

# Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt's tapestries: identifying art and popular artist

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## Abstract

This study aimed to see how the popular black artist Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt (1919-1977) represents her cultural universe by means of her work in tapestry. Thus, this article: a) discusses conceptions of art and popular artist through the lens of Cultural Studies; b) identifies specificities of the artist and her work, in order to know how her experiences are actualized in her tapestries; and finally, c) analyzes two pieces of tapestry exhibited in the Afro-Brazilian Museum, produced between 1969 and 1975, with a view to identifying elements that demarcate the concepts of popular art and popular artist. It is concluded that the works coming from subaltern classes have a creative potential – therefore, this knowledge has the same importance as any other and studying Madalena's place of speech as a black-woman-tapestry maker is key to grasp her artistic making, because her creative process is closely linked to being a woman and a black person in Brazil.

**Key words** popular art; cultural studies; place of speech; tapestry.

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## Tapeçarias de Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt: identificação de arte e artista popular

### Resumo

Este estudo teve por objetivo compreender como a artista popular negra Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt (1919-1977) representa seu universo cultural por meio de seu trabalho em tapeçaria. Assim, este artigo: a) discute concepções de arte e artista popular a partir da lente dos Estudos Culturais; b) identifica especificidades da artista e de sua obra, de modo a saber como suas vivências se fazem presentes em suas tapeçarias; e, por fim, c) analisa duas tapeçarias expostas no Museu Afro Brasil, produzidas entre 1969 e 1975, com vistas a identificar elementos que demarcam as concepções de arte popular e artista popular. Conclui-se que as produções oriundas das camadas subalternas têm um potencial criador – portanto, esse saber tem a mesma importância de qualquer outro e estudar o lugar de fala de Madalena enquanto mulher-negra-tapeceira se mostra essencial para entender sua produção artística, pois seu processo criativo está intimamente ligado ao fato de ser mulher e negra no Brasil.

**Palavras-chave** arte popular; estudos culturais; lugar de fala; tapeçaria.

## Tapicerías de Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt: identificación de arte y artista popular

### Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo comprender cómo la artista popular negra Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt (1919-1977) representa su universo cultural por medio de su trabajo en tapicería. Así, este artículo: a) discute las concepciones de arte y artista popular a través de la lente de los Estudios Culturales; b) identifica especificidades de la artista y de su obra, de modo a saber cómo sus vivencias se hacen presentes en sus tapicerías; y, finalmente, c) analiza dos tapicerías exhibidas en el Museo Afro Brasil, producidas entre 1969 y 1975, con el objetivo de identificar elementos que demarcan los conceptos de arte popular y artista popular. Se concluye que las producciones oriundas de las capas subalternas tienen un potencial creador – por lo tanto, este saber tiene la misma importancia de cualquier otro y estudiar el lugar de habla de Madalena como mujer-negra-tapicera se muestra clave para comprender su producción artística, pues su proceso creativo está íntimamente ligado al hecho de ser mujer y negra en Brasil.

**Palabras clave** arte popular; estudios culturales; lugar de habla; tapicería.

## Tapisseries de Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt: identification d'art et d'artiste populaire

### Résumé

Cette étude visait à comprendre comment l'artiste populaire noire Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt (1919-1977) représente son univers culturel à travers son travail de tapisserie. Ainsi, cet article: a) aborde les conceptions d'art et d'artiste populaire à travers le prisme des Études Culturelles; b) identifie les spécificités de l'artiste et de son travail, afin de savoir comment ses expériences sont présentes dans ses tapisseries; et, enfin, c) analyse deux pièces de tapisserie exposées au Musée Afro Brésil, réalisées entre 1969 et 1975, afin d'identifier les éléments qui délimitent les concepts d'art populaire et d'artiste populaire. Il est conclu que les œuvres provenant des classes subalternes ont un potentiel créatif – par conséquent, cette connaissance a la même importance que toute autre et étudier le lieu de parole de Madalena comme une femme-noire-tapissière est essentiel pour comprendre sa production artistique, car son processus de création est étroitement lié au fait d'être femme et noire au Brésil.

**Mots-clés** art populaire; études culturelles; lieu de parole; tapisserie.

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## Introduction

Since the social and cultural place that certain groups occupy restrict the opportunities, the visibility, and the legitimacy of their works, it is necessary to create discussions about the artistic practices of the black people, since these populations bear a historical trajectory of oppression, silencing, and forgetfulness. Thus, when mobilizing the art of Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt (1919-1977), the central question of this investigation was:

- Which elements allow us to see Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt's tapestries as folk art?

Born 100 years ago in Vitória da Conquista, Bahia, Brazil, the artist produced her tapestries using 154 needles, with which she embroidered her experiences and memories of spaces and events from her childhood. The works go through two different periods and practices: the first phase began around 1950, with her 'ink paintings;' and the second phase, with her 'wool pictures,' lasted from 1969 to 1975, 2 years before her death, in Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Both phases were not pursued at her place of birth, because, by the age of 20 years, she had to leave her family in order to work as a housemaid in urban centers, like Salvador, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro.

We think that the artist's representation is based on popular culture, that is, it starts from the location where she experiences her social and cultural reality and, in an imaginary, sensitive, and memorial act, she transfers some experiences of a practical world to her embroidery works.

Men elaborate ideas about reality, which are translated into images, discourses, and social practices that not only qualify the world, but also guide the view and perception of this reality (Pasavento, 2006, p. 49, our translation).

Thus, the concept of representation demarcates an ambiguity, of 'being and not being' the represented real, and this allows us to visualize what is absent.

In this sense, Pasavento (2006, p. 50, our translation) claims that what is allusive to representations is always real and, in this sense, the imaginary is invariably another real and not its opposite: "the world, as we see, appropriate, and transform it, is always a qualified world, socially constructed by thought." That is, the imaginary is made of representations about the world experienced, the visible, the not visible, the desires, but it comes to have real force for those who actually experience and deal with such reality. Therefore, "representations are making an absence present, where representative and representation keep relations of closeness and detachment between them" (Pasavento, 2006, p. 49, our translation).

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However, the objective of this study is grounded in the visibility of popular artists and the recognition of themselves as artists and their works as art, and it also seeks to destabilize the idealist structure posed by the supremacist white and patriarchal society where the forms of knowledge built outside the academic space are not considered a powerful production of theoretical, aesthetic, and symbolic dialogues. In addition, it is important by enabling the visibility of black female artists, since their voices are silenced and put in a social place that hinders the possibility of transcendence.

Thus, the fact that these populations do not occupy certain spaces and do not have studies regarded as a form of knowledge leads us to think of a reconfiguration of ideals relying on other gazes and to put into question what was created from a Eurocentric perspective.

The forms of knowledge produced by individuals belonging to historically discriminated groups, besides being against important discourses, are places of power and configuration of the world for new gazes and geographies (Ribeiro, 2017, p. 75, our translation).

Throughout the text, we have chosen to refer to the artist only as Madalena because we analyze her history even before she married Luiz Augusto Reinbolt, in 1952, since the German surname of her husband can deterritorize Madalena in relation to her place of speech as a black woman and Brazilian popular artist.

