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THE WOMAN WRITER IN THE WORK OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE¹

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Abstract: Due to the social and political relevance of Feminism and Literature and the representativeness and reach of the voice of Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, we chose to analyze her literary and essayistic work. The corpus consists of two short stories from the collection entitled *In Your Neck* (2017a) and the following essays: *Let's all be feminists* (2015), *To raise feminist children: a manifesto* (2017b), *The danger of a single story* (2019). The aim was to analyze the images of women and women writers that emerge from Adichie's texts. The main theoretical references, in addition to Adichie herself, were Virginia Woolf (2019) and Ursula K. Le Guin (1989a; 1989b; 2012; 2019). In analyzing Adichie's short stories and essays, it was found that, through her specific and nomadic autofictional practice, Adichie elaborated a collective image of women as subjects who give themselves the right to speak.

Keywords: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Woman writer. Feminism.

INTRODUCTION

We will be compatriots and contemporaries of all those who wanted justice and beauty, wherever they were born and wherever they lived, regardless of the borders of the map or time (Galeano, 2013).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the emergence of new social forces triggered a collective struggle for the recognition of women as subjects of rights. Feminism played a crucial role in destabilizing crystallized images of women in culture, art and, consequently, in people's imaginations.

The change in mentality is gradual, processed through the consolidation of individual and collective historical awareness. In contemporary times, despite all of women's achievements, the idea that women should be submissive to men still finds space and acceptance.

Literary and supposedly "scientific" images of women, especially those constructed before the 20th century, have had and continue to have a major impact on how femininity is understood by people. The concept of masculinity has been contrasted with that of femininity in an unequal way, in other words, without considering that both have the same weight and value.

A fundamental point to explore is the fact that women have been kept illiterate for centuries, which has prevented them from developing an intellectual life and participating actively in society. Even more seriously, it prevented them from recognizing their own subjectivity in a positive way, that is, apart from the male imaginary about them.

Researchers Cecil Jeanine Albert Zinani and Natália Borges Polesso (2010) point out that the androcentric discourse had a significant impact on women writers, since the supposed intellectual inferiority of women was constantly reinforced. Progressively seeking to "de-universalize the male point of view", feminist criticism aims to "enrich the literary process" (Zinani; Polesso, 2010, p. 101).

It is from this theoretical and methodological framework that the work of Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie will be analyzed. The capillarity of her influence and the fact that she makes social and political criticisms in her writings and speeches legitimize her as a spokesperson for women, black women, black African women and women writers in general.

From the work of the Nigerian author, two short stories were selected from the collection entitled **On Your Neck** (2017a) and the books **Let's all be feminists** (2015), **To raise feminist children: a manifesto** (2017b), **The danger of a single story** (2019). The aim of this article is to analyze the images of women and women writers that emerge from Adichie's texts, i.e. how they are represented.

FEMINISM AND LITERATURE

What you need as a writer is exactly what Virginia Woolf said: enough to live on and a roof over your head. [...] What you live on certainly comes from a formal job, not from writing [...]. If you have work to do, you need to trust yourself to do it.

(Ursula K. Le Guin, "The wave in the mind")²

Who has the right to speak? This question may seem unanswerable *a priori*, but if we look at it from a social and historical perspective, we can at least tell who has been repeatedly denied the right to speak.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her work **Can the subaltern speak?** (2010), questions hegemonic discourses from a post-colonialist and feminist perspective, thus assuming intellectual activity as a form of struggle and resistance. And the question of subalternity is central to her critical view of the human journey.

Spivak is interested in showing that what is accepted as truth is the result of a socio-cultural construction. In this way, she aims to devitalize crystallized conceptions that are part of a project to control subjectivities. Systems of domination can be rendered meaningless as their false assumptions are undermined from within (Selden; Widdowson; Brocker, 2005). The subaltern, in the Spivakian view, is the one whose voice is not recognized or heard.

The author herself recognizes that she is trapped in a paradox, since speaking in the place of the subaltern, i.e. making them an object of knowledge, implies reproducing the structures of power and oppression that keep them silent. The contradiction is that the discourse of resistance is amalgamated with the hegemonic discourse. The Other is constituted so that it can be spoken about and through.

2. OUR TRANSLATION

From the original: "What you need as a writer is exactly what Virginia Woolf said: enough to live on and a room of your own. [...] What you live on probably has to come from daily work, not writing [...]. If you have work to do, you have to trust yourself to do it." (Ursula K. Le Guin, "The wave in the mind")

3. It's important to say that the intention in this article is to "speak with", effectively establishing a dialog with the authors cited, especially Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Adichie, however, is on the fringes of this paradox in that she has experienced situations similar to those faced by her characters, as will be discussed in the following sections. Another point that distinguishes the two, in this respect, is that literary discourse humanizes the process of giving voice to the other, while academic discourse, due to the hermetic nature of scientific language, distances itself from those it attempts to address.

"Speaking for" and "representing" do not have a relationship as a *sine qua non* premise: dialog with the Other - who is being spoken about or represented - is precarious, not to say non-existent, given the one-sidedness of academic writing.³ What's more, you can "speak for", but this speech may not reach the person who motivated it, if it is a "subaltern subject". Once again, it should be pointed out that this mainly concerns academic discourse, given that some of Adich's essayistic writings are accessible because they originated orally. The works **Let's all be feminists** (2015) and **The danger of a single history** (2019) were the result of lectures given by the Nigerian author.

