

Racial and Amefrian Relations in Westernized Universities: The Message is Given

Relações raciais e amefricanas nas universidades ocidentalizadas: o recado está dado

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RESUMO

A sala de aula nas universidades ocidentalizadas ainda se apresenta como espaço social de privilégio branco, fazendo com que a escrita e a interpretação sobre a história afrodiáspórica sigam o caminho de uma história única. Deste modo, o presente artigo objetiva problematizar o estudo das relações raciais, das relações amefricanas e da história da África nas universidades ocidentalizadas a partir da enunciação de corpos-políticos pretos performados em narrativas ficcionais. Sobre o caminho metodológico, apostamos em uma escrevivência em oraliture performada em narrativas ficcionais marcando na cena acadêmica uma política de escrita engajada e encharcada pela afirmação de uma ciência cuja racionalidade não é linear, constituindo-se pela complementariedade entre razão e emoção. As narrativas foram construídas a partir de memórias inscritas no corpo-político de duas mulheres pretas e um homem preto que responderam ao questionário on-line da pesquisa Necropolítica e População Negra, vinculada ao Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas E'léékò. A história afrodiáspórica e ladioamefricana resiste ao esquecimento, silenciamento, invisibilidade, apagamento nas paredes brancas das universidades ocidentalizadas, na cena brasileira, por meio da presença intelectual e militante de homens e mulheres pretas. A escrevivência em oraliture performada em narrativas ficcionais neste estudo, marca o ser-sendo na produção do conhecimento de muitas mulheres e homens pretas e pretos na universidade; marca o porvir do conhecimento produzido a partir das experiências pretas.

Palavras-chave: Racismo; História de África; Educação; Escrivência; Campo problemático e pista para um futuro.

ABSTRACT

The classroom in westernized universities still presents itself as a social space of white privilege, making the writing and interpretation of Afro-diasporic history follow the path of a unique history. Thus, the present article aims to problematize the study of racial relations, Amefrican relations and the history of Africa in westernized universities based on the enunciation of black political bodies performed in fictional narratives. On the methodological path, we bet on a *escrevivência* in oraliture performed in fictional narratives, marking in the academic scene a policy of writing engaged and drenched by the affirmation of a science whose rationality is not linear, constituted by the complementarity between reason and emotion. The narratives were built from memories inscribed in the political body of two black women and a black man who answered the online questionnaire of the Necropolitics and Black Population research, linked to the E'léékò Studies and Research Center. The Afrodiasporic and Ladino-Amefrican history resist oblivion, silencing, invisibility, erasure on the white walls of westernized universities in the Brazilian scene through the intellectual and militant presence of black men and women. The *escrevivência* in oraliture, performed in fictional narratives in this study, marks the be-being in the production of knowledge of many black and black women and men at the university; it marks the future of knowledge produced from black experiences.

Keywords: Racism; History of Africa; Education; Escrivência. Problematic field and clues to a future.

Year 2019. In the scene, a virtual classroom, a white professor, Paulo, 31 years teaching at a public university in Southern Brazil. He denies the possibility of including discussions about race relations, about Africa and/or “Amefrica”¹ in his syllabus (GONZALEZ, 1988/2018a). In the PhD classroom, a small group of black students, three in a class of twenty-five, are bothered, outraged, annoyed, and not knowing how to deal with the racism that flows through the professor’s mouth: Black epistemologies? African philosophy? African history? Amefrica? “*Escrevivência*”? What nonsense! I do science. And it is not possible to make any changes to the syllabus. You should not even be here! You came in through the back door and still want to dictate what I should teach. It was not the first time that Paulo vented his racism through his white, cisheteronormative, patriarchal, colonial political body, which accumulates dozens of

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complaints about racist, sexist, and LGBTIA+phobic manifestations, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

- Good evening, professor, my name is Latifa. I am a 30-year-old black woman, born in the cradle of anti-racist militancy inherited from my mother and father, both active in the struggle of black social movements. I am dismayed and outraged by what I heard! Racism is a crime, professor! And what you are doing is called epistemic racism. Do you know Lélia Gonzalez? Well, I will introduce you to this interpreter from Brazil, as Raquel Barreto (2018) points out. Lélia says:

[...] Amefrica, as an ethnic-geographical reference system, is our and our ancestors' creation on the continent in which we live, inspired by African models. Therefore, the term *amefricanas/amefricanos* (Amefricans) designates an entire descent: not only the Africans brought by the slave trade, but also those who arrived in AMERICA long before Columbus. Yesterday, as today, Amefricans from different countries played a crucial role in the development of this Amefricanity that identifies, in the diaspora, a common historical experience that demands to be properly known and carefully researched (GONZALEZ, 1988/2018b, p. 330).

