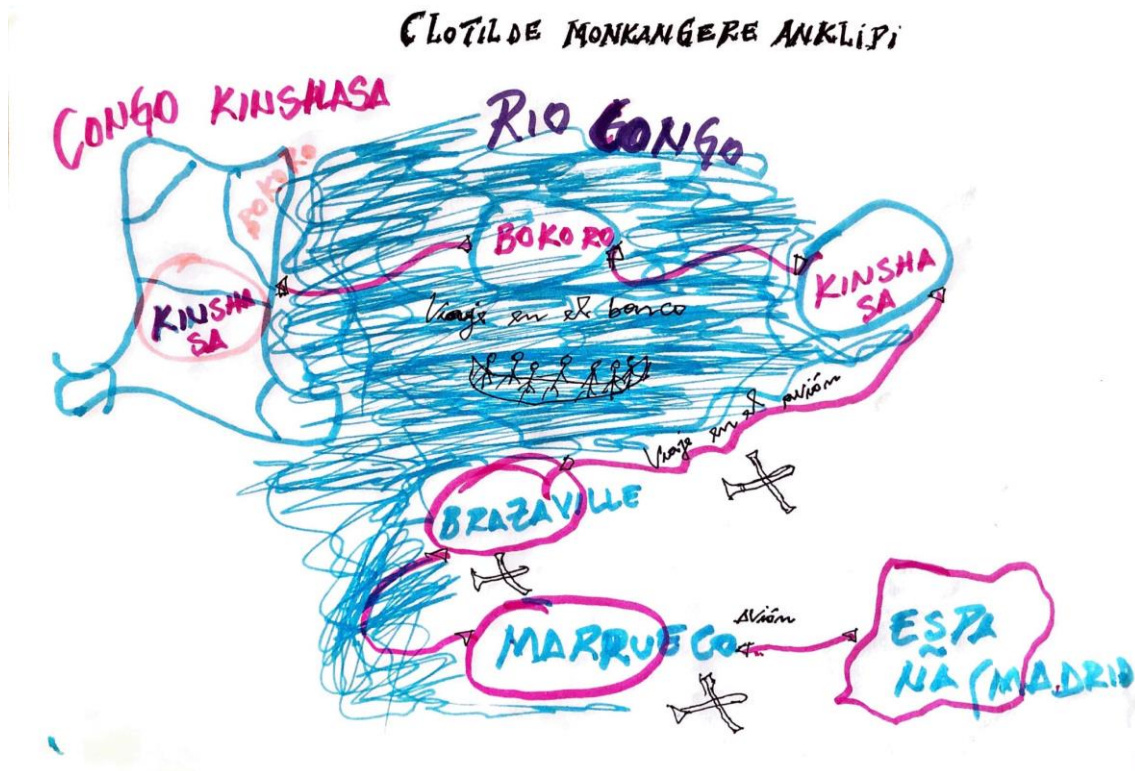


DIARY OF AN IMAGINATION LABORATORY

'The solitary bird has five conditions. The first, that it goes to the highest heights; the second, that it does not suffer company, even of its own kind; the third, that it sets its beak to the wind; the fourth, that it is of no particular colour; the fifth, that it sings softly.'

San Juan de la Cruz

*Fly around*

In my town, I had a friend, a great friend from my childhood. My family always sought to separate us. When I left, I was unable to say goodbye. We have exchanged messages, but we haven't been able to talk. I haven't been able to hear his voice. A.A

In 2021, Vox put up a poster at Puerta del Sol station in Madrid which said: 'An unaccompanied minor: 4,700 euros per month. Your grandmother: a state pension of 426 euros per month'. It was a clear message of distortion and hate.

The unaccompanied minors referred to are immigrant children, in particular those arriving from the countries of the Maghreb, especially Morocco and Algeria, although in truth unaccompanied minors also arrive from other African countries, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Reference to them is loaded with a now-commonplace inference of dehumanization and criminalization, despite being young people who leave their countries of origin to escape from poverty, violence, war, a lack of opportunities, persecution, institutional neglect, to live the 'European dream'. Almost all of them arrive via the southern border, following the same routes taken by adults, at risk of abuse,

trafficking, exploitation, and breaches of their rights during the many months that their journeys last.

Once they arrive in Spain, the authorities, which tend to assume that they are adults or otherwise submit them to the violent process of determining their age through medical tests, force them to remain at a police station until they have been identified and registered. They are then taken to a Migrant Detention Centre, and finally, once they have passed through the centre, two options are considered: either they are repatriated to their country of origin, or they remain in Spain in a highly-precarious irregular situation. Often we see violent and unlawful 'hot returns' in which they are summarily sent back without being identified first or having their individual circumstances assessed.

