

# Jung at the crossroads or reading Jung from Exu

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## Abstract

This paper proposes a reading of some aspects of Jung's work based on the orisha Exu and the notion of the crossroads, understood as an epistemological reference for an expansion of analytical psychology. Reading Jung through Exu means proposing complex and contemporary reflections on analytical psychology, expanding therapeutic possibilities and socio-historical analysis. Exu is a decolonizing principle that doubts orthodoxies, confronts stagnation and destabilizes Eurocentric worldviews. Communication, movement, dynamism, creativity and transformation are elements common to Exu and analytical psychology. Unconscious, shadow and transcendent function are some of the Jungian concepts worked on in dialogue with the Exu principle. ■



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“Exu” – Carybé

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## Jung at the crossroads or reading Jung from Exu

*A encruzilhada é o umbigo do mundo (dito de terreiro)*

*Adakê Exu, Exu, ê Mojubá*

*Ê Bará ô, Elegbara*

*Lá na encruza, a esperança acendeu*

*Sou Grande Rio, Grande Rio sou e*

*Adakê Exu, Exu, ê Mojubá*

*Ê Bará ô, Elegbara*

*Lá na encruza, onde a flor nasceu raiz*

*Eu levo fé nesse povo que diz (trecho do samba-enredo da Acadêmicos do Grande Rio, escola campeã do carnaval 2022).*

### Clearing the way

Synchronicity. That was my key reading for the victory of the *Acadêmicos do Grande Rio* samba school at the 2022 Rio Carnival. The school from Duque de Caxias, a municipality in the Baixada Fluminense, took an unprecedented storyline about Exu<sup>1</sup> to the Sambódromo and won its first championship. The storyline sought to confront the Christian view that assimilated Exu to the Devil, attributing to the orisha evil characteristics that are the raw material for the persecution of Afro-Brazilian religious terreiros undertaken by Christian fundamentalism. To this end, he brought various aspects of Exu, his manifestations and his domains to the parade.

The narrative was a great manifesto of praise for the festival, for life and for Afro-Brazilian cultures, criticising racism, social inequalities and hatred. Exu killed a bird yesterday with a stone that he only threw today.

<sup>1</sup> The storyline *Fala, Majeté! Sete Chaves de Exu* was created by carnival designers Gabriel Haddad and Leonardo Bora, with research by Vinícius Natal. The synopsis can be found at <https://www.academicosdogranderio.com.br/enredo> (visited on 29 April 2022).

The Yoruba aphorism makes perfect sense if we consider that this epiphany took place at the first carnival after the electoral defeat of the city's former mayor, a licensed bishop of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, and a declared antagonist of the Momo festivities.<sup>2</sup> It was an important affirmation of faith at the carnival, which also marked the return of popular festivities after more than 600,000 deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, in a country governed at the time by the science-denying, Christian fundamentalist far right, which destroyed the environment and social and cultural rights.

A significant event in synchrony, the carnival of Exu illuminated the writing of this work and expanded my imaginary repertoire on the complexities of the orisha that guided my Jungian formation. If, at first, my idea was to read Exu from a Jungian perspective, gradually the endless hunger from Exu devoured Jung and led me to invert the logic: Exu comes first. Jung is the offering at the crossroads. That thrown stone hit us here.

To read Jung from Exu is to make a party, to get the Swiss psychiatrist to dance in the street and communicate with the time of now.<sup>3</sup>

It means proposing open reflections, crosses, expanding therapeutic possibilities and socio-historical analyses. As a decolonising principle, Exu incorporates himself into Jung, laughs,

<sup>2</sup> There are countless articles in the press with pronouncements against Carnival by then mayor Marcelo Crivella (2017-2020). When he was accused of corruption, he defended what he considered one of the highlights of his government: taking funds away from Carnival. <https://vejario.abril.com.br/beira-mar/crivella-justifica-governo-tirei-recursos-carnaval-prisao/> (visited on 13 May 2022).