## **Art and artist in the weaving of popular culture**

The culture observed as yarns that weave interpretations of art and popular artist leads to definitions that may never come true, since the concept of popular culture is designated by another culture that does not experience and knows little about the other, the other different, but also made present in our society, as the subject belonging to this culture has a personal perception of the cultural envelope in which she/he lives, bringing the experience from reality to her/his actions – which are hidden through the weft of invisibility by those who dictate legitimacy.

Chartier (1995, p. 179, our translation), when saying that popular culture is a scholarly category, leads us to think of definitions that, throughout history, are constructed and aim to “delimit, characterize, and name practices that are never designated by its actors as belonging to ‘popular culture’.” Thus, when we speak of people’s culture, popular culture, traditional culture, primitive culture, illiterate culture, dominated or subaltern culture, we deal with words and expressions that the so-called literate category has created, from its

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viewpoint, in order to characterize who is the other – not the self –, what she/he makes and creates.

In this sense, Abreu (2009, p. 84, our translation), claims that popular culture is one of the most complex concepts to be defined:

[...] what is key, in my opinion, is considering popular culture as an instrument that serves to help us, not in the sense of solving, but of addressing problems, highlighting differences, and helping us to think social and cultural reality, always multifaceted.

This complexity that the author evidences may be due to two factors: a) the difficulty of defining what culture is; and b) the questionable definition of what is popular.

According to Hall (2003), the term *popular* may be grasped through three possible definitions.

The first explanation is associated with the *cultural industry* – something is popular because the masses consume and seem to enjoy it. We may think that a large part of society consumes products linked to the modern capitalist cultural industry and, according to Hall (2003), a considerable number of workers receive these products. It is a fact that the relations between the cultural industry and the audience are extremely manipulative and infamous, something which leads us to see that people who appreciate these goods live in a *state of false consciousness*: “they must be ‘cultural fools’ who do not know they have been nurtured by an up-to-date type of opium of the people” (Hall, 2003, p. 253, our translation). That is, the idea of *people* and *popular* is subordinated to commerce and capital relations.

According to the author, the second definition of *popular* is rather descriptive, because it is summed up in all the things that the people do or did, getting closer to the anthropological definition of the term. However, Hall (2003, p. 256, emphasis by the author, our translation) hesitates to accept this definition for two reasons, first because “almost *everything* the ‘people’ have ever done can be included in the list” and because it is not possible to classify everything that the people does in a single category, without putting into question the opposition between belonging or not belonging to the people: “the structuring principle of the ‘popular’ in this sense consists in the tensions and oppositions between what belongs to the central domain of the elite or the dominant culture, and the culture from the ‘outskirts’” (Hall, 2003, p. 256, our translation).

However, the third and last definition considers that the *popular cultural activities* are determined by specific classes and the social conditions in which they are incorporated or, in other words, the main element for a definition of *popular* is perceiving how the relations

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that put popular culture in continuous tension with the dominant culture are, among their possible relationships, influences, and divergences.

The term “popular” indicates this somewhat displaced relationship between culture and classes. More precisely, it refers to the alliance of classes and forces that constitute the “popular classes.” The culture of the oppressed, of excluded classes: this is the area that the term “popular” refers to (Hall, 2003, p. 262, our translation).

Likewise, as Chartier (1995) exposes, it is useless to want to identify the popular resorting to cultural objects or models. A sociology of distribution is also unacceptable, assuming that the hierarchy of classes or groups corresponds to a parallel hierarchy of cultural works and practices.

The “popular” is not contained in sets of elements that would suffice to identify, catalog, and describe. It qualifies, first and foremost, a type of relationship, a way of using objects or standards that circulate in society, but which are received, understood, and manipulated in various ways (Chartier, 1995, p. 184, our translation).

Moreover, according to Pelbart (2002, p. 149, our translation), “as the Hindu critic Homi Bhabha suggests, any culture is already a partial and hybrid formation, and a national totality or a colonial binarity are nothing more than imposed approaches that fall upon them.” In this way, as different as they may be, communities are the product of a miscegenation, they start from different groups that dialogue to each other, but such colonial binarity gives rise to cultural hierarchies and it is exactly the hierarchy that makes each group perceive the cultural relations of a community in a certain place, something which opens room to the claim that understanding the culture of a people passes through a *place of speech*: “modern subjectivity is closely linked to this dialectics that essentializes the other to, by denying her/him, constitute the self” (Pelbart, 2002, p. 149, our translation).

According to the author, *Western* hegemony is constituted by having the force on the *Eastern* other as a basis, which denies the power of such groups to superpose and place themselves as the high culture, that is, that of the *man-male-white-rational*. This forged culture was not conquered by virtue of its forms of knowledge, as well as its beliefs, values, and ideas, but due to its capacity to put itself as greater than the others and to consider itself in the right to act through the use of force upon these bodies: “it is as if white supremacy

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works by attracting alterity and subordinating differences according to whiteness degrees” (Pelbart, 2002, p. 150, our translation).

Therefore,

[...] popular culture is one of the places where the struggle for or against the culture of powerful people is engaged; it is also the prize to be won or lost in this struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance (Hall, 2003, p. 263, our translation).

Thus, we may be constituted as a force against the power bloc, which can be a point of entry into the preparation of a popular culture or a populist force that says ‘yes’ to the power bloc. That is why, according to the author, popular culture matters, because, above all, it is organized around the contradiction: “popular forces versus the power bloc” (Hall, 2003, p. 263, our translation).

In this way, is popular art a result of cultural practices of those who are inserted within popular culture? Canclini (1983) argues that the popular, especially popular art, should not be characterized as a concentration of objects, but as a practice, since the meaning of artifacts may be altered by social conflicts, as no element has its popular nature guaranteed forever, even if produced by the people or consumed by it:

The sense and the popular value have been conquered in social relationships. It is the use and not the origin, the position and the ability to provoke popular practices or representations, that confers its identity (Canclini, 1983, p. 135, our translation).

When asking what is the definition of popular art, kitsch art<sup>1</sup>, or popular culture, Canclini (1983) puts into question that almost all researchers who adopt an approach to define popular art follow Western aesthetic standards from past centuries, based, in this way, on the form and on the function and originality of objects. According to such scholars, pieces with a handicraft nature produced by the people could not be considered and did not deserve to be called art.

If we could change this idealistic perception of art and free the concept of art from its Eurocentric burden, “we could include under the name of art manifestations that work in the other way the sensible and imaginary relations between men and other men and

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<sup>1</sup> The *kitsch* “includes common or ‘useless’ objects wrapped in an artistic package, carelessly finished handicraft pieces or iconography and colors that shock our cultivated sensibility, and the many atypical uses or copies that the popular classes make of the goods belonging to the great Culture” (Canclini, 1983, p. 36, our translation).

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their environment” (Canclini, 1983, p. 136, our translation). However, as long as things do not cease to be analyzed only from an elitist viewpoint, popular art will be under a white idealization and the objects should adjust to other people’s categorizations related to their meaning – and many of these objects will be underestimated, because they should not “be incorporated into a museum” (Canclini, 1983, p. 136, our translation).

