Movimento Negro in Salvador de Bahia: an alliance between things

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MOVIMENTO NEGRO V SALVADORU DE BAHIA: ALIANCE VĚCÍ

ABSTRAKT   Při procházce ulicemi Salvadoru de Bahia je možné vnímat přítomnost symbolů kultury boje, kterou propaguje hnutí Movimento Negro, jež v reakci na místní strukturální rasismus vyzývá k zaplnění prostoru oslavnými reprezentacemi afrického původu. Pokus o pochopení toho, kdo nebo co je Movimento Negro, byl učiněn prostřednictvím terénního výzkumu. Ukázalo se ústřední postavení materiálního a senzitivního rozměru jako prostoru boje mezi ekonomickými a rasovými skupinami (Rancière 2004). Rasismus i formy odporu v reakci na něj jsou viditelné a materiálně se projevují v tělech, prostorech a předmětech. Movimento Negro je hyperobjekt (Morton 2018). Je to "vícedruhová asambláž" (Haraway 2015): zachycena ve svých smyslových projevech nás nutí zpochybňovat místní systém významů a samotná epistemologická paradigmata, na nichž je založena modernita (Gilroy 1993).

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA   de-kolonialismus; černošství; rasismus; prostor; Movimento Negro; aliance věcí; městské umění; pixação

ABSTRACT   Walking through Salvador de Bahia's streets one perceives the presence of symbols of the culture of struggle promoted by the Movimento Negro, which invites to *encher o espaço* ("fill the space") with celebratory representations of Afro-descent, in response to local structural racism. An attempt was made to understand who or what the Movimento Negro was through fieldwork. The centrality of the material and sensitive dimension, as a space for struggle among economic and racial groups (Rancière 2004), has emerged. Both racism and the forms of resistance in response to it are visible and materially manifest in bodies, spaces, and objects. Movimento Negro is a hyperobject (Morton 2018). It's a "multispecies assemblage" (Haraway 2015): caught in its sensual manifestations, it forces us to question the local system of meaning and the very epistemological paradigms on which Modernity is based (Gilroy 1993).

KEY WORDS   de-colonialism; blackness; racism; space; Movimento Negro; alliance of things; urban art; pixação

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic building (Barth 1998) in Brazil is closely linked to structural racism. The term refers to racial discrimination as a mechanism that organizes interactions and economic relationships between people in a given society (Bastide – Florestan 1959). The position of individuals in the hierarchy in Brazil has its roots in the local structure during colonialism (Nascimento 1975; Batista da Silva 2020). The racist discourse that spread from Europe to Brazil around the nineteenth century under the influence of Social Darwinism was instrumented to maintain the same asymmetrical power relations of the slave system within the nascent nation-state of Brazil.

Subordinate groups have moved from former slaves to exploit works and various citizenship criteria have been created (Schwartz 1993, 16). The result has been a profound socio-economic divide among the population, which still exists today (Baggio – Resadori – Gonçalves 2018; Veliq – Magalhães 2022). In the contemporary local context, there is a growing awareness and sensitivity to these issues of inequality of access to resources and full recognition of citizenship rights, which permeates the social fabric outside the scientific community (Graças Gonçalves 2009). This is due to the work of various socio-political organizations that have struggled to improve the living conditions of individuals since the eighties of the twentieth century. Among these, an important

role has been that of the Movimento Negro (Ribeiro Corossa-cz 2007), the main promoter of the discourse of denouncing racial discrimination as a political responsibility and actions of re-education of the population (Gomes 2005). It's part of the politico-cultural macro-movement of afro-descendants dislocated outside of Africa (Gilroy 1993), which includes the Black Panthers and the current Black Lives Matter. The first problem faced was to identify who this Movimento Negro was in Salvador de Bahia. All field work has been built around this difficulty. Considering the mutability of these afro-descendant movements with the historical moment and the specific geographical place in which they are examined (Hall 2006), it must be premised that by "contemporary Movimento Negro" we mean the specificity with which this is configured from the 1970s onwards (Araujo Pereira – Silva da Lima 2019). Nilma Lino Gomes (2017) defines it as a heterogeneous set of political, academic, cultural, religious, and artistic groups united by the intent to enhance and affirm negro's history and culture in Brazil, by breaking "the racist barriers imposed on negros and negras in the occupation of different spaces and places in society"[1] (Gomes 2017, 24). A recent study (Arau-jo Pereira – Silva de Lima 2019) shows that the Movimento Negro in the present day is characterized by its widespread diffusion within the social fabric and its use of aesthetics as a favorite tool of action (Araujo Pereira – Silva de Lima 2019). While that study focuses on the diffusion of new "anti-racist" narratives and cultural codes through digital tools and media (Araujo Pereira – Silva de Lima 2019, 8), here it will be proposed an analysis of diffusion strategies through the material dimension of reality. The places, bodies, and spaces of the city are configured as core elements to understand ethnic and racial tensions and the workings of the Movimento Negro. The ethnic construction of *negritude* ("afro-brazilianity") will be considered here in the sense of Gilroy's (1993) *blackness*: a complex representation of a black particularity divided by ethnicity, gender, and political consciousness. This will be presented through the material implications of the daily life of the so-called afro-descendants in Salvador de Bahia. We will reflect on the materiality of places as valuable clues to analyze and understand the strategies of action of the Movimento Negro and its configuration.

