Lu Ain-Zaila's Sankofa and Brazilian Afrofuturism: Akan Philosophy and Black Utopia in a Postapocalyptic World

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Abstract: This article examines how Lu Ain-Zaila's postapocalyptic *Duologia Afro-Brasil 2408—(In)Verdades: Ela está predestinada a mudar tudo* (2016) and *(R)Evolução: Eu e a verdade somos o ponto final* (2017)—places Akan philosophy at the center of her Afrofuturistic project. Ain-Zaila builds her narrative around Ghanaian Adinkra symbols, using them as moral and ethical guidelines for her characters and as tools for readers to reflect. I propose that her literary project provides an alternative to the Western philosophical tradition, one that emphasizes Afrocentrism and Afro-Brazilian consciousness and experience. I also argue that her duology envisions a utopic future based on Black people's ancestral knowledge and Afro-Brazilians' struggles for recognition, equality, and social justice.

Keywords: Afro-Brazilian literature, science fiction, Afrocentrism, Adinkra symbols

Ti koro nko agyina. (One person does not hold council.)
Nea onnim no sua a, ohu. (He/she who does not know, will know from learning.)
Akan proverbs[1]

We are constantly reminded that the apocalypse is a real and persistent threat. In the political arena, the worldwide rise of the extreme right poses a severe threat to democratic politics. In the US, for example, Donald Trump's autocratic tendencies reshaped American democracy. Recent reports show that Trump sought to politicize the (usually) nonpartisan Department of Justice and use it as a weapon against his rivals, trying to obtain information about them and to overturn the 2020 election.[2] In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro's neofascist governing style has seriously compromised human rights and democratic institutions (Terto Neto 49–50). As former president Dilma Rousseff eloquently stated, "We live on the threshold of an authoritarian experience with unforeseeable circumstances" (538).[3] In the ecological realm, scientists have issued repeated warnings about "a point of no return": a "projected rise in the global average temperature of 3.2 degrees Celsius (4.4 F) over preindustrial levels by the end of the 21st century," leading to the intensification of storms, wildfires, droughts, floods, and melting glaciers that "would bring pain, misery, and disruption that would eclipse everything COVID-

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[1] For a comprehensive list of Akan proverbs, see Korankye's *Adinkra Alphabet: The Adinkra Symbols as Alphabets and Their Hidden Meanings*. I would like to thank Lu Ain-Zaila for being very approachable and promptly answering my request for an interview, as well as Rebecca Atencio, Leila Lehnen, and Jeremy Lehnen for supporting me during our study group in the summer of 2021. I was able to complete this article thanks to our productive and enjoyable weekly meetings. Also, my deepest appreciation to the blind-review evaluators for their valuable editorial suggestions.

[2] For more information on Trump's abuse of government power, see Blake; Benner, Fandos, Schmidt, and Goldman.

[3] Rousseff was impeached in 2017 for the so-called "pedaladas fiscais," the name given to cooked federal accounts that masked the government's deficit. Critics of the impeachment denounced the strategy as a political move designed to kill the Lava Jato investigation, a corruption probe that began in 2014 and implicated many politicians including the former president of the Chamber of Deputies, Eduardo Cunha, from the Movimento Democrático Brasileiro party. For more information on Rousseff's impeachment, see Watts. Detractors of Operation Car Wash accused federal judges of politicizing the probe. As Sotero and Prusa write, "The massive scandal also had the net effect of discrediting all members of the political establishment, and opened a path for Congressman Jair Bolsonaro, a former army captain who had been pushed out of the military, to mount a successful presidential campaign in 2018. Once elected, President Bolsonaro named Sérgio Moro as his Minister of Justice and Public Security. Arguing that as minister he could take the fight against corruption to a new level, Moro joined the government—but in doing so, he strengthened concerns over the politicization of the operation" (4). Moro was the federal judge who oversaw the investigation. For more information on the Operação Lava Jato, see Bechara and Goldschmidt.

19 has thrown at us" (Andersen). The worldwide pandemic aggravated vast economic disparities (affecting the least developed countries the most) and racial inequalities (worsening racial wealth gaps in large nations such as the US and Brazil). As Coy writes, "the SARS-CoV-2 virus unerringly targets the most defenseless members of society." This wretched landscape reminds us of Renato Russo's famous lyric "nos deram espelhos e vimos um mundo doente," which in 1986 already vaticinated the conditions for an apocalypse that we have partly witnessed.