In relation to this hierarchy between art and popular art, Lima (2009, p. 99, our translation) makes it clear that this issue refers to the distinction of social classes:

The opposition stems from the “elite/people” dichotomy and it refers to the same matrix that assigns knowledge to divergent layers, necessarily opposing them to making things, which is associated with the subaltern strata of society.

Thus, according to the author, we may assume that everything coming from the elites is the result of a form of knowledge regarded as superior, the fruit of thought, denying to the popular layers the possibility of conceiving and expressing themselves, assigning to them a mere handicraft making.

According to Lima (2009), handicraft is a making in which every process takes place manually, that is, the hand is the main tool for manufacturing an object, even by using auxiliary tools as an extension of it is the human touch and gesture that sets the production pace. In this sense, a rural crockery maker, a visual artist, a designer, a housemaid, a sculptress, and a weaver, for instance, all of them, without exception, are craftsmen, because they produce/make their object/work using their hands. However, these functions end up being classified, since a *female crockery maker* is often named by the great culture as an *artisan* and a *sculptress* is called an *artist*.

When explaining the dissociation between *intellectual work* and *manual work* in the capitalist era, linked, respectively, to the elite and the people, Lima (2009) reports that popular production is condemned by the elite for having a spontaneity in its making, because it often does not follow the Eurocentric beauty and does not please the eyes hidden by the closed weft of idealism. The human being involved with the great culture, upon seeing an object of popular origin, often tries to explain it by associating this with a *gift* or *divine power* and she/he is surprised by the fact of seeing ‘beauty.’ The author emphasizes that it is

[...] as if she/he was affirming that poverty is not compatible with beauty, that a poor person is devoid of aesthetic design and cannot rationally conceive a work that is beautiful, provided with harmony, balance, content, and meaning (Lima, 2009, p. 100, our translation).

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This way of classifying subjects, things, actions, and behaviors is extremely discriminatory, because it limits popular works to an undervalued space and its value is decreased because it is intended only for local sales. It is reaffirmed that this classification system results in detachment between the so-called scholarly and popular groups and a hierarchization of social classes (Lima, 2009, p. 101, emphasis by the author, our translation):

The urban, the schooled, the scholarly, the intentional, and the sophisticated things are, according to this polarized discourse, what qualifies and distinguishes the matter with which the **great art** operates or, simply, art. By making it popular, defined as opposed to scholarly creation and through categories that are alien to it, it is reserved in a space of lesser importance: this is the **popular art** or just the **handicraft**.

Therefore, in order to characterize the categories of the universe of handicraft and art, it is necessary to incorporate these representations as historical realities, which act, reflect and turn their world into their creative medium, besides the recognition of a cultural form of knowledge. So, according to Lima (2009), there is a need for an analysis capable of looking at the ways of life, the values of these subjects, their expressions of reality, as long as the term *handicraft* is used only to refer to the production process, both in charge of scholarly and popular hands.

According to Canclini (1983), it is not possible to define popular culture *a priori*, nor can we do so with popular art. What we may discuss is how handicraft appears in the midst of the relationships it establishes, coming from the factors that lead to its production to where these relationships take place:

We need, therefore, to study handicraft as a process and not as a result, as products inserted in social relationships and not as objects facing themselves (Canclini, 1983, p. 53, our translation).

When thinking of art through broader and more scientific social studies, in comparison to the historiography of art and the traditional sociology of art, Bulhões (1991, p. 26, our translation) indicates that these studies have introduced new approaches representing two common traits: “progressive abandonment of the perspective of analysis that prioritizes the individual nature of visual activities and critique of the elitist aspects of the production, circulation, and consumption of an work of art.”

In this way, the author shows that the commercialization of a work of art, the complexity of artistic value, and the affirmation of the depoliticized nature of art, interconnected to each

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other, contributes to new studies in the social history of art. This conception addresses the “system of relations that is responsible for the activities of artistic production, circulation, and consumption” (Bulhões, 1991, p. 28, our translation). That is, it does not put into question the individual artist and her/his social role or the works according to their styles and tendencies or social groups as drivers of certain artistic practices, but as the set of relationships within a society and in an exclusive moment:

It is worth recalling that “art,” thus, is a specific segment of all visual practices, which take place in a society. Therefore, a part of these administrative practices and controlled by the visual arts system constitutes the “visual arts” recognized as such in a given space and time. **We cannot forget that there is a whole wide range of visual works that are on the margins of these so-called artistic manifestations.** The incorporation or not of elements coming from these marginal practices with an administrative set into the arts system varies widely according to the system’s inner determinants, but also from demands imposed by the evolution of society itself (Bulhões, 1991, p. 29, our emphasis, our translation).

We may say that the visual arts system has its origins in Renaissance Europe, where the development of society relying on a historical-cultural process provided the separation between *manual work* and *intellectual work*, which stems from a distinction and a hierarchy of the second over the first. In this way, the figure of *artist* overlapped, instantly, the figure of *artisan*: “thus, the category ‘art’ was defined by a set of relations, advocating values of the social sectors with which it was identified at that time: nobility and bourgeoisie” (Bulhões, 1991, p. 28-29, our translation).

In this sense, art has established by means of a break with the other artistic practices, such as weaving, ceramics, and jewelry, among others, in which, under rules of their own, specific skills for production separate a professional from a lay person and the sacred from the profane and the social distinction of the elites has been constituted in the system of the visual arts. In addition, it is crucial to point out, according to the author, that the visual arts system also emerged as a domination system, since they imposed on society a set of standards that came from a minority.

As far as the colonial world was concerned, there was also an imposition on colonized peoples of the visual standards of their colonizers. In this way, those who had access to the arts system began to impose a symbolic domination over others, who also pursued artistic practices, too, but they were not regarded as belonging to what was called art: “the symbolic construct of social extracts not integrated into the system, establishing distinction mechanisms that legitimized pre-existing social domination, from which the system was also a result” (Bulhões, 1991, p. 29, our translation).

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This differentiation began to exist as a political power strategy in society, “a strategy that becomes more efficient, to the extent that it is more masked, appearing as legitimate” (Bulhões, 1991, p. 29, our translation). Idealism, the object value and the value of art itself is closely linked to the visual arts system, which dictates the artistic legitimacy and the essence that holds the aura of art:

The strength of the arts system is linked to its own structuring; its institutions, to the weight of its history. Institutions maintain and renew the rituals, establishing discriminations and hierarchizations within the varied universe of visual activities (Bulhões, 1991, p. 31, our translation).

Although historically the concepts of popular culture and popular art have been used as a way of hierarchizing cultural works, we see and map, throughout this article, popular culture and popular art as empowering concepts to grasp the artist’s place of expression and the space that she/he occupies in the social fabric (influenced by factors such as discrimination of sex, gender, and sexuality, race, origin, religion, among others).