METHODOLOGY

This article is an excerpt from my Master's thesis in Anthropological and Ethnological Science[2]. Data and case studies reported here were collected by a field work from July to December 2019 in Salvador de Bahia. Back home, bibliographic research continued until December 2020. Face-to-face interviews were collected. Learning about the phenomenological dimension of culture was a privilege. As Csordas (1994) reminds us, taking up Merleau-Ponty (1945), culture resides

1   My translation.
2   The Thesis has been discussed on 16th March 2021.

as much in objects and representations as in the bodily processes of perception through which the same representations are created. For this reason, it was necessary to observe the being-in-the-world of the interlocutors, through the anthropology of the body (Malighetti – Molinari 2006) in which the researcher's corporeality was configured as an instrument of investigation and place of reflection. Individual's bodies have been considered continuity of space, the first place of socialization and resistance (Low 2017). To focus on the materiality of human existence, a video camera was used[3] to document interviews, and events and to keep track of peculiar elements reminiscent of blackness scattered throughout the city's places.

RACIALIZATION OF SPACES: *LUGARES BRANCOS AND LUGARES NEGROS*

Although traditionally in Brazil a *color continuum* is used in the censuses to classify the ethnicity of individuals (Corossacz 2007; Fry 2019) during my field period in Salvador, people tended to adopt the polarizing model: "white or black". The representations are opposed: *branco* ("white") is the economically and politically dominant group, *negro* ("black") is instead who is in a subordinate position concerning the first. For a long time, bodies were manipulated to conceal the phenotypic traits attributable to the African populations, such as frizzy hair and fleshy lips (Do Nascimento 1978; Sansone 2003). In the 1990s, shifting toward the "black pole" began (Barba 1999; Sansone 2003; Malighetti 2004): people increasingly manipulated their bodies to highlight and enhance Afro aesthetic qualities, which had previously been concealed. This mutability of aesthetic canons[4] is part of the wider process of deconstruction of the local system of thought - based on a racist vision - and of denouncing the discrimination of certain social groups. The color of the skin is not only an index

3   In another forum, we could look deeply into how to use of technologies and images could influence the construction of the ethnographic field (Pink 2011), but for the time being, the subject of the article is not mentioned here.
4   Since colonial times, the local population has had a varied set of phenotypic traits and skin tones, due to the widespread sexual unions between Portuguese settlers and indigenous women, and enslaved Africans. In those times, an individual's status was inferred from the way they dressed and the items they wore; what distinguished masters of slaves was therefore a performance of social status (Samson 2015). At that time, skin color alone was not a distinctive quality. The "speech of race" reached Brazil later, around the 19th century, under the influence of European social Darwinism (Corossacz 2007). It is from this time that biological explanations of the socio-economic status of individuals, an almost obsessive focus on the phenotypic characteristics of the body (including skin color) began to spread, and a conception of "being a master" and "being a slave" was created in terms of the opposition between a Euro – descendant, and Afro-descendant. By the local mentality in which the status has been made also the equation of "whiteness" as a right to inherit privileged status and wealth has become something to display aesthetically.

of physical distinction but the symbol of the supremacy of the "white" and the irreducible inferiority of the "black race" (Bastide – Florestan 1959, 83). Vito, the young 25-year-old boy who describes himself as Afro-Brazilian and who lives in a precarious economic condition, explained to me that being a pack is a matter of inheritance of comfortable living conditions and not something determined by genetics.

> Paola: "Like the Mercado Modelo where they took the slaves?"
> Vito: "(…) When we say *branco* ("white"), we don't talk about the color of the skin, you know! The *brancos* who live in this *favela* ("shanty towns"), are descendants of *niggers*, of Indians, and people end up not understanding this: despite that, they also have *branco*'s blood. What is required to be a *branco* is that they are not inside the slum. They have inherited: they are people who have already been born with money, who have already been born with a legacy as much money as history."[5]

When Vito talks about "the legacy of money and the history of *brancos*", he refers to the invisibility of the collective memory (Halbwachs 1990) of Afro-descendants in national history (Do Nascimento 1978; Bastos 2020). The practices of the Movimento Negro aim to restore visibility to subjectivities (Ortner 2005) from these groups, in both the historical past and the living present. Vito's words also introduce another central theme of this reflection: the overlap between being *negro*[6] and living in the *favela*. As we shall see, the ideology of stratification (Matera 2015) is something that is inscribed in the materiality of the urban fabric and that creates a *coincidence between race and the space* of the city that individuals are allowed to occupy.

