

Rosana Paulino and the Art of Refazimento: Reconfigurations of the Black Female Body in the Land of Racial Democracy

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Abstract

This essay analyzes the historical and aesthetic significance of the visual art project Assentamento(s) (2012-2013) by Rosana Paulino. Her work re-inscribes the black female body into the historical narrative of Brazil, complicating long-established notions of “Brazilianness”. By using art techniques and materials that combine lithography, digital printing, drawing, sewing, video, and sculpting, Paulino develops a multi-layered artistic assembly that she describes as a process of refazimento (“remaking”). Paulino pushes the boundaries of the historical archives, highlighting both the struggles and agency of black women within Brazilian society. I argue that, as a contemporary black woman visual artist, Paulino engages in a method of historical interpretation that Saidiya Hartman defines as “critical fabulation”. My study explores how Paulino’s refazimento represents a method of inquiry that confronts the legacies of Brazil’s racial democracy and its ideology of mestiçagem. Paulino’s visuality reclaims Afro-Brazilian ancestral memory and black female complex subjectivities.

Resumo

Este ensaio analisa o significado histórico e estético do projeto de arte visual de Rosana Paulino Assentamento(s) (2012-2013). O trabalho de Paulino reescreve o corpo feminino negro na narrativa histórica do Brasil, complicando noções há muito estabelecidas de “brasilidade”. Usando técnicas e materiais de arte que combinam litografia, impressão digital, desenho, costura, vídeo e escultura, Paulino desenvolve uma montagem artística de várias camadas que ela descreve como um processo de refazimento (“refazer”). Paulino ultrapassa as fronteiras dos arquivos históricos, destacando tanto as lutas quanto a atuação das mulheres negras na sociedade brasileira. Argumento que, como artista visual contemporânea da mulher negra, Paulino utiliza um método de interpretação histórica que Saidiya Hartman define como “fabulação crítica”. Este artigo explora como o refazimento de Paulino representa um método de investigação que confronta os legados da democracia racial brasileira e sua ideologia de mestiçagem. A visualidade de Paulino recupera a memória ancestral afro-brasileira e as complexas subjetividades femininas negras.

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A cornerstone of nationhood, positioned at the crossroads of race, gender and sexuality, the black female body became at once a symbol of desire and repulse; a manifestation of social, cultural, and sexual anxieties; an icon on display for public consumption. To satisfy the parameters of colonial ambivalence and domination strategies, the exoticized, folklorized black female body was used as a sign of deviance, animalization, hyper-sexualization. Hortense Spillers' famous essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987) starts with the author's acknowledgement of the iconographies her own black female body has been subjected to, as she navigates the racial landscape of the U.S.:

Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar", "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother", "Aunty", "Granny", God's "Holy Fool," a "Miss Ebony First," or "Black Woman at the Podium": I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented (1987, 65).

Spillers' quote highlights the meanings attributed to her body – the body of a black woman – all of which are based on somebody else's definitions. They illuminate a spectator's ways of seeing her/that body. As she builds on her argument of how black women's bodies have been central to foundational discourses about the national identity of the U.S. (and the country's notions of sexuality), Spillers highlights how these images have been constructed historically, socially and culturally by an "othering" gaze. Her rendering "My country needs me" indicates that these images have been associated with her black female body, regardless of her ability to consent to any of them. The invention of iconographies of the black body (more specifically, those gendered as female) is rooted on discourses of national belonging and national identities. Such discourses – manipulated by elites in power – have been developed at the expense of silences and erasures of certain bodies – the ones that serve the purpose of otherness. Historically, those iconographies have become hegemonic qualities attached to the ways the black female body is viewed, represented, and consumed in culture, social dynamics, and institutional spaces. But what can one learn when the black female body breaks those imposed silences? What are the

stories those bodies are telling us about themselves? And what are those stories revealing about national paradigms?

My study of contemporary art by black women in the diaspora across the Americas – particularly in the U.S. and Brazil – explores instances of counter-narrative discourses and problematization of some of those long-standing representations of the black female body in the geo-political contexts where they are created. As a larger project (from which this essay is generated) my study bridges contemporary literature and visual culture in works by Audre Lorde and Miriam Alves (focusing on their poetry); and Carrie Mae Weems and Rosana Paulino (and their work of visual assemblage).² Whether it is on the page or on canvas; in the craft of language or the composition of objects and materials; I approach the multi-media production of such artists as what Bakhtin called “units of meaning”, created in “dialogic interaction” with contexts outside of themselves (Bakhtin 1992, 279).

In their visuality (on the page or other media), these artistic texts also demand an engagement from the audience (the reader or the viewer) in the meaning-making processes: they confront us with the historical and cultural legacies of dehumanizing representations of the black body, while offering ways to appreciate the view against and beyond those narratives. I am interested in investigating, as a broader project, the artistic capacities for liberatory discourses; the imagined worlds created on the premise that black female subjects are simultaneously complex, nuanced, multi-layered, and whole. Central to my exploration is the notion of plurality of discourses and the multiple visions of liberation: when one listens to the black female body, one is prompted to multivocality (Henderson 1989, 19-22).³ This exploration of plurality, multivocality, and cultural representations leads me to the following questions: How do black women artists re-invent new iconographies of the black body? How do their re-inventions at the same time revisit historical legacies and archives

² My current research project explores the transnational politics of gender, race, sexuality, national identities and (self)representation in the cultural production by contemporary black women artists across the diaspora in the Americas. Bridging literature and visual arts, I examine how these “texts” weave a visual representation of the trajectory of contemporary black diasporic feminist knowledge and artistic production.

³ Henderson’s essay juxtaposes Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia with U.S. black feminist critic to offer a model of reading black women’s literature as they speak “from a multiple and complex social, historical, and cultural positionality which, in effect, constitutes black female subjectivity” (Henderson 1989, 21). My research draws from Henderson’s approach to explore the multivocality and complex subjectivities in the work by the artists I named here from a transnational perspective.

and restore agency to the black bodies? How does this artistic production communicate desire and eroticism that complicates pre-defined notions of black women's sexualities?

In my analysis of the transatlantic creative projects by black women artists, I argue that the black female body is not only a sign, a visible display of meaning. More than that, its materiality – as Houston Baker highlights, its “tactile, essentialist, historical dimensions” – becomes conceptual (Baker 1988, 351). In that sense, contemporary black women artists use the black female body as a (re)conceptualized icon that defies the principle of arbitrariness of meanings attached to signs. This (re)conceptualization becomes, at once, an artistic method and methodology integrally involved in the (re)writing of that body. By exploring these contemporary iconographies in black women's art, I consider the black female body as both signifier and signified; metaphor and historical text. In this sense, my discussion draws from what Patricia Hill Collins has offered in her study of the intersections between black women's sexuality and the colonizing project in the Americas: “Civilized nation-states required uncivilized and backward colonies for their national identity to have meaning, and the status of women in both places was central to this entire endeavor” (Collins 2005, 30-31).