<sup>3</sup> It was during the rise of Nazi-fascism in Europe in the 1930s that Walter Benjamin pointed out that it was necessary – if we want to tell history alongside the narrative of the oppressed, and therefore of those who are defeated in history – to break with the idea of a continuum, of triumphant progress, of linear time moving towards a glorious future. For him, the present is full of nows. It is a now that is at once past, future and present (BENJAMIN, 1994).

spits marafo and refuses certainties, orthodoxies and stagnations, destabilising Eurocentricities. Communication, movement, dynamism, creativity, transformation: elements common to Exu and analytical psychology.

The orisha has already been the subject of important work in the Jungian field. Here I briefly present two of them. Sônia Lages' (2003) master's thesis and an article published by Serbena and Gabani (2015).

Sônia Lages (2003) presents Exu as the archetype of the shadow in Brazilian society and explains the intention of her dissertation as follows:

The pretension is to demonstrate that the entity of Exu is the projection of the shadow of the Brazilian collective unconscious, but that, in the terreiros of this studied religious field, the problematic of the shadow reacquires a new connotation. [...] This dissertation is therefore essentially a psychological analysis of the entity of Exu and its repercussions in the religious field of Umbanda, in the individual and in society (p. 4-5).

Based on field research in which she observed rituals and religious practices, Sônia Lages interprets Exu in Umbanda, in its various aspects (malandros, pombas giras, catiços, etc.), using Jungian concepts. Exu is understood as a collective psychic phenomenon and analysing it is, for the author, a way of unveiling important aspects of Brazilian society.

Serbena and Gabani also analyse Exu in relation to the Jungian concept of the shadow. For the authors, as a shadow, Exu has the capacity to unveil a psychic process, a hidden potential that can point to alternative futures as the symbol ceases to be identified with the Devil, with Evil, and becomes integrated into consciousness, with its conflicts and ambiguities. Serbena and Gabani point to the possibilities of individual and collective psychic transformations by bringing its symbolism into consciousness (SERBENA, GABANI, 2015, p. 62).

Integrating the shadow Exu into consciousness depends on confronting the one-sided Christian religiosity that rejects evil as part of life and, precisely for this reason, is more susceptible to being dominated by it. The authors' conclusion contributes to understanding the relevance of Grande Rio's carnival in this psychic process:

Taking the Exu out of the dark projections and bringing it into the light of consciousness is the only way to remove the fear of an archetypal possession caused by ignorance of its true symbolism. And then, as Jung (...) points out, what the archetype, in this case the figure of Exu, will or will not actually be will depend solely on an attitude of consciousness (SERBENA, GABANI, 2015, p. 67).

In dialogue with these works, I can say that the movement here is different. The attempt I propose is to read Jung from the perspective of Exu, who is understood as an epistemic principle that guides the understanding of the dynamics of the psyche. I will not emphasise the observation of religious rituals. The analysis will focus on itans, stories of Yoruba origin that make up a collection that allows us to get closer to the Exu principle. I won't be approaching archetypes such as the trickster or mercurial similars, which could limit the recognition of the specificities and distinctions of the master of the paths.

My point of departure and arrival is the crossroads. I claim the crossroads as a concept for reading the world, based on the powers of Exu (RUFINO, 2019, p. 18). Crossing Jung with Exu doesn't aim to correct or purify Jung, to eliminate his contradictions, his racism and Eurocentrism, but to open up questions, possibilities, to try out paths (RUFINO, 2019, p. 18).

The path to this conversation will begin by presenting Exu as a principle, and then we'll take Jung to the crossroads by working with itans that intersect with analytical psychology.