In addition, it is crucial to point out that autofiction represents a "break" when it comes to silencing the speech of subalternized subjects, because this mechanism of literary creation allows us to affirm that, yes, the subaltern can speak for himself; in fact, the term subaltern is a product of the discourses of domination and subjection of the Other, so overcoming it is important.

Therefore, "creating spaces through which the subaltern subject can speak" remains essential, as does "working 'against' subalternity" (Spivak, 2010, p. 14), but it is also necessary for the intellectual to recognize that the "subalterns" can articulate themselves:

some lifting and supporting and shoring up others, thus collectively winning the attention and ears of the world. Similar to the experience narrated by Adichie in *The Danger of a Single Story* (2019), when the author names several African authors who enabled her to see herself in literature, as a reader, character or writer.

The difficulty many people have in seeing themselves represented in cultural products, in general, and in literature, in particular, has to do with what Ursula K. Le Guin (2012) discusses regarding the “unquestionable assumptions” that exist in fiction, namely: everyone is male; everyone is white; everyone is straight; everyone is Christian; everyone is young. The fictional character who escapes these frameworks will be the “Other”, before whom the supposedly unified subject asserts itself as a parameter of normality.

Le Guin (2012) says that when she was born there were only men, a generic “he”. She mentions a phrase, illustrative of many others, which refers to those who write as male - see below for the possessive pronoun in the masculine - thus implying the exclusion of the writer: “A writer knows which side *his* bread is buttered on” (Le Guin, 2012, p. 11, *emphasis added*). Despite the simplicity of the example, it works perfectly to support her thesis that women have been forced, in different areas, including linguistics, to be an “imitation of a man”, a *pretend-a-him* (Le Guin, 2012).

The American theorist also discusses the role of the audience in this context. If there is to be a text there must be a reader, Le Guin crosses this data by arguing that the specific demands of readers influence, to some extent, what people dedicated to writing want to write. Thus, “stories are extracted from fiction

4. OUR TRANSLATION

From the original: “There is no more subversive act than the act of writing from a woman’s experience of life using a woman’s judgment. Woolf knew that and said it in 1930. Most of us forgot it and had to rediscover it all over again in the sixties. But for a whole generation now, women have been writing, publishing, and reading one another, in artistic and scholarly and feminist fellowship. If we go on doing that, by the year 2000 we will - for the first time ever - have kept the perceptions, ideas, and judgments of women alive in consciousness as an active, creative force in society for more than one generation.” (Le Guin, 1989a, p.178)

by the spiritual, intellectual and moral needs of the writer’s people. But this all occurs on a somewhat unconscious level” (Le Guin, 2012, p. 192). Therefore, it makes sense to say that if texts are produced that rewrite history and star subjects who have been silenced and whose possibilities of existence have been mutilated with impunity over time, it is because there is a need for such texts to exist, because there are people waiting to read them.

Woolf discusses how the difficulties imposed on women to achieve financial and intellectual autonomy are the reason for the lack of female literary production throughout history. This situation only began to change effectively in the 20th century. Adichie is one of the writers who points to the emergence of this new *zeitgeist*. With her work published in several countries, the Nigerian author embodies progress in terms of the place occupied by women in the social, cultural, academic and literary worlds. Adichie materializes the predictions of Le Guin and, consequently, Woolf:

There is no more subversive act than the act of writing from a woman’s life experience using a woman’s judgment. Woolf knew this and spoke about it in 1930. Most of us forgot about it and had to rediscover it all over again in the 1960s. But for a whole generation now, women have been writing, publishing and reading each other’s works, in artistic, academic and feminist communion. If we keep doing this, by the year 2000 we will - for the first time - have kept women’s perceptions, ideas and opinions alive in our consciousness as an active and creative force in society for more than a generation. (Le Guin, 1989a, p. 178) ⁴

However, the challenge of financial support remains in a reality that is still markedly macho, a point made clear in the short story “Jumping Monkey Hill” (2017a). Woolf admonishes (2019): a woman who really wants to dedicate herself to writing needs to have money and a roof over her head. Why? So that she can fish for ideas through thought and so that she can enjoy them fully, independently, without needing anyone’s permission. Thus, dedicated not only to others, but to herself, her thoughts can fold in on themselves, contemplating the birth and maturation of ideas without interruption. The author creates the following image: thought is thrown into the current, oscillating, sinking until an idea takes the bait and gains solidity; however, in the midst of mental elaboration, someone interrupts. And this, the author points out, frustrates what, even without being of such remarkable value, would correspond to one of the steps of an endless ladder, built arduously by several generations of women writers.