In Salvador de Bahia, the individual's racial categorization determines his or her access. Attention to urban space helps to capture the manifestations of structural racism. Salvador de Bahia is composed of conurbations of very different buil-

dings: from the opulent churches of the Pelourinho[7] to areas with modern buildings where rich families live. Then there are the *favelas* ("shanty towns"): precarious concrete towers with bare bricks that extend under the large bridges that connect the city, near the overpasses, and in areas far from the urban center. Moving from one zone to another, the feeling is that of being literally in a constantly changing city. Marcello Balbo (1993) invented the term fragmented city to refer to the *magalopolis* of developing countries like Brazil. Their peculiarity is their chaotic fragmentation, in which urban unity disappears and a juxtaposition of elements completely different from one another occurs (Balbo 1993). Lefevbre (1970) defined the city as the projection of society on the territory and its practical-sensible and social morphology at the same time, as a reflection of a precise political project (Lefevbre 1970, 75). In the conformation of the town, the class distinction (Harvey 2016, 10) between *brancos* and *negros* is materialized. The "dual" feeling of these postcolonial urban areas embodied the duplicity of the citizenship of the colonial political project (Balbo 1993, 26). The difference is experienced in a space form: racialized forms of social relationships are part of the landscape (Wade 2020). My callers used the phrase *lugares brancos* ("white areas") to indicate areas frequented by individuals in the middle and upper segments of the population. This is especially the latest built coastal areas where there are numerous discos and tourist places. Another *lugar branco* par excellence is the center of commerce. In addition to being localized. Mostly close to residential areas rich brancos, it is a place where prices are much higher than in small neighborhood retail stores. I mean, there's this whole network of restaurants whose costs are too high for a black. Besides the lack of affordability, the device of derogatory representations associated with the black body also acts as a filtering mechanism. In malls they go find mainly *brancos*: the few *negros* will often be confined to the role of scavenger or security. This point was also brought to my attention by Marcos, a black museologist and anthropologist (40).

> Paola: "So in the Ads for job offers they write "good looking"?
> Marcos: "you can go around the city, you can go to the shopping malls here, the ones closer and the ones further away: you go into the shops and see girls who are lighter [in skin tone] than you, with straighter hair than yours, standing there. But isn't the population of Salvador the blackest! Where are those [negras]? You'll also meet them persons [negras], clean the street. And you will meet these guys.[negros] in malls: clean the street or for safety. So it's like this: is It is the blackest city [in Brazil]?! Yes, it is; but with major problems. With that issue to be resolved: Where should these men and women [blacks] stay?"[8]

When Marcos questions "where should women and men be", he brings up a major issue of the negros' condition of existence: they experience a situation of non-recognition (Bastos 2020, 679). This disavowal of their role in society creates an

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5   My translation.

6   In the words of colloquial usage of people in Salvador de Bahia, this conception of race often emerged as a joint of the socio-economic condition of the individual with the aesthetic morphology of his body (Mitchell 2017). Although the close dialogue between the Afro-descending movements located outside Africa in the twentieth century influenced the Brazilian context with the concept of the North American race (Fry 2009), in Salvador there are two terms to indicate Afro-Brazil: *negro* and *preto*. The difference is that the priest - in a biological sense - connotes the aesthetic morphology of the body and involves a black and dark skin color. The term Negro is rather a macro, fluid category, connected with the socio-economic condition of the individual. *Negro* means "to be poor", *preto* no. The priest may be rich, but he is united to the *Negro* through the stigma inherited from Africans. In Salvador de Bahia expressions such as preto pobre ("poor black") or preto de favela ("black of the favela") are used, to emphasize the double stigma of the person: black of economic condition, but also for the color of the skin. Recent genetic studies on the demographic composition of the Brazilian population (Maio – Santos 2005) exemplify the significant impact of theories of social biologists on the concept of race at a local level, but the overlap of these categories with the distinctions of social class is evident.

7   Salvador de Bahia's old town.

8   My translation.

area of non-existence (De Genova 2002) which is both material and social. They are materially confined to places other than brancos and at the same time they experience social confinement: when they are allowed to frequent "places of prestige" they assume a subordinate position to brancos. You don't see them eating in restaurants, but work as safety. So it is not just. a question of being able to physically and materially be in a space, but it is also the social status that the individual can claim at that moment. Being Afro-Brazilian is an experience and cannot be removed from the economic, political, and historical dynamics that gave birth to this category (Hall 2003). If it is in a state way of doing and thinking (Foucault 1997, 262), then it is not surprising that it is precisely the racist system of thought - underlying the conformation of the nation state (Quijano 2005) - that regulates the lives of Brazilian citizens (Do Nascimento 1978; Almeida 2018). In Brazil, racism acts as a political micro-technical, regulatory body (Sales 2006). It works through the seal stereotyped and denigrating representations of *negritude* ("blackness"), creating a non-existent space for individuals and placing them in a well-defined socioeconomic and physical-geographical space. That is a racialization of spaces the creation and maintenance of separate locations for the various economic and racial categories (Low 2017). This is why 'space structures can be seen as the outcome and means of [building] social relationships which have a racialized discourse" (Wade 2020, 34). The gap in terms of quality of life and citizenship between brancos and negros is also manifested in the differences in services and facilities present in the geographical space in which they live. According to Balbo (1993), those who do not have a sewer service at home may not be considered citizens, even if they are the majority (Balbo 1993, 29). It made me reflect on the house of Gleids (30), a black graffiti artist who I followed for a lot of the field work. He is a well-known artist.in his region and is often tasked with painting local markets to attract customers. Despite the very economic income in his apartment, which is equipped with amenities when compared to those of his neighbors, basic services are lacking. The domestic space consists of a small bedroom with a small window and standing iron bars, a mattress upstairs for sleeping, and a gas cooker. The bathroom is a corner, separated from the rest with a plastic curtain. Gleids has a bathroom, however, is no water. Definitely a different situation from the average. A combination of inefficiencies that strengthen the cumulative disadvantage between *brancos* and *negros*: distinctions that are perpetuated until they become peculiar features of the same landscape (Harvey 1989, 142). As will shortly be seen, living in the *favela* exemplify the condition of *negritude*: an experience of socio-political marginalization inscribed in the materiality of places.