### The Exu principle

Bara, Elegbara, Legba, Yangí and many other names in candomblés, santerias and batuques. Tranca Ruas, Tiriri, Lalu, Caveira, Sete Encruzilhadas, Giramundo and many other names in umbandas and macumbas. How many Exus live in Brazilian religions of African and/or Afro-Amerindian origin? There are also so many names for the many faces of Exu. The orisha closest to human beings, Exu does good, does evil, loves, hates, has no possessions but loves food and money, creates messes for fun and solves them for pleasure. Owner of communication between beings and worlds, he mediates agreements and creates misunderstandings. He protects his sons and daughters, but woe betide anyone who forgets to praise and feed him: his life can turn into a living hell of failures, stumbles and even illness and death. Good and evil are not opposed to Exu. Everything depends on contexts and situations and he is capable of doing evil in order to bring good to one of his sons. Exu is movement, action, street noise, ambiguity and grace. He is the cunning of the weakest, he steals from or rewards those who deserve his contempt or consideration. Markets are Exu's, immemorial places where goods, words, knowledge and information are exchanged. Exu loves intrigue and enjoys playing games with human beings, who are always so binary and literal in their black and white way of seeing the world.

Usually, getting out of a mess created by Exu requires the victim to negotiate and have the sagacity to see unexpected paths. Exu lies like no other and therefore recognises liars and even has sympathy for them, as long as they don't lie to him. Every now and then an orisha teaches him a lesson, but it's no use and he continues to play his tricks. And how he eats! Exu is hungry, he's in a hurry to eat, leaving him hungry is dangerous. That's why he always eats first. Feeding Exu means trying to guarantee order at the party and in the world. An order that is always unstable and capricious, because the lord of the crossroads likes the unexpected, the creative, in-

telligence, everything that moves the world, even if it creates chaos and uncertainty.

His ambiguities, his phallus and his African origin have contributed to a Christian reading that assimilates Exu to the Devil. Beyond the obvious ethnocentric racism of this assimilation, it denotes the difficulty of the Judeo-Christian historical matrix in dealing with forces that cannot be contained in dichotomies and binarisms (PRANDI, 2001a). We should also remember that Jung says that the Devil is a variant of the shadow archetype, which helps us to understand the effort of this Christian religiosity to make the contradictions and uncertainties that Exu raises shadowy, beyond the reach of consciousness (JUNG, 1985). Exu is whatever he wants to be, refusing any normativity that anyone tries to impose on him (RUFINO, 2019, p. 45).

The physical space that materialises this multiplicity of Exu is the crossroads. An itan tells us that Exu was given the crossroads by Oxalá, for having been a faithful assistant to the great orisha while he created human beings. The crossroads is the place of the in-between, of choices, of possibilities. Therefore, of impermanence. It's where you can always go back to when a path is interrupted or frustrated.

The primordial factor, maintainer and producer of creative powers, Exu is the principle of the principle:

Ifá, witness of destiny and lord of wisdom, teaches us that Exu precedes all creation. Thus, he participates in and integrates everything that is created, just as he is also implicated in everything that will be destroyed and what is yet to come. He is the dynamic principle that crosses all events and things, since without him there is no movement. Exu is compulsory to all beings and cosmic forces. He is the deity closest to those classified as human, he is the owner of our body and its powers, he is the communicative principle between beings, deities and ancestors. Exu is the

substance on which existences are based; he is language as a whole. It is the pulse of the worlds, lord of all possibilities, an uncontrollable, unimaginable and unfinished sphere (RUFINO, 2019, p. 23).

Exu operates in the simultaneity of intersecting temporalities. Past, present and future do not exist. This temporality of Exu is, as we will see later, similar to that of the unconscious, as Jung presents it. This is why he is born before his parents, why he hits a bird yesterday with the stone he threw today, why he is the youngest and oldest orixá at the same time. Exu wasn't even created, because he created creation, which maintains and destroys in permanent movement (RUFINO, 2019, p. 33).

### Jung at the crossroads

One way to establish a dialogue between what we are calling the Exu principle and Jungian psychology is to analyse the itans, sacred narratives from Yoruba cosmogony. This source of information allows us to get closer to the complexities of Exu and, following the hypothesis I'm developing here, illuminates Jung's propositions about the dynamics of the psyche.

According to Edmilson Pereira, the itans allow us to understand Exu's role in the world and, with this, his presence in the life of each individual and also in human collectivities (PEREIRA, 2017, p. 105-6).