Unsurprisingly, narratives of the apocalypse have always been staples of the fantasy and science fiction genres. Hypothetical revolutions and imaginary upheavals within imagined societies reveal pressing dilemmas in present political life and grant us insight into the practices of *realpolitik* (Paik 2).[4] In this article, I examine how Lu Ain-Zaila's postapocalyptic *Duologia Afro-Brasil 2408—(In)Verdades: Ela está predestinada a mudar tudo* (2016) and *(R)Evolução: Eu e a verdade somos o ponto final* (2017)—situates Akan philosophy at the center of her Afrofuturistic project. Ain-Zaila builds her narrative around Ghanaian Adinkra symbols, using them as moral and ethical guidelines for the characters and tools for readers to reflect. Adinkra symbols are part of an inherited system of communication and thought of the Akan peoples, ethnic groups that occupy southern Ghana and southeastern Ivory Coast (Arthur 6).[5] Gyekye notes that although there is no precise translation for philosophy in the Akan language, the concept of wisdom ("love of wisdom" or "quest for wisdom") is a form of thought that emphasizes the intellectual analysis of subjects and arguments, and thus comprises a philosophical system (61–63). This scheme is inseparable from practical experience, meaning that to develop mentally, to develop wisdom (or a wise system of thought, a philosophy), it is necessary to gain life experience (63). Adinkra symbols provide thinkers with useful guidelines to advance intellectually during life's journey: "As a communicative system, Adinkra images carried Akan traditional wisdom regarding observations upon God and man, the human condition, upon things spiritual as well as the common-place and upon the unavoidability of death" (Mato, qtd. in Arthur 13).

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[4] This citation refers to page 2 of the introduction. A clarification on pagination is necessary because every chapter in the Kobo e-book edition begins with page 1.

[5] According to Arthur, "[t]he groups constituting the culturally and linguistically homogenous Akan ethnicity include the Asante, Fantse, Akuapem, Akyem, Okwawu, Bono, Wassa, Agona, Assin, Denkyira, Adansi, Nzima, Ahanta, Aowin, Sefwi, and Baoulé" (7).

My examination of Ain-Zaila's duology argues that her literary project provides an alternative to Western philosophical systems, and instead emphasizes Afrocentrism and Afro-Brazilian consciousness and experience. The Westernization of the world between 1500 and 2000 made Western knowledge— or "the European paradigm of modernity/rationality"—global and hegemonic (Mignolo 17). European expansion inaugurated coloniality, displacing local histories and knowledges in favor of the Western episteme (34).[6] I propose that Ain-Zaila's duology, by placing non-Western knowledges at the center of her Afrofuturistic project, contributes to what Mignolo names the "decolonization" of the episteme. This essay advances its argument in two parts: first, I apply Akan philosophy in order to understand the protagonist's journey toward self-knowledge in *(In)Verdades*; second, I examine how female empowerment and community political action are intertwined in *(R)Evolução*. Ultimately, I argue that Ain-Zaila's duology envisions a utopic future based on Black people's ancestral knowledge and Afro-Brazilians' struggles for recognition, equality, and social justice. In her Afrocentric vision of the world, Ain-Zaila celebrates Akan philosophy by using Adinkra symbols. By reclaiming millennial African practices and celebrating local Indigenous cultures, her work should be placed alongside important science fiction productions—such as Cameron's *Avatar* (2009)—and be seen as a precursor to Coogler's Afrofuturistic *Black Panther* (2018). In addition, Ain-Zaila's duology seeks to bring the specificities of a peripheral nation into the science fiction genre and the Afrofuturism movement: her Afrofuturistic vision of the historical resistance of the underprivileged in Brazil creates new and original forms of speculative fiction.

(In)Verdades: Akan Philosophy and the Journey for Self-Knowledge

Ain-Zaila is the pen name of the Afro-Brazilian political activist and pedagogue Luciene Marcelino Ernesto. She has a BA from the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), where she specialized in child education ("Lu Ain-Zaila"). Ain-Zaila published the romance duology *(In)Verdades* and *(R)Evolução* in 2016 and 2017, the Afrofuturist collection of short stories *Sankofia* and the cyberpunk novel

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[6] These citations refer to the introduction of the Kobo e-book.

Ìségún in 2018.[7] She defines herself as an Afrofuturist writer, concerned with the survival of Black people in the future. Afrofuturism to her is "o negro conseguindo se ver no futuro . . . , uma ideia da existência negra, do negro no futuro" (Angresson 00:08).

Ain-Zaila echoes Dery's thinking in his classic article "Black to the Future," where he applies the term "Afrofuturism" to speculative fiction that focuses on Afro-American themes and concerns within the technoculture: "The notion of Afrofuturism gives rise to a troubling antinomy: Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search of legible traces of history, imagine possible futures?" (180). Dery argues that science fiction, as a literary genre, seamlessly encapsulates the Afro-American experience, since technology has always regulated and branded Black bodies, and aliens and monsters characterize the Other, just as Afro-Americans have been outcasts in US society (179–80). To Ain-Zaila, to write Black science fiction in Brazil is an act of resistance, a way of challenging dominant national discourses that erase Black culture and seek to whiten the "Country of the Future" ("Ficção científica" 56–57). The Afrofuturist writer proposes that Brazilian Afrofuturism must include what she calls "Consciência dos Três Círculos do Afrofuturismo": (1) a Black creator;[8] (2) an Afrocentric thought that includes a knowledge of the past and an understanding of the present; and (3) a historical, social, and political consciousness in direct and indirect speech, produced by the author (*Afrofuturismo* 9). To delineate these three requisites of Afrofuturism, she draws from Adinkrahene, known as "the king of Adinkra symbols" (Arthur 156). Adinkrahene (fig. 1) alludes to the circularity of time, since "there can never, strictly speaking, be a beginning and end of the universe; it has always moved in an infinite succession of circles and is eternal and rhythmic" (156).