In this sense, Frota (1975, p. 18, our translation) observes and contextualizes the popular artist’s identity and place in society: “the ‘primitive,’ generally coming from the popular strata, looks with a highly personal view through the culture she/he has received, moving away from it, and she/he differs from the scholarly artist by not having an intellectual concept of art and nature.” In this way a subaltern artist uses the reality sensitivity to produce her/his objects and artifacts, conveying to the viewer a perception much more focused on her/his cultural identity. Thus, she/he resorts to life experience as a support of inspiration, creation, recreation.

Popular artists are not part of a world apart, rustic, picturesque, or socially tragic, they “only express, with values of their own and a language of equal importance to our’s, an internal reality common to all, getting closer to it by the use of other elements” (Frota, 1975, p. 22, our translation). Therefore, for them, art is part of daily life, they do not care about judgments of the great culture that often do something to fit in a particular style or era. Popular artists, on the other hand, use singularity as a thread for creation.

Therefore, “what is asked, indeed, to contemplate the so-called primitive artists’ work, is a creative empathy, devising special antennas that allow us to probe the cultural envelope’s borders [where] we are sealed” (Frota, 1975, p. 20, our translation). When analyzing the popular artists’ works, we must visualize in other ways and not from the idealism established by the European person. It is necessary to let the spool that ties the gaze go, in order to look from another viewpoint, another culture, and perceive manifestations as lines of possible relationships. The author also emphasizes that the enjoyment of an

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artistic work constitutes a meeting between aesthetics and anthropology. Therefore, it is indispensable to know extensively the experiences lived by an artist and, finally, analyze her/his work.

Aiming to discuss conceptions of art and popular artist through the lens of Cultural Studies, we observe that popular culture is not found in material products, but in the tessitura of knowledge, meanings, sensibilities, creation, and recreation in which subjects and groups attribute words, ideas, views, and versions, sharing symbolic universes. We may characterize as symbolic beings those who create webs, wefts, and networks of relationships to interweave their perception of life in the means that bring them closer.

## **Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt: a black woman in popular culture**

Born in Vitória da Conquista, em 1919, Madalena (Figure 1) tells us, through embroidered tapestries, her experiences and memories of rural Bahia. The representations start from a childhood of plenty on a cattle ranch and all that her parents owned and did, representing not the objective reality, but the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events aroused during her moment of creation:

I am black, but I love dark color. I love brown, I love black pants, black blouse. I love black blouse with silver necklace (Frota, 1975, p. 120, our translation).

**Figure 1** Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt



Source: Frota (1975, p. 115).

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Madalena's free gesture with brush and ink and with needle and wool began during her childhood, in the popular everyday life in Bahia, visualizing her family during the production of clay plates and pots, the production of clothes with the cotton she harvested, growing animals and planting food:

I picked leaves in the bush and took a green juice and using the feather of a chicken I started to produce something there on the papers, then I threw it away (Frota, 1975, p. 114, our translation).

However, this self-knowledge process as a female artist was interrupted around the age of 20 years, when she left the small farm where she lived with her parents to work as a housemaid in large urban centers.

This exit from the rural to the urban world evidences a hybridization process; working in Salvador, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Petrópolis, the artist has become articulated and intertwined in other cultures, but she does not forget her cultural data belonging to Bahia. This can be observed both in the materialities that she uses in her works and in the visual representations, which mainly depart from rural reminiscences, because, as Canclini (2011) puts it, we may think of a popular work built through hybridization, since it is also constructed by having the relationships between traditions and urban life as a basis.

Madalena did not have the opportunity to pursue a formal school education, showing to be illiterate in verbal language, but she uses the visual language to write her experiences, converting the needles into pencils that draw words in the form of figures. Embroidery came before she dealt with the tapestry, it is a popular art that was taught by her mother and it is configured as a domestic practice for which women were in charge:

My mother made clay crockery, made lace, made blankets, sewed cotton with the wheel and made clothes for the whole family (Frota, 1995, p. 114, our translation).

When she arrived at the household of Lota de Macedo Soares and Elisabeth Bishop, in 1949, to work as a cook, Madalena began to paint in a moment of absence of her mistresses, who, when they saw her work, started encouraging her to engage in this production, gaining from them, at first, paints and brushes and, later, needles and wool yarns, with which she began to embroider tapestries. Bishop wrote that the cook had revealed herself as "a wonderful primitive painter, so that soon we are going to sell her paintings on 57th Street and all of us are going to be rich" (Museu Afro Brasil, 2018).

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However, the fact that Lota ordered the artist to seek a degree in order to introduce herself as a great artist evidences a colonized gaze on her works, since it might need improvement or mere validation of an art school to enter the artistic circuit, which is grounded in the visual arts system. This need to have her work standardized by an often Eurocentric pattern can be seen in other black female artists over history, like Maria Firmina dos Reis (1825-1917), Carolina Maria de Jesus (1914-1977), Ruth de Souza (1921-), and Conceição Evaristo (1946-).

The artist produced in the household of Lota de Macedo Soares, in a small room for housekeepers, sitting on the bed with her 154 needles in a basin on a stool close to her, which were executed on the cotton waste with the most varied wool yarn colors. She even lost her job because her dedication to artistic activities began to affect her performance as a cook. However, she could not make a living as an artist and had to work as a housemaid until the end of her life.

When she was producing, the work began by dividing in cotton waste the spaces to shape the composition and, when the work was very large and complex, she made a synthetic sketch of what she was going to embroider. She chose cotton waste for almost all the supports of her tapestries, because it is a natural fiber of vegetal origin that has as a characteristic of its own the irregular and flexible weft, allowing greater needle movement.

The art of Madalena in tapestries carries a Bahian ancestry whose outline dates back to her mother and a black popular culture, resistant to the colonization processes. In this sense, in order to get closer to the artist's social and cultural experiences, there is a need to identify how, historically, certain places were built for the black populations in the early 20th century in Vitória da Conquista. According to Nascimento (2008), to see which are these established places, we must investigate how the representations of the 'black being' and the 'being black' were built and put into question the ambiguities inherent to this construction.

Thus, it is worth understanding that the representations of what it is to be black are intimately linked to the social place, which is always under construction: "throughout these processes, we notice that a great part of the representations of this 'social place' is that of subalternity, subjection and it is grounded in racial discrimination" (Nascimento, 2008, p. 97, our translation). Although black populations have a socially-oriented place, it is possible to turn this line into the possibility of building a resistance identity, so that it is possible to cope with racism and the persons involved in it.

Therefore, we can observe that social places submitted to blacks are linked to the notions of civility, education, and language: "I believe that civility, thought mainly by 'whites,' is part of a 'competent discourse,' related to the whitening rationale, still diffuse, not totally perceptible, but present" (Nascimento, 2008, p. 98, our translation). They lived, in this sense, under standards inscribed by local powers and, if they did not comply, they could be fined and, in some cases, even arrested.

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One of the works carried out by women in urban spaces was domestic services, which were mostly pursued by black women: “among the opportunities available for the Bahian working classes, domestic employment was the most degrading job, which most directly evoked descent from the old reality of urban slavery” (Ferreira, 1994, p. 46, our translation). Even the women who worked with domestic handicrafts, the poorest ones, managed to hire a maid. This shows that the black population continued to serve ‘sinhás’ and masters, indicating the resistance of social structures that the abolition of slavery could not break.

