of the Pilot Plan, Brasilia’s planned city center, designed by modernist architect Lúcio Costa drawing on Corbusierian principles. The *invasões* generally housed migrants from rural parts of Central and Northern Brazil, who had come to work on the construction of Brasilia, or as domestic workers in Brasilia’s upscale homes. Obá’s parents, for example, migrated from Anápolis and Catalão in the center-west region of Goiás. In the late sixties, the military government carried out a series of forced clearings of squatter settlements in Brasilia, and other major Brazilian cities. Those

cleared from the *invasões* outside Brasilia were resettled in newly founded dormitory towns like Ceilândia, and the neighbouring settlement of Taguatinga, where Obá lives and teaches today. The process was known as the Invasion Eradication Campaign or CEI, from which Ceilândia's name is derived.

Though parts of Ceilândia were constructed by the Brazilian government, the town is in many ways the inverse of Brasilia. It is a mixture of prefabricated single-story homes built by government agencies, and shacks erected by residents themselves on allocated plots. In a 1979 article, British architect David Gosling reports that Ceilândia had

(...) all the problems of the worst of the old favelas. Ninety four percent of the houses do not have a water supply, not one has a sewage disposal system, only one street is paved, only 13 percent of the houses have electric light and 'the 26 telephones in the town cease to function when it rains'. On rainy days large holes form in the streets containing an infectious mixture of rainwater, household rubbish and effluent from earth closets. There is no regular service for refuse collection (Gosling, 1979: 54).

In 1976, Brazilian newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* referred to Ceilândia as the biggest "Official Favela" (Ibidem: 54).

Ceilândia has changed since then, but a 2018 article about the Sunset housing division in the town, published by Brazilian media giant *Globo*, suggests that a lack of health and educational services, improper sanitation and unpaved roads remain an issue. According to the article, the federal government continues to grapple with "regularizing" the "informal urban centers predominantly occupied by low-income populations" that characterise Brasilia's satellite towns (Globo.com, 2018). It is no surprise then, that Ceilândia's identity as the constitutive and deliberately invisible inverse of Brasilia remains intact, much as Brasilia's status as symbol of Brazil's modernist ambitions persists. Ceilândia-based filmmaker, Aderley Queirós' comments on his practice indicate the way this ongoing dynamic between Brasilia and its satellites plays out culturally, "in my first films,

there were no scenes shot in Brasília, because Brasília was negation, we could only see it through its negative” (Mesquita, 2018: 66).

In Obá’s work, particularly his performances, we find this constitutive dialectic at play, though in different terms. In keeping with my proximity to these issues – as a U.S.-based, non-Brazilian, without any “skin in the game”, so to speak – I have laid out Brazil’s dialectical constitution in abstract, socio-economic terms through my discussion of Ceilândia’s founding. I posit Brasília as synechdochal thesis, Ceilândia as the corresponding antithesis, and Brazilian modernity as the synthesis emerging from the two. In this formulation, Brasília and Ceilândia are merely stand-ins for a more general dynamic that structures Brazilian identity and nationhood. This violent and generative dynamic – which occurs between a range of other symbolic pairs of concepts, such as black and white, rich and poor, formal and informal, progress and stasis, sacred and profane, European and African and so on – is Obá’s focus, thus “syncretism” emerges as an important term within his practice.

Obá, however, in keeping with his proximity, employs a very different vocabulary to discuss Brazil’s dialectical structure, that of the body and the religious. These are particular, in that they are intensely intimate; they play out in homes and families, in bedrooms and rituals. They are hard to speak about, but potent nonetheless as vessels of histories, information and power. This is what Obá means when he says of his practice and preoccupations:

What is a Black body? What is a mixed-raced body? With these physical features that I was born with I have already inherited a whole range of behaviors that I do not master, which I have received as a kind of social inheritance. So, of course, this involves thinking about the Black body, about this historic body. Obviously these situations introduce some issues. All this experience within a Catholic tradition. Why has the Afro-Brazilian side always been rejected, always marginalized? So I think it starts from a lot of personal distress and a personal quest to understand these roots. When I talk about this issue of syncretism, there is the ritual side that has always really interested me, the issue of a transcendental, archetypal,

symbolic perception (...) (Barros, 2019: n.p.).