Professor, regardless of what you may think, we black women are here, in the university scene, in the doctorate, committed to the process of inscribing our ethics, ontology, and black epistemology in this territory that is also ours. Today we are three black people in this room, vilified by your racism. Tomorrow, we will be dozens denouncing what we experience here to the competent bodies.

For teachers and students, the classroom is a universe mediated by everyday relationships, whose pedagogical meanings should be guided by the dialog between the people who compose it, instigating imagination, curiosity, emancipation, feeling of belonging, and the desire to expand knowledge. Although all this may be part of the ideals of formal education, often, the capacity for reflection and problematization of many teachers - mainly the white ones - around racial relations in Brazilian society and a global context becomes distant from that what they think they are doing, given the walls of epistemic racism. About racial relations, the classroom in westernized universities is a social space of white privilege, causing the writing and interpretation

of our history to follow a sole path, the dangerous path of a single story, as states and denounces Chimamanda Adichie (2019).

The idea-concept about westernized universities presented here is part of the discussions proposed by Ramón Grosfoguel regarding the “epistemic privilege of western men over the knowledge produced by other political bodies and geopolitics of knowledge” (GROSFOGUEL, 2016, p. 25). According to the author, such white privilege of defining what is true and what is best for other political bodies:

[...] have generated structures and institutions that produce epistemic racism/sexism, disqualifying other knowledge and other critical voices in the face of imperial/colonial/patriarchal projects that govern the world-system (GROSFOGUEL, 2016, p. 25).

This is how theoretical-methodological and epistemological models are read, taught, and used in the human and social sciences in the face of our reality as Amefricans in Brazilian territory. How long will this go on?

Since 1980, social struggles materialized in the efforts of black movements in search of access to public services, especially university education and, more recently, with the advent of affirmative action policies, are presented as one of the most important facts that would begin to influence undergraduate courses and postgraduate programs in the humanities and social sciences. An engaged thought, politically located in the anti-racist struggle, started to influence and open fissures in the academy even in the face of epistemic racism. We are talking about a struggle that comes from afar, with an important milestone in the 1980s due to the conjuncture and political events that had, until then, been in favor of the redemocratization process in Brazil: political amnesty (1979), the movement for direct elections (1984), the establishment of the Constituent Assembly (1986) and the theoretical-methodological renovation that took place since the end of 1970². With the so-called renewal of political history and its articulation with cultural history, a period of expansion of postgraduate and reinvigoration courses (GOMES, 2004; RUBIM, 1996), as in the case of history courses - under the historical-political and also historical-cultural effect - such a conjuncture would reflect in the field that would privilege the analysis of labor-based relations of domination.

The study of racial, Amefrican relations and African history in the light of the mandatory nature of their teaching, approved by Law 10.639/2003 (BRASIL, 2003), after many discussions and claims by black movements, proposes that formal education deal and think not only in the inheritance and *ethos* of a specific group but also in the writing of human history (MOORE, 2012). And, in the specific case of Brazil and Amefrica, a human history committed³ to the promotion of racial and civilizational equity when approaching discussions about: a) ontology, ethics, and epistemology around the being and understanding the world beyond western truth; b) the relations of power and domination between colonizer and colonized; c) denunciations of racism and their maintenance and updating in the different spaces that constitute westernized societies, especially the academic space.

Like a mighty river heading for the sea in its continuous ebb and flow, the obligation to learn and teach challenges us to deal with what has been contiguous and common since the third decade of the 16th century: Africa and the trafficking of native peoples from its Atlantic coast towards the American Continent – the diaspora of African peoples and colonial slavery – the Amefrica Ladina. Thus, with the purpose of not leaving the classroom “with velvet in their clogs”, i.e., so that the silencing, invisibility, dehumanization, erasure of Afro-diasporic productions of life, knowledge, and modes of existence is not perpetuated, this article aims to problematize the study of racial relations, Amefrican relations and African history in westernized universities from the enunciation of black political bodies performed in fictional narratives.