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[7] The term "cyberpunk" refers to a subgenre in science fiction in which computers and artificial intelligence dominate future urban societies. Bruce Bethke coined the term in 1983 by publishing a short story entitled "Cyberpunk." According to Butler, in the cyberpunk narratives of the late 1970s and early 1980s, "technology provided the cyber part of the label; the street life of the stories and novels offered the punk part" (9). For a good introduction to the cyberpunk movement in science fiction, see Butler's *Cyberpunk*.

[8] By asserting the need for Black authors in Afrofuturism, Ain-Zaila opposes Samuel R. Delany, who contends that Afrofuturism in science fiction does not presuppose a Black writer, but instead centers on Black characters in the future: "[T]o the extent Afrofuturism concerns science fiction and not the range of all the arts, including painting and music, classical and jazz, it requires writers writing about black characters in the future" (Delany 174).

Figure 1: Adinkra symbol of Adinkrahene.

This conceptualization of time as circular is quite different from the concept that appears in Western society, which focuses on a linear notion (a topic I return to later in the article). Ain-Zaila's concept of "Three Circles of Afrofuturism" reproduces the visual and symbolic complexities of Akan's Adinkrahene. Akan philosophical thought can also be seen in the writer's futuristic postapocalyptic Brazil, in which revolution and change intertwine with multiracial and multiethnic characters and Afrocentric concepts.

(In)Verdades, the first volume of Ain-Zaila's duology, starts at the beginning of the twenty-second century, when climate change "mudou a realidade de uma forma esperada, inesperada e assustadora. E com o Brasil não foi diferente" (6).[9] World authorities were not able to reduce the dumping of toxic waste and the growth of civilization's carbon footprint, which aggravated global warming, causing tempestuous rains, flooding, and the rise of the oceans. These humanmade natural disasters ultimately destroyed Brazil's coastal cities. Millions of people died, and millions had to be evacuated and forcibly relocated to the interior of the

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[9] Environmental racism is another crucial issue in Ain-Zaila's work. Control and power over scarce resources are at the heart of her *Duologia Afro-Brasil 2408*. Environmental racism is the recognition that minority communities are often dumping grounds for toxins and hazardous waste. Environmental public policy (or the lack of it) has a profound impact on marginalized populations. For more information on environmental racism and environmental justice, see Bullard; Nixon.

country. The "Grande Mudança Climática," which obliterated forty percent of Brazil's territory, took place slowly over time but peaked in 2198. In 2268, the survivors began to reconstruct the nation, "[p]rimeiro como províncias, que loucura . . . e depois de 30 anos, formamos a República Distrital do Brasil, com as três regiões, numa estrutura de governo misto, parlamentar" (15). The three regions that were formed are related but autonomous, with their main representatives ruling in a coalition government. In 2395, the government adopted restrictive measures, such as the rationing of energy, water, and food, and limited offspring to one per couple, the "Lei do Filho Único." Information on every individual was stored in the "Centro de Controle de Distribuição Pública (CCDP)," connected to the "Aparelho de Comunicação Integrada," a centralized biometric system that functioned simultaneously as a tool of identification and an instrument of control. The military, which led territorial relocation and survival efforts, founded the "Forças Distritais do Brasil." These special forces guaranteed the functioning of the government, the organization of the national territory, and the protection of citizens against climate disasters and social unrest. The resulting society is community-based, as private property is abolished, and resources must be distributed equally. It seems so, at any rate, because problems have been steadily brewing within this supposedly ideal world, as corruption has been growing and profoundly affecting society. The "Forças Distritais do Brasil"—together with the "Centro de Investigação Avançada," a federal government agency—have the important joint mission of investigating and preventing the illicit attainment of Hydro Bio Natural resources, the "recursos HBN": "[r]ecursos HBN genuínos são aqueles não manipulados geneticamente—*o estado original*—fonte de variabilidade genética sem a intervenção humana" (43; author's emphasis).