One of the most critical aspects affecting these immigrant adolescents and young people is the zone of invisibility or stigmatization in which their bodies and their future expectations lie. Impelled by violence to take decisions from adult-based perspectives, and often without speaking the language that would allow them to integrate into the community, in fractured, disadvantaged, or non-existent family environments, with their studies and their lives interrupted, with traumatic migration processes, with dreams that vanish as soon as they cross the first of innumerable borders, with a complex situation when it comes to entering the labour market, with insecure life horizons and jobs, with emotional instabilities.

In theory, the systems providing shelter ought to provide a safe refuge and essential support. However, the truth is more complicated. Despite the existence of programmes that have this purpose, many immigrant adolescents and young people find that there is a lack of resources and inadequate capacity. These failings lead to overcrowding and limited services, affecting their wellbeing and making it harder to adapt.

The aid environment must go beyond the mere provision of basic assistance. This may be essential to satisfy basic needs, but some aid environments can make the mistake of 'passive assistance', leading to dependence and perpetuating the stereotype of immigrants as passive recipients of aid.

Journey

In my town, in the midst of a revolution, the bandit rebels killed my mother, my father, my betrothed, my child. Every day I talk to my sister, who is nervous about the violence. I seek to calm her and I refuse to tell her about everything I'm going through here. I just give her strength. This situation makes me very nervous. P.B



In 2021, we put up a poster at the Mejía de Lequerica Refuge in Madrid inviting adolescents and young people from the Congo, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Liberia, Nigeria, and Senegal to take part in 'Imagination Laboratories', designed as part of the first stage of research for the project entitled 'The hypothalamus flight'. A research, action, and creation project through which we intended to explore the lives of immigrant adolescents and young people in an irregular situation in Spain, and to test sensitive tools of contemporary creation as a process for repairing their wounds, but also to build their desired futures.

The process stimulated creativity as a tool to encourage dialogue and to address the fractures in those bodies impelled by violence to take decisions from adult-based perspectives, with traumatic migration processes and dreams that vanish as soon as they cross the first of innumerable borders.

The hypothalamus flight documented the urgency of learning spaces for all (adolescents, young people, artists, specialists, activists, institutions, audiences, and communities) through a horizontal process that entailed the development of Imagination Laboratories for restorative and collective fictions with a methodology that sought to explore and share the hopes, thoughts, and feelings of

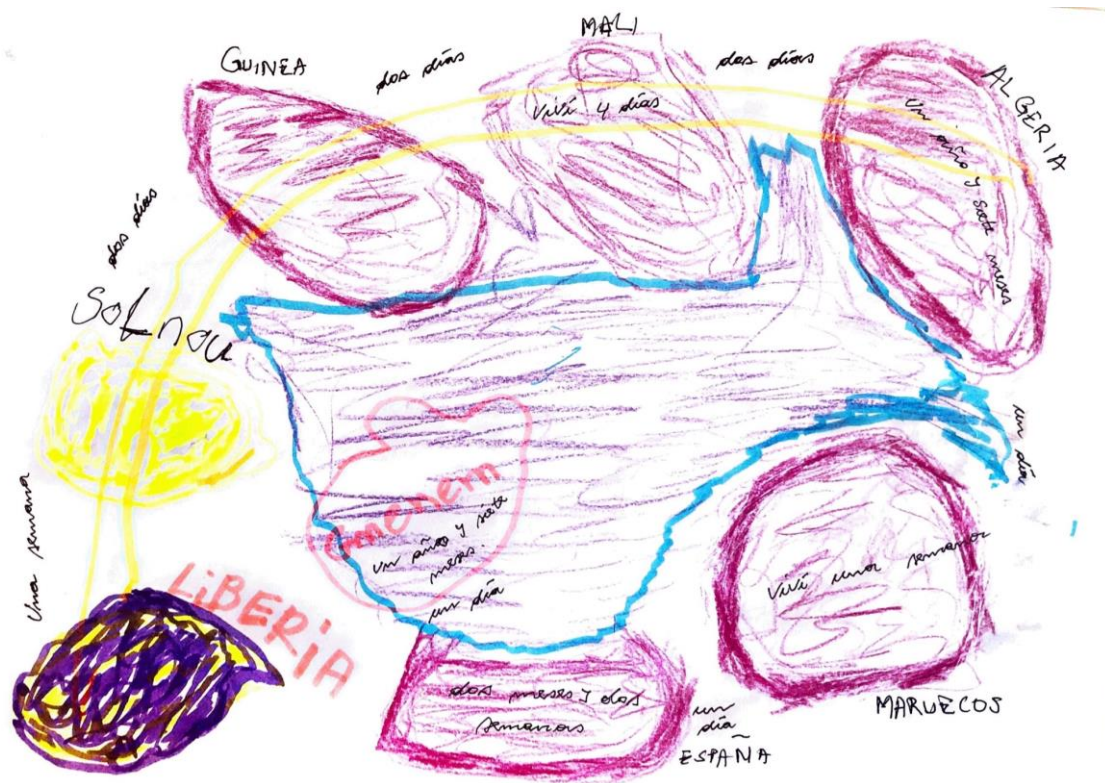
these adolescents and young people. The intention was to question how to deconstruct the stereotypes around migrant bodies and reconstruct and project their obsessions, affections, and family and social wounds. How to socialize and value the memory and the knowledge they brought from their countries of origin and their mother tongues. How to learn from them and alongside them.