Ursula K. Le Guin (1988) argues that, at the end of the day, all you need to write fiction is a pencil and paper. According to her, this is enough as long as the writer knows that she is responsible for that pencil and for what she is going to write, in other words, that she is free: “Not totally free. Never totally free. Perhaps very partially. Perhaps only in this act [...] But in this, responsible; in this, autonomous; in this, free” (Le Guin, 1988, p.236).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in the short stories selected for analysis, brings to light the extent to which representations left over from previous centuries still prevail in academic and literary circles. She does so from the female perspective and judgment: revealing

5. OUR TRANSLATION

From the original text: *Where does a woman write, what does she look like writing, what is my image, your image, of a woman writing?* (Ursula K. Le Guin, “*The fisherwoman’s daughter*”)

6. We have chosen to talk about a decolonial perspective, rather than a postcolonial one, since the latter assumes that colonization is a historical event that has been overcome, while the former recognizes that a continuous struggle is necessary, i.e. it is not just a question of revising the past, but of being aware of the forms of colonialism in the present, which takes place in the midst of globalization and the impact of new communication and information technologies on peoples. (Reis; Andrade, 2018)

about the female soul “[...] its depths and shallows, its vanities and generousities”, saying “[...] what its relationship is to the world [...]” (Woolf, 2019, p. 86).

In view of the glimpse we have of Adichie through her female characters who exercise this profession academically or literarily, it is worth sharing the category established by Vicent Collona: specular autofiction. The theorist explains it using the metaphor of a mirror: it is a reflection of the author in the work. The author is not literally represented in the work, Collona explains: “it may only be a silhouette; the important thing is that he comes to place himself in the corner of his work, which then reflects his presence, as a mirror would” (Collona *apud* Martins, 2014, p. 27-28). In the following section, it will be possible to ascertain this initial impression of “indirect mirroring” by analyzing the texts of Addis Ababa.

THE WOMAN WRITER AND THE WRITING OF THE SELF

Where does a woman write, what does she look like while doing it, what is my image, your image, of a woman writing?

(Ursula K. Le Guin, “*The fisherwoman’s daughter*”)⁵

This section will analyze the short stories “The Obstinate Historian” (2017a) and “Jumping Monkey Hill” (2017a) in order to deepen the discussion about women writers in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s work.

The texts in the collection **In Your Neck** (2017a) are based on and target issues of gender and decoloniality⁶. The Adichian narratives reveal, through fiction, the social

and cultural point of view of those who were and are subjected to the colonial process and patriarchy, in its different manifestations, based, yesterday and today, on the dyad of domination and subordination.

In “The obstinate historian”, the heart that gives the narrative its movement is called Nwamgba: a Nigerian woman opposed to oppression. This character is driven by strong convictions and survival strategies. This makes it possible for Nwamgba to maintain her integrity regardless of the circumstances she is going through. In the narrative, without losing herself, she has to adapt to different contexts: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial.

Nwamgba and Adichie, albeit in different ways, represent the multitude that potentially exists in a single woman: the daughter; the wife; the widow; the mother; the grandmother. Above all, she represents a living heritage of ancient times and traditions. This powerful condition is revealed diegetically, but it is also endangered by the colonial and patriarchal forces that impose themselves on the social and historical context represented in the narrative.

The context is that of an African land in which the colonizers have arbitrarily made themselves the model of existence to be followed; where Catholic missionaries are teaching the natives a new language and culture, but far beyond that, they are convincing them that the language and culture they are being taught is superior to their own. The situation itself inculcates in the natives the belief that they need to have their souls saved and that, by mastering the language of the whites, they will be respected by others as those who possess knowledge that others ignore.

Nwamgba has a strong personality and, when she falls in love with a man called Obierika, she fights against every obstacle to marry him. There is a rumor about a curse on his family’s fate, which consists of women who marry men of this lineage suffering successive

miscarriages; nevertheless, her parents let her marry. After a few miscarriages, Nwamgba and Obierika finally have a son, whose name is Anikwenwa. Despite this happy event, there is a sudden change of situation, as Obierika dies suddenly and Nwamgba suspects that his cousins are responsible for the death of her husband, whom they seemed to envy.

The point is, after Obierika’s death, Nwamgba loses her voice in her community. So she decides that her son will learn the colonizer’s language in order to fight and defend his rights as Obierika’s legitimate heir, since his uncles are usurping his property. Anikwenwa undergoes significant changes in his personality after studying with the Catholic missionaries. This change is allegorized by the name he is given after baptism: Michael.

This conflict, shaped by the change Anikwenwa has undergone, who has a transplanted identity in place of his original one, is the most severe of all, as it affects the new generations of the family. Although Michael regains what belongs to him because he is Obierika’s son, he abandons his roots and consequently, on a deeper level, abandons his mother.

A new birth will rebalance the chaos that has plagued Nwamgba’s existence: her granddaughter, Afamefuna, baptized with the name Grace. She will become the obstinate historian, responsible for remembering and filling in the gaps in her own history and the history of her people, through memories and research. In Afamefuna, which means “My name will not be lost”, Nwamgba recognizes the spirit of Obierika. At first, she finds it strange that her beloved has chosen to “come back” in the body of the girl. Such a choice can be interpreted as a symbol: a paradigm that falls apart for another to emerge.