On the methodological path, we start by articulating the concepts of *escrevivência* by Conceição Evaristo (2017), oraliture by Leda Maria Martins (2003) and fiction by Luis Artur Costa (2014). According to Conceição Evaristo, the word *escrevivência* is born from the play between the words “to write”, “to live” and “to see oneself”, based on the “speaking of enslaved black women who had to tell their stories to the casa-grande”, i.e., it presupposes “the authorship of black women, who already own writing, blurring this image of the past, of African women who had to tell stories to lull those from the casa-grande” (EVARISTO, 2020, s/p). *Escrevivência* is a political act of black women who seize writing and the writing of the self, which expresses a

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singularity, but also the collective agency of black voices crossed by racism, sexism, and classism (EVARISTO, 2017); it has an ethical dimension by providing to those who produce the writing, “the place of enunciation of a collective self, of someone who evokes, through their narrative and voice, the history of a shared “we” (SOARES; MACHADO, 2017, p. 207). When discussing *escrevivência* as a methodological tool, Lissandra Soares and Paula Machado (2017) argue that:

[...] It serves to subvert the production of knowledge because, besides introducing a fissure of an eminently artistic character in scientific writing, it appears through the intonation of subaltern women’s voices and their positionality in the narration of their existence” (p. 207).

Leda Maria Martins’ (2003) *oraliture*, by making use of memory from an oral and corporal repertoire, invokes the spellings of the body, the faded vestiges that have become secrets since the transatlantic violence, but that resist, escaping as insurgent performances that connect Amerfrican black bodies in the diaspora. *Oraliture* concerns memory that is inscribed “as a spelling by the written letter; thus it articulates itself to the field and process of vision mapped by the look, apprehended as a window of knowledge” (MARTINS, 2003, p. 64).

As for fiction, it is taken as a way of reinscribing reality, making it “even more real, more complex, dense, and intense by intrincating its plots with new possibilities of relationship” (COSTA, 2014, p. 553). Also according to the author:

The use of fiction as a strategy for the problematization of a field of research allows us to make the “object” more complex, to give density to its virtualities that do not fit within limits set by its current representation: to go beyond the strict description of the “given”, entering the elusive meanders of events and their intricate field of possibilities. To shift the quest to represent objects by formalizing them with words that are intended to be empty of their own meaning: they would only present the object through neutral and objective language (op.cit., p. 558).

Based on the concept of fiction (COSTA, 2014), we bet on the creation of fictional narratives that allow the insurgency of a writing policy that opens fissures in scientific production. In this study, fictional narratives are taken as a fertile field that

allows us to conjecture, name, and (re)elaborate racist and sexist imageries about black bodies in westernized universities; to produce the collective agency of black voices, considering the senses, affections, apperceptions, emotions, daydreams, and becomings that flow through the body in line with reason; and, thus, enunciate new imageries from memories, gestures, performances of political bodies in the academic scene. The fictional narratives presented here were constructed from the spellings inscribed on the body of two black women and a black man who answered the online survey questionnaire *Necropolitics and Black Population: problematizations about racism and anti-racism and their consequences in times of Covid-19 pandemic and post-pandemic*⁴, linked to the Psychology course at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPeI) and the Postgraduate Program in Social and Institutional Psychology at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (PPGPSI/UFRGS).

Therefore, we enunciate our methodological path as *escrevivência* in *oraliture* performed in fictional narratives, marking in the academic scene a policy of writing engaged and drenched by the affirmation of a science whose rationality is not linear, constituted by the complementarity between reason and emotion. We assume, with Fanon (2008), the world of non-linearity built on the poetic powers of existence, which breaks with colonial white reason, preconceived and prescriptive about how we should exist and act in the world. Each section of this article will be presented by a scene performed by black political bodies that inhabit the university world in order to enable the understanding of the theoretical-epistemological discussion present here.

The message is given

In the scene, Latifa. Black woman, cisgender⁵, bisexual, of African origin tradition, PhD student. With her inky black skin, haughty body, and steady steps, she moves towards a classroom. She is going to meet students who feel uncomfortable, not to say angry, with the racism that exudes from the white walls of the university.