On the streets, poor women exercised various activities, traced much of the small urban commerce, created alternatives to occupy varied domestic services, and outlined new ways of living alongside urban slavery: “a whole network of relationships, habits, and values, inherent to a popular culture that had developed since the colony, has in black and homeless women a striking reference” (Ferreira, 1994, p. 99, our translation). Therefore, the black and working women were the main target of the sanitization project of republican policies.

Although living under these rules, the black population left much of its culture in Bahia, since, as A. B. Silva (2017, p. 145, our translation) points out, the rural area and the outskirts of Vitória da Conquista have a large black presence, since in these regions there was greater conservation of the mestizo characteristics prior to the demographic and immigrant growth of the municipality in the 20th century: “the rural area of Vitória da Conquista is a predominantly black and almost unknown universe of the city.”

To become a black-woman-tapestry maker, Madalena had to grasp her social place before the power structures, since there is a racialized, colonizing, and patriarchal look at bodies, works, and forms of knowledge and, besides opposing them, it is necessary to see how they are constructed in order to deconstruct them, since this look does place women, especially black women, in a place of forgetfulness: “to think how oppressions combine and intertwine, generating other forms of oppression, is key to consider other possibilities of existence” (Ribeiro, 2018, p. 122, our translation).

Therefore, the artist is a subject sewn by the structural (in)visibility of discrimination of gender and race and, through tapestry embroidery, we may think of the senses traditionally linked to women’s roles in society. In this way, the early 20th century was marked by symbolic constructions that ruled how a man and a woman should be and the occupation of their places in society, as Moraes (2016) puts it. While the men were assigned to public services, women were in charge of household chores: “with each yarn woven into the fabric, the young girl sized the texture of her dreams and materialized the expectations about her social future” (Moraes, 2016, p. 7, our translation).

Considering the above, we can notice that, through cloths, yarns, and needles scattered in domestic environments, social roles were plotted and put aside of a historical construction, according to the author. Such practices were introduced since childhood by the

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school, family, and religion, because being a woman is associated with patience, modesty, care, necessary for the practice of embroidery and sewing: “these markedly feminine adjectives had as their strong foundation the biological issue, postulating characteristics about culture and social behavior” (Moraes, 2016, p. 12, our translation).

The philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (as quoted in Ribeiro, 2017, p. 37, our translation) explains that “women were constituted as the *Other*, because she is seen as an object, that is, a woman is seen as something that has a function.” In this sense, a woman is not defined by herself, but in relation to the masculine gaze, in other words, a gaze that dictates submissions and hierarchizations. However, this gaze leaves women in this place, not allowing the world to be introduced with all of its possibilities, preventing it from being a ‘for-itself’ and directly imposing this place of *Other*.

Nevertheless, according to Grada Kilomba (as quoted in Ribeiro, 2017), a black woman is the *Other of the Other*, a position that puts her in a place of reciprocity more difficult than what Beauvoir outlines as *Other*. According to Ribeiro (2017, pp. 38-39, our translation), Kilomba passes through the analysis of the category of women as *Other*, “when claiming that black women, being neither white nor men, occupy a very difficult place in white supremacist society, because they embody a kind of double deficiency, the antithesis of whiteness and masculinity,” so, they play the role of *Other of the Other* that leads a black woman not to be seen as anything but a housemaid.

Thus, Ribeiro (2018, p. 123, our translation) points out that the feminist movement must be cross-sectional in order to give voice to the various existences of womanhood: “to think of cross-sectionality is to realize that there can be no primacy of oppression over the others and that it is necessary to break with the structures.” That is, it is understanding that race, class, and gender cannot be categories thought in isolation, because they are inseparable. Thus, the hushed voices and the marginalized bodies of women victims of other forms of oppression, as well as sexism, will have the opportunity to emerge from obscurity.

Asking about the myth of female weakness, Carneiro (2011) tells us to which women this feeling refers, as black women have never identified with this myth because they have never been treated as weak, because at no time in history there has been a careful protection (even if often sexist) to these bodies and voices. Meanwhile, black women worked as slaves in crops or in urban areas, as cooks, seamstresses, saleswomen, prostitutes...

What could be considered as history or reminiscences of the colonial period remains, however, alive in the social imaginary and acquires new contours and functions in a supposedly democratic social order, which maintains intact the gender relations according to the color or race instituted within the slavery period (Carneiro, 2011, our translation).

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Black women experienced and went through paths different from other women since the slavery period, they were marked by the weight of racism and, even today, face remnants of oppression. Therefore, to speak of black feminism is, above all, to act in an anti-racist way by interconnecting the discussions, which previously corresponded only to a group of specific women, possibilities of looking at the black women's forms of existence and knowledge in another way, with a view to being able to reach another level of visibility.

By blackening the claims of women, making them more representative of Brazilian women as a whole, we see traces of a path to humanization, since the concept of humanity embraces only white men. Therefore, the struggle, as Ribeiro (2018, p. 27, our translation) points out, involves a new civilizing milestone and an expanded concept of humanity: "a world where there are other possibilities of existence that are not marked by the violence of silencing and denial. We want to coexist, in order to build new social foundations."

In view of this, it is indispensable to discuss the place of speech, that is, to think above all the social place that black women occupy. To do this, Ribeiro (2017, p. 61, our translation) designs her research by taking the feminist viewpoint as a basis, which emphasizes the social conditions constituting groups in power relations. In order to understand the groups, it is necessary to consider the categories of race, gender, class, and sexuality as structural devices that stem from inequalities and create groups: "it is not a question of affirming individual experiences, but of grasping how the social place that certain groups occupy restricts opportunities."

The act of exclusion and non-humanization of these groups leads their works, forms of knowledge, and voices to be silenced due to the fact they are treated as subalterns and by being structurally excluded from any opportunities for transcendence: "speaking is not restricted to the act of uttering words, but to being able to exist" (Ribeiro, 2017, p. 64, our translation). Non-existence is justified by social conditions that hinder the visibility and legitimacy of works because they cannot access certain places, such as universities, the media, and institutional policies.

From the moment the privileged group begins to put into question its place of power and give the opportunity to put other varied experiences in place of visibility will make it possible to change the structure of oppression and, thus, build an anti-racist world. A black woman's speech stems from realities experienced, she does not speak by means of, but by herself and by the risk she faces, as Lélia Gonzales (1984, p. 225, our translation) points out, this is so because she has been infantilized for a long time, since someone always took her voice, but now she wants to speak and will speak: "that is, the trash will speak, and that is OK."

Madalena, by identifying herself as a black woman - "I am black" -, faces the closed wefts that prevent visibility in power relations: "the relationship between a black woman and power is a virtually non-existent theme. So, to speak of power is similar to speaking

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of what is absent” (Carneiro, 2009, p. 50, our translation). Forgetfulness is justified by the fact that this woman has been part of a group historically oppressed and subalternized and, even today, lives with racism knocking on the doors of its households. Therefore, it is worth thinking on: a) the fact that she was a housemaid; b) what justifies the fact that she has not been able to make a living from her works; c) the fact that she is regarded as a popular artist; and d) her place of speech.