EU SOU *FAVELA*

In Salvador de Bahia's *favelas*, defined as *lugares negros* ("black places"), there is a high coincidence between the density of the population living there and the number of people considered Afro-Brazilian. One of the reasons is certainly the gentrification process (Zukin 1987) that occurred in the 1990s. The result was a near-complete replacement of the black population - of physiognomy and socio-economic status - in Pelourinho (De Albuquerque 2021). Many of these families, such as Sagaz's (26 years old), received government money to move from the center to the suburbs of Salvador (Albuquerque Ribeiro 2021). It was a real ghettoization of *blacks* and their association, in the local collective imagination, with the condition of *ser favelado* ("being of favela"). Even the *favelas* which are located in a geographically central area of the city, exhibit the particular characteristics of the "suburbs" as a place of deterioration and institutional abandonment. Due to the lack of transportation that easily links the neighborhood to other parts of the city, residents rarely travel from their area of residence. In addition, when the *favela* is located in a central area of the city, the inhabitants are discouraged in their movements by military surveillance (De Souza – Serra 2020). For example, in front of the atelier where Fernando (28 years old, a black artist) works in an area that is very popular with tourists, there are always three or four armed soldiers lurking there. I found out later that the back street is the entrance to a *favela*. Their presence discourages poor *negros* from entering the main street, where *brancos* and *gringos*[9] ("foreigners") stroll to admire the architectural beauty of the buildings. It is difficult for the police to get into these areas because they are considered dangerous and under the control of drug trafficking. You may enter only if you are accompanied by a resident or someone who has the confidence of the community. I was also taught that to move alone in the city I should never deviate from the main route already known because there was a risk of entering 'dangerous *favelas*'; connected to the safe streets by small roads. Because of the detention and closure outside, these are places that are not well known. Brazilians who have never been to conceive of them as they are presented by the media in sensationalistic programs: places of violence, where there is no 'culture'. Vito, among others, told me about a television program in which the military police kill drug traffickers in *favelas*, who are portrayed as *negros* (of skin and economic status). This is just one example of how the vision of the *negro* from *favela* is disseminated, understood as "an imaginary subject dramatized as a young man from a deficient *comunidade* (literally "community") who would escape the fate of an early death through [...] drug trafficking"[10] (Durão – Coelho 2013, 922). However, the first favela I went to with Gleids and his colleague artist Ocio (44 years), had a large iron door guarded by a local man. Looking back, I realized that the community fears the violent incursion of the army from the outside. The stories that come from those who live in these neighborhoods are different from those released by the me-

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9   This term is used at the local level as a derogatory term for "foreign tourists". It's mainly used to indicate those who seem to have more purchasing power, such as Europeans.

10   My translation.

dia. I often participated in poetry events, where the accidental death of the inhabitants of the same *favela* as the competing poets was made public. Accidental death, brought about by the state army, is a daily fact. The expression "bala perdida" ("stray bullet") is used in local colloquialism to describe these opaque situations in which officers shoot and kill civilians (Da Lima 2013). It isn't uncommon that during military operations in and near *favelas*, an individual believed to be a *negro* (dark skinned and modestly dressed) is killed because he or she is mistaken for a criminal. Through the Internet, analogous episodes involving also very young civilians twelve or ten years of age are always more divulged (Anunciação – Bonfim – Ferreira 2020). All of them were mistakenly killed. I remember being astonished when in a theatrical performance, a news episode that happened a few days before was told. One black man walked down the street at night. He was shot on sight: the soldiers confused the umbrella he was wearing with a gun. I learned many similar stories, especially at Black cultural and artistic events, like in the poetry slams I mentioned or like in this play. It's hard to get that information out of the official media. We don't see them, we don't know them. There is a government of physical and moral existence (Foucault 2004, 31): *branco* and *negro* imply moral meanings. The former is the norm, the ideal citizen while the latter is deviance, the a--normal (Malighetti 2004; Sansone 2015; Fernandes de Souza 2016) who must be confined far from the police; rejected as a potential threat to society (Foucault 2017). So being a *negro* "has little to do with skin color, but more essentially with the condition of living for death, of living with fear, expectation, or of living truly poor and miserable"[11] (Almeida 2018, 96). Starting from Foucault's (1977) concepts of *biopolitics* and Mbembe's (2003) concepts of *necropolitics*, Fatima Da Lima (2013) explains that in colonial contexts

life (bios) has not been the place where historically power networks have found a privileged ground, but it is death and the possibility of killing that has constituted the organizing principle of social relations[12] (Da Lima 2013, 22).