In this twenty-fourth-century Brave New World, the heroine Ena is born: "Ena nasceu nesse mundo consciente e finito" (6). In the introductory note to *(In)verdades*, Ain-Zaila underlines the importance of having a Black female protagonist in a fictional work (3). Unlike the English-speaking editorial market, where Afrofuturism has a strong presence, the Brazilian editorial market does not value Black literature and Black science fiction (Angresson 00:10). Thus, Ain-Zaila reaffirms the significance of "o protagonismo negro" in Brazilian literature and science fiction. Ena epitomizes Black female empowerment; the third-person omniscient narrator describes her as a woman "forte e focada" (6). Ena is also the one who brings about revolution, change, and renovation; she is predestined to

change everything, as the book's subtitle notes ("ela está predestinada a mudar tudo"). Indeed, the narrative is built as a bildungsroman: in a journey of sacrifice and search for truth and self-knowledge, throughout the narrative Ena transforms herself just as much as she alters society. However, Ain-Zaila's duology relies not only on classical models of Occidental narrative construction but also—and most importantly—incorporates Black and Afro-Diasporic elements. For example, the Akan concept of Sankofa is a crucial element in the construction of the romance's plot: Sankofa (fig. 2) is a phrase (San Ko Fa) that means "go back and retrieve." It is a "symbol of wisdom, knowledge, and people's heritage" (Arthur 273).

Figure 2: Adinkra symbol of Sankofa.

In the two books, Ena returns to her past, to the culture of her ancestors (Sankofa), and the moment of her trauma (the murder of her father). Alto Oficial Amir Dias, Ena's father, was assassinated in a terrorist bombing in 2396 when she was only twelve years old. Dias was a target because he was investigating the large corruption ring that was diverting and commercializing precious HBN resources. At the fatal moment of the terrorist attack, Ena was with her father. Her mother, Naira, a highly placed public servant, had to go to the office of Identificação Civil Nacional [ICN, or National Civil Identification] to review the efficacy of the protocols of identification, so she dropped Ena off at Dias's office. The narrative

then changes to direct dialogue, emphasizing the strong connection between father and daughter. Ena's birthday is approaching, and Dias decides to give her a present in advance: a beautiful onyx necklace of the Sankofa. He asks Ena if she knows what the symbol means and she replies: "*Sim pai . . . Nunca é tarde para voltar e apanhar o que ficou para trás*" (44).

Minutes later, Dias receives a phone call and leaves to meet an unknown individual in another part of the building. A bomb explodes and the building is partially destroyed. Many people—including Dias—die and others are seriously injured. Although she is saved by Dias's secretary, the loyal Ana, Ena is forever changed. From that moment on, Sankofa's principle—to return and retrieve what was left behind—regulates her life. Ena sets out to unravel the corruption scheme and discover who killed her father.

The desire to uncover the truth behind her father's assassination guides her future steps. In *(In)Verdades*, past, present, and future coalesce. In this sense, the plot is not linear but crisscrossed by flashbacks, time lapses, and jumps, interspersing third-person omniscient narration with digressions in first-person direct speech. Against unilinear Western historical time, a decolonial concept of time includes historically structured heterogeneities constructed by temporal/spatial nodes that are always in motion; Mignolo notes that decolonial time is built through "the knotted experience of chronology and geography, of global designs and people's desires and fears, their/our sensing and emotioning, and the constant flows *in* space and time" (34; author's emphasis). Likewise, in Akan philosophy, time is a concrete reality that includes a coexistent past and present, and less a concept of infinite future; time is, therefore, change, transformation, and growth within the flows of the past and present combined (Gyekye 170–72). Even more so, Akan beliefs understand time as intimately connected to an individual's characteristics, which seem to invest the notion of time with some type of cosmic power (172). Within this conceptualization, the past also emerges as essential for the formation and development of the individual. According to Gyekye, "a crucial aspect of Akan metaphysics is the existence of the world of spirits (*asamando*), a world inhabited by the departed souls of the ancestors" (86). Ain-Zaila's duology transmits such Akan philosophical concepts. In her pursuit of truth, transformation, and self-knowledge, Ena seeks the future without forgetting the past, incarnating Sankofa's ideals.

In the first volume of the duology, Ena attends training at a military school to become an officer in the "Forças Distritais do Brasil," just like her father. She must overcome many obstacles not only to graduate but also to unveil the truth about her father's death and the Hydro Bio Natural crimes. Officer training is so grueling that few succeed. Ena also faces racism from other recruits, especially from Caios, a white upper-class cadet and the son of another high-ranking officer. Racial tensions emerge when Caios and his group, Henrique and Savio, all white men, become the antagonists of Ena, Wadei, and Naná, who forge a multicultural, multigendered, multiracial, and multiethnic band. This diverse group epitomizes the utopia of a truly democratic and inclusive nation. Wadei, from the Center-Northeastern region, is also Black and lost his legs in an accident when he was a child. His legs are sophisticated prostheses: half man and half machine. The fact that Wadei is a cyborg, a hybrid, not only illuminates the group's democratic possibilities by highlighting futuristic diversities but also underscores the marginal's role in resistance to dominant power. As Haraway notes, "a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities" and "[c]yborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling" (15). The coupling of machine and man in one body, or cyborg politics, in Haraway's term, also works to deconstruct Western oppositional dualities, subverting the antinomy between gender reproduction (man vs. woman), nature and culture, body and mind, and slave and master (57).