We dream of creating a piece of documentary contemporary theatre that fuses the call of migrating birds with the voices of these adolescents and young people, to amplify and blend from the stage the conflicts, desires, wounds, pleasures, loves, and the link between the migration crisis and climate crisis. A piece constructed around improvisations based on their stories about life, with the focus on the body as the first land of exclusion and in listening exercises for their life spaces, in city mapping and in the construction of emotional cartographies that asked themselves how to get around the city or the neighbourhood on the basis of their sensual experiences.

After three months' work, the dynamics at the Centre changed and the boys were transferred 'elsewhere', preventing us from continuing with our journey together to get there. We started finding ourselves in other spaces and journeys (Parque Europa, El Retiro, My house, Madrid Río). Other desires started to appear along with other scenarios (Condeduque, CEPI centro Arganzuela, Hablarenarte, Casa Encendida, Espacio Afro).

Flying in flocks

Cameroon – the palace of the bamoun king – the god king – the two-headed serpent – the rain –
the writing – the machine for making cornflower



In 2023, *The hypothalamus flight* is a staged ceremony for those perished at sea. The piece activates a collective ritual through the installation of a stage altar where there is singing and life is evoked and celebrated. The myth of the Abayomis dolls (meaning 'precious find') mingles with the life experiences of immigrants from the global south.

Inspired by funeral rites, the Afro-Cuban Ocha-Ifá ritual, the piece opens with a dinner for all of the participants. From this communal meal, *The hypothalamus flight* is transformed into a stage altar of voices from the present and the past. Stitched from the hairs of the bodies that have traversed the creative process for this piece, the Abayomis dolls invite the audience to a collective chant, a chant of pleasure and protest.

The subversive words of public oratory are crossed with the memories and ancestral knowledge of the migrant bodies. The hypothalamus flight puts artists, activists, immigrants, iyalochoas, babalochas, and musicians on stage. At the beat of the batá drums, the participants are called to a collective expression of grief, and of poetic, political, and on-stage restoration.

When Bay, a young Senegalese man, was crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a wooden boat, an Abayomi emerged from the depths of the sea and landed at his feet. The Abayomis were dolls made by slave women to calm the cries and pain of their children. They tore their clothes and made them with six knots, and with each knot a prayer, a wish, and a blessing, as a symbol of love, protection, joy, and resistance.

What have you eaten today?
How is your family?
How did you get here?
Do you like the food?
What things do you like about your life?
What things do you not like about your life?
For you, is money obligatory or necessary?
Imagine you have a lot of money. Do you think you have an earthly paradise in your hands?
What would you change at this hostel if you were in charge?
Why did you choose Madrid?
What do you like most about the city?
What is your favourite colour?
How long have you been in the city?
What kind of food do you like?
Why did you leave your country?
How do you imagine your life in two years' time?
What advice would you give your friends who are thinking about emigrating and coming here?
What do you not like about this centre?
How is your family?
What do you think about polygamy?
Could you accept it? Why?
How did you spend the weekend?
Did you leave a betrothed in your country?



* All photographs are drawings made at the imagination laboratory. Credit: Osikán – creation nursery

José Ramón Hernández (Palma Soriano, 1988)

Afro-Cuban non-disciplinary artist. He lives and works in Madrid and Havana. His output varies across artistic direction, drama, choreography, curating live arts, installation art, performance, teaching, mediation, and cultural management. He is the founder and artistic director of Osikán – creation nursery. His creative research focusses on rituals of African origin, performativities, peripheral bodies, materials, spiritualities, memories, migrations, cartographies, and desires. He tests the limits between fiction and reality, works with non-fictional documents and the tools of the senses in order to affect and intervene in social processes and communities. He has won major prizes and recognition, including the 2016 Villanueva Criticism Prize awarded by the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) and the International Association of Theatre Critics (ACT) for his work BaquestriBois. His works have been exhibited in Cuba, Mexico, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Belgium, the United States, Brazil, and Spain. He is a spiritualist, babalocha, and palero.

Osikán is a creation, research, imagination, and action nursery where artists, specialists, activists, and communities live side by side. A nursery of gatherings and participation that imagines strategies of the senses to encourage critical dialogues, heal social wounds within our contexts of life and of work today. We activate creation with the desire to put our hands on the ground. The germination of collective learning, curatorship projects, alliances, critical thinking, walks, and deliriums. The most visible origin and trajectory of Osikán is found in Cuba, in a context of artists that work in critical manner at the margins and on the fringes of state cultural institutions. Currently in Madrid, Havana, and Montreal, Osikán creation nursery is expanding into a patchwork of alliances with the Cuban, Afro-Caribbean, and Latin-American diasporas around the world, in connection with other alternative networks and international circuits.