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- Hi guys, for those who don't know me, I'm Latifa. My name? It is from the Swahili language, from Kenya and Tanzania, it means one who is kind. It takes me back to my origins, to the need to understand where my ancestors came from; it took me to the African Continent and that was a differential for my subjective construction. It is deplorable that other black children do not have this same possibility. In fact, they would have it if Law n. 10.639/2003⁶ were implemented. Well... we are mobilizing black students from the postgraduate program (PPG) to assess the situation that occurred in the PhD class and organize interventions. We have as guests Professor Cláudia Ayana and student Pedro Henrique, who was with me in Professor Paulo's class. Here, in this room, we are already more than twenty, and it is very empowering to be in this collective from the point of view of identity and anti-racist struggle. We feel that the anger we experience is not unique, that my problem is not just mine, that we are a fortress when we are together. I will report the steps already taken. We delivered a letter to our PPG reporting Professor Paulo's racist manifestation in the PhD class, and there is a demand for us to gather other complaints of racism by this same professor in master's and undergraduate classes. This letter was also delivered to the Dean, and we have already been invited to speak in different spaces of the university. We had support only from NEABI⁷.

After formalizing the complaint, many white teachers and colleagues adopted other ways of harassing us. I notice, for example, that invitations to write articles and projects never reach me, unlike other white colleagues who, from time to time, comment: "Are you going to participate in that project that the professor created?" In these moments, I discover that I am never invited, even though I have studies and knowledge on the subject. The same happens with research grants in projects, always passed on to white students. At times I regret having started my PhD at this university, at this PPG. Sometimes I feel guilty for having reported racism, because now I am targeted: the problematic PhD student, the militant, the trouble-maker. The other day, there was a meeting in which a professor, also white, who is on Paulo's side, said that what I wrote was fake news. I reported it to the coordinator, who stated that she was aware of the truth of what had happened and reprimanded him in private after the

meeting. That's it, the bully embarrasses me during a public meeting and is scolded in private.

I've been thinking a lot about this, being a black woman aware of racism has its price. It was better to speak up, denounce (even though I knew it wouldn't change anything), than to think that another black woman or man could enter the course and think she/he is alone, that no one has ever been outraged, raised her/his voice, as bell hooks says (2019). As an alternative, to settle the dust of the complaint, they put a black professor in the course, with a postdoc degree, who was at the university for thirteen years, and only after the complaint was she invited to work at the PPG. In a way, it was a victory, however, I worry about what she might experience with these white professors, because she told me that when she was a student in the course, she went through situations similar to mine.

The message is given, let's not shut up, we won't leave or let them *sneak off the classroom*⁸. The time has come for discussions about racial relations, Africans, the history of Africa to inhabit the classroom. We need to critically reflect on the process of enslavement of African peoples, even in the face of doubts about what came to be considered the arrival of the first enslaved people in Brazil. However, we know that it was with the sugar culture and the first sugar mills, such as the Capitania of São Vicente, that the first Africans were brought to the country (MALHEIRO, 1867). Agostinho Malheiro (1867) states that Martim Affonso de Souza found slaves as early as 1531, after the capture of a caravel in Bahia. After passing through Pernambuco, this vessel headed to the city of Sofala - East African coast of present-day Mozambique (VARNHAGEN, 1854; SILVA, 2011).

However, the first regular *tumbeiro*⁹ would arrive in 1538, a ship of an old and well-known trafficker who, since 1514, had traded in indigenous lives with Dom Manuel (ELLIS, 1982; VERGER, 1987; RAMOS, 2004; SILVA, 2011; DORIGNY, 2017). The traffic of African slaves, in particular, as it is announced, has long been carried out in the so-called East Indies, since slavery has for a long time been a historical phenomenon. According to Lovejoy (2002), slavery has been present in many places

since classical antiquity, and Africa has remained directly linked to this history by providing enslaved people both to ancient civilizations and to the Islamic world, to India, to the Americas and, inside the continent too, until the 20th century. However, the manipulation and use of the idea of race and economic rationalization of the system make American slavery different from other slave experiences in the history of humanity. Kabengele Munanga (2012), when prefacing the work *Racismo e sociedade: novas bases epistemológicas para entender o racismo*, by Carlos Moore, observes, however, that this phenomenon is not or was not structured based on African slavery, but on a socio-political construction that presents itself as a phenotypic universal expression and condition.