The manifestation of otherness through this orisha is particularly important for Jungian psychology. According to Jung, the problem of opposites is the most profound aspect of the psyche: "The structure of the psyche is, in fact, so contradictory or contrapuntal that there can be no psychological observation or generic proposition that does not immediately oblige us to also affirm its opposite" (JUNG, 1985, p. 74).

The point is that what we can broadly call Western modernity is built on rational principles that tend to eliminate contradictions, understood as problems or even logical flaws. Binarisms and ir-

reducible oppositions organise worldviews, ways of governance, social relations and subjectivities. Colonial reason, by establishing a separate and hierarchical humanity based on racial criteria, is an example of this. For Jung, this historical process, in which Christianity plays a fundamental role, produces a tendency towards the one-sidedness of consciousness, casting unvalued aspects of the personality into the shadows. The Christian idea, based on St Augustine, of evil as *privatio bono* underestimates the psychic force of evil and is yet another element that contributes to the one-sidedness of the conscience. The problem, for Jung, is that this historical-cultural disposition divides contemporary subjects, disconnecting consciousness and the unconscious and hindering the process of individuation.

One of the itans protagonised by Exu that we have chosen to analyse here warns of the dangers of one-sidedness in understanding the world and human relationships. Here's the story:

#### Exu leads two friends into a death struggle

Two peasant friends set out early in the morning  
to work in their fields,  
but one and the other neglected to praise Exu.  
Exu, who had always given them rain and good harvests!  
Exu was furious.  
Wearing a pointed cap,  
white on one side and red on the other,  
Exu walked along the border of the fields,  
with one on his right  
and the other on his left.  
He passed between the two friends  
and greeted them emphatically.  
The peasants looked at each other. Who was the stranger?  
"Who's the stranger in the white cap?"  
asked one.  
"Who's the stranger in the red cap?"  
asked the other.  
"The cap was white, white," emphasised one.  
"No, the cap was red," assured the other.

White. Red. White. Red.  
 For one, the stranger was wearing a white cap,  
 for the other, a red cap.  
 They started arguing about the colour of the cap.  
 White.  
 Red.  
 White.  
 Red.  
 They ended up fighting with a hoe,  
 killed each other.  
 Exu sang and danced.  
 Exu was avenged (PRANDI, 2001b, p. 48-9).

Exu's revenge on the friends who forgot to praise him is not realised through supernatural resources. The friends are punished for their own inability to see reality beyond a binary bias. For them, the hat could only be white OR red, not white AND red. They both cling to their partial and, as such, false truths and engage in a death struggle. From Jung's perspective, we can read this narrative as a metaphor for the clash between the one-sidedness of consciousness and the unconscious that challenges it. The Swiss psychiatrist argues that consciousness and the unconscious have a compensatory relationship. Thus, the more one-sided consciousness is, the more the unconscious moves in the opposite direction, creating a split that can favour the emergence of uncontrollable and destructive psychic forces.

Like the unconscious for Jung, Exu is an uncontrollable principle. Integrating consciousness and the unconscious requires psychic work that begins by recognising that this unknown force exists in the psyche. The equivalent of feeding Exu in the first place is, in the process of individuation, looking at the shadow and understanding that it is part of us, that we are contradictory, imperfect, unfinished and multiple beings. To understand this in **Ourselves** is also to allow a more comprehensive view of the contradictions of the **Other**. As a result, we adopt a more complex perspective on the world, particularly on human relationships.

Exu, like the unconscious as Jung characterises it,

He is the one who, in order to teach people, plays tricks on them, disallowing all those who are complacent about the presumption of a truth that is limitedly finished. It is the principle of unpredictability that uses the cunning of appearance, correlating it to a sense of reality. It punishes any form of obsession with certainty by establishing doubt (RUFINO, 2019, p. 53).

Overcoming this situation requires suppressing the dichotomous separation between consciousness and the unconscious. To do this, the contents of the unconscious cannot be unilaterally condemned, but rather their compensatory importance for consciousness must be recognised. Through the transcendent function, a transformation of the conscious attitude becomes possible without disregarding the unconscious. Unconscious contents need to complement those of consciousness. The individuals who are least aware of their unconscious side are the ones who receive its influence the most, without realising it. To avoid such secret and undesirable intrusions of unconscious contents into our actions, ways are sought to make these contents conscious. In short, the less dissociation there is between conscious and unconscious life, the more individuals are able to fulfil the purposes of the Self, of the deepest aspect of their psyche (JUNG, 2013).