Within such historical legacies, contemporary black women artists negotiate with inherited social structures that, on one hand, profit from the hypersexualization and commodification of their bodies; and on the other hand fosters mechanisms of silence. Visual artists such as Carrie Mae Weems and Rosana Paulino,⁴ for instance, offer opportunities to critically revisit the past that inform stereotypes of black women's bodies, asking the audience “to consider what stereotypes mean, how they come to mean what they do”, and whether or not their invocation in their artistic production “can work toward an antiracist agenda” (Burrell 2010, 125). Within that context, I am also invested in interrogating the historical and cultural processes of racial formation and ideologies in the geopolitical spaces where the works of art are produced. In this interrogation, I discuss how these artistic manifestations unveil the complexities of national discourses and racial ideologies.

⁴ Between 1995 and 1996, Carrie Mae Weems created a series of 33 toned prints called “From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried”. In the series, Weems uses archival photographs that documents black life and black subjects in the history of the U.S. Like Paulino's work, Weems' project re-configures those photographic materials to retell a narrative that unveils the so-called scientific studies on black bodies in the nineteenth century across the country. My current investigation bridges Weems' and Paulino's artistic projects as they use art to retrace the legacies of colonialism and scientific racism within the intersections of gender, race, and nation.

In this essay, I focus on a discussion of Rosana Paulino's visual art project *Assentamento(s)* (2012-2013). A native of São Paulo, Brazil, Paulino uses the photographs by Swiss zoologist and Harvard professor, Louis Agassiz, taken in the second half of the nineteenth century in Brazil. I argue that Paulino's series in *Assentamento(s)* (in English, "settlement") re-inscribes the black female body into the historical narrative of Brazil, complicating foundational ideas of what may have been considered markers of a national identity – markers of "Brazilianness" (Costa 2011; Oliveira, 2014).⁵

The ideological shifts determined by the post-abolition period imposed a re-definition of Brazil as a "mestiça" nation (Abdias 1978, 69 - 75). As Lilia M. Schwarcz explains, after the official dismantling of slavery as a system, the beginnings of the twentieth century in Brazil is marked by a leaning towards a positivist-evolutionist ideology, with an emphasis on the ideals of individual freedom and the citizenship (1993, 14-15). However, the Brazilian intelligentsia was still deeply committed to a deterministic model that understood the performance of entire groups of people as a result of biological predispositions. "An interesting paradox", concludes Schwarcz, "this combination of liberalism and racism establishes a local success that was fundamentally contradictory" (Schwarz 1993, 14, translation is mine). In that context, the national dilemma for the elites in power is posed: if, on one hand, the characterization of the nation as "mestiça" was said to be "interesting" and "unique", on another hand, it highlighted the degenerative fate of a population contaminated by the mixture of incompatible racial groups (Schwarz 1993, 240). Such paradoxes allowed for a national discourse that sold itself as liberal and progressive (free from the rigid racist structures in other modern nations such as the U.S.); while exploiting the labor, sexual and cultural capacities of the black body.⁶

⁵ At different historical moments, the concept of *brasilidade* ("Brazilianness") has been shaped by different discourses of national identity to sustain hegemonic power and perpetuate social hierarchies in Brazil. In this essay, I am using this term in its more general sense to highlight the discourse of a national identity based on the notion of homogeneity – one by which racial difference has been co-opted and manipulated by elites to put forward the idea of national unity and harmony. A common pattern in the construction of the idea/discourse of "Brazilianness" is the emphasis on the hypersexualization of Afro-descendant bodies, or the "sexual excess" of such bodies as a marker of *brasilidade*, as discussed by Cristiane Oliveira in her analysis of Brazilian social thinking of 1920s and 1930s (2014). In particular historical moments, the inclusion of such groups is a reflection of a strategic discursive and political strategy on the part of the elites, and that has not translated into social mobility or political power for the black populations. The first decades of the 20th century was one of those historical moments when the ideology of a "mestiça" nation was strategically used as a "local solution" to the racist biologism of the previous era (Schwarz 1993, 136). However, such model of national identity did not address the nation's structural inequalities, deepened in the following years.

⁶ Abdias do Nascimento lays out a reflection of historical consequences of the so-called racial democracy to the lives of the black population in Brazil, using, maybe for the first time, the term "genocide" applied to that context. What Nascimento defines as "the process of a masked racism" is characterized by the sexual exploitation of the enslaved

By using art techniques and materials that combine lithography, digital printing, drawing, sewing, video, and sculpting, Paulino develops a multi-layered artistic assembly that deconstructs such paradoxes. Paulino's project explores the limitations of the historical archives, highlighting both the struggles and agency of black women within Brazilian society. By allowing the black female subject to tell her own story, I argue that Paulino's artistic project engages with what African-American cultural theorist Saidiya Hartman defines as "critical fabulation": a method that requires the re-semblage and re-representation of the "authorized accounts" established by the archives (Hartman 2008, 11).

Leaning on the conceptualization and method of inquiry established by a practice of critical fabulation, my essay discusses how Paulino's *Assentamento(s)* follows Hartman's proposition to explore the "capacities of the subjunctive" in narratives legitimized by historical archives. In other words, Hartman invites us to ask: "what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done", beyond the confining possibilities of the archives – an invitation for a critical reading of the archives, one that repositions an "impossible story" as central to how we might understand history (Hartman 2008, 10-11). In that same vein, Paulino's *Assentamento(s)* invites us to contemplate the black female body beyond the silences and commodifying language imposed by legacies of colonialism; beyond the long-standing cultural iconographies that often condition black female subjectivities to a patriarchal and racist gaze. As a contemporary artist working directly with archival materials produced in the 19th century, Paulino defines her project as a process of *refazimento*, a remaking of the black female body – its material and subjective conditions, and its significance for new understandings of its historical legacies.

As the meaning of the term *refazimento* indicates, Paulino, as the creator of *Assentamento(s)* – this multi-layered installation (in material, medium, and meaning) –

woman, and, at her expense, the idea and ideal of a "raça mestiça" is created in a process of whitening (and purportedly erasure) of the black population (Abdias 1978). Under the umbrella of *mestiçagem*, several racial categories have been created in Brazil in order to identify the *mestiça* population, following a complex combination of elements of racial identification, skin color, region, and social status. Although the discourses of *mestiçagem* have promoted fragmentation in terms of a unified articulation of "blackness" or black culture in Brazil, the whitening process has never subverted racism in the country, and resistance (cultural and political) to the manipulation of the ideology of racial democracy by the elites has always been part of the history of Afro-Brazilians, as pointed out by number of intellectuals such as Abdias do Nascimento (*O Negro Revoltado*, 1968; *O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro*, 1978). For further reading, see Octavio Ianni (*Raças e Classes Sociais no Brasil*, 1966; *Escravidão e Racismo*, 1978); Kabegle Munanga (*Rediscutindo a Mestiçagem no Brasil*, 1999; *O Negro na Sociedade Brasileira: Resistência, Participação, Contribuição*, 2004); Lilia Moritz Schwarcz (*Nem Preto, Nem Branco - Muito pelo Contrário: Cor e Raça na Sociabilidade Brasileira*, 2013).