Thus, teaching and learning require thinking about issues related to memory and history (RICOUER, 2007), actions that, in turn, make us think about the human condition and its nature, as a memoryless animal, to complete or seize oblivion in its use and/or effect as an art and science (WEINRICH, 1999). Which leads us to consider, therefore, teaching and learning in the light of the skills of “forgetting”, “remembering”, and “forgiving”, the latter – in particular – one of the hardest tasks. By this ability, the sign of the “art of forgetting” the experiences kept and brought in the crossing of the *Calunga Grande* (the big ocean), the myth of Lethe based on the work of Ricouer (2007) and Weinrich (1999)¹⁰, allows us to understand the oblivion and the strength of the sense of the need for the images of Africa to be erased and re-signified.

This inhumane system reached such a point that, in crossing the Atlantic, the bodies and souls of the captives, when tasting the course of its waters – as in the river of Lethe, one of the nymphs of Hades (WEINRICH, 1999) – so that they could be reborn, they needed to be freed from the weight of their memories and the bonds that held them to their origins and, thus, “socially killed” (PATTERSON, 2008). Physically and symbolically usurped, besides being stripped and displaced, their memories would become an object, product and production of the practices of inventions and resignifications. What Achille Mbembe (2017, p. 30) calls “fabulation processes”, the ways of “presenting as real, certain or exact, often invented facts” in the name of a Western, mercantile, Eurocentric reason.

That is, in their encounter with the European in the 15th century, forced to break with the elements that made it possible to give understanding to the beginnings of their existence, these men and women were forced to give life to the Greek myth and others that would emerge in the “new world”, starting to push new meanings and ways of dealing with “the black as a European product” (OLIVA, 2003, p.443) and further ubiquitous classificatory category¹¹. Proof of this was the attempt to erase the memory, moving, for example, the meaning of the traditional Yoruban thought in which “the trees associated with the beginnings of existence”, as we can interpret from Nei Lopes (2004, p.55), would become a grove of oblivion:

[...] around which the slaves who embarked to cross the Atlantic were forced to circle around (nine men; seven women), in a ritual tending to provoke a kind of amnesia about the moment they were experiencing. According to some interpretations, this ritual was a defense of African traffickers against possible spells or plagues sent back by the unfortunate trafficked (LOPES, 2004, p.76).

In this “new world”, under the aegis of enslaved work and body training, through the refinements of punishment and surveillance, the survivors of the *tumbeiros*, upon arriving in the Americas, would be reborn to command and obedience, although not always and nor fully servile and domesticated as the colonists would have liked them to be. Slavery, even though the Pope has already asked for forgiveness - as said by the lyrics of the song *Prayer for the Liberation of South Africa*, by Gilberto Gil (1985) - , will forge the art of oblivion and its resignifications would continue today to haunt and try to tame those who carry a stigma in their ancestry as an open wound. This is Professor Paulo’s attempt to keep forgotten, silenced, invisible, erased the civilizational, ontological, ethical and epistemological legacy present in different Aphrodiasporic expressions and traditions, which remain alive in Brazil and Amefrica Ladina as a whole.

Paulo’s white political body performs the colonial matrix of power, built on the distinction between humans and non-humans produced by colonialism, updated by coloniality. Frantz Fanon (2005) points out that colonialism is defined as a system of violent exploitation and domination, produced by the colonizer before the colonized people. The author emphasizes that violence, in the colonial logic, is essentially given,

since the colonizer acts from the perspective of dominating and exploiting the existence of men and women who live in the colonized territory, removing their goods, customs, culture, traditions in the name of the enslaved work. European colonialism in African lands produced a racialized split between whites and blacks, affecting worldwide the hierarchy and racial domination of the former over the latter (FANON, 2005). The concept of coloniality, on the other hand, goes beyond the limits and particularities of historical colonialism, as something that does not disappear even after supposed independence or decolonization of colonized peoples (QUIJANO, 1997), whether on the African Continent or in Amefrica.

Coloniality constitutes a “world pattern of capitalist, colonial/modern, Eurocentric power” (QUIJANO, 2005, p. 126), whose power relations subordinate subjects and knowledge. It consolidates a “conception of humanity according to which the world’s population is differentiated into inferior and superior, irrational and rational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern” (QUIJANO, 2010, p. 86). An idea of inferiority, irrationality, non-humanity that, in the scene of westernized universities, produces behaviors like Professor Paulo’s when faced with black political bodies. What other historical elements are important for us to continue to problematize the study of racial, Amefrican, and African history relations in undergraduate and postgraduate programs at our universities?