Naná, from the Center-West region, is the daughter of the Pataxó leader Ararê.[10] After the Big Climate Change at the end of the twenty-second century, all Brazil's Indigenous groups were relocated to the Center-Western region. Naná indicates that ecological disasters decimated the Indigenous peoples and, consequently, many of their traditions became extinct (121). Following these terrible occurrences, Indigenous groups started a coalition of tribes to preserve their culture and the country's remaining biodiversity: "[o]s índios . . . tinham conhecimento, sementes e um certo nível de tecnologia que nos permitiu, diferentemente do que aconteceu no resto do país, lidar melhor com a realidade

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[10] The Pataxós live in several Indigenous territories in the south of the state of Bahia and north of Minas Gerais. They speak Patxohã, the language of the Pataxó warrior. For more information on the Pataxós, see "Povos indígenas no Brasil: Pataxó."

posta, ou seja, nos organizamos, dividimos o trabalho e o que tínhamos para comer ou cuidar dos doentes, ao invés de nos degladiarmos por um pedaço de qualquer coisa" (121). In this passage, the marriage between the ecological and technological guarantees the survival of the remaining population. Indigenous peoples, more attuned to nature—but perceived as primitives by the (supposedly) civilized white descendants of Europeans—have both the "conhecimento" and "tecnologia" to save the country from obliteration (a process of devastation that was started and fueled by white men's destructive notion of progress). As in *Avatar*, where Pandora's native population has a deep and permanent connection with surrounding nature—and is thus better equipped to protect and conserve the land (Felinto 15)—in Ain-Zaila's futuristic Brazil, the Indigenous people lead the conservation of the territory,[11] ensuring it will remain to be used by future generations.

Mignolo remarks that, in Indigenous millenarian cosmologies, the concepts of nature and culture do not appear as a dichotomy; on the contrary, they are relational and linked to all the living, what the Argentine semiotician names *vincularidad* (41).[12] By placing Indigenous knowledges as central to survival and development of society, Ain-Zaila also shapes new forms of governance: a state that is plurinational rather than mononational.[13] Ena, Wadei, and Naná embody the true democratic ideal of an inclusive nation, which upholds and celebrates Black people, Indigenous groups, and all hybrid and peripheral individuals. In the first installment of the duology, the characters look to the past to help build the wisdom necessary to overcome present obstacles and construct a more equitable future for all Brazilians. Ena, Wadei, and Naná must return to their individual and collective pasts to face the present and understand—and transform—the future; they participate in the Sankofa principle. In this sense, Ain-Zaila's Afrofuturism serves

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[11] Felinto also notes that, curiously, it is not a scientist or pacifist who leads the resistance against land occupation in Pandora, but the handicapped soldier Jake Sully, "a figura militar … que se ergue em defesa dos injustiçados" (18). Paradoxically, in an allegory that opposes US military interventions marked by dominant postcolonial discourses, a soldier heads up the fight for liberation. In this sense, Ain-Zaila's duology emulates *Avatar* because it is a band of unlikely soldiers—Ena, Wadei, and Naná—who lead the revolution to forge a better and more equitable country.

[12] This citation refers to page 41 of the Kobo e-book epilogue.

[13] Mignolo postulates that the modern nation-state is mononational because non-European modes of existence were overruled by colonial imposition (13–14). "However, the idea that the state could be plurinational and not necessarily mononational is an important step towards delinking from the modern nation-state formation" (14). This citation refers to pages 13 and 14 of chapter 4, "Decolonizing the State."

as a precursor to Coogler's *Black Panther*, since the popular Marvel movie also uses the Adinkra concept of Sankofa to construct an Afrofuturist film that manifests a decolonizing project (Osei 383). By privileging a Wakandan pictorial writing system, which resembles the Adinkra symbols (383), constructing a mise-en-scène steeped in African architectural traditions (385), and representing precolonial female agency via the women of the Royal Council and the Dora Milaje (386–87), *Black Panther* asserts the importance "of projecting a positive image of Africa" and maintains the "Sankofa principle of using the past to construct the present" (386).