rebuilds a narrative that allows for a critical inquiry on colonialism, as Silvia Cunsicanqui has described in her *Sociología de la Imagen* (2015, 30). In many ways, Hartman's concept of "critical fabulation" (and her re-reading of the historical archives) and Cunsicanqui's reflections upon a decolonial reading of visual works by Waman Poma (Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala), for instance, are helpful in offering a methodological framework for my own reading of art – which is, itself, a decolonial reading practice. Following Cunsicanqui's methodological footsteps, this essay explores Paulino's "autonomous discourse" as an artist/creator/meaning-maker of an art piece built upon a "juxtaposition of stigmas" whose origins are rooted in centuries of colonialism and colonial mentality (Cunsicanqui 2015, 30 – translation is mine). My engagement with Paulino's work becomes, then, an exercise to privilege the search for those decolonial markers of knowledge, more specifically those supported by an understanding of Afro-Brazilian cosmologies and epistemologies (Gonzalez 1988, 69-82)⁷. This exercise invites a shift in interpretations of the gaze (of the viewer; that of the subject depicted in the artwork, and that of the artist); as well as our relationship with space (the space within ourselves – our subjectivities – and the physical space around us, for example the one of the art gallery). This practice also involves a consideration of emotionality as a source of knowledge, a site of inquiry, and a method of discovery and interpretative practice – an approach Audre Lorde explored in her iconic essay "The Uses of the Erotic" (2007, 53-59).

In this sense, I am interested in examining how Rosana Paulino deploys, in her visual representations of the black female body, iconographies that (re)define hegemonic historical narratives and liberate the black body to become a sign of plurality and agent of meaning-production. Thus, at the same time as I pay attention to the artistic meanings in the artwork, I also want to explore the methods of art-making forged by Paulino as conceptual and methodological tools that allow her to reposition the black female subject-self as storyteller.

⁷ As a decolonial reading practice, this essay is heavily influenced by Lélia Gonzalez's long-lasting call for an understanding of Latin American from an epistemological perspective offered by those people most ignored, hurt, despised, and forgotten in the processes of coloniality and its legacy across the Americas – its Native Peoples and Afro-descendants (Gonzalez 1988). Hers is the concept coined as "Amefricanidade" which refers to the bodies of knowledge brought with the enslaved blacks into the Americas, and, then, re-configured over the centuries. For Gonzalez, a decolonial understanding of black diasporic epistemologies in the Americas must for the transformations in knowledge production, specific to the Afro-descendants who survived and re-created life across the American continent.

Rosana Paulino: Refazimento as Method and Methodology

In order to analyze the multi-layered meanings of Paulino's visuality, I first want to briefly discuss the historical and ideological significance of Louis Agassiz' collection of daguerreotypes. It is also important to understand the role Agassiz played as an intellectual in a context when elites of the New World, profiting from slavery, desperately needed a fresh theory to sustain the old fallacy of racial hierarchies. Funded by Harvard University and under the patronage of the Portuguese colonial power ruling Brazil, Agassiz assembled a small crew of scientists and students to go on a scientific expedition in 1865, a little more than two decades before the official declaration that abolished slavery in Brazil. As an empiricist, Agassiz was determined to challenge Darwin's theory by arguing that evolution was not plausible according to geologic records. The trip to Brazil was an attempt to disprove Darwin's theory, particularly because Agassiz saw in the unique biodiversity of Brazil a perfect laboratory to test his counter-theories of phylogenetic embryology and glacial catastrophe in the tropics.

However, the expedition to Brazil was more than a scientific thrill for Agassiz. As a polygenist, Agassiz applied his methods of classification to the documentation of "racial types", sketching and describing the mixed-race Brazilians whose photographed bodies became part of his specimen collection. He saw the Brazilian phenomenon of *mestiçagem* (racial miscegenation) as "mongrelization" of pure racial types, which would ultimately lead to sterility. Agassiz wanted to prove how miscegenation promoted the deterioration of what he called "the higher race": a phenomenon he described as presenting "the singular spectacle of a higher race receiving the impress of a lower one, of an educated class adopting the habits and sinking to the level of the savage" (Agassiz 1868, 285). Agassiz' insistence in disputing Darwinism was also deeply personal: his career and prestige as an intellectual was at stake with the growing popularity of Darwin's evolutionary theory. Despite losing his battle against Darwinism at the end, Agassiz' expedition and views left an enduring mark on Brazilian racial thought by reinforcing classification methods that explained the inherent inferiority of non-white racial types – a way of thinking that found great resonance within Brazilian elites for centuries to come.

In 2012, when echoes of polygenic thinking still dictate the ways Brazil structures its institutions and social spaces, artist Rosana Paulino decides to explore issues related to the connections between (pseudo)scientific intellectual production and slavery in Brazil

(Hillesheim and Silva, 2018, 415 – 16)⁸. During her research, Paulino comes across a reproduction of Agassiz's daguerreotype in George Ermakoff's book *O Negro na Fotografia Brasileira do Século XIX* (2004). Paulino's process of re-assemblage of Agassiz's photograph included a combination of techniques, juxtaposing different materials and media, and creating, thus, a multi-layered visual text. In the photographic archives left by Agassiz, the black body is frozen and mute; it has no history, no name. In Agassiz' photography, the black body remains as an image subjected to the control and appropriation by those in power. Agassiz' collection denies the photographed black bodies any act of agency, speech, or individual history. Theirs is an objectified body whose identity we do not know; theirs is a body with no name, no life of its own.

In contrast, *Assentamento(s)* promotes a re-reading of that black body as a depository of individual and communal history. For that reason, Paulino's art-making process represents a significant aspect for my discussion of black women artists' role in elaborating frameworks and methods that allow for revisions, reinterpretations, and expansions for what the historical record is limited to offer as a full narrative. First, Paulino takes the small picture of Agassiz's photograph, included in Ermakoff's book, enlarging it to natural size. Then, the artist transposes the enlarged picture to a piece of fabric, cutting it into large sections. One by one, Paulino puts the fragmented sections back together applying sutures. The sutures in the fabric remain visibly rough in the final composition, and the sections are purposefully misaligned. The artist repeats that procedure for all the three images of the black woman – frontal, rear and profile, as the typical practice dictated at the time. In this circular movement of assemblage, disassemblage, and reassemblage of the black female subject in the photograph, Paulino engages with what she calls “um processo de refazimento” (a process of remaking) of the black subject. In a video produced by Célia Antonacci, Paulino explains this process further:

Imagine someone who is captured, as was the case of enslaved black women and men; then, thrown on a ship's hold and suddenly arriving at a completely different land, at a completely different space. These people had to rebuild themselves, it's truly a remaking.