The *negro* is the homo sacer - following Bauman's (2007) notion - of the Brazilian nation: "the main category of human waste created in the course of the modern production of ordering sovereign spaces"[13] (Bauman 2007, 42). The black body becomes doubly stigmatized and cannot be visible (Do Nascimento 1959). The coincidence of race, social class, and territorial affiliation in the identification of suspicious individuals during police investigations (Anunciação – Bonfim – Ferreira 2014), recalls the situation in the suburbs of Paris where young Parisian blues, mistaken for criminals, are killed during police checks (Fassin 2013). These examples demonstrate how "the hierarchical social order often intersects a spatial understanding of difference" (Ciavolella 2013, 185). It turns out that my interlocutors used the residence space as a deter-

mining parameter of an individual's racial class, which in turn is an implication of socio-economic status. The term "negro" is frequently associated with the term *favelado*. We can also grasp this overlapping of categories from Vito's explanation to me that: "a white man, of skin, that comes from the *favela* is always descended from Africans"[14] (conversation with Vito, 22nd July 2019). The descent is a relational matter (Ingold, 2000), not biological. If you live in the *favela*, even if you have a light skin tone, it means that you are descended from those who experienced a situation of subordination before you: the Africans.

In response to stigmatization, violence, and marginalization, *favelas* residents are working to fill gaps in the state and deconstruct prior judgments about them (Goffman 2004). In doing so, they challenge the hegemony of the *brancos*: the terrain in which the generalization of representations expands as a condition for the constitution of social order (Butler – Laclau – Žižek 2000). This process is also marked by the current debate on the possibility of ceding the very term *favela*. Someone like the *negro* educator and scholar Edoardo (44 years old, a resident of the *favela* of São Jõao Cabrito) wants the word *comunidade* ("community") to be used. This choice of terminology underlines the network of relations in the neighborhoods and the solidarity at the root of their political and cultural initiatives. Others, such as Sagaz (26 years old, black artist), continue to use the word 'favela'. Naming a place is a practice that places people in space/time (Low 2017). In the name of places is encapsulated the memory of the social group; in turn, the identity of the group is reproduced and maintained in the link with the territory and the memory conveyed to it (Tassan 2017). Consistent with the current historical moment of de-stigmatization of everything that refers to *negritude* (Sansone 2003; Malighetti 2004), we are also witnessing the valorization of the peripheral neighborhoods *lugares negros* par excellence. Coming from the *favela* (or *comunidade*) has become a source of pride: they are places to build a community based on solidarity and mutual assistance (Coelho – Durãoe 2013). Individual and group identity is shaped by external recognition or misrecognition (Taylor 2013, 25), which is why the material and immaterial self-representation that *negros* diffuse in the urban fabric takes on great relevance.

MATERIAL CAPILLARITY OF THE MOVIMENTO NEGRO

Recognizing oneself as a *negro* implies "taking on a whole aesthetic discourse that is destabilizing, even in silence"[15] (Araujo – Silva 2019, 24). This is why the artistic and sensory elements disseminated in the spaces of the city reminiscent of *negritude* are of great importance. Gilroy (1993) also recognized in the art forms of Afro-descendants a very strong political protest. As in the North American context he described, hip hop plays

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11   My translation.

12   My translation.

13   My translation.

14   My translation.

15   My translation.

a crucial role in Brazil. In Salvador, the social critique of the capitalist system is decoded and mobilized to call into question the local racist system. *Rap* (rhythmic poetry), a dance style called *breakdance*, and *graffiti* are part of Hip Hop (Gomes – Pontarolo 2009). Graffiti is large frescoes on the walls of public spaces, which are translated into images of the social protest that animates this counter-culture (Gilroy 1993). The suitability of the graffiti in Brazil is given by the fact that they act in the field of the memory of the *negro* struggle, representing the poor and their spaces and identity in the construction of a racial consciousness of its precarious (Araujo de Oliveira 2009, 85). During the field, I accompanied in the *comunidades* several *graffiteros* ("graffiti's artists") *negros*, who freely contributed to the rehabilitation of the neighborhoods through their art. I have worked with Cabuloso (36 years old) amongst many artists. He is an internationally famous artist: for twenty-one years he has been producing graffiti, as well as art installations and creations of various kinds. He has dark skin, a round nose, and long dreadlocks. He claims to be *negro* because he spent many years of his life selling water bottles on the beach to pay for his studies at the Art Academy. I asked him what it means to him to paint in public spaces and he responded by describing the sense of well-being he gets by improving the lives of people who have no access to institutional art spaces.

> Paola: "Very cool! I used to know your art for a long time, [I met it] in the street, graffiti! […] What is "*rua*" ("street")? How would you explain "rua"?
> Cabuloso: "[...] When I do a wall painting, I pay tribute to the city, I also make a social contribution to my art. And that's what inspires me, you know? To feel me as a creator, to feel like a part, a protagonist of the cityscape, you know? The happiness of transforming a trail, the facade of.a house of poverty. When you go into a favela and make one painting on the facade of a house or a public school or an association of inhabitants or... an organization that... you deserve. Sometimes with art you don't have the [economic] opportunity to paint and it comes as a surprise and it shows up and it boosts the self-esteem of these people, you know? You're waking them up for hope, you know? Happiness, he'll be more proud to inhabit this house and he'll maybe feel motivated to conquer other things and get. *Graffiti* art is a 'mobilizing' art, beyond information. [...] They don't leave their place, their neighborhood to go to a museum to see the art: so it's the art that's going to them and for them, on that day, it's a happy day you know! It's very rewarding to go and paint where there are people without the conditions to see art. It's very rewarding.[16]

This kind of activity permits the dissemination of art outside of institutional and elitist spaces and, as in the case of the *pixação* that we'll observe, redefines what art is (Bargna 2013). Cabuloso also relates the question of the physical non-mobility of residents of the *favelas* and the question of "art as a mobilizing force". He uses this term to refer to the role of aesthetics

as an instrument of subversion and socio-political mobility. By directly influencing the sensory perception of space, the hegemonic sense system that shapes people's perception is called into question (Rancière 2004). The environment is not "space" like a linear vacuum, apart from the rest (Dorato 2019; Van Aken 2020); it's more of a relational context (Ingold 2000, 192). People are formed by the environment in which they are submerged, together with other entities (Low 2017).