It will be Afamefuna, later baptized Grace, who will take an interest in the history of her ancestors and will thus seek to rewrite

the unique history taught in the classroom. Nwamgba is “overjoyed by the child’s solemn interest in her poetry and stories, and by the teenager’s attentive watch as her grandmother struggled to make pottery with hands that had already begun to tremble” (Adichie, 2017a, p. 229). When her granddaughter starts secondary school, she distances herself from her grandmother, but their connection is very strong. Afamefuna/Grace senses that Nwamgba needs her and goes to meet her, regardless of her father’s orders. On this occasion, in Afamefuna/Grace’s bag, there is a textbook with a chapter entitled “The pacification of the primitive tribes of southern Nigeria”, written by a man who had been among them for some years; it is a colonizer’s version of the white invasion of Nigerian lands. This unique textbook story tells of “savages” with “curious and senseless” customs and who “had no poetry”. Afamefuna/Grace does not recognize herself in these images, until the teacher informs her that the “call-response” practiced by her grandmother was not poetry. Dissenting voices are not accepted by the hegemonic narrative.

And when, years later, Afamefuna hears that a black professor has resigned from the university for refusing to allow the subject “African History” to exist, she decides that she will dedicate herself to this area of study. Through this character, Adichie defends the inseparability between education and dignity, and also reflects on the connection “between the hard and obvious things that are printed in books and the soft and subtle things that are lodged in the soul.” (Adichie, 2017a, p. 232)

The disorders in intersubjective relations caused by colonialism and patriarchy are expressed in the internal and external tensions of the characters and their relationship with their surroundings and others. Is the beloved son Anikwenwa Anikewnwa or is he Michael, the colonizer’s mirror? Grace/Afamefuna,

representing the third generation of the family, is seen by Nwamgba as the reincarnation of Obierika’s spirit and, like her grandmother, symbolizes hope and the rescue of the ancestral heritage. The perspective, unknown to most, of those who were colonized in Africa is disseminated through Grace/Afamefuna’s studies and academic conferences. Her name, “Afamefuna”, symbolizes the key to preserving one of the many existing stories about Africa and is thus the key to preserving the spirit of the grandparents.

In terms of structure, the narrative focus on the third person does not create a definitive distance from the characters’ inner lives, but rather the necessary distance to more clearly delineate the socio-political context that interferes with the forms of sociability experienced by the characters. Although the short story is not written in the first person, it is argued here that there is an autofictional character in the narrative, which will be explained in the next paragraph.

Shirley Jordan (2012) argues that the wound, the fracture, the strangeness of the self are internal to the autofiction written by women whose cultural identities are hybrid. This “I” is therefore fragmented and, at the same time, plural: it contains several voices at the same time, without being delimited by any of them. This condition applies to Afamefuna/Grace, who is “several” in one. In a different way, this condition also applies to Nwamgba, in the sense that it contains several women in itself, a point mentioned earlier. In addition, Nwamgba suffers disruptions in her cultural identity due to the disorders caused by colonialism and patriarchy in intersubjective relations. It could be said that this condition also applies to Adichie, whose ancestry and immediate life situation is linked to the history of her people and her status as an Igbo black African woman. Therefore, it can be seen that autofiction is “the place where the subject loses

itself and dissolves into multiplicity”. (Laouyen *apud* Jordan, 2012, p. 83)⁷. In the other story, the analysis of which will begin in the next paragraph, there is also the indirect mirroring of the author in the diegesis - her silhouette.

“Jumping Monkey Hill” (2017a) is about a *workshop* for African writers held in Cape Town, the capital of South Africa. The event was the brainchild of an academic scholar of African Literature called Edward Campbell. He is also the creator of a literary prize dedicated to African Literature. In principle, the workshop was to be led by the last winner of the aforementioned prize, a Ugandan, but it turns out that the real leader of the meeting is the British *scholar*.

The structuring axis of the short story is metafiction. Metafiction occurs when the narrative is based on metalanguage, i.e. its plot is constructed from the creation of fictions (Avelar, 2010). The main character, Ujunwa, is a writer whose character, Chioma, created during the workshop, is also a writer. Her story and that of her character are somewhat similar as the narrative progresses.

We then have a series of mirrorings structured in the triad made up of Adichie, Ujunwa and Chioma. In addition, metafiction also manifests itself when the short stories written by the Workshop participants are analyzed collectively, that is, statements are made about the fiction created within the fiction. This moment of being in the hot seat, to accept the points made by others or to defend one’s story or narrative techniques, brings out hidden tensions and, in this way, the short stories within the short story “Jumping Monkey Hill” give more shades to the main narrative. The main narrative gains body and density from the knots that emerge between who the participants are in front of the Oxford scholar and who they are when they are apart from him and the “opportunities” he represents.

7. OUR TRANSLATION

From the original text: «*le lieu où le sujet se perdue et se dissout dans la multiplicité*». (Laouyen *apud* Jordan, 2010, p.83)

The short narratives of all the Workshop participants are linked by a specific circumstance: they are all African writers, of different nationalities, being judged by a white British researcher who, ironically, has the last word on the texts of Africans, on what African Literature is and, more seriously, on Africa. These conflicts that surround interpersonal relationships in the narrative put a strain on what is experienced by the protagonist and, in parallel, by the character in the short story she wrote. Both the character of the short story created within the narrative and the protagonist of “Jumping Monkey Hill” follow the opposite path to that of the Workshop participants, as they do not renounce their dignity for the sake of opportunities or even survival.

The white academic, in the context of the story, is an allegory of the colonizer who reduces the colonized to an Other, considered inferior. He embodies the imperialist subject as he maintains systems of domination through his possessive attitude towards the object he analyzes and the opinions he issues as definitive truths. Edward also symbolizes the survival, in current times, of the sexist and racist man, who, as well as devaluing women intellectually, draws a distinction between the white female body - which he treats with respect - and the black female body - which he reduces to an object of desire.