In this way, based on the writings, we can draft another story about the work done through yarn and needle, perceiving what is on the flip side and between the lines, seeing what is socially and historically linked to women’s roles – that is, we see hierarchies, exclusions, submissions that were and still are aimed at a biological sex.

Madalena’s tapestry art, first of all, may be analyzed as a movement that asks about the traditional roles attributed to women. As she is a black-woman-tapestry maker, we can notice a threefold social invisibility, of gender, race, and art, since embroidery is regarded as a minor art, because it is historically associated with a domestic work done by women. Thus, seeing Madalena as an artist means going against established paradigms, providing black and popular artists with speech and representation.

Therefore, we are not concerned with establishing an explanatory model for Madalena’s works because it uses Cultural Studies as a reference, an axis of vision that considers social conditions and power relations under which a particular social phenomenon or material product was produced. To guide our analysis, we use the 15 questions proposed by Efland, Freedman and Stuhr (2003, pp. 196-197, our translation) to address works of art, first by weighing the subject’s social and cultural place:

- 1 – In what culture was this artistic form produced? (This is “the culture”)
- 2 – Identify and describe the geographical aspects of the region/country in which the producers of this object live. In which way do climate, topography, vegetation, and natural resources influence the artistic form produced?
- 3 – In what period was the artistic form produced?
- 4 – Describe the physical appearance of the artistic form.
- 5 – How did/does the artistic form work in culture?
- 6 – Which aspects of aesthetic cultural production are the most important: the process, the product, the symbolic meaning?
- 7 – What is the social meaning of the artistic form?
- 8 – What were/are the aesthetic values of culture?
- 9 – Who were the artists? What sex were they? Age? Social status?
- 10 – How were they chosen to become artists?

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- 11 – How were they educated?
  - 12 – For whom, who did produce the artistic form?
  - 13 – Is the artistic form still produced today? Is it the same or different? In which sense?
  - 14 – How is the artistic form used today in culture?
  - 15 – Why should we address it as art?

We use the questions proposed by Efland et al. (2003) as guides for our analysis, however, we think that narrating popular artists, who have often been marginalized, requires reorganizing paths, so we organize the questions proposed by the authors in our own way, to first think of the peculiarities of each work based on the description and then answer the elements asked about in the other questions, which are assigned to all the tapestries under analysis.

## **The popular in Madalena's tapestries**

Madalena's artistic making is vast and is part of private collections belonging to Brazilian collectors. However, 4 of her works can be seen in the Afro-Brazilian Museum, located in São Paulo. In this article, we chose to analyze 2 tapestries out of the 4 exhibited in this museum, establishing a relation between Madalena's production process and the cultural universe in which it was inserted. Thus, the concepts discussed throughout this research are taken up in the analysis in order to think about her creative process, because analyzing her works means going beyond descriptions, grasping memories and experiences of a black-woman-tapestry maker who carries in her body the history of a people that was sewn by cultural and social invisibility. This indicates what her works tell us about her place of speech.

Madalena's tapestries were produced in the 20th century, between 1969 and 1975, a period corresponding to the phase of the artist's 'wool pictures' – these works were not produced in Vitória da Conquista, place of her birth, but while working as a housemaid in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador, however, her imaging representations mainly depart from her experiences and memories of the rural Bahia. Therefore, we think that the artist went through a hybridization process with the numerous cultural experiences over her life, but we analyze the relationship between tapestries and popular culture.

Starting from this formulation, we may claim that the tapestry works are made by having a popular Bahian culture as a basis, which transfers the marks of a black identity, beginning with expressions of ways of life, memories, and customs and because its artistic objects refer to her mother's teachings, which stemmed from textile production, ranging from embroidery to lace and clothing: "my mother made clay crockery, made lace, made

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blankets, sewed cotton with the wheel and made clothes for the whole family. Bed linen, bag, suit for my brother, bedding for us, so many things” (Frota, 1975, p. 114, our translation).

Also, the geographical aspects of Vitória da Conquista directly influenced her embroidery works, since imaging representations mainly come from episodes related to environments with great diversity of flora and fauna. According to Souto (2017), the region is characterized by a tropical climate, softened by the relative altitude, differing from most of the cities in the state for registering milder temperatures. In turn, the relief is defined as a plateau, usually little uneven in the highest part, smoothly waved, with small rounded top elevations. Its valleys are wide, flat bottom, and they have headwaters shaped as an amphitheater, disproportionate to the thin water courses that run in that environment.

Climate dynamics, rather than relief and soil, determine or at least influence the behavior and types of biome that constitute a given region. Thus, the municipality, due to its tropical climate, is characterized by two plant formations: the savannahs and the tropical forests. The savannah (named as Cerrado in Brazil) is a shrub formation with deep roots, thick leaves, and twisted trunks. In turn, the tropical forests (Atlantic Forest) are dense, ombrophilous (with almost year-round humidity), heterogeneous, with broad-leafed species (large leaves), stratified (having all types of trees), with great biodiversity (Moniz, 2018).

However, this diverse vegetation divides space with the expressive livestock of this region. In the 18th century, Arraial da Conquista had just a church and a few dozen houses; still there were dense forests, with abundant fauna and flora. After the arrival of the first cattle herds brought by the ‘tropeiros’ from the State of Minas Gerais, the forests began to be felled to give place to pastures. João Gonçalves da Costa himself, the founder of Arraial da Conquista, became a cattle owner and his family was the region’s richest milk and meat producer for more than a century (Prefeitura Municipal de Vitória da Conquista, 2018).

The tapestries were embroidered using yarns of acrylic wool on a cotton waste bag weft, whose irregular and flexible weft did not condition the movement of needles, giving greater autonomy to the creation. The most used and easy to see embroidery in her works is the *straight stitch*, which presents irregularly, with varied sizes filling all the spaces, making it impossible to see the support. We do not have the exact size of the works, but we can see their flat quadripartite shape, which corresponds to the classic definition of the term *tapestry*.

In addition, the works under analysis seem to have a single section, since, according to Andrade (1978), the tapestry artist cannot accurately portray the shadows and depth as a painter manages to do in a picture, as the yarn does not provide a smooth surface like a painting, in which light is reflected everywhere. Thus, as we lack an exact perception of sections in Madalena’s works, we chose to describe the works by resorting to their shape, observing first the central part and then the upper and the lower parts. We also identify

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some symbolic meanings of each work – the most important aspect for Madalena’s cultural aesthetics.

**Figure 2** Tapestry 1 – Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt, untitled, 20th century, acrylic wool in cotton waste bag weft



Source: Afro-Brazilian Museum Collection.

The first tapestry we analyze is the work “The Heritage” [A Herança] (Figure 2), which the artist describes for Frota (1975) in one of her interviews. According to the author, “The Heritage” represents a farmhouse, with characters identified as father, mother, and eight sons, besides livestock scattered around the headquarters.