"LET IT FLOW": THE *PIXAÇÃO*

Let us conclude this reflection with *pixação*, a typical Brazilian artistic practice. Contrary to *graffiti*, whose aim is to embellish public spaces, *pixação* is *brutal como o sistema* ("as brutal as the system") (Fig.1). These are stylized writings and letters, spray-painted on the walls. Big and black, "essential" signs and incomprehensible[17] stand out on the historic buildings, on the well-kept buildings where the *brancos* live, on the walls in the street, and beside the overpasses. Everywhere. The aim is to fill all areas of the city, as the Movimento Negro intends to do. As Baudrillard (1979) writes of the early graffiti that appeared in New York in the 1970s, even *pixação* is like a "polymorphous perversion of children, who ignore the limit of the sexes and the boundary of erogenous zones[18]" (Baudrillard 1979, 322).

Organized in small groups, the artists make nocturnal incursions in areas of the city inaccessible during the day and scribe their names. The colors used are black, white, or blue and the wall to be painted is referred to as a *tela. Telas'* placed in a high visibility position, such as on the eaves of buildings, are preferred. With no harnesses, flip-flops, or barefoot, the boys climb. The higher the writing, the greater the danger to the creator. The level of mastery of the artist is given by his agility and ability to climb, but especially by making his name visible. Starting from the right, on each canvas are placed: the names of the artists, then a long open wavy line, and at the end the name of the crew to which they belong. Besides the *pixações* sometimes there are the names of the boys who died in these raids (Fig. 2). Many people are dying as a result of danger. Sometimes there are also messages written in a way that people can understand. Most are complaints directed at the military police and racist system, some examples are: "preto ("black") not a rat", "Pixador vandal, PM (military police) murderers". As they have explained to me, the motivation behind this type of incursion is the marginality of creators. A socio-economic marginality, whose effects for many of them are expressed concretely in the physical and spatial confinement of the *favela*. Most of them are young *negro* from the suburbs, who during the day work as garbage men in the Pelourinho and at night, armed with spray cans, climb up the historic buildings to demonstrate against the local system. As Sagaz explained to

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16   My translation

17   Each Brazilian state has developed its own alphabet, making it indecipherable to those who are not part of Pixo's art scene.

18   My translation.

Figure 1: *SisTema BRUTAL !!!* ("Brutal System !!!"). Pixaçao in Salvador de Bahia 2019.

Figure 2: *OBZO VIVE* ("Obezo lives"), pixaçao in memory of the death of pixador Obezo. Salvador de Bahia 2019.

Figure 3: *U16 SCANK + OM CiBORG* (names of local street artists), fill the urban space with your own identity. Salvador de Bahia 2019.

me, besides denouncing the local administration's negligence, there is the need to make his individuality visible. It's the possibility - through these writings - of denouncing one's existence as a peripheral *negro* and of making it materially manifest.

> Sagaz: "The truth is that many people end up doing it [the pixação] as a question of identity. You see, as you said, these are people who risk their lives... To get upstairs. Some people just died. I think one year ago [Obezo is dead], he is dead [...]. But this question of 'risking their lives are people... mostly, I think... 90-95% are *pretas* ("black women") e *pretos* ("black men") from the suburbs of Salvador. Even if they are not *negras* [on a phenotypic level] they are still people who live on the periphery. [...] Those who end up risking their lives I think most are the people from the periphery of Salvador, who end up risking their lives because of being invisible by society. They feel unseen. [...] The fact that young people want to mark, imprint their name in a place that you pass by and [say] 'ah! But this is my name! '[...] I think this is what finally brings them [the pixadores] to questions of manifestation too, about the system. Much of it has been turned against the government for the negligence of the state. Beyond the protest against the government, we need to see another voice.... but most importantly, it's about visibility [...] Mark your name not as 'space is theirs', but write your name on the whole city.

Sagaz's words testify to the frequency of death of someone during the production of *pixações*. Just as incidents of "stay bullet" in *favelas* involving the state army are not disclosed, likewise, the death of these artists is always uncertain. A few months after my return to Italy from the camp period, exactly on 12th February 2020, I was informed of Skank's death. He was an artist from the *favela*. He did not dedicate himself only to *pixação*, but he was known throughout the city for the immense writings of his stage name, Skank, with which he materially filled the city (Fig. 3). He was one of the most prominent contemporary exponents of this art movement in Salvador. Many young people feel represented by his writings and, for them, he embodies the hope that they can make visible their black subjectivity. His death, like so many others, remained in obscurity: we know that he died during an artistic incursion at night. Before he could even climb the walls of the building, he was met by five gunmen and shot to death.