As in “The Obstinate Historian” (2017a), the story is written in the third person, but the third person does not prevent us from knowing Ujunwa’s perspective on the events that take place on *Jumping Monkey Hill* and the emotions that each of them arouses within her. Similarly to the other story, the use of the third person seems to be a strategy to generate critical distance, exploring the context in which the narrative takes place. In addition, the other Workshop participants are referred to throughout the narrative by their

nationalities, giving the impression that they are metonymies of their places of origin and represent the multiplicity of existing Africas.

The short story carries small allegories that point to a broader context, whether in relation to the fragmentation of Africa by the colonizers, or in relation to the gender and ethnic-racial roles and relations that are established in the narrative: Edward's way of proceeding; the Workshop participants' attitude towards the London *scholar*; the *Jumping Monkey Hill resort* as a prototype of "Africa" (the "Africa" that Edward and his wife, Isabel, are used to). On this last point, Africa is reduced to an imitation, "window-dressed" and "commodified".

The participants in the Workshop are: a white South African; a black South African; a Tanzanian; a Ugandan; a Zimbabwean; a Kenyan; a Senegalese, who was in Paris doing her university studies; a Nigerian, who is the protagonist of the story. After everyone has settled in at the *resort*, the reader is introduced to Ujunwa's writing process: "She sat there for a long time, moving the mouse around, trying to decide whether her character would have a common name [...] or an exotic one [...]" (2017a, p. 110). Which calls for an additional comment on the concept of metafiction:

Metafictional novels are usually constructed from a fundamental and continuous opposition between the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the revelation of its illusory character. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously creating fiction and making statements about the creation of that fiction. The two processes are amalgamated in a formal tension that breaks down the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism'

8. OUR TRANSLATION

From the original: "Metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. The two processes are held together in a formal tension which breaks down the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction.'" (Vaugh *apud* Heilmann; Llewellyn, 2007, p. 1).

and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction' (Vaugh *apud* Heilmann; Llewellyn, 2007, p. 1).⁸

Thus, in order to demarcate the boundaries between Ujunwa's story and Chioma's, Adichie used a different font size when writing the *mise en abyme*. The smaller font signals that Chioma's story is being written by Ujunwa at that moment in the narrative. This procedure characterizes the revelation of the illusory nature of the intradiegetic and extradiegetic fictional object - since the fictional illusion of the short story "Jumping Monkey Hill" is also undone, it is a simultaneous and double process of unveiling the gears of literary writing. In addition, we see the character making statements about the story she is creating, critically pondering the choices she has to make. This breaks down the boundaries between the process of creation and criticism, revealing, in a single act, the interpretation of what is being fabricated and the deconstruction of the illusion generated by mimesis; indirectly, it also deconstructs the idea of the work that emerges all at once, in a single stroke of absolute inspiration.

The narrative in *abyss* then reveals itself to be autofiction, making "Jumping Monkey Hill" (2017a) a kind of "metaautofiction": since it thematizes literary writing and, in doing so, thematizes the "I" as the raw material of fiction, in this sense, the writing of the self is a constitutive part of the creative process. However, it is worth noting that the writing of the self does not occur for mere aesthetic preference, but for political reasons: it becomes necessary in order to expose a situation of injustice and indignity.

Autofiction is a term whose definition is not definitive. This concept is associated with

the post-Freudian conception of the subject, which is fixed not on the truth value of the narrative, but on the value of the act that is exposed in it (Jordan, 2012). Shirley Jordan (2012) explains that autofiction practitioners often use it to deal with traumatic experiences such as rape or incest. As to whether or not it has to be written in the first person, Jordan states that writers and readers invest in this path, but she informs us that there is also the autofictional “I” that camouflages itself; this, the researcher calls nomadic. It could be said that this category, nomad, applies to Adichie in relation to the writer characters under analysis, as well as to Ujunwa and Chioma, since the use of the third person diverts the reader from inferring that this is an autofiction.

Thus, we consider that Adichie practices a specific nomadic autofiction in her short stories, thus approaching more flexible practices and theoretical perspectives on autofiction, such as the one defended by Ana Letícia Leal, according to which autofiction is “all writing of the self that invents the biographical self” (Leal *apud* Martins, 2014, p. 31).

For Sébastien Hubier, autofiction is “a writing of the ghost, and, in this respect, this practice puts on stage the desire, more or less disguised, of its author, who seeks to say, at the same time, all the *selves* that constitute him.” (Hubier *apud* Martins, 2014, p. 4) (Hubier *apud* Martins, 2014, p. 43, *emphasis* added) This movement is evident in Adichie’s writing, through which the subalternized voices of the past and present are heard.

Returning to the discussion about the difficulties faced by women writers, it is worth asking what they are subjected to? “At first, Ujunwa tried not to notice that Edward often watched her body, that his eyes were never fixed on her face, but always slightly lower.” (2017a, p. 116). Being reified usurps the right to speak and the social validation of what is

produced by women. Not only does Ujunwa experience this, but so does one of the other *Workshop* participants.