Even the artist's chosen name, Antonio Obá, speaks to his interest in syncretism. In the text accompanying his first solo exhibition in New York, it is noted that Antonio is a reference to *Santo Antonio Categeró* [Saint Anthony of Carthage], commonly known as "the Holy African". Saint Anthony was born Muslim in 15th century North Africa, but was captured as a young man and taken to Sicily as a slave. As the story goes, he asked to be baptised Catholic and took the name Anthony, after St. Anthony of Padua. Saint Anthony is very popular in Brazil and is recognised as the patron saint of Black people.

Obá is also a rich reference. The Mendes Wood text points out that it brings together masculine and feminine genders from an Africanist perspective:

'Obá' was the word for 'King' in the Benin Empire of West Africa, founded in the 15th century and destroyed by the British at the end of the 19th century. 'Obá' is also connected to the word 'iabá', which is the name used for orishas (deities) with female attributes. In nature *iaba* is identified as the ruler of troubled waters and also as the *Iaba* River, also known as the Niger River. 'Obá' also references the Great Warrior Queen, Xangô's first wife, an Orisha who rules over thunder and fights with an 'ofá' (bow and arrow), sword, and shield (Mendes Wood DM, 2018: n.p.).

Obá's name then, is another episode of dialectical synthesis, or in the artist's own terms, syncretism. It is important to note that Obá's syncretism is not the harmonious hybridity posited by Brazil's myth of racial democracy. Rather, the violence of the syncretic is key to Obá's project. His research-driven engagement with Afro-Brazilian and African history also means that the marginalised and overlooked elements of Brazilian national identity take center stage in his practice, much as fellow Ceilândia native Queirós places the satellite towns, not Brasilia, at the center of his creative output.

With this in mind, let us now turn to one of Obá's works, the now

infamous 2015 performance *Atos de transfiguração: desapareção ou receita para fazer um santo* [Acts of Transfiguration: Disappearance or Recipe for the Making of a Saint] [Figs. 1 and 2]. The twenty-minute performance begins with a naked Obá walking through the audience, holding a plaster reproduction of the Virgem Aparecida, patron saint of Brazil, so that it hides his genitals. Once he arrives at a stage demarcated by a bright spotlight in an otherwise dark room, he kneels in front of a wooden bowl and grater, positioning the bowl and large grater between his legs, with the top of the grater resting against his stomach. He then begins to grate the plaster statue



FIG. 1. Antonio Obá, *Atos da transfiguração – desapareção ou receita de como fazer um santo*, [Acts of Transfiguration: Disappearance or Recipe for Making a Saint]. Performance, 20 mins. Photographed by Francisco Moreira da Costa at Antonio Obá: *(In)corporações*, curated by Roberto Conduru at Galeria Cândido Portinari – UERJ, Rio de Janeiro, 2016.



FIG. 2. Antonio Obá, *Atos da transfiguração – desaparecimento ou receita de como fazer um santo*, [Acts of Transfiguration: Disappearance or Recipe for Making a Saint]. Performance, 20 mins. Photographed by Francisco Moreira da Costa at Antonio Obá: *(In)corporações*, curated by Roberto Conduru at Galeria Cândido Portinari – UERJ, Rio de Janeiro, 2016.

The grating is the bulk of the performance. It is slow and repetitive, painful to watch as his legs begin to tremble with the effort and his skin glisten with sweat. It is also reminiscent of manual labour, recalling the

plantation, the repetitive motion of chopping cane, perhaps. One has nothing to do but watch the muscles of his arms and shoulders ripple, oscillating between admiration and pity. It is also deeply sensual. Sensual in the sense of the erotic, all of his repetitive and goal-oriented activity, a kind of stroking, is focused between his thighs. He is handsome and clean shaven from the crown of his head to the top of his thighs, nudity in its most extreme form; the reference is pornography, but also purity. It's the "clean" in clean-shaven.

It is also sensual in the sense of an engagement of the senses. The sound of the grating is as much a part of the experience as its visuals. As one watches for minute after minute, the mind cycles through associations and sensations – "that must hurt", "what a body!", "he must be tired", "hear his breathing", "my mother used to grate coconut like that on Sundays", "the grated plaster is so much like flour", "when will this end?", "is he crying?", "all the color is gone now". All that, and I wasn't even there. I've only seen a video, who knows what I might have smelled, would my skin have prickled? Maybe.

Sixteen minutes in, when the *Virgem* has finally been reduced to a white core, he stops. He takes a few seconds to settle himself and set aside the grater. Then he begins to cover his body in the powder. He does not dump the bowl of powder unto his head. He sort of sprinkles it, his wrists flicking in a way that is reminiscent of the gestures employed by Catholic priests in spreading incense, and his fingers grasp the powder in the way the Eucharist wafer is held during communion. Even having only the most passing knowledge of Catholic rituals, the reference is clear. When he is completely covered in the white powder, he stands and walks out, with his head solemnly bowed.