⁸ In their 2018 study, Betina Hillesheim and Mozart Linhares da Silva give evidence to the “eugenic spectrum in the contemporary biodeterminist discourse” in Brazil. The authors show how recent studies in the areas of psychology and medicine have supported associations among violence, psychological development, and anatomy. Such studies also justify project of crime prevention configured as strategies of vigilance and body-control, especially on those subjects from marginalized groups.

Not only they remade themselves, but they also remade a culture. They brought in values, they brought in ideas (Antonacci 2014).

Here, the artist herself performs Hartman's method of "critical fabulation" by (re)creating the narrative established by Agassiz' archives. The exposed rough sutures that rebuild the nameless black female body in Paulino's work functions as a reminder that black people have never been integrally incorporated into society as full, dignified individuals: they continue to be treated as second-class citizens, subjected to cycles of oppression. The sutured black body reveals that the social and political integration for black Brazilians – promised since the abolition of slavery in 1888 – remains incomplete, carelessly and poorly performed (Antonacci 2017, 285-286; Aulicino and Oliveira 2015, 89-91).

Moreover, Paulino's process of refazimento extrapolates the boundaries of art-making. In fact, part of Paulino's process of transposing the small photograph into the natural-sized one involved the development of an intimacy with the subject in the photography through which memory and subjectivity is reclaimed and recovered. In an informal interview with the artist, Paulino recalled the moment at which she unraveled the large roll of paper on which the image had been reprinted. As she recalled that moment, she was also reminded of the intensity of her connection with that black woman, as if participating in "a ritualistic preparation for an encounter with an ancestor" (Paulino Personal Interview, 2018).

Paulino also recalled that, lying on her studio floor, the image of the black woman started to communicate things never revealed before. The artist noticed the black woman figure was wearing a rustic bracelet on her left wrist and that she had a small pattern of scarification stripes on her face, below her eyes. Following the lead of those observations, Paulino's research concluded that both the bracelet and the skin marks were possible signs of complex messages about the woman's ethnic identity and social status. The marks on the figure's face could have been scarification performed by her ethnic group in the African continent, years before her captivity. Studies show that facial scarification, for instance, has been a common practice to mark a person's lineage identification among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria and other parts of the diaspora (Orie 2011, 15). Therefore, it is absolutely plausible that the woman in Agassiz' photograph represented an example of a "pure type" (according to his views): a woman kidnapped in West Africa and enslaved in the Portuguese colony. As Paulino recalled the development of those discoveries, the artist shared a powerful statement: "I realized I was in the presence of someone who had a history;

someone who had a community. That woman was somebody's daughter, sister, friend. That woman had a full life" (Paulino "Personal Interview" 2018).

This statement by the artist shows the quality of an investment that it is not limited to the artistic endeavor; it is also embedded in the recuperation of historical memory. Therefore, Paulino's process of refazimento should be understood as both a method of inquiry and an aesthetic project of radical, transformative creation. It involves a practice of trespassing the boundaries of historical narratives; of questioning long-established truths. Besides, it is a methodology that accounts for ontological and epistemological knowledge that has been for too long dismissed as illegitimate within the Anglo/Eurocentric canons of intellectual production. Paulino's practice of listening to the ancestral knowledge coming from the black female body in *Assentamento(s)* can also be understood as a practice that centers marginality and allows for a sensorial learning experience. As pointed out by Célia Maria Antonacci, Paulino's artistic production engages with a reclamation of an 'invisibilized' memory as an ontological experience by black women in every aspect of social life – including the one experienced by the artist herself as a black woman in Brazilian society (Antonacci 2017, 278-279).

In this sense, refazimento also becomes a methodology of artistic creation guided by sensorial principles of investigation that humanizes the black female body and brings her closer to the artist's personal memory. Aulicino and Oliveira highlight this dimension of Paulino's work when they discuss how *Assentamento(s)* revisits a history of barbarity and complex relationships imposed by the system of slavery; yet, the repositioning of the image, with its fragments imperfectly aligned, also reclaims the flux of life, recreated within a context of impossibilities, brutality, and contradictions (Aulicino and Oliveira 2015, 91 – 92). This aspect of memory becomes particularly relevant today as contemporary black female artists have turned to their own bodies as aesthetic motifs in re-signifying the histories of objectification of black bodies. That is the case of the photographic work by U.S. African American Nona Faustine in the series "My Country"; and the one by Jamaican-American Renee Valerie Cox in "Venus Hottentot 2000". In the public sphere, historical institutions worldwide have taken actions to recognize (and, in some cases, apologize for) their former participation in perpetrating the legacy of exploitation of black bodies. In some instances, such institutions are confronted by local communities and the descendants of those directly affected by such violence.

As I write this essay, the world is witnessing the development of a lawsuit brought against Harvard University by Tamara Lanier, one of the direct descendants of an enslaved man pictured in Agassiz' daguerreotypes. Besides his expeditions across South America as a Harvard professor, Agassiz also collected photographs of enslaved people in the U.S., including a plantation field in South Carolina. Differently from the black woman photographed by Agassiz in Brazil, whose identity remains unknown, some of his subjects in the U.S. had a record of identification. Such was the case of Papa Renty and his daughter, Delia, whose images were commissioned by Agassiz in 1850 and, then, returned to Harvard. These images eventually ended up in a storage cabinet, forgotten, until they were (re)discovered in 1976. Since then, Harvard has kept tight control over access to the collection, charging licensing fees to anyone seeking to use them. Now, Tamara Lanier, one of Renty's direct descendants, is suing Harvard, demanding that the daguerreotypes of her ancestors be returned to the family (Hartocollis 2019, n.p.).

Lanier's lawsuit has raised important conversations about the role of prestigious institutions, such as Harvard, in the history of slavery across the diaspora. These are the institutions that have promoted, funded, and legitimized knowledge production in the name of scientific and academic rigor. Their direct participation in the perpetuation of racist ideas, theories, and practices throughout history place them (and the very knowledge they produce) on suspicious terms to whether their current values and pedagogies can affect real change. Besides this, the case has raised debates around issues of memory ownership and personhood. As enslaved people, blacks were considered property by a system that disowned them from their own selfhood. Lanier's case is built on the argument that Renty's and Delia's images are part of the family memory, stolen in the past – and now it should be returned to where it belongs, as a gesture of reparation, restitution, and reintegration of family property, violated by the system of slavery. However, the enslaved black woman in the daguerreotypes used in *Assentamento(s)* was never identified. Besides the fact that Agassiz took her photograph in the city of Rio de Janeiro in mid-nineteenth century, nothing else is in the record about who that woman was. Therefore, the impossibility of tracing any lineage that connects that woman to her descendants could lead her to virtually any Afro-Brazilian, including Rosana Paulino herself. If that theory is considered, Paulino's refazimento process of art-making can also be understood as a process of memory restitution, because her work redresses the violations perpetrated over the black female body by re-signifying and reinstating the figure's humanity and personhood.