It’s worth noting that Chioma, the character created by Ujunwa, is also a woman writer who faces forces that are contrary to the unveiling of her essence: while standing in front of a customer at the bank where she has just got a job and who looks at her with malice, she recalls that she wrote plays in high school and that she wanted to study literature, Chioma simply decides not to take part in the “game” that is unfolding in front of her, to which her coworker has already submitted. Chioma’s father supported her, reading everything she wrote as a teenager and pointing out her successes and failures in learning the art of literature. However, when she wanted to pursue her relationship with literature, her father discouraged her. She studied economics and, after successive failed attempts to find a job, ended up turning to her father. He helped her, but the question remains: did he know that he was pushing his daughter, of whom he had once been so proud, into an abyss in which her body would be the bargaining chip?

When it was time for Ujunwa to share this story with the others, after she had finished reading, she saw different reactions: the Ugandan commented on her story with praise, followed by the Tanzanian, who realized, by listening to the story she had produced, the relationship between the different cities of the so-called Third World; the South African also commented that it was a snapshot of reality, portraying what women face in Nigeria. However, Edward raises his voice and dismisses everything the others have said: “It’s never exactly like that in real life, is it? Women are never victimized in this crude way, and certainly not in Nigeria [...]” (2017a, p. 123-124). The Kenyan endorses Edward’s opinion, speaking of his personal conviction that the ending was not believable, since, yes,

the character would have submitted to sexual exploitation in her job in the bank's marketing team, because she had to fight for survival.

What happens next is another small allegory of what many women writers face: "Something withered inside Ujunwa [...]" (ADICHIE, 2017a, p. 124). But, like Chioma, she doesn't submit, she doesn't obey what would be considered a "plausible" ending, because she stands up and says that this story is her story. It is clearly and irrevocably revealed to the reader that this is autofiction, because it was Ujunwa who went through all that in Lagos.

In line with Michel Laub's view that "every writer writes about himself and memory, in a broad sense, is the material of writing" (Laub *apud* Martins, 2014, p. 41), Adichie highlights autofiction as a practice that feeds on memory, ancestry and the "self" (the essence of being), but at the same time transcends the individual "self" and the practice of healing in order to fulfill a critical social function.

The characters' acts of resistance represent an ongoing paradigmatic shift that is embodied in the Adichian narratives through the protagonists. They form "images" of women and/or women writers who defend their dignity and rights.

THE WOMAN WRITER IN THE WORK OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

Through her characters and her voice as a public person, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie represents a multitude of women. The narratives of *In Your Neck* (2017a) and her works *Let's all be feminists* (2015), *The danger of a single story* (2019) and *To raise feminist children* (2017b) give rise to and ratify this condition of spokesperson. We will briefly present her essayistic texts and then cross-reference the theoretical ideas with the diegetic materiality of the characters in the short stories analyzed.

Let's all be feminists (2015) is an adaptation of a talk given by the author in 2012 at the annual TEDx Euston conference. In it, Adichie discusses the influential force of stereotypes on society and turns to reflections on gender inequality, discussing and problematizing the role of culture in maintaining or changing the *status quo*. *The Danger of a Single Story* (2019) was also adapted from a talk Adichie gave at TED Talk in 2009. In it, the author gives examples that show that people are vulnerable to the stories they hear, especially those they hear from an early age, which end up becoming irrefutable truths for them. Adichie (2019) problematizes that these "unique stories" can lead people to be unable to relate to other human beings without being negatively crossed by their preconceptions, which limit and reduce the Other. *Para educar crianças feministas* (2017b) comes from a letter in which Adichie responded to a friend's question about how she could raise her daughter in line with the feminist worldview. The author gives fifteen suggestions to help achieve her plan to educate children not to make prejudiced distinctions based on gender notions and, consequently, to value human beings regardless of their biological sex. The author's broader aim, when addressing mothers and fathers interested in promoting a paradigm shift, is to present children of the 21st century with alternatives to socially widespread gender stereotypes that are ingrained in the most diverse cultures.

Having made this brief presentation, we will now return to the investigation of the intersections between the short stories and the essays mentioned above.

In *Let's all be feminists* (2015), Adichie uses personal examples to illustrate her ideas and thus endows them with argumentative force. Gender issues are one of the cornerstones of her social and political criticism, as the author sees and experiences the injustice intrinsic to gender

relations, both in relation to past centuries and in relation to contemporary times. The Nigerian author explains her position:

The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be instead of recognizing how we are. We would be much happier, freer to be who we really are if we didn't have the weight of gender expectations (Adichie, 2015, p. 36-37).

These expectations affect the being of the woman writer, a fact that can be seen in the short stories analyzed in the previous chapter, "Jumping Monkey Hill" and "The obstinate historian". Thayane de Araújo Morais states that the character Ujunwa, in "Jumping Monkey Hill", "in a metafictional relationship, writes a short story that materializes in the fiction of herself a history of female silencing" and the character Afamefuna/Grace, in "The obstinate historian", "makes use of academic writing to record in History the narratives of subalternized subjects, like her grandmother." (Morais, 2017, p. 49). Both characters deal with gender expectations and the oppression suffered by women. Ujunwa and Afamefuna/Grace represent Adichie's two professional fields: the literary and the academic, with writing as their point of convergence (Morais, 2017).

