

Arts, Linguistics, Literature and Language Research Journal

THE BODIES OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN LITERATURE

Walquíria Almeida Andrade

Graduated in Literature – Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA). Master's student in Literature – POSLET - Universidade Federal do Sul e Sudeste do Pará (UNIFESSPA). Teacher at the municipal and state public schools of Pará (SEMED/ SEDUC)

All content in this magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License. Attribution-Non-Commercial-Non-Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).



Abstract: This article aims to point out some considerations about the place that bodies of cultural difference, (women, black people, children, indigenous people, migrant quilombolas, immigrants, refugees and LGBTQIA+), occupy in the official literary discourse of Latin America, proposing from the thoughts post-modern, post-colonial and decolonial, the decolonization of knowledge, hegemonies, and above all of being itself. Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Gayatri C. Spivak, Bell Hooks, Grada Kilomba, Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo appear within this discussion, as well as other Latin American theorists and those of different nationalities, to contribute to the understanding that The bodies of cultural difference have never had a voice, time or place in Latin American literature, especially black women. However, these minority groups are endowed with knowledge that, once expressed, through their songs, narratives, writings, memories, images, cults, beliefs, faces, bodies and many other possibilities, problematize official history. And this implies unveiling discourses of absolute truths, of power, and breaking with hegemonies (society, church, family) that have always dictated rules, orders, places and positions.

Keywords: Literature. Resistance. Decolonization

INTRODUCTION

Our history of colonization is permeated with absolute truths, fixed concepts and linear epistemes. However, there is an understanding of prioritizing certain types of discourse to the detriment of others.

Namely, in general, the prioritized literary discourses are those of white, straight men who make up elite culture, valued as a classic standard and model for the general formation of subjects, societies and all social classes, the canonical ones. This process of cultural

formation associated with “belles lettres” has served to create processes of cultural hierarchy that have historically belittled and inferiorized voices and speeches of a more popular nature.

Contrary to these projects of elitization of culture and exclusion of bodies of cultural difference, we intend to point out some considerations about the place that women, black people, children, indigenous people, migrant quilombolas, immigrants, refugees, homosexuals and LGBTQIA+ occupy in the official literary discourse, proposing from post-modern, post-colonial and decolonial thoughts, the decolonization of being.

Without the intention of exhaustion, even due to the brevity of the research and the magnitude of the question, we seek to share notes that lead us to reflect on the contributions of literary criticism to the rupture of hegemonies, prejudices and silencing.

Within this dynamic, the distinction will appear between the concepts of modernity and post-modernity, coloniality and post-coloniality and decoloniality, as well as cultural identity and cultural difference, also highlighting concepts of culture, hybridity and memory, understanding both within the field of Studies Cultural to question what was built in a relationship of power, and deconstruct it through insubordination and resistance.

Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Gayatri C. Spivak, Bell Hooks and Grada Kilomba appear within this discussion, as well as other Latin American theorists and those of different nationalities, to contribute to the understanding that the bodies of cultural difference never had a voice, time and place in Latin American literature, especially the black woman, who through Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo and so many other black women and writers, built a literature of denunciation, discomfort and mainly of ruptures and disobedience.

DIFFERENCES AND DIFFERENT CULTURES

It starts with thinking about culture as an element of proof of human existence and language phenomena as constitutive elements of identity processes that manifest themselves in the individual's interaction with the environment. It can be said that it is in culture and through culture that individuals realize themselves and constitute themselves in a hybridized way, what Bhabha (1998) calls the constituent element of language and, therefore, of representation.

In this sense, languages have the function of revealing the processes of cultural identification that appear within a hybridized field, where "discourses and systems of representations construct places from which individuals can position themselves and from the which can speak" (HALL, 2000, p 17), thus defining symbolic systems of representation and forms of exclusion as elements of marking difference.

The discourses and systems of representation were based on power structures imposed by colonialism, Eurocentrism, which have always dictated speech and listening within Latin American literature. Which means to say that any and all speeches produced outside this dictate were and are placed in a lesser place, of minority production, therefore without literal value.

The producing minorities are, in fact, bodies of cultural difference that have always been outside of official history, appearing only in situations of subalternity of their forces and/or their bodies.