In many of the several pieces that compose *Assentamento(s)*, Paulino stitches elements to the fabric on which the image of the black woman's body was transposed. By using this technique, Paulino adds a layer to the original iconography, demanding from the viewer an acknowledgement of that woman's bleeding heart; the unborn life she carries in her uterus; and the roots coming out of her legs, deep into the ground. By re-creating this iconography, without denying its pernicious and enduring historical legacy, Paulino's process of refazimento echoes Saidiya Hartman's method of "critical fabulation", which the author explains as follows:

The intention here isn't anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather *laboring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible*. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration (Hartman 2008, 11, emphasis is mine).

By laboring to re-create a full picture of that enslaved nameless captive, Paulino defies the limits of the archives left by Agassiz and his crew. Agassiz' photograph no longer retains its original visual impact; even its purpose is now intercepted by a representation of a different narrative. As a product of refazimento, Paulino's piece revisits the historical archives to unveil what would have been; how it would have felt; the untold narratives of the captive. In this sense, Paulino's work illustrates Hartman's method by exploring the "capacities of the subjunctive" (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities)" (2008, 11). Following Hartman's framework, Paulino's *Assentamento(s)* becomes, as a re-assembled visual text, "a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history", by both expanding and displacing the authorized account, once established by Agassiz' gaze (Hartman 2008, 11).

Paulino's work is not limited to a reconsideration of history in this process of refazimento. Its polyphonic capacity also invites the viewer to explore the ancestral and spiritual dimensions of black women's subjectivity. Let's consider the title of this series: *Assentamento(s)*. In Portuguese, the term comes from *assentar* – to settle, to root, to ground. The translation into English as "Settlement(s)" proves to be precarious, if not impossible. The word in English does not capture the multiple nuances of its linguistic and cultural meanings in Portuguese, neither their associations with Paulino's work itself. On one hand, the noun *assentamento* evokes ideas of migratory movement, displacement, uprootedness.

On another hand, it may also evoke the un-becoming processes imposed on masses of enslaved bodies, as Paulino describes it in her video statement.

As an installation, the three pieces in natural size are settled on bare walls, creating a semi-open shape. In between each piece, placed on the ground of each corner, Paulino also adds what looks like, at first glance, a bundle of wood logs. Placed on the ground in-between the bundles of wood logs, one can notice small-sized screens projecting a repetitive clip of ocean waves hitting the shore. The ocean sound fills the space where the artwork is installed. The setting created for *Assentamento(s)* demands a slow, attentive, and fully sensorial engagement from the viewer with the art and the space. As one approaches each one of the pieces, *assentadas* (settled) on each corner of the room, one starts to notice the details Paulino carefully designs for the installation. Like a narrative, the elements of the story begin to unfold: the bundle of wood logs are mixed with body parts (human limbs made of clay); each bundle, tied by a cord, rests on a bed of straw. Those fragmented body parts, bundled up and deposited next to each one of the natural sized pieces on the walls, connect the individual black woman to a collective of other enslaved black bodies – violated, brutalized, and dismembered in the Middle Passage.

On one hand, the sound of the ocean waves becomes a haunting auditory reminder of the traumatic legacies of slavery: the lost lives in the depths of the ocean, the horror, the pain. On another hand, the movement of the sea is also a reminder of the human capacity to survive, to thrive, and to recreate oneself and community. In the Afro-Brazilian cosmological framework of *Candomblé*, the ocean is one of the main icons representing life energy. Within that context, the term *assentamento* carries a much more nuanced meaning: it refers to the designated place in a ritual where practitioners (or “filhos/as de santo”) deposit the strength and energy of the temple (the *Igbá*) through the invocation of *Axé* – the life force found everywhere around us. Therefore, in *Candomblé*, “*assentar o Axé*” (to deposit the *Igbá*) represents one of the most important elements in a ritual to recognize the inseparable connection between the spiritual and the earthly worlds – and their continuity within each other (Kileuy and Oxaguiã 2009, n. p.). Paulino’s work reconfigures the space of the art gallery, offering the possibility for audiences to re-think their relationship with the space and with art itself; her work brings into the room a sense of sacredness; the gallery becomes a space where the ancestral energy and sacred life force are deposited.

As Kimberly Cleveland has highlighted, Paulino appropriates what have been historically “white spaces of control” in Brazil (such as art galleries and museums) by

creating, through her art, alternative readings of historical narratives about black subjects (Cleveland 2010, 302). This resignification of visual and spatial meanings in Paulino's work is particularly important when one considers the black female body at the center of the installation. In Paulino's work, the black female body becomes the repository of Axé; the conduit of African ancestral connections; and, ultimately, the depository of cultural foundations and wealth. Furthermore, *Assentamento(s)* re-designs the ways in which to look at the black body. The sutures that stitch the fragmented body parts function as an oxymoron because their visibility demands the viewer to look at that woman's wholeness and profound humanity. In its stillness and quiet opulence, the black woman emanates sensuality and desire: she invites us to see her, through her, and beyond her. The pulsing, bleeding heart; her gaze directed at us; her roots reaching out from her legs; the life she quietly generates in her womb – all of this is part of Paulino's investment in expanding the multi-dimensions of a black female *self*. In *Assentamento(s)*, this black woman is no longer mute and powerless, as the one in Agassiz' photograph. In Paulino's work, this black woman is telling us something: she knows, she sees, she feels, she wants, she reaches out, she grounds herself, she receives, and delivers Axé.

Refazimento as a Counter-Narrative to the *Mestiçagem* Ideology

In her discussion of Paulino's work, Cleveland mentions how the artist "does not feel that an association with Africa is an innate part of her but, rather, something that she can put on and take off, like a game" (2010, 316-317). Cleveland explains further that Paulino chooses "not to take on a superficial 'African' identity, because it does not benefit her", and instead prefers to simply identify as a Brazilian (2010, 316). Cleveland's understanding of the dynamics of self-identification and representation of blackness in Brazilian art seems to oversimplify the complexities Paulino attempts to engage with. In a country where racial thought has been historically dominated by eugenicist views at first, and a façade of racial democracy in the modern era, black artists have strategically used Afrocentric approaches to convey their positionality and creative stance. Artists such as Abdias do Nascimento, among others, explicitly appropriate a variety of African motifs and symbolism to resist cultural, epistemological, and historical "rejection of Africa on the part of the dominant classes" (Nascimento 1980, 142).