What they did to us: “Ham’s Redemption¹²”

In the scene, Claudia Ayana. Black female, cisgender, heterosexual, 53 years old. She has been in the South of the country since 2015, after joining the university by racial quotas. An intellectual and activist in the anti-racist struggle, she understands the scenario of discussion of racial relations in our westernized universities as an arduous but necessary task.

- Good evening! It’s a pleasure to be here with you. We are here talking about the pains of racist violence that challenged the black political bodies of our black brothers and sisters at this university, but also the pains of those who came before and

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paved the way for our presence here. I understand that here we have a clue to continue opening fissures in the racist and sexist structures of Brazilian universities.

Evellyn Rosa and Míriam Alves conceptualize racist violence as:

[...] the action or effect of employing the idea of race and human hierarchy in social and interpersonal relationships, producing the invisibility, silencing, and subalternization of racialized black subjects (ROSA; ALVES, 2020, p. 5).

The concept of race is a useful fiction, an ideological construction, whose need for its invention was to ground the power of the Western Hemisphere, which considered itself “the center of the globe, the birthplace of reason, universal life and the truth of Humanity” (MBEMBE, 2017, p. 27). Aníbal Quijano (2005) points out that, after the union between race and color, around the 16th century, race came to be used as a justification for colonial domination and Eurocentric hegemony. Race, therefore, linked to skin color, and the resulting racism, constitute elements of coloniality that continue to produce effects on black political bodies in contemporary times, and which are found in the pattern of hegemonic power (QUIJANO, 2005). And, obviously, this pattern of power structures Brazilian universities, becoming a barrier to the transit of black political bodies.

Education in my family led us to independence, study was always taken as a priority and I know that this is not the rule in our black people. Education has helped me take a different path, even though we lived on a strict budget - we were lower class. I have studied only in public schools and without much luxury. My mother used to repeat a mantra, as she wished I had the same clear eyes as my father, she said, “Study, my daughter. You are poor and black, you must study for you to be a person”. She was not sure about the moment I would be considered a person. What did she think a person was? What does the university thinks a person is? I think the meaning of being a person transmuted in my mother’s head along the time. I remember the time when, for me to be a person, I needed join her in her church activities. A fervent Catholic, she implemented the booklet of evangelization in our house, I was baptized, did catechesis and confirmation, until the moment I rebelled. Today I follow the African

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matrix tradition. When I remember the moment she introduced me to Ham's Redemption, an 1895 painting by Spanish artist Modesto Brocos that she learned from a group of church women, I was stunned. My mother saw herself in that black woman praising God for the whiteness of the child. And every time I tried to talk about how much the church contributed to the enslavement of our ancestors and continued to act in colonial logic, we argued...

Christian baptism will impose on enslaved Africans and their descendants the sin of becoming Ham's heirs in a new imitation and metamorphosis of Lethe. Christianity imposed on us, black men and women, the curse of the sons of Noah and his heirs, as ideological-religious support by proposing a scientific perspective that, according to Moore (2012), came about because the Muslim empire had been heir to the long tradition of slavery in the Byzantine and Persian Empires. Moore (2012), citing Lovejoy (2002), observes that it was during the 8th, 9th, and 10th centuries that the old slave tradition came closer to the new religion: when black slavery became legitimized based on the legend that says that Ham, black peoples' ancestor, was condemned to be black by Noah.

A common biblical myth for Jews and Arabs, the latter, unlike Jews, do not see the curse as a sanction against Canaan, but rather on Africans for their being black. However, according to Moore (2012), it was as of the Roman physician Galen (2nd century) that this thought, due to the theory of the humors of a specific essence of a race, gained greater prestige during the expansion of the Arab Empire; i.e., Al Masudi (10th century), by referring to this theory, proposed to explain the reason for the weakness of black intelligence, given the imperfect organization of their brain. What they did with us...

An example of writing committed to the "art of oblivion" is *Divisões Perigosas: Políticas Raciais no Brasil Contemporâneo [Dangerous Divisions: Racial Policies in Contemporary Brazil]*, by Peter Fry et al. (2007), whose insistence on the idea of oblivion is intended to dissuade anyone who may have any memory of or commitment to moral and political responsibility in the face of the issue of practices that promote racial equality. It is a work produced by a "group of scholarly citizens", opposed to

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projects that would promote the process of racialization in the face of social policies underway in Brazil. In the epigraph to this work, poet Ferreira Gullar replies:

No person today is to blame for what happened in the country centuries ago. You cannot punish those who do not have access to quotas or it will be implied that poor whites are slaveholders. We have to end racism on both sides (FRY et al., 2007, p. 23).