This is not an easy achievement, but the subject of ongoing work in the individuation process. The transcendent function requires an understanding/elaboration of the ciphered messages of the unconscious and a confrontation between the ego, the centre of consciousness, and the unconscious. Bringing these opposites closer together enables the emergence of the third element, the one more, which is the transcendent function (JUNG, 2013). Its materialisa-

tion through symbols capable of integrating contradictions without reducing them to one term and without reinstating new dichotomies makes it possible to assume this conflict as part of the psychic dynamic.

The avoidance of confronting the unconscious favours the constellation of complexes, momentarily modifying the subject's personality, producing a phenomenon similar to possession. Jung compares complexes to imps or goblins that take possession of individuals with greater force the less conscious they are (JUNG, 2013, p. 44-5).

These tricks that Jung attributes to the unconscious are also typical of Exu, when he interferes in people's lives, demanding recognition and food. There is no point in fearing and avoiding Exu, just as fearing the complexes only distances consciousness from the unconscious, making it difficult to produce the transcendent function. As frightening as complexes may seem to consciousness, Jung affirms that they are normal manifestations of life. For him,

The fear of the complex is a very strong prejudice, because the superstitious fear of what is unfavourable has survived untouched by our decanted Enlightenment. This fear provokes violent resistance when we investigate complexes, and it takes some decision to overcome it.

Fear and resistance are the signposts that mark out the royal road towards the unconscious (2013, p. 49).

To continue bringing Jung to the crossroads of Exu, I'd like to comment on another itan. Here's the narrative:

### **The black rooster**

Exu wandered the world in search of something new. He was bored and the lack of creativity in living beings made him deeply irritated.

– Everything was always the same... – he thought to himself. – Nobody invents or changes anything. What a bore!

So he realised that night was approaching and, with it, the threat of a storm. He decided to seek shelter in a house by the side of the road.

When he knocked on the door, he was greeted by a furry animal:

– What's your name?

– Monkey!

– And your father, what's his name?

– Monkey!

– Your mum?

– Monkey!

– Your brothers?

– All Monkeys!

Exu turned his back and walked away without saying another word. He wasn't going to spend the night in a house where all the inhabitants had the same name, which, for him, represented the most absolute proof of a lack of imagination. And Exu never liked obtuse people or animals. He soon came across another house and, knocking on the door, was greeted by another animal.

– Good afternoon! I'm looking for shelter to protect me from the coming storm, but first I need to know your name, said Exu, full of authority.

– My name is Elephant," replied the resident.

– And your father? – asked the visitor.

– Elephant, like me!

– Your mum?

– Elephant too!

– Your brothers?

– There are three of them and their names are Elephant, Elephant and Elephant.

– Bloody hell! – grumbled Exu as he walked away without saying goodbye.

A few more steps and Exu found another house, where he was greeted by a small bird with entirely black plumage.

– Hello, I’m Exu and I’m looking for shelter, but first of all I need to know your name.

– They call me Black Rooster! – replied the resident.

– And your wife?

– Chicken.

– Your children?

– That depends on their age,” explained the owner of the house. – The older ones are hens and pullets, the younger ones are chicks and the smallest ones are called little chicks!

Delighted with the answer, Exu decided to stay the night in that house and thanks to this he acquired a great admiration for the black rooster, which he still considers his favourite animal to this day (MARTINS, 2011, p. 31-33).

Exu’s enchantment with the creative is because creativity is movement, it is the invention of a path, it is the possibility of bringing joy to everyday life, it is what sustains life. Jung defines the creative impulse as something that, as well as being therapeutic, is basic to the human psyche and needs to be channelled into meaningful achievements for the individual, a condition for the individuation process. To realise oneself in the world and for the world is to give way to this creative impulse, one of the manifestations of Eros in our lives. On the importance of using creative power, Von Franz affirms:

(...) If someone doesn’t live their inner possibility, they become destructive. That’s why Jung also says that one of the cruelest destructive forces, psychologically speaking, is unused creative power.