The bodies of cultural difference are the bodies of minorities subjugated by history. These are bodies that live on the margins, silenced and rejected. They are women, black people, children, indigenous people, migrant quilombolas, immigrants, refugees, homosexuals and LBTQIA+. Bodies of cultural

difference are those that differ from the standards established by patriarchal society. They are different in skin color, physiognomic characteristics, biotypes, social, cultural, economic, religious, geographic classes, and "it is what the other is" (HALL, 2000, p. 74). It is about the other, and it is these differences that characterize the cultural identities of each person.

As Stuart Hall (2000) says, difference, like identity, simply exists, and both are inextricably linked. In other words, they are in a relationship of great dependence, and the affirmative way in which we express identity tends to hide this relationship.

Still according to Hall (2000), identity is relational, and the difference is established by a symbolic marking in relation to other identities marked as elements of representation, which in many cases are imbued with actions of stigma, for example, racism, which "is an attempt to stigmatize difference with the purpose of justifying unfair advantages or abuses of power, whether of an economic, political, cultural or psychological nature" (KILOMBA, 2018, p. 88). This difference is a cultural process that exists in the presentification of power. It is an element to raise questions about the power of representation and the meanings that involve power relations to define who is or is not socially included.

LITERATURE AND OTHER THOUGHTS

Literature, thought of as a social expression, is the result of a language that seeks to express the way of being in society and of turning towards it. Whether to criticize it, affirm it or overcome it.

It is also worth thinking that literature needs to be able to deconstruct historical and dialectically established hegemonies, providing spaces so that oppressed,

subalternized, marginalized subjects can provide themselves with autonomy and freedom, taking upon themselves the task of creating spaces through which subjects can speak whenever they wish, and be heard (SPIVAK, 2010), thus leaving this status of subalternity.

Within this questioning thinking, post-colonial thinking appeared between the 1950s and 1960s, which, according to Bhabha (1998), proposes to review literary productions based on the recognition of cultural, social, historical, economic and political differences.

The postcolonial perspective consists of the reinterpretation and rewriting of the forms and effects of an “older” colonial consciousness based on the subsequent experience of cultural displacement that marks the most recent, post-war histories of the Western metropolis (BHABHA, 1998, p 243).

The proposal is to look at the domination and subordination of the subject’s subjectivity, as a problem of the colonization process of Latin America, seeing the distinctions and differences in ethnocentric discourses, and intervening in the idea of a linear and homogeneous literature, thus recognizing the cultural difference of minorities silenced by official history, legacy of colonialism.

Post-modernity, on the other hand, is a broad ideological concept, based on Western industrial and economic infrastructure, and on globalization since the 1960s, describing profound repercussions on popular expression, mass communication, cultural manifestations in general, sending traces ranging from an emphasis on heterogeneity, difference, fragmentation, indeterminacy, to fruitful distrust in relation to universal and totalizing discourses (ZOLIN, 2009).

This thought opposes the concept of modernity that is seen not through the historical period, but from “a narrative constructed by and for specific subjects: men,

white, heterosexual, with high purchasing power and who think from a hegemonic and privileged epistemological locus” (SILVA & MEDEIROS, 2018, p. 94). In other words, in modernity, these places of discourse that evoke theories, methods, techniques and knowledge are thought of by subjects who disregard others, their knowledge and cultures, their races and genders.

Postmodernity provokes reflection on the paradox of progress generated by the dichotomies of center and margin, public and private, poor and rich, and development and underdevelopment, which seeks to build spaces, openings for other voices, other statements, other identities (BHABHA, 1998), which can be found in literature as an escape from the stability of the project created by those who believe they are holders of knowledge, imposed by a colonized and elitist culture.

The Decolonial perspective, in turn, goes beyond a questioning and reflective look at the issue of coloniality and dominance of literature in Latin America.

It is a notion developed, above all, by Latin American thinkers (but also by thinkers from other countries in the southern cone) who focus on critically and deeply analyzing how European coloniality imposed itself on power structures in Latin America, on ways of knowing, being and thinking of the people of Latin American countries” unveiling the production of knowledge of a mainly Eurocentric and North American episteme. Decoloniality is therefore configured as a power to reflect and modify fixed structures with regard to the teaching of literature, acting, therefore, from the critical perspective of education” (MACHADO & SOARES, 2021, p. 03).