The limitations of that strategic essentialism reside in the idea that Africa is used as an over-generalized mythical trope rather than a complex fabric of multiple historical,

cultural, political, and social threads. The fact that Paulino, as a self-declared black woman artist, seems to reject an unequivocal, simplistic, and “superficial” association with any African identity, as Cleveland reports, highlights the artist’s commitment to address the contradictions, ambiguities, and complexities of black subjectivities that were ruptured and rebuilt throughout Brazilian history. In her analysis of contemporary art by Paulino and Argentinian Claudia Contreras, Luana Saturnino Tvardovskas reminds us that art, in its many forms, can be interpreted as a practice of self-definition, in which the artist’s craft is shaped by autobiographical contours, and its platform becomes a space where the artist expresses herself aesthetically, politically, affectively, and ethically (Tvardovskas 2013, 2). Paulino’s work reflects the artist’s continuous engagement with her own social existence as a black woman in Brazilian society – one that explores the nuances in the interlocking relationships of race, gender, sexuality, and national identity. Paulino’s choice to avoid using an uncomplicated and potentially simplistic association with Africa (as a trope for artistic of personal identification) also indicates a position of inquiry of the conditions (historical, social, cultural, and psychological) under which black diasporic subjectivities have been configured and transformed. That position resonates with Tvardovskas’ understanding of Paulino’s work as subversive and feminist. Paulino revisits her personal memory and history as a black woman in Brazilian society, contextualizing her experiences within a larger national context in which black women’s subjectivities are in flux. Her art approaches, with honesty, “the relationship between a personal history and the Brazilian imaginary”, revealing a narrative of pain and cruelty, and, at the same time, pointing out a pathway constituted by “liberating and transformative relations” (Tvardovskas 2013, 5, translation is mine).

As Tatiana L. Marques and Rafael S. Myczkowski explain further, Rosana Paulino seeks to expose the raw sutures and wounds of domestication of the black female body and their profound fissures in the social, political, and historical fabric, from which art history cannot escape (2017, 102). By addressing these ruptures (its violent and traumatic effects, physical and symbolic), Paulino questions the pillars that sustain the fallacious claims of racial democracy in Brazil and the maintenance of a social hierarchy that keeps black women in positions of subordination, servitude, or objectification. *Assentamento(s)* illustrates how the artist is engaged in this inquiry by revisiting Brazil’s historical past and racial discourse. At the same time, Paulino refrains from making simplistic claims for an uncomplicated “African” identity that could reduce it to a shallow understanding of what “African” means

in the African continent and the diaspora. Instead, Paulino chooses to mark her positionality as a black woman who creates art from a particular socio-cultural position, interrogating foundational ideas that characterized the specificity of Brazilian racial formation.

Images of *mestiço* bodies have been heavily emphasized in Brazilian modern art, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s artistic production. *Mestiçagem* becomes, then, part of the figuration of the tropics in an exaltation of a unique Brazilianness. What Agassiz deemed as a national degradation in mid-nineteenth century becomes a mark of national identity in the modern era of the late twentieth century. Besides Gilberto Freyre in his iconic 1933 *Casa Grande & Senzala*, a myriad of artists and intellectuals are key figures in crafting the contours of that understanding, such as Mário de Andrade, Oswaldo de Andrade, Raul Bopp, and Luís da Câmara Cascudo. In the visual arts, the work of Anita Malfatti, Tarsila do Amaral, and Emiliano Di Cavalcanti exemplify how *mestiçagem* is used as a trope for national identity in combination with other aspects of the natural world of the tropics. As motifs, the visuality of black and *mestiço* bodies – as it is the case of Amaral’s 1923 “A Negra” (“The Black Woman”), for instance – reinforces, on one hand, the folklorization of the Afro-Brazilian cultural element as part of a national emblem. On another hand, this same context promotes the disguise of processes of black identification as a political instrument, promoting the erasure of Afro-Brazilian historical protagonism and subjectivities (Simioni 2013, 6-8).⁹

I agree with Aulicino and Oliveira when they remark that Paulino’s work represents a clear break from that modernist trend because, instead of reinforcing the idea of cultural mixture, her work visually exposes the sutures in that process of cooptation and assimilation (2015, 91). The use of sutures is, in fact, one of Paulino’s artistic signature techniques. Several of her works – such as “Bastidores” (1997), “Tecido Social” (2010), and “Atlântico Vermelho” (2016) – display the use of sutures to symbolize, among other things, the deep wounds imprinted on black bodies (Jaremtchuk 2007, 87-95). Besides this, the sutures imply the ways by which Brazil, as a nation, has an “unresolved past” when it comes to slavery: the Brazilian contemporary mentality and social dynamics insist on treating the black

⁹ As highlighted before, Lilia Schwarcz discusses this shift in the racial ideology sustained by the elites in the turn of the twentieth century in Brazil (Schwarcz 1993, 11). The whitening processes of the previous era was reconfigured as a praise to the racial miscegenation in the twentieth century. The complexities of such reconfiguration included, in some cases, the conciliation of seemingly rival ideologies. For instance, sociologist Alberto Guerreiro Ramos proposed, in late 1940s, an approach to race in Brazil that both sought to affirm blackness as a way to promote “real” racial democracy in the country. For more Ramos and the contradictions of that era, see the 2015 article by Luiz Augusto Campos “‘O Negro é Povo no Brasil’: Afirmação da Negritude e Democracia Racial em Alberto Guerreiro Ramos (1948-1955)”.

population as inferior (Simioni 2010, 13). The legacies of colonialism and slavery can be easily noticed in contemporary structures of the domestic space where, for instance, the great majority of domestic workers are black women from the outskirts of society and whose work conditions simulate those of late nineteenth century (Rara 2019, 2).

As old tropes that permeate the Brazilian imaginary, the monolithic images of the black female body seem to always find their way back to the surface of popular culture and public commentary as forms of commodification of otherness. bell hooks explains that, in order to justify the exploitation and sexual violence imposed on enslaved black women, the dominant culture created “an iconography of Black female bodies” as hypersexual: “the perfect embodiment of primitive, unbridled eroticism” (hooks 1991, 153). In Brazil, the black female body incorporates a series of stereotypes which I call, inspired by hooks, the iconography of *mestiçagem*. The discourses of *mestiçagem* and the ideology of racial democracy, two fundamental forces that have informed Brazilian racial order for more than three centuries, gave rise to the Brazilian color spectrum and racial hierarchy, predicated on the objectification and sexual exploitation of Afro-Brazilian women (Gonzalez, 1981; Carneiro 1994 and 1999; Gilliam & Gilliam, 1999). Within a set of categories and imageries, shaped by the discourses of *mestiçagem*, “it is possible to perceive that Brazilian women of different color categories other than white are placed in unalterable or un-exchangeable social roles” (Araújo 2016, 154).

In the so-called paradise of racial democracy, Brazilian black women’s sexuality gains different contours within the discourses of *mestiçagem* and the establishment of its whitening ideology. In the absence of legal racial segregation, black women’s bodies are manipulated and controlled by a patriarchal and racist ideology that also creates sexualized signifiers according to the laws of pigmentocracy. Those sexualized signifiers reinforce and perpetuate the idea that black women’s sexuality and eroticism do not belong to their own bodies, but to a system that regulates the use of their bodies. As Elisa Larkin Nascimento points out:

Miscegenation as the fruit of the sexual abuse of subjugated females reveals little about mutual understanding among human beings, but does speak eloquently of male colonizers' violent control over women. The genius of the Brazilian ideology was to make this violence the core of a self-serving discourse in which the white elite purges itself of any responsibility or guilt in the violence inherent to racism and patriarchy (Nascimento 2007, 59).