(...) If someone has a creative gift and, out of laziness or some other reason, doesn’t use it, that psychic energy becomes pure poison (2020, p. 261).

The black rooster enchants Exu for his creativity in naming different existences, replacing the monotonous naming that standardises the animals of the same family by exalting the difference between them. Creative power singularises individuals, it is our mark on the world, our unique and non-transferable expression. It transforms what is given, pointing to possibilities, to the unfinished nature of things, to change as something permanent. One of the symptoms that frequently appears in Jung’s patient reports is the feeling of stagnation. Creating, whatever the soul demands, is fundamental to overcoming this state of paralysis that generates suffering and discomfort.

The black rooster offered at the crossroads pleases Exu, the creative animal is his favourite sacrifice, connecting the crossroads paths with creativity. The liberated creative flow relieves the pressures of the unconscious on consciousness and allows for greater integration of our psychic forces. Crossing consciousness and the unconscious is like reading Jung from Exu: “(...) the crossroads is the place where one swallows in one way in order to spit it out in a transformed way” (RUFINO, 2019, p. 69).

The crossroads can be a symbol of these amplified possibilities of being freed from literality, the one-sidedness of consciousness, binarisms and dichotomies, creative blockages and fear of the potential of the unconscious. When Luiz Rufino talks about the art of cruzo, I understand it as a way of understanding the art of living based on the development of the transcendent function, the goal of the individuation process (RUFINO, 2019, p. 86).

Crossing is not about defining, putting an end to, resolving or healing. It’s about opening up opportunities for understanding and action. It’s to amplify, a verb that Jung (1985) loved so much. In



The Practice of Psychotherapy, Jung emphasised that therapy, as he understood it, did not have happiness as its goal. Sometimes the opposite is true, because the search for wholeness of being is also an awakening to the collective pains of the world. But therapy can help us achieve a purposeful and therefore more fulfilling existence. If healing is understood as ending the pain or closing our wounds, it will never be complete.

At this crossroads, we continue once again with Rufino, asking, after all, if what Jung calls the unconscious isn't one of the names of Exu:

Exu is configured as the deity closest to us, incarnate at every moment of our existence, from the cry of the newborn to the last breath of death. The wise connoisseur would say: "Exu is the first in life and in death." Even though he is interpenetrated in all instances of human existence and comes as close as possible to the human character, he laughs at our limitations, longings and mocks those who are obsessed with greatness and certainty. Exu makes us sit in the void, he scorns our pretentious truths. He builds by destroying. In his syncopated game, what lurks is the fall. No wonder he is the principle of unpredictability. So what emerges from the syncopated void? Exu blows on us: reinvent yourself, create. There will always be a possibility (2019, p. 127-8).

Wouldn't recognising the possibilities in reinventing oneself be one of our searches, analysts and analysands, in our therapeutic relationships?

### **Corre gira: possibilities for exusiac therapy**

In this Exu-Jung crossroads, we can ask: How can we bring Exu into the therapeutic setting? I'm not referring here to a religious perspective, but rather, as discussed above, an epistemological and existential principle that guides therapeutic practices. This is not an easy task, because our psy-

che is formed and conformed to a hegemonic and very powerful Christian cultural matrix. Our psyche is divided and has difficulty dealing with ambiguities and paradoxes (SANFORD, 1988, p. 145).

One of the possibilities I've been working with is reading Exu's itans. These readings help to develop other ways of looking at situations that seem hopeless. The bewilderment, the creativity, the unusualness that appear in these stories dislocate ways of seeing reality, unbalance certainties, provoke reflections such as "but what if...", building alternatives. These readings can be unfolded in images or in the production of other narratives in which the protagonist is the analysand herself. In this way, the symbol of the crossroads as a multiplicity of paths can be brought into psychotherapy.