In **The Danger of a Single Story** (2019), Adichie calls herself a "storyteller" (2019, p.11). Thus, by sharing experiences, Adichie constructs her symbolic place as a spring from which new narratives can emerge that break the logic of the definitive story about something or someone. And the use of personal examples reveals an autobiographical character in both her fictional and non-fictional writing processes. It is through this window that we discover the characters Ujunwa, Chioma and Afamefuna in the Nigerian author.

Like the character Ujunwa/Chioma, Adichie had been writing since childhood and already suffered from what she calls "the danger of a single story". Whether it's the

patriarchal single story about women having no intellectual capacity - and, by extension, no right to a voice - and serving only to satisfy male needs and procreate; or the single story about Africans as perpetual martyrs, hostages to themselves, in other words, victims of a condition that would "force" them into inferiority in relation to other races.

The fact that Adichie only had access to books of British or American origin affected her way of looking at literature, of which she didn't think she could be a full part. She couldn't imagine, as a child, that a black person could be a character in one of those children's books; she also found strange all the elements of the story that were different from her immediate reality in Nigeria, for example, the presence of snow or the fact that everyone was white and had blue eyes.

Adichie argues that a story can leave deep impressions on its reader or listener, affecting the way they perceive the world. The writer Chinua Achebe, along with other African writers, was one of those responsible for situating, for the author, literature as part of a broader spectrum that encompasses the African experience in both reading and producing texts.

Being seen only as a stereotyped representation of someone's mental image of their gender, ethnicity, social class, nationality, etc. is something that permeates the story "Jumping Monkey Hill". Chioma and Ujunwa are seen from the surface to which the dominant stereotype forces them and, in this way, they are reduced to a single story about what it is to be a black African woman.

In the book **The Danger of the Single Story** (2019) and in the short story "Jumping Monkey Hill" (2017a), there is a point of convergence between fiction and biography. Adichie recounts (2019, p. 20) that a university professor told her that the novel she had written was not "authentically African". In

view of this, the author argues that she would be able to recognize weaknesses in her work, but did not conceive that any of them could be linked to a lack of “African authenticity”. His criticism was that the characters “looked too much like himself, an educated middle-class man” (ADICHIE, 2019, p. 21). This implies that, in order to be African, the characters must be starving or have no access to education. Similarly, in “Jumping Monkey Hill” (2017a), Edward Campbell determines for each workshop participant what is or isn’t truly African in their stories. He associates the concept of “real Africa” with ethnic, religious, civil and political conflicts. In other words, he associates Africa with what would have media importance in the geopolitical context and would somehow feed the (Western) imaginary that already exists about the continent, linking it to war, famine or poverty. In doing so - another irony that tensions the narrative and provokes the reader - Edward induces African writers to corroborate the “single story” about themselves.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the discussion that Adichie proposes about power, which is inseparable from the construction of a unique story. She explains: “Power is the ability not only to tell someone else’s story, but to make it your definitive story” (2019, p. 23). Edward figuratively represents power. He wants Africans themselves to agree and strengthen the definitive story about Africa. At the same time, yet another irony, the *scholar* represents possible contact with a literary agent in London, which means that confronting him or falling out with him would be a risk of jeopardizing one’s literary career. And what is the price of dignity? The workshop participants are flogged with this silent question on a daily basis - each time they don’t react, don’t respond or don’t give their opinion - or, if they are rebuffed, they remain silent in a clumsy manner.

Adichie states that the single story robs people of their dignity, making it impossible to recognize the human in the other, because it “emphasizes how different we are, not how similar we are” (2019, p. 27-28). Telling Chioma’s story, which is part of Ujunwa’s story - emphasizing here that the experiences of both are in line with Adichie’s own story - is an affirmation that “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to despoil and slander, but they can also repair that shattered dignity.” (2019, p. 32). Thus, it is important to know that Nigerian women (not only Nigerian women) face moral and sexual harassment in their workplaces. It is also important to know how the different historical stages occurred in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, thinking here of the short story “The obstinate historian”. It is this protagonism that seeks to repair shattered dignities that characterizes the work of Afamefuna/grace and that characterizes Adichie, whose master’s dissertation looked at the reality of Nigerian women. The appeal addressed to the reader, in the form of narratives that open the Pandora’s Box of History, is that of a refusal of the single story, because “when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise” (Adichie, 2019, p. 33).

With regard to the condition of women, in **Let’s all be feminists** (2015), Adichie reveals how much there is of Chioma in herself, or how much there is of Adichie in Chioma, as she comments on an article of hers in which she discusses exactly what it is like to be a young woman in Lagos. And the indignation contained in this article is channeled into a greater sense of hope, since Adichie claims to believe in the ability of human beings to evolve (Adichie, 2015). Thus, Adichie’s importance in relation to history is based on her conviction that it is worth dreaming of a different world, with more justice, where there are “happier men and happier women, more

authentic with themselves”. (2015, p. 28). Her texts, as well as laying bare reality, are the raw material for the making of Tomorrow.