This is a concept that starts from a critical perspective and involves a change in stance, both ethical and political, allowing questions in the form of teaching conducted by a Eurocentric education.

In teaching, from a decolonial perspective, thinking is detached from the logic of the existence of the uniqueness of the world, opening space for a plurality of voices, paths and possibilities, in an understanding of the search for the right to difference, an opening for an other-thought (MIGNOLO, 2008).

Such thinking, which questions epistemes and problematizes the edges, came from a life effort. As the black American teacher, activist and writer says (BELL HOOKS, 2013):

I came to the theory because I was suffering, the pain inside me was so intense that I couldn't continue living. I came to the theory desperate, wanting to understand, wanting to understand what was happening around me. Most of all, I came to the theory because I wanted to make the pain go away. I saw, in the theory, a place for healing (HOOKS, 2013, p. 59).

The search is for a theory that endorses the break with stereotypes and the prevalence of a canonical, hierarchical and oppressive teaching, which silences “those whose voice cannot be heard” (SPIVAK, 2010, p. 12). That ignores differences, and rejects a more popular type of literature, where the voices are peripheral to subaltern and marginalized people who do not belong to the great hegemonic centers of power.

Furthermore, teaching, especially literature, must be constructed through a detailed look at the strategies of violence, subordination and dehumanization that produce the “other”, taking into consideration, that this other is endowed with revolutionary potentialities that are consumed throughout life, allowing them transformations and disobedience. This way, he begins to bring a discourse that goes against the official discourse from a denouncing and accusing perspective of false truths.

There is an apprehensive fear that if the colonized speaks, the colonizer will have to listen and would be forced into an uncomfortable confrontation with the

truths of the ‘Other’. Truths that supposedly must not be said, heard and that must be kept “silent as secrets”. I really like this expression, “kept silent as secrets”, because it announces the moment when someone is about to reveal something that they are presumed not allowed to say (which is presumed to be a secret). Secrets like slavery. Secrets like colonialism. Secrets such as racism (KILOMBA, 2018, p. 90).

Such truths are veiled by masks, which once removed, can cause discomfort and even a feeling of repression, as Freudian psychoanalysis explains, “repression consists of pushing something away and keeping it at a distance from the conscious mind”. (FREUD 1915/1968, p.17). Keeping secrets of racism, prejudice and exploitation away is suffocating memories, stories, lives.

The issue is that by the very nature of the colonization process, truths are endorsed by discourses of domination that legitimize them, and beyond that, they are just memories of excluded people, and these memories consist of the storage of information that is continually modified based on the individual and collective experiences of each different body, consisting not only of remembered fragments, but most of the time, of those large intervals that are forgotten (OLIVEIRA, 1999).

When spoken about, memory is idealized as an individual process, but contrary to popular belief, it is recorded when it relates to the collective.

Experiences from the past and present come together in an interactional space in the social field, and it is at this moment that memory is re-elaborated in a conflicting field of two times. And this conflicting relationship, according to Zumthor (1997), has characteristics of selectivity, which he attributes to each performer as having their own repertoire.

The memories of the excluded, within Latin

American literature, are voices of affirmation, thinking of literature as a representation of possibilities, of spaces of languages that are always the other person who comes to say. Piglia (2001) believes in creating a space for the voice of the other, for another voice that says what perhaps could not be said otherwise, what Lapouge (1996) calls in-between voices, where spaces are articulated and diverse, unique, near and far cultures, to open spaces, even if strange and dislocated, to make native, repressed voices heard, voices of cultural differences.

Questioning epistemes involves questioning knowledge and absolute truths, as these “define not only how, but also who produces true knowledge and who we believe in” (KILOMBA, 2018, p. 91). Beyond that, everything is unscientific, specific, subjective, personal, emotional and partial, produced only by those who have opinions and experiences, confronting facts and knowledge recorded by official and hierarchical discourse. They are just inventions of themselves, reports, memories.

This new stance is what Fanon (2008) calls violence. On one side is the annihilation of bodies, ideas, culture and dominance of space by the colonizer, and on the other, the violence of the colonized in their desire to recover their dignity, their sense of self. It's your story of anti-colonial struggle.