As an emblem of national unity, Brazilian *mestiçagem* is born out of the historical violation of women's bodies – black and indigenous. Acknowledging this historical fact should not be used, however, to deny that some interracial relationships in colonial Brazil developed consensually. There is significant historical research that examines the complexities of social structures during the colonial times and the first republic in Brazil, providing data for the consensual, strategic, and emotional ties of interracial and inter-class (official and unofficial) relationships (Hordge-Freeman, 2015; Lavrin, 1989). Yet, the ways in which Brazilian elites manipulated the discourses of *mestiçagem* have create the illusion of a racially democratic society, very popularized in the modern era when the country engaged in building an internationally attractive identity for itself.

In an apparent diversity, the iconography of *mestiçagem* produces the images of *mulatas*, *morenas*, *pardas*, *cafuzas* based on what Osmundo de Araújo Pinho calls “uma miscigenação predatorial” [“a predatory miscegenation”]: it is a sexual practice inscribed within a context of inequalities and asymmetries (2004, 100). It is crucial to notice how quickly and efficiently certain iconographies of *mestiçagem* have become popular and iconic of a gendered-Brazilianness, such as the one of the sensually unbridled *morena* or the devil creatures embodied by *mulatas*. Such iconographies infuse a significant portion of the Brazilian literary canon that reached the status of highly visible expressions of popular culture. This is the case of well-known modernist writer Jorge Amado, whose novels have been translated in more than forty-nine languages and popularized in film and TV shows. The *morenas* and *mulatas* in Amado's novels are often depicted with remarkable sexual agency, but only in service of the development of the male characters they are involved with. Despite their sexual desire, Amado's *morena* and *mulata* characters are monolithic figures that support the deceptive ideology of racial cordiality (Araújo 2016, 155-56). What seems to be central in deconstructing this ideological framework is to understand what principles, values and realities it serves. A critical examination of the ideology of *mestiçagem* in Brazil (as in other Latin American countries) should not be based on the denial of *mestiçagem* as a historical phenomenon, given the fact that Brazil reflects the expression of many influences and confluences in its culture, social dynamism, and phenotypical makeup. To re-think the ideology of *mestiçagem* demands, however, a critical inquiry of a system that has historically privileged those closer to how whiteness is perceived, while disadvantaging, obstructing, and oppressing those who are more visibly perceived as far away from whiteness.

In her 2005 research, Regina Dalcastagnè collects data from over two hundred contemporary Brazilian novels and traced the profile of the characters depicted in those texts. It is shocking to be confronted with the results of Dalcastagnè's study: 92% of all characters in contemporary Brazilian novel (from 1990 to 2004) are white; only 28,9% of protagonists are women. In that scenario, Dalcastagnè highlights, women characters in any significant role for the narrative are mainly confined to the domestic sphere, while black women and *mestiça* characters are largely depicted as domestic or sex workers and criminals (2005, 53-55). Even within that latter group, the stratification follows the logic of whitening in Brazil, according to which *mestiças* tend to be portrayed in higher positions in the social hierarchy, such as housewives and students (2005, 55).

As a genre, the fictional novel is, according to Toni Morrison, an "act of imagination" through which the artist access "the interior life of others" (1995, 92). In resonance with Morrison's idea of fictional writing, Dalcastagnè adds that a reader who approaches a novel, besides the desire for similitude, they want to understand what it means to be an "other"; what it means to inhabit a distant land, to speak a different language, to experience the world in a different manner (2005, 14). In conclusion of her analysis of the data collected, Dalcastagnè reminds us that literature, like any other artistic form, cannot escape a human practice connected to a complex network of interests and power structures. These structures determine what gets to be represented and, therefore, legitimized as the representation of the "other". To deny those connections between art production and structures of power means "to insist on the perpetuation of a form of oppression that eliminates from literature everything that marks social differences" (Dalcastagnè 2005, 53, translation is mine).

Art, therefore, reflects those socio-historical conditions; and, more importantly, the means of art production are controlled, as Dalcastagnè discusses, by systems of legitimization that allow for the visibility of certain representations, while erasing others. In that sense, Paulino's method of *refazimento* also promotes the re-ordering of those structures of power and legitimization because her work disrupts the mechanisms of silence these structures impose. *Assentamento(s)* dismantles the racial codification imagined by Agassiz and perpetuated by the *mestiçagem* ideology; it restitutes dignity, humanity, history, subjectivity, and complexity to a black female body seen before as mere commodity.

Rosana Paulino and the Contemporary Visual Art Scene in Brazil

Rosana Paulino's art marks the contemporary moment in the production of visual arts in Brazil. More specifically, Paulino's work is situated at a contemporary scenario in which black Brazilian artists are increasingly occupying more spaces, including the ones designed to be inaccessible to them. This shift is not happening in a vacuum. It is part of a historical continuum of black Brazilian activism that has consistently included artists of all genres. In its contemporary rendering, the black artistic visibility follows the resurgence of social movements in Brazil in the aftermath of the military regime of the 1960s and 1970s. It is only in the early 1980s that a self-identified black feminist intellectual and creative production begins to conquer some kind of visibility. Black Brazilian feminists have built a trajectory of profound engagement in theorizing about gender, race, class, and liberation, even though they are still kept outside of the broader black feminist canon, which is mostly focused on the U.S. and English-speaking Caribbean. The work of Luiza Bairros, Beatriz Nascimento, Lélia Gonzalez, and Sueli Carneiro remains relatively unknown, even inside of their own home country¹⁰. Alongside this intellectual trajectory, black Brazilian women artists have developed a multi-faceted and prolific production that questions the limits of genre, aesthetic form, gender, and nationality.

In contemporary visual arts, Sonia Gomes, Janaína Barros, Renata Felinto, Musa Michelle Mattiuzzi, and Rosana Paulino are part of a generation of artists that develop an aesthetic exploration centered on issues related to the position and role of black women in Brazilian society. As Alecssandra M. de Oliveira points out, these artists (many of whom are also researchers and curators) are "dangerous" because they address historical issues that have been kept away from the national scene in visual arts: "They took it for themselves the themes and language that express their own lives, and those of their grandmothers, mothers, and sisters – they became the voices that have been silenced" (2017, n.p. translation

¹⁰. Besides the works cited in this essay by these intellectuals, see also *Beatriz Nascimento, Quilombola e Intelectual: Possibilidade nos Dias de Destruição*, a 2018 collection of works by historian Beatriz Nascimento, which includes her pioneering studies and theorizing on ancestral Afro-diasporic territories, subjectivities and bodies; and Luiza Bairros' ground-breaking essay "Nossos Feminismos Revisitados" (*Revista de Estudos Feministas*, ano 3, no. 2, 1995), where she discusses feminism in Brazil from the perspective of race, class, gender and nation, articulating what we now recognize as intersectional feminist theory.

is mine). Oliveira's description of such artists as "dangerous" echoes what Audre Lorde had said about self-empowered women in a context where their bodies are controlled:

Of course, women so empowered are dangerous... For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives (Lorde 2007, 55 - 57).