There are 1 man and 1 woman on the left side of the screen center – the father and the mother. In the center there is 1 white house with several windows and 1 door in the middle, all embroidered in brown. On the right side of the center 8 men are noticed – 1 at the top of the screen. In the upper and lower parts we can see livestock of various colors and 2 cowboys; interestingly, the left side of the bottom seems to have 5 brown-colored dogs. The faces of the father, the mother, and the sons are represented in brown color and the faces of the cowboys in the black color, evidencing miscegenation.

This tapestry, with a ‘sertanejo’ look and predominance of greenish tones on the grazing next to small colored points of plants and flowers, conveys a story reported by the artist herself:

The **Heritage** is about a man called Paulo Rico. He lived on my homeland in Conquista da Vitória. He had 8 sons. He had a cattle ranch that darkened by sight, with ‘carijó’ cattle and zebu cattle. And there was much cattle, much bush, lots of pond, lots of farm. He had one foot bigger than the other and he put his big shoe

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on the farm road, so that everyone could see and know that it was his farm. When he grew up his eight sons, his wife died, then he died, and then remained his eight sons. And one of his sons lived in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil, he had ten children. And this man went there to share the heritage. But the other sons got together to kill, one of them, in order to have more cattle for each brother in addition to the farm. And they said: the heritage is OK for seven people! Let us kill this guy? And he was murdered. One brother had the saddest death in all the world. He was murdered in the farm and put into a pit, buried with his boots, and larkspur and hat, a pit in what they name as 'mamãozinho.' It provides a man-sized potato. It is a fruit, it even serves as a remedy, this is a fruit that is born in the countryside, we do not have it here. Every year that potato rots and they cover those holes to prevent cattle from falling down into them. So they opened their brother's mouth with the larkspur, poured a pot of boiling coffee, and killed and laid a stone over it. And went on to divide the heritage. When the judge got there, he said: a brother of yours is missing. I want him here. And they said: our brother asked us to say that he is already very rich, so the heritage should be divided between us. Then the judge said: bring your brother here, he has to sign the document stating that he does not want anything, so I can share the heritage. Then, they collapsed. And the judge inquired: where is your brother? He called his wife's house, and the woman said, "He's been there for 10 days and I do not know about any news. He went to receive the heritage. Then the police officers inquired, asked, investigated, they went to the farm on the police wagon, removed the stone with their own hands. They brought him back and he is buried in the Conquista da Vitória, in the cemetery of my homeland. They made a crystal tomb, with pure crystal glass, at that time they put him there, looking like a saint, just as they killed him, I was a small child at the time, it cost 100 'contos.' With crystal, just glass, for everyone to come and see, and the brothers went to jail and the whole heritage was left to his wife (Frota, 1975, pp. 118-119, emphasis by the author, our translation).

We can notice in this tapestry and in her speech that the region of Vitória da Conquista is characterized by great abundance of bovine herds, as the data available confirm, and, also, fruits, as well as herbs and plants, were used as natural remedies, which are very common in the black and Indian cultures.

Thus, A. B. Silva (2017, p. 144, our translation) reveals that, even today, despite the preponderance of Christianity for centuries, it is clear in the region, in Afro-Indian religious practices, in prayers, in spiritual healing and blessing rituals, in the use of medicinal plants, in shamanic practices, such as requests and prayers to entities like 'old black man' or 'caboclo das matas.' Therefore, Vitória da Conquista does not differ, in general, from the Brazilian religious tradition, which is characterized by a cultural hybridism between the three formative groups of Brazilian society: Indians, Europeans, and Africans.

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**Figure 3** Tapestry 2 – Madalena dos Santos Reinbolt, untitled, 20th century, acrylic wool in cotton waste bag weft



Source: Afro-Brazilian Museum Collection.

The artist's need to increase textures is observed in Tapestry 2 (Figure 3), which shows applications of fabrics and crochet stitches. In the center of the screen there is a lake with many plants species on an orange fabric, demarcated with polka dots of different colors and sizes. In the upper part there are black and white men wearing trousers and shirt and the black woman in the left corner wore turban, along with necklaces and with a dress, almost mixing with the palm trees of varied colors in the background, is highlighted because she is bigger than the men represented on the screen. At the bottom we see black and brown cattle and on the right side there is a man pulling a white horse.

The liveliness and abundance of elements in this work, as in every work, refer to the economic status their parents had in Bahia: "I grew up very fat, very strong, I never saw anyone enjoying the abundance that I enjoyed. In my life I will never, never, see anything like that" (Frota, 1975, p. 116, our translation). This justifies the artist's need to work with 154 needles at the same time, as they become an extension of her hand, just as a color palette, to embroider as she pleases and have several colors at once, too. That is how Madalena beautifully transfers the experiences that move freely in the flexible cotton waste bag weft and at a certain moment they are fixated from the knot onwards.

Madalena's artistic making goes beyond tapestry's materiality, because her production mode and her social place are directly linked to a specific way of life, which is transferred not only to her art, but also to her way of existing in society, leading it to be named as a popular work. Popular art, like popular culture, works significantly throughout Bahia, not only by means of visual arts, but through other segments, such as religiosity, cooking, music, and dance.

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Most black artists are called *popular artists*, revealing that race is also a marker of the popular, as R. A. F. Santos (2016, p. 131, our translation) points out: “then, the early 20th century was a special moment in which the black artist starts to look at her/himself and her/his relatives and acquaintances and she/he identifies somehow with her/his characteristics and her/his culture.” However, as signaled, popular art is observed along with the early Indian and black populations, since artistic objects are constantly imbricated in their forms of living, that is, in Indian and black culture living means making art.

The popular art nomenclature, according to the same author, validates the production of people who live in adverse environments, allowing their creativity, memories, and imagination to be seen as art by the audience, critics, curators, and historians, who constitute the market itself. And, also, popular artists “found in the Visual Arts a way, in the midst of the low-income neglected mass population, to express their essence, subjectivity, and individuality” (R. A. F. Santos, 2016, p. 133, our translation).

Therefore, as emphasized by R. A. F. Santos (2016), the fact that a visual work has been produced by a less educated artist, considering only the formal school curriculum, does not make it less significant than that produced by a scholarly artist, since this artist carries with her/him another knowledge set that differs from what is regarded as more valuable by formal education: “the individual-subject resorts to memory to build a biography, in order to create her/his artistic project, her/his social identity” (Frota, 2005, p. 117, our translation).

Besides its popular meaning, Madalena’s art also transfers a social circumstance of race and gender, which is part of a colonial and patriarchal system that delimits what a black-woman-tapestry maker can do and how she can exist in society. It is clear, thus, that the artist’s social place leads her to be characterized as a popular artist, since she belongs to a group historically excluded from certain spaces, staying in a position of subalternity: “in this history, the popular is the excluded one” (Canclini, 2011, p. 205, our translation).

Her survival depended on her hands in pursuing a career as a housemaid and, when she realized that she could start painting as in childhood again and make a living from her works, the possibility of transcendence emerges: from a housemaid to a great artist. But this did not happen, as what she sold was not enough to afford her cost of living, and she had to work in the houses of other women again: “after producing lots of canvas, then I got tired of paint because I had to wash my hands several times, everyone began to frighten me, people said that I was going to acquire a hand disease, but my hand did not get sick due to canvas, it was caused by soap” (Frota, 1975, p. 123, our translation).