The participation of black women in literature is proof of this breaking of paradigms and silences, which comes to claim the place of black women, bodies of cultural difference, within literature as a producer of knowledge and denouncer of prejudices, stigmas, racism, violence that both history and society prefer to veil. It is in this uncomfortable place that Carolina Maria de Jesus shows her place of speech, and Conceição Evaristo brings the writings of the black woman.

Carolina Maria de Jesus in *Eviction Room:*

diary of a favela resident (2007) describes her daily life in the Canindé favela, in São Paulo, as a garbage collector who finds in reading a refuge from her life of poverty. “As I write I keep thinking that I live in a castle the color of gold that shines in the sunlight. [...] It is necessary to create this fantasy environment, to forget that I am in the favela.” (JESUS, 2007, p. 60-61).

His writings, in simple language, but rich in details, assume the position of literary events as they lose their immediate character and manifest themselves through language, contradicting the attribution given by elitist and sexist criticism, of being just an informative text about the hunger in Brazil.

The hunger described by the author is much more than mere information, it represents the reality experienced by someone who knows hunger in depth to the point of giving it color. With this, her writing gains meaning because hunger is a sensation experienced by the same social groups (BAKTHIN, 2003), thus occupying a place of representation (HALL, 2016).

Conceição Evaristo's writings as “*Unsubmissive Tears of Women*” (2011) narrate stories of women who managed to create alternatives to overcome their pain, their suffering, revealing violence, racism, prejudice, and denouncing the suffering of black women who fought and are fighting to free themselves from patriarchy, be heard and respected.

Conceição Evaristo establishes a discourse that goes against the official discourse, as it is in the “counter-discourse, contesting the current discourse, that the writer positions herself, envisioning, in this sense, a possibility of rescuing what was relegated to the deviations of History” (DUARTE et al., 2016, p. 135). Just as her poem “*Vozes-mulheres*” reveals, the past, the present and the future appear as the time that witnesses and accompanies the process

of liberation of the female voice, leaving the silence, the whisper, the echo, to then be able to scream and be free. “[...] Yesterday - today - now. In my daughter’s voice the echo of life-freedom will be heard” (EVARISTO, 2008, p. 32-33).

The fact is that part of literary criticism ignores the existence of female-authored literature, written by women and black women. A denouncing piece of writing, which reveals the veiled slavery of the 21st century, as stated by Carolina Maria de Jesus when she speaks ironically about hunger: “It was a rerun of the show. [...] And so on May 13, 1958, I fought against current slavery – hunger!” (JESUS, 2007, p. 32), and because they are still stuck in a dominant and elitist cultural model.

Writers Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo represent, through their writings, the power and range of voices of bodies of cultural difference, breaking barriers and breaking paradigms as a sign of resistance and decolonization.

The idea of decolonization needs to reach its full scope: from knowledge, it is from being. Decolonizing knowledge means breaking with knowledge fixed by colonization. And when it comes to being, it is the break with oneself. It is a break with everything that history has planted, and (un)consciously cultivated and disseminated. They are collective awakenings and for the collective. It is to assume positions as new subjects for new stories, stripping

away prejudices and operating within systems of meaning that make identities silenced by colonization emerge.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In view of those willing, there is an understanding here of the overvaluation of canonical literature, while a devaluation of the more popular literature, of the different.

The bodies of cultural difference have never had a voice, time or place in Latin American literature, especially black women. However, these minority groups are endowed with knowledge that, once exposed, problematizes official history. And this implies unveiling discourses propagated and taken as absolute truths. It means breaking hegemonies (society, church, family) that have always dictated rules, orders, places and positions.

The desire is for everyone to be seen, accepted and respected exactly for their differences. That the different be seen from a new perspective, decolonized, committed to breaking with fixed ideas, absolute truths, stigmas, prejudices, exclusions and silencing.

May the gaze also turn to the edges, to minority groups, women, black people, children, indigenous people, migrant quilombolas, immigrants, refugees, homosexuals and LGBTQIA+, who through literature break silences, reveal history and assert themselves as protagonists.

