



**MEMOIRS** - FILHOS DE IMPÉRIO E PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS | **MEMOIRS** - CHILDREN OF EMPIRES AND EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES  
**MAPS** - PÓS-MEMÓRIAS EUROPEIAS: UMA CARTOGRAFIA PÓS-COLONIAL | **MAPS** - EUROPEAN POSTMEMORIES: A POSTCOLONIAL CARTOGRAPHY

Saturday, 5 June 2021



*Justina Maria do Espírito Santo* | 2021 | Michel Cena7 (courtesy of the artist)

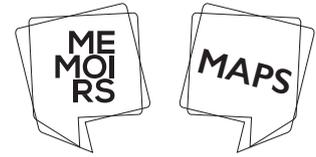
## EXU, ORIXÁ OF BLACK MEMORY

Fernanda Vilar

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“Exu killed a bird yesterday with the stone he threw today”.  
Yoruba proverb

The manifesto-cum-film “AmarElo – It’s All for Yesterday”(1) by Leandro Roque de Oliveira, the rapper better known as Emicida, begins and ends with this Yoruba proverb about Exu, an orixá who can kill a bird yesterday with a stone thrown today. Exu is a transitional element, the last orixá and the first human, who makes communication between the heavens and the earth possible (2). In the Christian



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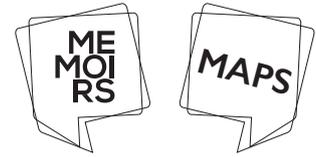
Brazilian imagination, Exu is interpreted as the devil. However, in another narrative, different to the Official History of Brazil, Exu reinvents memory to rewrite the history of Brazil from the perspective of black people. The film condemns the damage done by slavery, and by abolition without reparations, as well as the politics of whitening that has been responsible for perpetuating a racial chasm in the Brazilian population.

Emicida brings the agents of Brazilian transformation to the stage of the Municipal Theatre in São Paulo, which almost a hundred years ago staged the aristocratic Modern Art Week of 1922. These are people who inherit a past that is salvaged by Exu. Those who are rescued live on the *quebradas* (the urban peripheries) and find platforms for speaking and mobilizing in street art, rap and poetry battles. They are people who struggle to have their rights protected in law: the LGBTQI+ community, women and people racialized as non-white—all those who carry in themselves the intersectionality of the vulnerable citizen.

To understand the contemporary debate over race in Brazil, it is worth seeing the recent #BLM movement through the Dunning-Kruger effect, a “phenomenon that leads individuals who have little knowledge about a subject to believe they know more than others who are better equipped, meaning that they take wrong decisions and achieve unwarranted results – rendering them incapable of recognizing their own errors” (3). Rather than saying, through the hashtag #BLM, “the police should suffer the consequences of their actions”, #BLM showed people the magnitude of the problem of police violence against black people in various countries around the world. Groups of people who do not suffer this kind of violence have learnt how many black lives are lost through the disproportionate use of force by police when they come upon black bodies. Exu moves between that which we did not want to see for so long and that which cannot any longer be denied. Exu is #BLM.

Still, today, condemning sexism or racism in Brazil is dismissed in heated online debates as “mimimi”; a popular term for an unnecessary complaint. The internet gives us the response to this discourse in the singular language of a meme (4): “mimimi is when it marks someone else’s skin and not yours”. The years of public policies of affirmative action and redistribution of income have enabled the oppressed classes to address their place in society and the structural problems that affect their existence. However, on perceiving the problems of society, it is perception itself that becomes the problem (5). The privileged see a threat in others’ freedom and scream back at every demand for justice: “Exu, Get out!”

The cultural, academic, community and media productions of recent years in Brazil no longer allow us to pretend that we do not know. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, the [Enciclopédia negra: biografias afro-](#)



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[brasileiras](#) [Black encyclopedia: Afro-Brazilian biographies], by Flávio Gomes, Lilia Schwarz and Jaime Lauriano came out. These three intellectuals have written and rewritten the trajectories of 550 people who made their mark on Brazil. The book recounts the work and practice of both well known and little known black personalities. Some of them are imaginary portraits, asserting a space of existence within the broader history of Brazil. Exu illumines and inspires.

A new collection organized by Julio Ludemor, *Carolinas: a nova geração de escritoras negras brasileiras* [Carolinas: the new generation of black Brazilian women authors], celebrates the Brazilian literary achievement of Carolina Maria de Jesus, author of the famous *Quarto de despejo* (1960) [published in English as *Child of the Dark: The diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*]. The collection includes 180 black writers, drawn from online meetings promoted through 2020 by the Festa Literária das Periferias (Flup) [The Literary Festival of the Peripheries]. It is Exu writing stories.

On the literary scene, there is the award-winning work *Torto Arado* (2019), by the writer Itamar Vieira Junior who, in spite of having received almost unanimously positive critical and public reception, was the target of a provocative critique by the journalist [Fabiana Moaraes](#), who wrote in a tweet: “*Torto Arado* is a good book, but: a lot of the enthusiasm comes from the publishing market, which draws attention to work that appeazes guilty white consciences (remembering here Allan da Rosa/Baldwin). The excess of didacticism is troubling. Sometimes it seems like a lesson for light skinned people”. The author responded with a reflection on racism, literature and the recent proliferation of black authors in Brazilian publishing. Exu provokes dialogues and debates.

The documentary “[Dentro da minha pele](#)”, [Inside my skin] by Toni Venturi and Val Gomes, was released in 2020. Its premise is to reveal “the structural racism that impregnates family relationships and work contexts, and constructs the subjectivity of white and black people” (6). To achieve this, thinkers, musicians, singers, instrumentalists and slam poets gave testimonies to show the scale and impact of racism in their lives. The film’s didactic message was accompanied by story-telling. It is an important document of the contemporary situation in Brazil and the consequences of many years without resolution. Exu offers resolution, through time.

These five recent Brazilian productions illustrate the work of Exu: more than subverting time, they reinterpret the past, teaching us that things can be interpreted differently from different perspectives. They discomfort us, and bring forward new material to reflect upon. They allow us to imagine how it is that we can kill a bird yesterday with a stone that we throw today. Through these works, Exu offers “valuable solutions so that tomorrow will not just be yesterday with a different name” (7).

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- (1) Available on Netflix.
  - (2) “Encyclopédia brasileira da diáspora africana”, Nei Lopes.
  - (3) Definition from [Wikipedia](#) in Portuguese, translated here.
  - (4) A “meme” can be a phrase, a link, a video, or site or an image that is spread through emails, blogs, new sites, social media and other information sources.
  - (5) I am referring to the article [“The Problem of Perception”](#) (2014), on Feminist Killjoys, by Sara Ahmed, when the author notes that when someone points out a problem, in particular of a racist or sexist character, this person often ends up being blamed for the problem they have identified. That is, if the person had not pointed out the problem, it would not have existed. That moment becomes the “creation” of the person who denounced it, creating a paradox of responsibility.
  - (6) [Olhar Imaginário](#).
  - (7) Preface of the book “A des-educação do negro”, by Carter Godwin Woodson. Translated Naia Veneranda Gomes da Silveira, Edipro, 2021, written by Emerica and [available online](#).
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