Another Adinkra symbol important to Ain-Zaila's first novel is the "teeth and tongue," the Se Ne Tekerema (fig. 3): "Se Ne Tekerema … depicts, in one sense, the interdependence of members of a society in working together to achieve a common goal. In another sense, the symbol represents the reconciling and adjudicating role played by the tongue between the two sets of teeth" (Arthur 50).
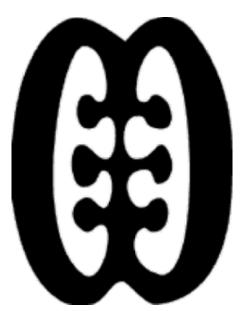

Figure 3: Adinkra symbol of Se Ne Tekerema

It is not a coincidence that the duology's first book ends with chapter 31, the number of the "teeth and tongue" in the Adinkra symbol. Ena, Wadei, and Naná work together, despite disagreements between them that threaten to shatter their friendship, to triumph over many mental and physical obstacles. The strenuous

military training, constant racist attacks from Caios's group, and Wadei's relationship with the barrack secretary, Ligia (who is viewed with distrust by Ena and Naná), all test the friends' unity and resolve. The trio even faces mortal peril from a "fanber," an incident in which their friend Emily is killed. "Fanbers" are technological mercenaries who are not registered in the central identification system and work to "burlar o sistema para quem pagasse o seu preço para conseguir mais água, alimento, remédio, sementes, o que lhes permitisse vantagem" (189). They are part of a web of corruption that reaches into the upper echelons of society and includes the economic elite, high-ranking military officers, important politicians, and distinguished public servants. Ena's father was murdered because he was about to uncover this venal scheme.

The end of the year 2407 also marks the end of the first volume of Ain-Zaila's duology. Chapter 31 contains first-person direct speeches from Ena, Naná, and Wadei. For Ena, many questions remain unanswered, and this compels her to take her destiny into her hands and continue her search for the truth: "quero respostas e os culpados numa bandeja de prata, que aliás, precisará ser bem, mas bem grande" (285–86). Focused on helping Ena, Naná designs a plan to acquire the unopened investigation files on Officer Dias's death: "tracei uma linha de ação, afinal de contas sou uma navegadora e rota é tudo quando queremos chegar a algum lugar" (287). Wadei reminisces about the year that is about to close, his experience in the military camp, his relationship with Ligia, and his friendship with Ena and Naná, and looks forward to his future as a private Army officer. He notes: "E eu espero sinceramente não ter que fazer a escolta daquele Dantas, sujeito preconceituoso e do distrito nordeste, que é bom, ele não cuida. Fico envergonhado por ele representar a minha região e principalmente por ter pessoas que votaram nele. Esse é um recado temeroso" (289). No matter what challenges lie ahead, Wadei is ready to face them openly: "E que venha o novo ano, pois eu estou pronto para ele" (289).

Dantas, a character introduced only at the end of *(In)verdades*, becomes crucial in the second book's plot and resolution. He is an important and popular politician who has ascended to power by stirring hatred against the "não-identificados." Nonidentified people live on the margins of society, rejected because they refuse to be included in the central system of biometric identification. They are not against the system per se but are against how the information is used to track and control the population. "Não somos contra a identificação biométrica, mas somos

contra o rastreamento que fazem da população" (179), explains Agarde, the leader of the nonidentified, to Wadei when they cross paths earlier in the story.

Dantas's right-wing populist discourse mirrors Bolsonaro's fascist tendencies. When *(In)Verdades* was published in 2016, Brazil had been on a clear path of "de-democratization"—a breakup of democracy—represented by the unsettling of political institutions and social unrest (Bianchi, Rangel, and Chalhoub 1). The so-called Jornadas de Junho—massive demonstrations that started in June 2013 as protests against the rise in bus fares in the city of São Paulo and quickly spread to other states, incorporating multiple ideological spectra and presenting a uniform platform against government corruption—contributed to the rapid rise of conservatism in Brazil. The emergence of extreme right-wing discourse culminated with Bolsonaro's presidential election in 2018.[15]

Unsurprisingly, Ain-Zaila's futuristic and postapocalyptic duology depicts authoritarianism, corruption, and social unrest. The books encompass the writer's notion of Afrofuturism as a historical, social, and political tool to reach an understanding of the past and present and help to build a (better) future. This journey of self-knowledge is both personal (Ena's search for truth and self-knowledge) and communal (the people's struggle for social justice). In the next section, I examine Black and Indigenous female empowerment and community engagement through political action and social transformation in Ain-Zaila's second book, *(R)Evolução*, proposing that the writer seeks to delineate an Afrofuturist project that is socially inclusive and politically transformative.

(R)Evolução: *Women Leadership and Community Political Action*

(R)Evolução opens with the symbol of Sankofa, returning to the idea of the need to recover the past to understand the present and forge the future. The second book narrates the culmination of Ena's journey, as the subtitle indicates: "Eu e a verdade somos o ponto final." The protagonist's development coincides with an upsurge in popular political engagement. The "não-identificados" rise up to demand social justice and collaborate with Ena and the trio in making the (r)evolution that changes the country for the better.

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[15] For more information on June 2013 protests and the rise of the extreme right in Brazil, see Rios; Lima; and Bueno.