In her iconic essay "Uses of the Erotic: the Erotic as Power", delivered at a 1978 conference, Lorde offered a re-conceptualization of the erotic as "an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered", available from within (Lorde 2017, 55). For Lorde (a self-identified black, lesbian, warrior, poet), recognizing and using the erotic as a source of empowerment and self-knowledge allows for a refined capacity to reject the terms of long-standing systems of oppression that deny women (and women of color in particular) that source of transformative power. Artists, such as Rosana Paulino, whose commitment is to confront those systems and their historical legacies, pose a threat to the continuity of forms of oppression that marginalize, exploit, and objectify black bodies. In Brazil, those systems are the ones that have kept black bodies at the bottom of social hierarchies, outside of educational, political and cultural spaces. And such systemic structures are still alive, insisting on setting barriers. The increasing presence of black women artists in the contemporary scenario of visual arts (in Brazil and beyond) proves that the structures of power that attempt to keep them as outsiders have already been shaken.

Inaugurated by the piece "Parede da Memória" in 1994 ("Wall of Memory"), Paulino's aesthetics questions the conventions and values attributed to the so-called universal themes, by drawing attention to the personal as an entryway to the universal. As an intricate multimedia assemblage, Paulino's work combines objects typically used in the domestic sphere to highlight the trivialization of violence against women in private life. Such as the case of her series "Bastidores" (1997, "Frames") in which Paulino sutures the mouths of black women's faces, printed on fabric and installed on embroidery frames. In 2005, Paulino expanded her art by dialoguing more explicitly with a larger historical background with a focus on race and racial relations in Brazil. Her series "Amas de Leite" ("Wet Nurses") uses fractured, faceless sculptures to represent how black women's bodies have been historically objectified since slavery: theirs were the breasts that fed the white

babies of the “Big House”, a practice that was fully incorporated in the Brazilian slaveholding society in the nineteenth century. These aspects of Paulino’s artistic production create a poetics of intimacy, marked by an articulation of “notions of domesticated bodies, deterritorialization, violence, and the body as archive” (Marques and Myczkowski 2016, 102). Paulino’s art resonates with a contemporary perspective over the notion of intersectionality by representing, thematically and aesthetically, issues in the crossroads of gender, race, class, nationality, science, and history.

Compared to other contemporary black women artists, Paulino’s work has earned unparalleled national and international visibility. Her art has been exhibited in several art galleries and museums in the U.S., particularly those housed and supported by institutions of higher education. In 2012, Paulino participated in the project “AFRO: Black Identity in America and Brazil” at the Tamarind Institute, a division of the College of Fine Arts at the University of New Mexico, where she produced four lithographs using Agassiz’ photographs – those lithographs initiated the project *Assentamento(s)*. More recently, in 2018, *Assentamento(s)* was exhibited at Clifford Gallery, at Colgate University, in Hamilton, NY. In 2014, the Espace Culturelle Fort Griffon, in Besançon, Southern France, hosted Paulino’s “Mulheres Negras: Obscure Beauté du Brésil”; and, again, in 2017 along with the collective exhibitions for “South-South: Let me Begin Again” at Goodman Gallery, in Cape Town, South Africa. Despite this international recognition, Paulino’s work is still positioned at the margins of what is often selected to occupy international spaces interested in displaying Brazilian visual arts.

In 2017, Paulino was invited for a solo exhibition titled “Atlântico Vermelho” (“Red Atlantic”) at the Padrão dos Descobrimentos in Lisbon, Portugal. That exhibition was a product of Paulino’s extensive research on the history and legacies of the European colonial project in Brazil, particularly the genocide of the indigenous communities and the transatlantic slave traffic it supported and from which it profited. The critic, Antonio Ribeiro, explains further details about the Lisbon exhibit:

The set of works exhibited here, as a result of the themes addressed and the materials used – watercolour, sketches, textiles, clay, threads –, their liquidity – the occupation of the space is fluid and spilling – and the sculpted figures – women bound, amputated, caught on hooks –, serve another of the artist’s concerns: to make visible the vulnerability to which black people have always been subjected, and, particularly black women. The lines are fine and delicate, the sculptures superbly crafted, but the expressions reflect great suffering, the

pain of people at the mercy of those who dominate them (Ribeiro, “Atlântico Vermelho”, n.d. n.p.).

These elements highlight Paulino’s critical inquiry about the issues related to an unresolved past and the consequences of that into the contemporary conditions of marginalized populations in Brazil. In that same year of 2018, the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), in collaboration with the Tomie Ohtake Institute, hosted an unprecedented large-scale exhibition titled “Histórias Afro-Atlânticas” (“Afro-Atlantic Histories”), presenting a selection of four-hundred and fifty works by two-hundred and fourteen artists ranging from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries. The MASP brochure stated that the exhibition was “motivated by a desire and need to draw parallels, frictions and dialogues around the visual cultures of Afro-Atlantic territories – their experiences, creations, worshiping and philosophy” (“Afro-Atlantic Histories” 2018, n.p.). Paulino’s work “Bastidores” and “Atlântico Vermelho” were featured among those hundreds of pieces in the exhibition. But it was later that year that Paulino earned a prestigious and significant national recognition for the entire body her work, becoming the first black woman artist to be featured solo in a retrospective exhibition staged in a museum in Brazil. The event hosted at São Paulo’s Pinacoteca, titled “Rosana Paulino: A Costura da Memória” (“The Sewing of Memory”) – the artist’s largest solo exhibition – celebrated Paulino’s trajectory creating installations, engravings, drawings, sculptures and collages. A host of one-hundred-and-forty thought-provoking artworks produced from 1993 to 2018 coherently presented a body of work by an artist who navigates the intersections of poetics, politics, history, and memory.

As an artistic project of self-recreation, Paulino’s work offers a platform for us to consider the structures of power that regulate the cultural spaces where self-representation comes alive. Such consideration invites further inquiry and exploration of black women’s creative processes. What does it mean for black women artists to create methods that allow them to use a language of liberation? What is at stake when black women artists forge spaces to display the artistic language they create? In addition, Paulino’s artistic project also promotes a reflection about who gets included in (and exclude from) hegemonic cultural spaces – museums, art galleries, art collections, canons, class syllabi, anthologized bodies of work, and translation projects, just to name a few. In other words, one could ask: how is cultural capital generated and distributed so that black women’s artistic production can reach wider audiences? How are resources being used so that marginalized narratives of history and culture can be incorporated into knowledge production? From margin to center,

contemporary black women artists, like Rosana Paulino, have crafted trajectories that allow them to occupy multiple subject positions within their artistic, intellectual and political work – a project that highlights pathways in the poetics and politics of self and communal (re)imaginings.

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