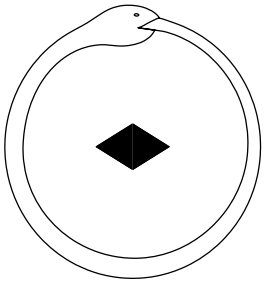


SOLAR STRATEGIES
OF SURVIVAL
Aza Njeri



notebooks
SELVAGEM



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Aza Njeri

*This notebook consists of the translation of the transcription of
Aza Njeri's talk about the Sun, filmed on March 14, 2024, at the exhibition*

Mbaé Ka'á showcased by the Botanical Garden of Rio de Janeiro.

*Aza's video can be [accessed here](#) as part of the Sun Cycle,
which comprises 17 speeches.*

I would like to begin this talk by introducing a philosophical **Bacongo** maxim. **Bacongo** is part of an ethnolinguistic group within the **Bantu** lineage. The **Bantu** languages form a large ethnolinguistic group, as do, for instance, the Latin languages. Portuguese belongs to the broader ethnolinguistic group of the Latin languages; **Bacongo**, in parallel, belongs to a broader ethnolinguistic group called **Bantu**. The **Bantu** languages share certain characteristics; a linguistic foundation that is considerably close across ethnicities, for example. However, there is something we observe within different communities in the African continent and those from the Afro-diaspora, including the ones in Brazil: the philosophical maxim that states that “every Muntu is a living Sun”. What this actually means is that “every human being is a living Sun”. This is an African **Bantu** (prominently **Bacongo**) philosophical maxim. One can find this same idea among groups of **Bantu** origin (e.g., the **Zulus**), but those who promote this notion that all of us are, unconditionally, living Suns are the **Bacongo** people.

It is important to say that the **Bacongos** came to Brazil through a process of abduction, enslavement, and radical dehumanisation. So, you see: these people were on the African continent, with their own philosophical, aesthetic, behavioural, and social frameworks, when strangers suddenly arrived and abducted this group. Then, this group embarked, crossed the Atlantic, and disembarked within a model of radical dehumanisation. When they left Africa, they were the **Bacongos**, the **Zulus**,

the *Chopes*, the *Macuas*, the *Rongas*, the *Tsongas*, etc. When they arrived in the Americas, they were the Black. Actually, what happened to us during the Atlantic crossing was an ontological rupture. Our humanity was stripped away from us during the course, homogenising these groups once philosophically, linguistically, and socially distinct. They were homogenised under this label, “Black”.

Later, this would develop into our Blackness, but now from an American, diasporic perspective. And we will wonder under what conditions these people arrived in here. In practice, these people, now Black, enslaved in an enslavement context — rather than in a “slavery” context, as they were forcefully placed into that condition — disembarked in Brazil carrying three things: the body, undeniably, the word and the philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic set they retained from their ethnicities. And, among these African philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic frameworks that disembarked in Brazil, comes the maxim that we are a living Sun.

The *Bacongos* come mainly from Congo and Angola. “Ba” means people, so it follows that the “*Bacongos*” would be the “people of Congo”. However, if we search for the *Bacongos* today, we find them in Cabinda, Angola. So, why don’t the “people of Congo” live in Congo? The answer is colonialism. It divided the borders in Africa, resulting in most of the *Bacongos* today being Angolan instead of Congolese. But why does this matter to us? Because we know, historically, that the first enslaved person to disembark in Brazil, in 1536, was of Congo-Angolan origin. So, the likelihood of this philosophy being the first African philosophy to arrive here is huge. We cannot prove it, but it seems plausible to me. And it is not just that. The African peoples from the Congo and Angola regions would come for the longest period; they were the first to arrive, and the last to stop arriving. They were brought in greater numbers.

For these reasons, the likelihood of the African cultural roots in Brazil being primarily of *Bantu* origin is very high. Adds weight to this hypothesis the fact that we speak a “Bantusized” [Bantu-influenced] Portuguese, a Portuguese whose base, cadence, and rhythm are directly influenced by *Kimbundo*, which is an Angolan language. If we say “falano”

and “comeno” [instead of “falando” and “comendo”, Portuguese words for “speaking” and “eating”, respectively], it is due to the rhythmic influence of **Kimbundo** rooted here. These people who arrived here didn’t speak Portuguese. Portuguese was an imposed language. And what happens when you speak an imposed language? You speak it with an accent. And it’s this accent that took root in Brazil as a linguistic survival strategy. What I’m trying to say is that it may seem that the understanding of oneself as a living Sun is a distant reality, but it truly isn’t.