Overcoming demands means reinventing life, because "The crossroads is where certainties are destroyed, it is, par excellence, the place of gaps and possibilities" (RUFINO, 2019, p. 108). Stimulating creative fantasy means allowing psychic contents from the unconscious to penetrate the conscious, multiplying paths for self-expression (JUNG, 1985, p. 32). A movement that Jung saw as liberating:

The power of the imagination, with its creative activity, frees man from the prison of his smallness, of being 'just that', and elevates him to a state of ludic play. Man, as SCHILLER says, 'is only fully man when he plays' (p. 43).

This ludic dimension that Jung refers to, inspired by aesthetic education as proposed by Friedrich Schiller in the 18th century, is deeply destabilising for an Enlightenment rationality. In the therapeutic setting, the act of telling stories to adults in itself produces an interesting effect of strangeness. When these stories mess with Christian morality, Enlightenment reason and Cartesian logic, bringing gingas, dribbles, pranks and syncopes, this effect is even more intense. It is in the strangeness, and often in the laughter, that the

breach is established and creative possibilities present themselves. We're not referring here to finding a solution to a problem, but rather to the act of putting that problem into new perspectives, which can result in important resignifications for the process of individuation, which is always open and unfinished, like the paths of Exu:

The famous expression "Exu gives path", commonly circulated in terreiros, reveals the dynamic, creative and unfinished character of the sign. Thus, to give the path is not necessarily to point the way, but to potentialise/practice the possibilities. The notion of the path is as ambivalent as Exu (RUFINO, 2019, p. 109).

This ambivalence doesn't allow us to point to the "right path", but rather to think that every trajectory can take on new meanings. It is possible to read and reread each person's life story from new meanings constructed in the present, through therapeutic work, and thus reinvent futures. The (re)significant possibilities of/in ambivalence can be illustrated by the cross/crossroads relationship analysed by Rufino: "The colonial project made the cross its aegis, colonial daily life made the crossroads the field of possibilities and mandingas, the reinvention of life, the primordial dwelling of Exu" (RUFINO, 2019, p. 39).

Dealing with these ambivalences of the psyche, and of life, presupposes recognising that there are forces at work within us that we don't control, even though they are part of us. This recognition is the beginning of overcoming the divide between consciousness and the unconscious. Zacharias compares it to the care observed in Afro-Brazilian religious rituals of feeding Exu before any other action (ZACHARIAS, 2019, p. 25).

We can develop this argument with the help of Marie-Louise Von Franz:

If the ego could relate directly to the Self or to a unifying symbol, the conflict would be resolved and the ego would function

again in its totality. This is the normal way opposites work, and the main impulse is once again the flow of life, with the ego following or serving this flow from wholeness. In fact, the conflict is never really resolved, but the emotion invested in it diminishes; it is overcome by suffering and absorbed by a new form of life, when it can then be looked at again without passion, from a different angle. (...) a renewed and healthy relationship with the dualities of the unconscious means that vital processes can once again flow (2020, p. 55, 70).

Therapeutic work with Exu's rich collection of itans can therefore help to build more complex ways of seeing the world and seeing oneself in the world, capable of destabilising certainties, relativising rigid moral principles, questioning socially established rules and standards, deconstructing absolute truths. And this is true for both analysands and therapists, because listening to the other, welcoming them into our soul, requires doubting our certainties and a posture of being humble (in Jung's terms) in the face of the unknown. It is in the enchantment of doubt that Exu teaches.

Without this psychic work, it is not possible to suppress the disunity with the unconscious by establishing the transcendent function. And for Jung, this should be the goal of every individuation process (JUNG, 2014b, p. 128).

In the playful readings that Exu provides in the therapeutic setting, there is an invitation to the freedom of experimentation:

(...) to learn from Exu is not to restrict the experience of constructing meaning to this or that possibility, but to many possibilities, including those that the sonar of our language has not yet detected. Exu is both what is done and the becoming of all endeavours. That's why, aware of its dynamics, we need to make an effort to grasp what is significant in established poetics (and,

we would say, in a way, catalogued by our scheme of expectations) and what we don't even imagine to be a potential poetics (and, we might add, a poetics of freedom of experimentation) (PEREIRA, 2017, p. 148-9).