During the first periods of fieldwork, before my cartographer friend Felipe (25 years old) explained something about *pixo*, I perceived these writings as aesthetically ugly. Finding myself immersed in spaces that knew all these things instead, completely changed my perception. In front of me, I didn't have incomprehensible black "scribbles" anymore, but subjectivities (Ortner 2005). I remember as if it were now the feeling I had when at a bus stop where I went every day, for the first time I saw on the wall behind me no longer "ugly" writing, but hundreds of thousands of bodies in motion. The vital energy was printed on the walls of people who had climbed to the top of buildings, risking their lives. I found myself immersed in the denunciations of a different story of the Brazilian nation. The dissemination of a social memory that tangibly tells the story of the violent exclusion of *negros*. As Felipe told me: "*negros* are the ones who go the highest, they have the least

Figure 4: A letter of pixaçao's alphabet on the street. Salvador de Bahia 2019.

to lose[19]". Art is a way for them to channel frustration and cultural sense of anger over their condition. *Pixação* fulfills this task as an "outlet valve," as Bob (35 years) told me. He also began to do it to canalize frustration. Now he deals with *graffiti* and he also works for free for the requalification of *comunidades*.

> Paola: "How did you get onto the street [to do art]? What about the rua?
> Bob: It was a pretty complicated thing. I was at a bad time in my life, and I was like this: I was trying to find something to give me something to live for. I already knew the alphabet of pixação, I knew a few pixadors and I liked being with those people [...] and from there I started pixing (he moves with his hand moving the air, emphasizing that he was "painting everything") and I loved it! It helped me and it lifted me out of an [negative] emotional situation, it gave me self-esteem [...] and I started pixing [...] my mother told me I had the face of a crazy person, I spent a year pixing in the street, all day, I would only come home at night all sweaty and dirty with paint. And it was helpful, you know? Get my pride back. I think it was the relief valve I needed at that time for various things that happened to me in my life [...] The *pixação* itself helped me, and then it came right after the graffiti and I never stopped, and I don't want to stop anymore."

What we see on the canvas are long waves and incomprehensible writing, but we look at the adrenalin and anger with

which the *pixador* created his artwork. *Negros* do not represent any of those on these high walls, but *they join* (Ingold 2013) these buildings. Based on the idea of 'correspondence' of Ingold (2013), we do not interact with the environment but we correspond with it. The *pixador*'s spray can become a *transducer* (Ingold 2013): a tool that converts the vital energy and propulsion of the body into an aesthetic-visual code. The quick climbing and adhering to the wall of the buildings, pressing on the tips of the toes not to fall, along with the danger of the situation are translated into the open, undulating line that remains on the wall. Felipe told me that "you have to let it flow"[20] and that the body has to "follow the wave of the moment"[21] in moving fast and stealthy in the silence of the night. Because of the dangerous situation, the writing can not be repeated. In a single gust, push the can, run the length of the wall, and escape. The body finds itself immersed in a flow of movement: influenced by the morphology of inorganic elements such as the walls of buildings perpendicular to the ground, exposed to the action of atmospheric agents, social actors that can interrupt its process of creation, and must master the spray can by calibrating the pressure on the cap to leave a trail. *Pixação* is made by this mixture, in which the sentience and the materials are interwoven until they become indistinguishable (Ingold 2013, 182). The artist doesn't focus on producing a picture, but on the situation in which he or she is physically involved (Costa-Moura, 2005). It's necessary to

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19   My translation.

20   My translation.

21   My translation.

adapt to the environment and the "things" that are immersed there; each body motion must be well calibrated. In *pixo*, the lines are *gestural*: they do not represent images, but express the quality of the body's motion during its production (Cain 2010, 126). It's a description of a movement in space/time that makes us look wet (Ingold, 2013) (Fig. 4). It comes out of the correspondence between *negro*'s body, the physicality of the city and the aerosol can. *Piaxação* is not *propositional*: it isn't an established picture, but something that derives from the situation (Ingold, 2013). It's the conversion of the vitality of the experience and the rhythmic gait of the individual (Lefevbre 2004) involved in the environment, into an aesthetic-visual code. Human beings are irreducibly part of the processes of the world (Ingold 2013), they are constantly immersed in the environment (Van Aken 2020) and this makes it inevitable that their becoming men and women are inseparable from the context in which they find themselves immersed (Remotti, 2011) But there is more: as Ingold (2000) wrote, through the exercises of descending and climbing, and their different muscular entailments, the contours of the landscape are directly incorporated into the bodily experience (Ingold 2000, 203). Starting from the idea that the city is a reflection of society (Lefebvre, 1970), it's reasonable to think that in the act of producing *pixação* we can capture the precariousness of the *negro's* body in the Bahiana city. To fully experience the urban space, they have to make dangerous nightly incursions. Setha Low's (2017) concept of "embodied space" is useful in this regard. Following this "heuristic model" we can re-think the "both experiential and material aspects of the body in space as well as to the fusion of body/space understood as a location that can communicate, transform and contest existing social structures"[22] (Low 2017 in Tassan 2017). More than the space inscribed in the body, the case of *pixação* looks like a "spatialization of the body". Once the production of the work is complete, the physical body of the *pixador* leaves the palace, but its subjectiveness remains on the heights of the palaces. Watching the landscape, we catch new *pixação* every day. This lets you understand where the body has moved, and in which space it has gone. The urban space is the artist's journal: it tells his daily travels. It becomes an open-air monument and memorial (Crapanzano 2004, 172), reminding us of the existence of these individuals and of all those who die day after day in the silence of indifference. According to Alfred Gell (1999) a person and a person's mind are never confined to particular space-time coordinates, but consist of diffusion of biographical events and memories of events, and a category of dispersed material objects, traces, and departures (Gell 1999, 222). As with *graffiti*, it's a process of territorial appropriation that situates culture in movement and space, through one's life experience and aesthetic tool (Barrozo, Bertoloto, Lorensoni, and Davies 2020, 11). However, in the case of *pixação*, they export the *favela* and enter in "white town" with their alphabet as if it were a rebellion of signs (Baudrillard 1979, 311). The symbolic value of the