So, what's happening here? Transfiguration refers to an episode from the New Testament of the Bible during which Jesus takes three of his disciples, Peter, James and John, up to a mountaintop to pray. Once there,

Jesus' appearance was transfigured – his “face shone like the sun” and “His garments became white as light” according to Matthew 17:2. According to Mark 9:3, his clothing was “glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them”. Not only is Jesus's appearance changed, but he is seen in conversation with Moses and Elijah, which inserts him into a tradition of prophetic foretelling of the arrival of the son of god. According to the Bible, the transfiguration “gives us a foretaste of Christ's glorious coming, when He will change your lowly body to be like His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). Catholic teaching also uses the story to remind Catholics that “it is through many persecutions that we must enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Theologian Dorothy Lee argues that “the transfiguration is not an other-worldly narrative, disconnected from the body and ordinary human experience. On the contrary, it is precisely Jesus' transfigured *body* that discloses the face of God and the hope of God's future (...)” she goes on, “[t]he transfiguration on the mountain is the meeting place between human beings and God, between the temporal and the eternal, between past, present, and future, between everyday human life – with all its hopes and fears – and the mystery of God” (Lee, 2004: 2).

According to Lee's reading, the transfiguration is its own moment of dialectical synthesis. Raised as a devout Catholic, even considering joining the priesthood at one point, Obá would be aware of all of this. The artist brings the black body, this “historical body”, into the conversation by grounding the story in his own black body through the medium of performance, but also through compositional reference to the most celebrated depiction of the transfiguration, 16th century Italian painter Raphael's painting, *The Transfiguration* (1520). The intersecting triangles that make up the composition of Raphael's *Transfiguration* are reproduced in Obá's torso and arms. The performance stages the black body being made white, but it is also a historically profane body, associated with labour, pain and hyper-sexuality more than any other, transfigured into a sacred one.



FIG.3. Antonio Obá, *Malungo: Rite for a Black Mass*. Galeria Luciana Caravello, Rio de Janeiro, 2016. © Miguel Pinheiro.

This reference to transfiguration is developed in *Malungo* [Fig. 3], where the difference in value between black and white, and sacred and profane, that could be read into *Acts of Transfiguration* – that is, the suggestion that becoming white or sacred is an improvement – is troubled. The series of works that share the name *Malungo* include a performance, *Malungo: Rite for a Black Mass* (2016) and a series of installations. I have only seen photographs and read very brief descriptions of the performance, so my discussion of it will not be as detailed as that of *Acts of Transfiguration*. Instead, I will think of the installation and performance versions of *Malungo* as a series that develops a tangle of ideas first hinted at in *Acts of Transfiguration*. “Malungo” is a colloquial word used by enslaved blacks in Brazil to refer to those who share the experience of enslavement and blackness, something like brethren or brother. The term, which originates

among the Bantu people of Central and East Africa, brings together three concepts – kinship, a big canoe and misfortune – to designate this bond as specific to the Black Atlantic. Jerome Branche, professor of Latin American literature and cultural studies, writes of the term:

(...) for the Bantu speakers who made the Middle Passage it meant shipmate. In colonial Brazil, the term *meu malungo* referred to “my comrade-with-whom-I-shared-the-misfortune-of-the-big-canoe-that-crossed-the-ocean”. Because the notion of the ocean (*kalunga* in Bakongo, another Bantu tongue) is embedded in the idea of a voyage in a big boat and also refers to the line of demarcation between life and death, *malungo*, for Bantu speakers in Africa, also referred to the “traveller” paraphrasing Robert Slenes, “on the sea of death who came back to the land of the living”. (Branche, 2015: 3)

With further reference to Slenes, a history professor at the University of Campinas, Branche notes that “the numerical preponderance of Bantu speakers among the enslaved in colonial Brazil, the fact that they shared a mixed Afro-Portuguese lingua franca as well as other complex cultural antecedents that cohered into new forms of sociability and outlook” suggests the idea of “a Bantu proto-nation in Brazil before independence” (Branche, 2015: 3).