Madalena’s works enabled many teachings and meetings – not only due to the representations that constitute her tapestries, but also by means of the practice that extends to the entire Brazilian black population, specifically regarding the visual arts. In this way, the social meaning of the artistic making comes from resistance, as she resists a structural system determining that popular knowledge is not seen as power. Here, it is worth asking:

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- What is the space of a black woman in art?
  - What does a black woman produce?
  - And what can she produce?

Initially, Madalena's work was named as an artistic work by her boss, Lota de Macedo Soares, and by neighbors of a socioeconomic level equal to that of the artist, who appreciated her work, but this came true when she entered a legitimate art space. In this sense, the Afro-Brazilian Museum gathers the African life's history, memory, culture, and contemporaneity ranging from before the tragic slavery period to today, allowing the black people to recognize itself when entering this space.

Moreover, exhibiting objects produced by black subjects, or visual works whose intent reveal clear identifications with the universe of black aesthetics, is a way of breaking with this demarcation between scholarly and popular spheres, evidencing that the popular art has a potential of its own just as the scholarly art, and, until recently, the latter was the only one that could occupy such spaces.

Just like Field (2000 as quoted in Frota, 2005, p. 23, our translation) we are looking for popular works interconnect to the works belonging to the elites, but it is indispensable to avoid "ethnocentrism in indicating their precedence in terms of finding inventive solutions, or even inducing the recipient to realize that they may be 'surprisingly' similar to the elite's creations, as if they were occasional findings of simple minds." Considering this, popular culture also has to remain popular within a legitimized place and this occurs when we have a space that encompasses the social and cultural meaning provided by a population that devises things through everyday experiences linked to its identity.

N. F. I. Silva (2013, p. 132, our translation) describes the Afro-Brazilian Museum as "a museum entity that stems from the gaps, the voids, the silence that condense and collaborate to maintaining the mistake based on the reductionist notion that assigns to the Africans and Afro-Brazilians nothing more than mere references to manual labor." One of the goals is to show another side of black cultures, insofar as black artistic making is regarded by the hegemonic class much more as an artisan and folk modality, concepts discussed in the visual arts system, than as a form of power. Therefore, "it must be [...] shown to exhaustion, since, under the circumstances, such works also represent the 'other side,' less stressed by critics due to the contempt that it implies" (N. F. I. Silva, 2013, p. 133, our translation).

It is to this extent, i.e. showing the other sides of the black culture, that Madalena fits, by providing black women with empowerment through her work, above all black artists. Seeing the four tapestries by the artist in a cultural heritage that embodies the culture of a people that was and still is marked by silencing means to see the possibility of breaking with structures devised by a people that used its strength to take the position of hegemonic class and dictate values and powers.

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By means of institutional changes, and starting from individual consciousness, social changes can be sought from an antiracist, anti-elitist, and anti-sexist perspective. Therefore, empowerment means commitment to the struggle for equality: “it is not the cause of an individual alone, but rather the way how she/he provides the others with empowerment so that they can achieve a fairer society for women” (Ribeiro, 2018, p. 136, our translation). In this way, the artist tried to make a living, but, in addition, within a social sphere, she allowed black female artists to see themselves as belonging to humanity and existing in power spaces: “it is about empowering the self and the others and turning women into active subjects of change” (Ribeiro, 2018, p. 135, our translation).

The female tapestry maker was educated in a rural context where her mother taught her household chores, because she knew that the only job opportunities available for women from the lower classes in that period were housemaid positions. Yet, Madalena goes beyond the embroidery on towels that her boss drafted before producing and, as she said: “I never drafted anything, no, I do everything having my thoughts as a basis” (Frota, 1975, p. 122, our translation). In this sense, she appropriated the yarns in an autonomous and inventive way, while not pursuing her work according to academic standards, but based on her experiences and memories.

The four tapestries represent experiences of a lifetime and, above all, they portray the longing and memories of Bahia, as the aesthetic values assigned by the popular culture linked to a black culture are rather associated with symbolic meanings. Visual manifestations may be observed in daily practices, such as in religiosities, myths, rites, customs, arts, cuisine, sounds, words, and culture. Therefore, aesthetic values are established through culture, something which constitutes and enriches the artistic making.

As A. G. Santos and Sanches (2014, p. 63, our translation) point out, “from an interdisciplinary perspective, the Afrodescendant aesthetic field to be explored is vast and varied field: anthropology, religion, art, architecture, history, philosophy, among others, are knowledge areas challenged in the analysis of Afro-Brazilian culture.” Thus, we may identify the immersion of Africans in the Brazilian history and aesthetic manifestations, because they brought along their cultures and their beliefs, strongly grounded in the ancestry that constituted Brazilian popular culture.

So, nowadays, Madalena’s artistic making has been produced in culture by the black women who resist the racism and patriarchy, identifying themselves as powerful elements that have rights of speech, that is, they have rights to coexist and to build new social bases. Besides, the artist’s work is also produced by the artists who turn their making into a means of survival and it belongs to the Brazilian popular art. We may say that handicrafts, stemming from the popular classes, have an artistic burden just as the so-called scholars, because they have a power of recognition in face of the history and culture of a certain locality.

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Therefore, a popular artist is immersed in a cultural universe that leads her/him to provide the world with meaning, that is, popular art is not within the objects and materials, but in the lived experiences. It is up to us to see that a popular artist resorts to contexts in order to build her/his artistic project, thus creating her/his social and cultural identity. In the act of doing and undoing the fabric derived from the web of art and culture, we observe the experiences of a common life in the yarns of the weft that popular art uses, expressing unique ways of existing, relating, and enjoying the world around it.

## Conclusions

Grasping nowadays the significance of Madalena's artistic making and how it may be categorized within popular culture has led us to discuss the social place of black women in Brazil and to ask why they are denied in power spaces and their works usually become invisible, because, as Ribeiro (2018, p. 19, our translation) states, "thinking of the black women's made me realize how important it was to recover neglected humanities." In this sense, Madalena, through her tapestries, allows us to see other versions and visions for black women in art and to build a representation for so many other minority groups in the Brazilian social structure.

When analyzing her tapestries, we notice that between sewing and embroidery, Madalena conveys not only individual experiences, but the way of living of a social group that, starting from the history of Eurocentric art, is regarded as minor art. In this sense, the imaging representations embodied in the tapestries resorted to memories of an agropastoral life in rural Bahia and, above all, the experiences of a black-woman-tapestry maker who sewed her life based on her experiences in Vitória da Conquista, Salvador, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro.

Studying the works by Madalena exhibited at the Afro-Brazilian Museum have led us to see that the works coming from the subaltern layers have a creative potential and this is a form of knowledge that should have the same importance as any other. Analyzing Madalena's place of speech as a black-woman-tapestry maker is key to grasp her artistic making and how it may be categorized as popular art, since her creative process is closely linked to the elements directly related to being a black woman in Brazil.

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