(R)Evolução is also a tale of Black and Indigenous female empowerment. In the introduction, entitled "Nunca é tarde para voltar e apanhar o que ficou para atrás, até si mesmo," Ain-Zaila delineates another facet of her Afrofuturist project: "Esta obra é um presente a todas e todos que acreditam e desejam uma representatividade verdadeira, um mundo onde heroínas negra, indígena, LGBTTQ possam ser a heroína de todas as cores e gêneros" (4). In this sense, the writer seeks to affirm the Black presence in Brazilian literature and the genre of science fiction, and a Brazilian presence within the Afrofuturism movement. Ain-Zaila denotes African and Afro-Brazilian culture as the inspiration for her literary project:

> Sou afrobrasileira, sem hífen, pois de cortes já chega aqueles feitos ao meu legado ancestral africano e na diáspora pouquíssimo ensinado nas escolas e nas universidades. Acredito que a minha motivação ao escrever esta obra e introjetar em meu íntimo o "ser escritora" veio da falta de me ver como uma face representativa, capaz de salvar o universo, o mundo, um país, um bairro, alguém. Em suma, sou negra, minha face é negra.… Meus heróis e heroínas surgiram no mundo real, negras e negros que me contaram de onde eu vim, que eu não era descendente de escravos, e sim, de um povo com um legado magnífico, sempre resistindo e ressurgindo. E finalmente, deles recebi a arma mais poderosa de todas: raízes. Eis a minha fonte de inspiração para escrever a Duologia Brasil 2408: *(In)Verdades* e *(R)Evolução*. (6)

As such, multiracial, multiethnic, and multigender female characters dominate the second book. Ena and Naná continue their personal and emotional development, and other characters increase in importance as well, such as Agarde (the leader of the "não-identificados") and Ana (Dias's secretary who rescued Ena from the terrorist attack). Ana—who actually sympathizes with the nonidentifier cause and is in a relationship with Marilia, a "não-identificada"—fakes her death to go undercover and join the resistance movement. Naira, Ena's mother, also takes on a larger relevance, forging an alliance with Agarde to take down the corrupt government and guarantee the rights of the marginalized.

Throughout chapters packed with action and mystery, Ena and Naná use their physical force and mental intelligence to unravel the truth about Dias's murder and the corruption scheme. Ena is compared to a Dahomey warrior, "que luta por princípios e morrerá por eles se preciso" (144). The Dahomey women warriors were from West Africa in what is now Benin. Exceptional fighters, they struck fear in the hearts of their opponents. From an early age, the Dahomey Amazons were taught how to fight, handle weapons, and endure suffering. As Alpern notes, "They lusted for battle . . . and fought with fury and valor, seemingly immune to fear" (11). These female warriors were also the inspiration for the Dora Milaje in *Black Panther*, who served as the king's bodyguard and security force, illustrating Black female empowerment in popular culture (Busch). Furthermore, Naná—who represents Indigenous female warriors—uses her knowledge of the natural landscape to track hidden "fanbers" in the forest.

Against this diverse group of female leaders, the villains—mostly white upper-class males—use the administrative machinery and repressive state apparatus to eliminate dissent and bring back conformity. To secure and maintain their power, the antagonists (mis)use their control of the country's limited resources: they decide to artificially provoke a shortage of energy, water, and food, and blame the "não-identificados" for the problems. The nonidentified must fight both the government's oppression and the manufactured hatred against them.

In the second book, the "não-identificados" organize the largest protest wave in the nation's history, capturing media attention. They demand equality and the right to be integrated into society, even without having their data registered in the central biometric system. These massive demonstrations are peaceful, and they attract the support of the identified. However, government agents infiltrate the protests to sow chaos and violence, as well as to manipulate public opinion against the nonidentified. The participation of the nonidentified in the revolution indicates the value of community action in the struggle for democracy. In this sense, while Westernization has placed the individual (individual pleasure and the pursuit of happiness) at the core of its episteme (Mignolo 42), non-Western societies have always embraced the "communal" and "communitarian" as their praxes of living and thinking. In this world system, the community appears as intrinsically linked to the living cosmos (46). "[T]he constitution of knowing (gnoseology), sensing, and emotioning (aesthesis) by Indigenous peoples themselves . . . reestablishes the priority of the communal over the glorification of the individual, and the society

of individuals separated from the living cosmos (nature) and enclosed in their own ego," writes Mignolo about pre-Colombian societies (46).[16] Likewise, communalism is at the heart of Akan culture, which emphasizes the well-being of all members of society. Gyekye notes that Akan philosophy is ultimately relational and involves others. In other words, the welfare of the individual is intrinsically connected to the interests of others: as one Akan proverb dictates, "the prosperity [or well-being] of man depends upon his fellow man" (Gyekye 155). Many Akan proverbs center on the same communal principles, as the epigraph to the article indicates. "One person does not hold council" suggests that one person alone cannot solve a problem as she or he depends on others to reach an equitable solution. Therefore, the notion of community is crucial to both social and political advancement. In Akan philosophy, "community does not obliterate individuality" (Gyekye 159). On the contrary: although Akan thought acknowledges that social conflicts can arise in the interactions among individuals in society, it is understood that these conflicts are not permanent; inevitably individuals will realize that their interests align with others (159–60).