And similarly to the Ujunwa/Chioma characters, the Afamefuna/Grace character also mirrors Adichie. The character went to university outside her home country, just like the Nigerian author. Both could have allowed themselves to be seduced by the *mainstream*, by the dominant discourse, but instead they decided to use the privileged place they had won in the academic world to rewrite history, to multiply the narratives, to recover the lives of those who had been silenced by the one-sided version of the colonizers. In this sense, Adichie and Toni Morrison have in common the understanding that, through imagination, it is possible to give new life to ancestry, restoring the voice of their ancestors and thus reconstructing their memories, thoughts and emotions.

For Morrison (1995), imagination is similar to the flooding of a river that remembers where it was before it was artificially modified. In the proposed analogy, writers would be rivers and, through the imaginative act/flooding, they would be able to remember their origins. According to this vision, memory seems to be the entrance to deep places of being and its ancestral roots, only available to those capable of making sense of chaos and thus ordering it.

It could be said, based on another analogy from Morrison (1995), that Adichie, similarly to an archaeologist, goes to a ruined site and, by studying the rubble, manages to reconstruct the world that once existed. These ruins, says Morrison (1995), are a kind of image from which someone starts to imagine the life and feelings of those who were part of them. The way in which the person interprets life within the images is very particular, since imagining is giving something of yourself to the ruins you want to rebuild.

Morrison (1995) says that in order to imagine someone else's inner life, you first have to get in touch with your own. What you evoke from the records - letters, photos, documents, personal reminiscences - will, at least partially, be interpreted from your subjectivity/worldview. In this way, resorting to specific nomadic autofiction, as Adichie does - and this is the hypothesis defended in this work - means fulfilling this first stage of inward diving. Therefore, it is from the autofictional “I”, immersed in the diegesis, even if camouflaged, that space is opened up for other lives to spring forth.

With regard to the third essay, **To raise feminist children: a manifesto** (2017b), it is also worth highlighting a few points. The first is that it is an eminently practical proposal, aimed at anyone who takes on the role of parent. The author starts from premises, rather than determining rules for feminist child rearing, since each context may require a feminism that suits it. The premise applicable to all circumstances would be a woman's awareness of her own value.

In this “essay-manifesto”, Adichie provides questions that act as tools for those who wish to change their mindset and behavior. The first step, of course, is to become self-aware of how you think and how you act. One tool-question proposed by the author would be to ask whether, by changing the gender of someone facing a certain problematic situation of injustice, the results would be the same or different.

So one wonders, in the case of “Jumping Monkey Hill”: if Ujunwa were a man, would Edward stare at her breasts instead of her eyes? If Ujunwa were a man, would Edward say that he would like her to lie down for him? If Ujunwa were a man, would Edward highlight the positive aspects of the short story produced during the Workshop, instead of writing it off, belittling the harassment

situations faced by women. In the same way, it's worth asking, thinking about the story "The obstinate historian": if she weren't a woman, would Nwamgba have had to put her son through a missionary school that would have kept him away from her and the Igbo culture for good, just so that he could learn the invader's language and defend them both in the fight for their rights? If she wasn't a woman, would Nwamgba be pressured to remarry because her breasts are still round?

As we have seen, in both "The Stubborn Historian" (2017a) and "Jumping Monkey Hill" (2017a), gender roles are a constantly problematized issue. Adichie, in her legacy to current and future generations, states: "If we don't use the straitjacket of gender on young children, we will give them the space to reach their full potential" (2017b, p. 11). Culture teaches girls to suffer in silence, to feel guilty and ashamed of the actions of others, to be "nice" to abusers, to have compassion for those who hurt them. Adichie (2017b) argues that these are the catastrophic consequences of wanting to please. And states that: "We have a world full of women who cannot breathe freely because they are too conditioned to assume forms that please others" (2017b, p. 19). As a response to this reality, Adichie proposes that girls should be taught to be like the matriarch in "The Stubborn Historian" (2017a): truthful, honest, courageous and authentic.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's narratives and speeches highlight the historical and ontological silencing suffered by a whole group of subjects: women; black women; black African women; writers; black women writers; black African women writers. Generations of women wrote even though they lived in an

environment hostile to female intellectuality and imagination. They have been succeeded by others who remain dedicated to changing the state of affairs in which "men hold the power to decide the truths that sustain the world" (Zinani; Polesso, 2010, p. 102).

This article has sought to demonstrate that the danger of a single history is still a problem - be it with regard to gender or ethnic issues - even if it is covered by subtle layers of pro-equality and equity political discourse. Domination is similar to the mythological figure of Proteus, always transforming itself conveniently, according to the circumstances and the conjuncture they make up. In this way, it becomes difficult to identify its effects within individual and collective minds. Power relations are inevitable, they are inherent to the human condition. But these relations are continually out of balance due to media and capitalist forces, which benefit from the new ICTs and capture the singularities of individuals, turning them into *commodities* and seeking to homogenize the population's *modus vivendi* through algorithms - the creation of increasingly impenetrable ideological bubbles. The question arises: what stories will be told in the future? By whom? When? In what form? How many? For whom?

The Nigerian author's works don't provide answers, but reading and analyzing them allows us to understand that reality doesn't have to be as it is presented to us; it is possible to change it, fertilizing the path so that justice and dignity guide possible futures. In them, following the light projected by Virginia Woolf, women will naturally cultivate the "habit of freedom" and the courage to write exactly what they are thinking, assuming a relationship "with the world of reality and not just with the world of men and women" (Woolf, 2019, p. 106).

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