crew is also ascribed to the remoteness of their neighborhood (Franco 2009, 23).

Pixação is strongly discouraged and persecuted for his violation of private property. In violating the right to private property, the *negros* of Bahia question not only the local Brazilian system but the very foundations of Capitalism on which the "monument of Modernity" stands. They do it in a public place and this gives it a very strong political charge, a revolutionary potential that defies authoritarianism (Butler 2017, 253). As is done with *negros*, even in the case of *pixação* the dominant group spreads a series of stigmatizing representations about him[23]. I close with Sagaz's reflection on the analogy between the stigmatized condition of the *negro* and the *pixação*.

> Sagaz: "In truth, because of this whole process, to be criminalized, it ends up that many people do not like [the *pixações*]. Like this has already been done for many years, like it's been done the same with the *negro*: the discourse that the *negro* is always marginal, and like a person who goes in the street hides his bag, etc... like, it's already been placed [in the sense of fixed] in the minds of many people and they believe that all negras people are like that... and from there it's kind of how the *pixações* have been criminalized."[24]

The "black group" wants to be the main actor in re-writing the national present, denouncing and telling the story of unspoken violence experienced by its people. High up on the buildings the suburban *negro* is in the "place of speaking"[25]: in a position to denounce these issues not only metaphorically, but also materially. By being placed at the bottom of the economic hierarchy and physically confined to the ghettos, the top of the tallest buildings becomes the "*lugar de fala*" ("place of talking") they choose. The night ends and the spaces return to being *lugares brancos* ("white places"). *Negros* don't have physical access to them, but what remains imprinted in the buildings is what is most vital in a human being: his energy and propulsion to action.

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22 My translation.

23 On the last day in Salvador I met on the bus two negros boys from the favela. They were doing the *rap du buzù* ("bus rap"). Basically, they would make passengers suggest words and compose poetic texts, right there. They'd end up asking for cash. They have mostly written poetry on racism and social injustice. I ended up joining them and doing a lot of bus lines, filming them at their company. As we paused at a bus stop, we began talking about pixação. We practiced deciphering the letters on the wall behind us. Two ladies wait as our bus, hearing our speeches approached intrigued. They wanted to know about it. They were surprised to find out that they were words rather than scribbles. That they were a social denunciation, not "vandalism".

24 My translation.

25 *Lugar de fala* ("place to talk") is an expression that reports who can speak about somenthing, expecially when people talk about racial and gender issues. The afro-brazilian philosopher Djamila Ribeiro (2017) explains how important for *negros* and women is to reclaim of theire political "place of talking" and to represent oneself.

CONCLUSION

The case of *ser favelado* ("from the slum") makes explicit the materiality of *negro's* violent *space of nonexistence* (De Genova 2002). The deconstruction of the pre-judgment towards being a *negro* from a *favela* and the use of *pixação* to denounce the reality experienced by the local population, are just a few examples of the action of how Movimento Negro "fill the spaces" with representations that contrast with hegemonic racist discourses.

As *lugar de fala* (Ribeiro 2017) points out, representation in the sense of sociopolitical presence in the *polis* must be forged by *negros*. In doing so, *negros* deconstruct what is *taken for granted* (Bourdieu, 2000), both local and global. Afro-Brazilians are challenging the capitalist economic system, violating private property. In addition to that, *pixação* forces us to rethink the reductionist epistemology on which Modernity is based (Benasayag 2015), such as the separation of the subject from space and the removal of the interdependence between things immersed in the environment (Ingold 2000; Haesbaert 2005, Low 2017; Van Aken 2020). *Pixador* joins with the buildings: his subjectivity fills the spaces and reclaims the political place denied to him. Popular sovereignty is only possible by an *alliance* not *of bodies* (Butler 2017), but *things*. Life is a continuing and dynamic process given by the correspondence (Ingold, 2013), co-existence and co-presence of the organic, inorganic and superorganic; a non-separation between people, animals, plants, and vessels (Hallam – Ingold 2014, 3). It appears necessary to admit "the agency of other-than-humans in our experience of the world" (Bollettin 2021, 25). The writings on the walls, the poems, the songs, the architectural drawings, the clothes, the people, and the space-time take part in the struggle to recognize the dignity of existence.

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