As with *Acts of Transfiguration*, the title of the *Malungo* works initiates a whole set of associative networks, that the work itself then plays out, literally in the sense of performance, but also figuratively in the sense of word play, where meaning is poked, prodded, stretched, and twisted. The word *malungo*’s positing of an Afro-Brazilian collectivity, Slenes’ “Bantu proto-nation”, recasts the syncretic from the perspective of blackness, rather than via the repressive colonial gaze of European cultural hegemony. In the artist’s own words, “syncretism as seen from the perspective of personal negritude” (Barbosa, 2017: 42). The “personal” in Obá’s statement is also key, as this is not an abstract, intellectual exercise, but one that is grounded in the artist’s own life and experience. As Janaína Barros points

out, “Obá’s production puts forward the notion of self-ethnography as an epistemological strategy in the contemporary art world (...), by reflecting on the crisis of the metanarratives adopted by different scholars in the second half of the 20th century” (Barros, 2019: n.p.).



FIG.4. Antonio Obá, *Malungo*, installation. *Parcours*, Basel, Switzerland, 2019. Image Courtesy of the Artist and Mendes Wood DM São Paulo, Brussels, New York.

In *Malungo: Rite for a Black Mass* (2016) Obá drinks a liter of cachaça from a eucharistic chalice while drawing a cross on his torso over and over again using charcoal. In the 2019 iteration of *Malungo*, installed in a building that was originally the site of a Franciscan monastery and church as part of Art Basel Switzerland’s *Parcours* programme, we find the chalice of cachaça on a version of the altar that appears in the smaller 2017 installation of the same name [Fig. 4]. This time the altar is flanked by two black candles and two 2019 paintings, *Figura da encruzilhada: o escalpelado* [Crossroads figure: the scalpel] and *Figura da encruzilhada: processos de cura – sangria* [Crossroads figure: healing processes – bleeding] with *Variações especulares – Narciso* [Specular Variations – Narcissus][Fig.5], the unreflective mirror that appeared in the artist’s PIPA Prize installation at MAM Rio, behind it. On the ground, in front of the altar is a bed of charcoal, cut into three by a T-shaped walkway.



FIG.5. Antonio Obá, *Variações especulares - Narciso*, from *Ambiente com Espelhos* series, 2017, antique wood frame and brushed steel, 179 x 173,5 cm. Image Courtesy of the Artist and Mendes Wood DM São Paulo, Brussels, New York.

Since the chalice of cachaça seems to be at the center of the performance and installation versions of the *Malungo* works, let us begin there. In the Catholic tradition, adherents drink consecrated bread and wine from a eucharistic chalice, as a form of communion with Jesus Christ. The bread and wine are believed to have been transubstantiated into the actual flesh and blood of Christ. Paralleling this, cachaça, as a by-product of sugar

cane processing, is a kind of transubstantiation of black bodies, via their labour, which has produced Brazilian sugar cane over centuries. Barros takes things further by teasing out all the various meanings of cachaça, first positing it as the “distilled spirit” of “Bantu Malungo”, which she translates as “a runaway slave”, probably a reference to the Association of Remnant Quilombo Communities of Pará¹ known as Malungu, or “the link of a chain”, possibly a reformulation of the concept of kinship. She goes on to tie the altar to the paintings:

Cachaça is an offering on an altar to Exu, messenger-orisha and lord of the crossroads. Cachaça as a form of enslaved labor in the colonial past and as pain-relief for the numbing of the body. The ritualistic meaning is conjured at the edge of human elevation in the sense of aggregating pain and pleasure in a body placed in involuntary sacrifice (Barros, 2019: n.p.).

The transubstantiation of black flesh into sacrifice that Barros argues the *Malungo* works propose through the inclusion of cachaça, as well as the use of charcoal, which materially references both transformation and blackness, does two things. For one, it indexes the sacrifice of millions of black bodies in the making of the nation that would become Brazil. It also, in sacrifice’s significance as a vessel of sacred communion, parallels the transformation that we find in *Acts of Transfiguration*, a profane body made sacred. But is this a transformation in the sense of one thing becoming another? Or is it a transformation of our perception that allows the recognition of the sacred in the profane? Or, to put it in terms of another dialectical opposition, the black within Brazilian modernity’s apparent whiteness, manifested most overtly in the starkly white buildings of Brasilia’s city center?