To end this section, I'd like to make one last comment on the issue of laughter and joy that Exu's stories evoke. It is common for the telling of these itans to involve both bewilderment and laughter in those who hear them. Exu's tricks, even if they end in death, bring a relativising humour, similar to what Mikhail Bakhtin identifies in carnival laughter. For Bakhtin, this laughter is subversive, as it inverts social hierarchies, discredits official discourses and brings the body, especially the low body, to the centre of the public square and the popular worldview (BAKHTIN, 1993). The laughter aroused by Exu seems to me to be of the same nature, a vital impulse, a pulse of life that Nise da Silveira associates with the power to act. In her Fourth Letter to Spinoza, the rebellious psychiatrist states:

Joy, you say, is the passage of man from a lesser perfection to a greater perfection and, conversely, sadness is the passage from a greater to a lesser perfection. Joy increases the power to act, while sadness diminishes it (1995, p. 68).

### **Returning to the centre of the crossroads**

In the exusiac spirit, what we've done here is an essay, an attempt to get closer to aspects

of Jungian thought based on the Exu principle. A saying in a terreiro goes that the lord of the body turns error into rightness and rightness into error. May this right-error free us from absolute and lazy certainties so that the adventure of unravelling souls, our own and those of others, is always enchanted, restless, creative and on the move. In the context of a country built by blood and also by Afro-diasporic and indigenous creativity, Exu, as well as caboclos, encantados, pretos velhos, entities, forest beings are references for thinking about the formation of the psyche (which is always a historical process), its dynamics and, consequently, therapeutic work. Open and multiple paths, always!

I return to the centre of the crossroads to set off on paths that will allow me to enter the forest of analytical psychology, as well as my process of individuation. And I conclude these provisional words with an extract from the poem Padê de Exu Libertador, by Abdias Nascimento:

I offer you Exu  
the ebó of my words  
in this padê that consecrates you  
not me  
but mine and yours  
brothers and sisters in  
Olorum  
our Father  
who is  
in the Orum  
Laroiê! ■

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## Resumo

### *Jung na encruzilhada ou lendo Jung a partir de Exu*

*Este artigo propõe uma leitura de alguns aspectos da obra de Jung a partir do orixá Exu e da noção de encruzilhada, entendida como referencial epistemológico para uma ampliação da psicologia analítica. Ler Jung a partir de Exu é propor reflexões complexas e contemporâneas sobre a psicologia analítica, ampliando possibilidades terapêuticas e de análises sócio-históricas. Exu é um*

*princípio descolonizador, que duvida de ortodoxias, enfrenta estagnações e desestabiliza visões de mundo eurocêntricas. Comunicação, movimento, dinamismo, criatividade e transformação são elementos comuns a Exu e à psicologia analítica. Inconsciente, sombra e função transcendente são alguns dos conceitos junguianos trabalhados em diálogo com o princípio Exu. ■*

Palavras-chave: Exu, encruzilhada, psicologia analítica

## Resumen

### *Jung en la encrucijada o lectura de Jung desde Exu*

*Este paper propone una lectura de algunos aspectos de la obra de Jung a partir del orisha Exu y de la noción de encrucijada, entendida como referencia epistemológica para una expansión de la psicología analítica. Leer a Jung a través de Exu significa proponer reflexiones complejas y contemporáneas sobre la psicología analítica, ampliando las posibilidades terapéuticas y los análisis socio-históricos. Exu es un*

*principio descolonizador que pone en duda las ortodoxias, se enfrenta al estancamiento y desestabiliza las visiones eurocéntricas del mundo. Comunicación, movimiento, dinamismo, creatividad y transformación son elementos comunes a Exu y a la psicología analítica. Inconsciente, sombra y función trascendente son algunos de los conceptos junguianos trabajados en diálogo con el principio Exu. ■*

Palabras clave: Exu, encrucijada, psicología analítica.

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