You see: here we are in the 21st Century and I am absolutely certain that none of us here could withstand a whipping. I am sure that none of us could endure a radical, long process of incessant dehumanisation that steadily limits one’s existence. So why, despite the whippings, did our ancestors think it was worthwhile to leave descendants? If I were enslaved, I don’t know if I would leave a child to be enslaved as well. Our ancestors, however, believed life was worth living. And this is one of the great heritages left by our **Bantu** ancestors when they landed here. Despite the whipping, enslavement, dehumanisation, I am a living Sun. And this is the maxim, the unnegotiable vital force that allowed the Black population to remain here to this day. This is an ancestral future. It’s like a philosophical seed kept by those who were extremely dehumanised and it made sense to them.

Despite being told I am not human, not being given what to eat, being beaten, I, with my body, my words, and my beliefs, still believe I am a living Sun. This is unnegotiable. And then we find it hard to understand how, in the present days, Black, poor, marginalised people facing severe struggles can continue to believe that life is worth living... It is because life is worth it. This is an ancestral philosophical technology we have inherited here in Brazil, and it is very much alive in our contemporary social behaviour.

Within this set of beliefs, the maxim of understanding oneself as a living Sun implies that the birth of a child in the community is like a new Sun rising. And it is our communal responsibility to *matrmanage*¹ this Sun so it may walk freely through life. As the ancestors of the future

1. “Matrmanage” is the direct translation of *matrigestar*, a Brazilian neologism (verb) that conveys the idea of *nurture*. (T.N.)

— all of us, without any reservations, will be ancestors to the future times —, to ensure our future ancestry and the solarly of our communities, we need to take responsibility. This **Bacongo** philosophical maxim of understanding oneself as a living Sun reached us during a period of enslavement and dehumanisation. This whole time, it has been demonstrating that while things may not be alright, the community will mat-
rیمانage its Suns. For all of us.

You see, the **Bacongos** never said that “everyone is a living Sun, except João, trans people, or something”. There is no exclusion. There is no exception, no condition, no buts. All of us are living Suns.

So, it would be the role of a healthy community, a healthy society, to supervise the journey of this Sun so that it can reach the full radiance of the midday Sun, but, above all, that it may also have a dignified sunset. That being said, I ask you: does Brazil kindle our Sun? Do you think Brazil kindles our Sun? As contemporary individuals in contemporary times, do you think the social model we live in today is more inclined to kindling or extinguishing our Sun? We don’t really need this answer, as the notion that we live in a period of radical, ongoing, and incessant dehumanisation pervades our lives. And you live in the same country as I do; I don’t need to come here and tell you about tragedies. You open a newspaper and you see that living in a contemporary society like ours is an act of bravery. And living solarly is an act of revolution. It is an act of revolution. We learned a lot from those who got here first.

Even with all the disgrace, with the chaos in Brazil, life is still worth living. And this is a philosophical key inherited by the Black population across the Americas in general — not only in Brazil. **Bantu** peoples have spread throughout the Americas. While the maxim that “life is worth living” is present in the Americas in general, it is mainly present here, in *capoeira*. It is an African heritage deeply rooted in the diaspora. And what is the diaspora? The diaspora in the Americas? There is also a diaspora in Europe, but that is more recent: in the 20th century, the Afro-Europeans migrated and established communities in France, Portugal, etc. But in America’s context, the Black people are in this continent due to a matter of ship. Black people are Afro-Brazilian because of ships. Because the ship of my ancestors docked here [I am Afro-Brazilian]. But if that same

ship docked in Chile, I would be Afro-Chilean. In the U.S.A., I would be African American. So, this notion of displacement and uprooting is ultimately so violent that our ancestors clung to what they had, their bodies, words, and beliefs, as a means to survival.

Then, it shouldn't strike us as a surprise what we see as the great African cultural-philosophical expressions in the Americas. *Capoeira*, which is body, word, and belief. *Capoeira* is pure philosophy. The *jongo*: body, word, and belief. The *samba*: body, word, and belief. And I could go on until tomorrow because I've done my research. All the African legacies in Brazil are based on body, word, and belief. So, we are speaking of extremely sophisticated strategies, but above all, solar strategies that have allowed us to persist.

To conclude, we can bring in the example of another African maxim, also **Bantu**, but now influenced by the Zulu: the **Ubuntu** philosophy. It says that "I am because we are". But what does this mean? "Ubuntu" has become a hashtag, the name of a restaurant — it reached the capitalized space. But what does "I am because we are" mean? It means that my humanity — more than humanity, my vital force — establishes itself at the moment that I recognize and promote *your* vital force. And the best part of all this is that this maxim considers the vital force of the entire ecosystemic web. So, when we say that every **Muntu** is a living Sun, that we are living Suns, that we are interconnected, we are not restricted to the human chain; we are speaking of everything that holds vital force. So, the tree in front of my house, the one I've looked at since I was 17 and is still there, is part of my ecosystemic web. To disturb that tree is to disturb my Sun, because we are one. And it was with this foundation of ecosystemic connection — a foundation of ecosystemic web — that our ancestors managed to resist, persist, and continue. That is it.

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