Barros tells us that Georges Bataille is a key reference for Obá “in his reflection on the integrity of the body within the three dimensions of eroticism (the body, the heart, and the sacred)” (Barros, 2019: n.p.). Though Barros does not provide enough of a citation for me to track and unpack her assessment of what Obá draws from Bataille’s work, Dutch anthropologist

and filmmaker Mattijs van de Port notes Bataille's attention to "the experiential proximity of the temple and the whorehouse", citing the French writer's confession, "my true church is a whorehouse, the only one that gives me true satisfaction" (van de Port, 2013: 70). For van de Port, Afro-Brazilian religion, both the Catholic and Candomblé varieties, exhibit an ecstatic and mystical tendency, which he finds in both the baroque aesthetics of Catholic churches in Bahia and Minas Gerais and the rituals of Candomblé. The essence of his point is captured in a description of the experience of French anthropologist Roger Bastide. It is worth quoting at length:

When one visits churches and candomblés, an analogy imposes itself, even against one's will, between two modes of ecstasy. Down there, in that intensely green valley, between the palm trees, the banana trees, and the thick undergrowth of plants, most of which carry the names of saints and orixás - Bush-of-Ogum, Saints-wood, Carpet-of-Oxalá, Wounds-of-Saint-Sebastian - the tam-tam of the negroes penetrates one's being through the ears, through the nose, through the mouth, punching one in the stomach, imposing its rhythms on one's body and mind. Here [in the baroque churches of the upper city] it is the tam-tam of the gold and the ornaments that penetrates us, not through our ears but through our eyes. As with the other tam-tam, that of the sanctuary of the spirits, it is inescapable. Attempts to get away from the golden profusion by closing one's eyes are in vain. It is as when one has been looking into the sun for too long: luminous stains, a whirling of reds and yellows going through one's brain. Opening one's eyes again, there is no way to put one's spirit to rest. The light plays over the low columns, it nestles in a black vine, in a green leaf, a sacred bird, an angel's smile, and then leads us to yet another glittering spot, with the effect that everything seems to be dancing and whirling, a spinning sensation that soon captures our own heads. Here, all that is profane in us has left us. Here, it is impossible to link two ideas, or to coordinate a thought: we find ourselves turned over to the most terrible of adventures (van de Port, 2013: 70) .

In Bastide's ecstatic experience we find an account of how the sacred might find expression in the carnal, or vice versa. What's more, the context

in which Bastide has this experience, is exactly the one that Obá claims for himself, that of Black Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian syncretic religions such as Candomblé.

For Obá, however, Brazilian syncretism is not a harmonious melding of parts. Working from the perspective of his “personal negritude”, it is an indication of the resilience of Brazil’s Afro-descended people and culture, which continues to assert itself even in the face of a negating national narrative. In keeping with his thinking syncretism from the perspective of blackness, Obá also foregrounds syncretism’s relationship to violence. It is there in the way his performances push his physical limits, and in his use of materials like cachaça and charcoal, both of which come into being through violence. Charcoal cannot be made without the destruction of something else, and even if we set aside cachaça’s historical association with slavery, sugar cane cultivation in any era is a violent business, the leaves of the plant are sharp enough to cut skin. According to a 2007 article in *The Guardian*, the contemporary Brazilian sugar industry, now more invested in the production of ethanol, has also been charged with practices akin to slavery (Phillips, 2007: n.p.).

Obá’s practice then turns on the exploration of the range of dialectical terms that characterise Brazilian national identity from the nation’s founding, to present day. He does not merely posit the merging of opposites, but also the simultaneous violence and creative potential of merger, through an exploration of his own personal history. His works do not critique or celebrate the tensions inherent in Afro-Catholicism, rather they play out of memories of an intense, intimate and complex relationship to a faith that is at once familiar and comforting, like your mother’s kitchen, and violently negating. As Obá writes of his work in the exhibition catalogue accompanying Roberto Conduru’s exhibition *Negros Índios*:

The supposed desecration of known icons (grating the image of a saint, filling a Eucharistic chalice with cachaça, weaving a rosary with sisal)

presents an uneasy reconciliation of the essentially different shades that make up the Brazilian formation, ranging from the religious aspect (enslaved blacks erecting churches in Ouro Preto, the social persecution of the Candomblé *terreiros*) to political and social situations (the obligatory substitution of African names with saints' names in a relationship of identity annulment, the whitening of the "race"). An amplified syncretism as an exponent of the wounds that colonized us and insist on colonizing our bodies, but also brings a certain reverence about the influences that, after all, the artist recognizes in his intimate family and affective roots (Conduru, 2017: 18)².

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Notes

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1 The quilombolas are Afro-Brazilians whose ancestors escaped slavery to establish autonomous communities in the hinterlands of Brazil. Their communities are called quilombos. In recent years these communities have been organizing to legitimize their claims to their traditional lands.

2 Translated by Nicole Smythe-Johnson.

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