REFERENCES

- BAKHTIN, M. **Os gêneros do discurso**. In: BAKHTIN, M. Estética da criação verbal. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003. p.261-306.
- BHABHA, Homi K. **O local da Cultura**. Trad. Myriam Ávila, Eliana Loureiro de Lima Reis, Gláucia Renate Gonçalves. Belo Horizonte: Ed. UFMG, 1998.
- DUARTE, C. L. CÔRTEZ, C. ROSÁRIO, M. do. PEREIRA, A. (organizadoras) **Escrevivências: identidade, gênero e violência na obra de Conceição Evaristo**. /. -- 2. ed. -- Belo Horizonte: Idea, 2018.
- EVARISTO, Conceição. **Vozes-mulheres**. In: Poemas de recordação e outros movimentos. Belo Horizonte: Nadyala, 2008, p. 10 – 11.
- _____. **Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres**. Belo Horizonte: Nandyala, 2011.
- FANON. Frantz. **Pele negra, máscaras brancas**. Tradução de Renato da Silveira. - Salvador: EDUFBA, 2008.
- FREUD S. (1968). **Le refoulement**. In S. Freud, *Métopsiologie* (J. Laplanche et J. B. Pontalis, trad., pp.45-63). Paris: Gallimard. (Trabalho original publicado em 1915). Disponível em: http://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1517-24302012000200007. Acesso em 20 de jul. de 2023.
- HALL, Stuart / Kathryn Woodward. **Identidade e diferença: a perspectiva dos estudos culturais**. Trad. / Org. Tadeu Tomaz da Silva. – Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2000.
- HALL, Stuart. **Cultura e Representação**/Stuart Hall. Organização e Revisão Técnica Artur Iraussu. Tradução: Daniel Miranda e Willian Oliveira. Rio de Janeiro, Ed. PUC-RIO, Apicury.2016.
- HOOKS, Bell. **Ensinando a transgredir: a educação como prática da liberdade**. Trad: Marcelo Brandão Cipola. S. Paulo. Ed. WMF Martins Fontes, 2013.
- JESUS, Carolina Maria de. **Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada**. 9. ed. São Paulo: Ática, 2007.
- KILOMBA, Grada. **Descolonizando o conhecimento: uma palestra-performance de Grada Kilomba**. Trad: Jessica Oliveira. 2018. Disponível em: <https://joacamillopenna.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/kilomba-grada-ensinando-a-transgredir.pdf>. Acesso em 20 de jul. de 2023.
- LAPOUGE, Gilles. **Os arquivos vazios da humanidade**. São Paulo: O Estado de São Paulo. 1996.
- MACHADO, Rodrigo Corrêa Martins. SOARES, Ivanete Bernardino. Por um ensino decolonial de literatura. **Rev. Bras. Linguíst. Apl.**, v. 21, n. 3, p. 981-1005, 2021. Disponível em: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1984-6398202116960>.
- MIGNOLO, Walter. Desobediência epistêmica: a opção decolonial e o significado de identidade em política. **Revista Cadernos de Letras da UFF**: Dossiê Literatura, língua e identidade, Rio de Janeiro, n. 34, 2008.
- OLIVEIRA, Luis Cláudio Vieira. **A pesquisa em literatura e os processos de construção da memória**. Boletim do Centro de Estudos Portugueses, vol. 18. Belo Horizonte: Fale/UFMG, 1998.
- PIGLIA, Ricardo. **Una propuesta para elnuevo milênio**. In: Margens / Márgenes, n. 2, 2001, p. 1-3.
- SILVA R. G. da.; MEDEIROS, P. H. A. de. A crítica literária comparada e os estudos pós-coloniais: um estudo sobre os corpos da diferença cultural. **Revista Humanidades e Inovação** v.6, n. 4 – 2019. Disponível em: <https://revista.unitins.br/index.php/humanidadesinovacao/article/view/1013>. Acesso em: 26 de jun. de 2022.
- SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. **Pode o subalterno falar?** Trad.: Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, Marcos Pereira Feitosa e André Pereira Feitosa. Belo Horizonte: Editora da UFMG, 2010.
- ZOLIN, O. L. **A literatura de autoria feminina brasileira no contexto da pós-modernidade**. Ipotesi. Juiz de Fora, v. 13, n. 2, p. 105 - 116, jul./dez. 2009.
- ZUMTHOR, Paul. **Introdução à Poesia oral**. Trad. Jeruza Pires Ferreira / Maria Lúcia Diniz Pochat / Maria Inês de Almeida. São Paulo: Hicitec, 1997.