The alliance between Ain-Zaila's female characters and the nonidentified emphasizes their similarities, highlighting their marginalized status. They are both seen by the white elite *machista* society as the Other, unfit to share in the benefits of social and political organization, even though Ena and her group are part of the system. When our heroes realize the misuse of institutions and manipulation of the population, they break with the established powers and place themselves on the side of truth and justice, aligning with the nonidentified to promote social transformation. If on one side the characters' journeys are deeply personal, on the other they show a strong community aspect since collaboration and interdependence are crucial for achieving positive social change.

In the last chapters of the book the plot culminates in an epic showdown between the justice seekers and the maintainers of the status quo. Ena finally discovers that the "fanbers" are just pawns in a massive corruption scheme that involves important social actors—politicians, military, public servants, and businessmen—that include Caios, Caios's father, Ligia, and Dantas, among many others. Crucially, Dantas was one of the people directly responsible for the terrorist attack that killed Ena's father. Taking the proof to the media, Ena and her group

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[16] These citations refer to the introduction of the Kobo e-book edition.

corner the villains, who remain determined to exterminate the heroes. In the action-packed final chapters, Ena, Naná, and Wadei engage in grueling physical battles and Ena is seriously injured. The Adinkra symbol of Owuo Atwedee (fig. 4), death's ladder, emerges as a bad omen.

Figure 4: Adinkra symbol of Owuo Atwedee

Owuo Atwedee reminds us that "death is inevitable for all" (Arthur 73). Nonetheless, Ena survives to reap the fruits of her arduous work and witness the dawn of a more fraternal and egalitarian country. In the final chapter, Ena reminisces in first-person direct speech about the changes she witnessed. One year has passed and July 25, 2408, has been proclaimed the "Dia da Revolução," which memorializes the death of revolution's heroes and celebrates the end of corruption and the beginning of a new democratic era. Agarde is elected one of the country's High Representatives, and every district now has three representatives, two "identificados" and one "não-identificado," consequently guaranteeing democratic representation for the nonidentified. All involved in the corruption scandal are sentenced and imprisoned, as Ena describes:

A cada instante ocorria uma detenção de empresário, oficial, funcionário, colaborador, e por falar nisso, o Dantas chorou

quando a sua sentença foi lida, 42 anos em regime fechado e nessa época, isso é sério.… As empresas e bens dos corruptos foram vendidos ou integrados aos distritos, cabendo aos sentenciados em cárcere, um valor em conta para recomeçar ao final de suas penas, curtas ou longas, conforme participação. Nas Forças Distritais ocorreram inúmeras expulsões, prisões e chegamos a uma perda de 25% do efetivo geral, não somos tantos e o contingente é respeitável, mas seguimos a vida. (224)

Life flows, as time flows, Ena thinks. "*Mmere dane O tempo muda. Ensina a vida fluir*," concludes the protagonist (226). The novel's close features the symbol of Mmere Dane (fig. 5) ("time changes"), which represents the dynamism of time and the importance of adapting to changing times (Arthur 156).
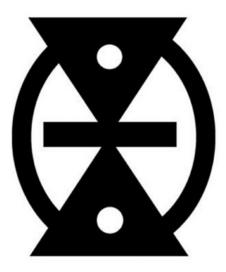

Figure 5. Adinkra symbol of Mmere Dane

Hence, Ena's journey—a path guided by the Akan philosophy of learning and self-knowledge—ends with truth, transformation, and justice. "She who does not know, will know from learning," says the popular proverb featured in the epigraph.

By reclaiming Indigenous and African knowledges, Ain-Zaila's work imagines a world outside Westernization (a cultural paradigm that is ultimately

leading the planet to apocalyptic chaos and obliteration), thus decolonizing colonial legacies as well as reinstating "communal-cosmic" praxes of living (Mignolo 46).[17] Moreover, Ain-Zaila's duology places Black female representation and agency at the center of Brazilian Afrofuturism. Through the empowerment of female minority groups and the emergence of community political action, she deconstructs stereotypes of race and gender as well as envisions a truly inclusive and democratic postapocalyptic future. In this Afrocentric vision of the future world, she celebrates Akan philosophy by using Adinkra symbols. Attuned to other Afro-Brazilian Afrofuturist writers such as Fabio Kabral, Ain-Zaila's Afrofuturistic project challenges the Western episteme[18] and invites the reader to imagine what a Black utopia might look like in a postapocalyptic world.

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[17] This citation refers to page 46 of the Kobo e-book introduction.

[18] Lehnen underlines that Kabral's narrative temporality disrupts chronological continuity. In this sense, Kabral "formulates an indirect critique of Western temporality and history and its attendant notions of 'progress'" (83).

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