In this writing, the authors enunciate situations or events that occurred in a past time that, if not forgotten, should at least be left aside. Nevertheless, we emphasize that when analyzed through the prism of racial relations and slavery, they would, dangerously, provide a new type of racial essentialism. Following the example of racial quotas for black students in Brazilian public universities, as well as other initiatives for the development of affirmative action policies, the tonic of the writings of this “group of scholarly citizens” would alert to the fact that discord and racial hatred are being introduced and disseminated, in other words, *the reverse racism*. For this and other reasons, César Benjamim advocates:

[..] Who is black and who is white in Brazil? Where is the boundary between them? [Then he himself answers with a new question, in the face of quota policies in universities] And what about the poor whites, who are many, what about them? (BENJAMIM, 2007, p. 33).

The “knowing how to forget” before such questions, as a common and imitative practice, would allow us to understand what Fry (2005) presents as a discovery about our way of being and acting in his studies, i.e., our desire for assimilation, in contrast to the conflictive and historically experienced racial segregation practices in countries such as South Africa and the United States. The evidence that would allow us to understand the desire for assimilation as a cultural process, even under the expression and the maximum degree of conflict, such as what happened in the slave rebellion of 1835 in Salvador, would be guided by non-racial lines and, yes, even according to Fry (2005), in an order of closeness to ethnic origins in Bahian society. The author, when looking for factual elements in the writing of history, strives to corroborate the statement that, in order to maintain their permanence in Brazil, Africans should leave their roots

behind, even with the cruel and massive campaign to such ends. From the point of view of a typical ideal action, through this conduct, one could interpret and understand it as something more important than the very maintenance of the authorities in Bahian society. Thus, for assimilation, it would be equivalent to say:

The path to civilization in Brazil should be rewarded not through the establishment of distinct and segregated 'racial' and 'ethnic' communities, each with its own particular lifestyle, but by assimilation and integration (FRY, 2005, p.174).

In this sense, our uniqueness as a people willing to assimilate and opposed to racial segregation in Fry (2005), seems to us to be intimately linked to the lineage of theoretical interpretation that insists on separating the idea of culture from racial and power relations, which are intimately linked to stratification and, therefore, crossed by issues related to social class inequalities. Therefore, for Fry (2005), as well as for the other authors of the articles that compose *Divisões Perigosas* (FRY et al., 2007), the miscegenation/assimilation process would appear as a civilizational element, whose arguments in its favor would become valid and valuable for its cultural aspect, in such a way as to offer us, from this ideal, not only the reference but also the idea of living the "lived myth" - racial democracy as a "myth-ideology". However, the "art of oblivion" proposes to us what is contradictorily opposed to it, i.e., what least should or could be forgotten - memory - *Mnemosyne*. Who, like goddess Lethe, in its river whose course runs parallel to the waters of forgetfulness and oblivion, beyond the mental state or moment of history, helps us to resume more accurately the study of racial relations.

Wilson Trajano Filho's (2007) article entitled *História da África: para quê? [African History: For What?]*, first published in 2004, one year after the enactment of Law n. 10.639/2003, does not allude in any way to the claims of black movements, educational experiences, or any kind of dialogue about political issues or scenes such as those that involved the embryonic proposition of the project¹³ which preceded the law, nor its filing by the Brazilian Senate in 1995. Trajano Filho (2007) seeks not only to dissuade but to discredit the proposal for teaching the history of Africa. Starting with the ambiguity of the question in its title *História da África: para quê? [African History:*

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For What?] Instead of presenting a position explicitly contrary to the approved bill, the author alerts to what could be called the idea of the search for common sense, based on what he considers to be the five good reasons for its teaching. First, the need to denaturalize Africa. As Trajano Filho says about what Africa is, it becomes:

[...] made of pieces chosen according to circumstances, and [that] proves to be very useful to indicate the other and the difference [...] both in the form of the radical other, from us separate (the African from the present) and in the form that accompanies us, [...] an external appendix (the generic African of the past) (TRAJANO FILHO, 2007, p. 52).

Second, the notion of a homogenized Africa. “Brazilian Africa” would thus be the product of the classifications made by the colonial powers. Therefore, the idea of tribes such as the Yoruba, Mandinga, and Uolofe¹⁴, proposed by anthropologists and historians of the past, would correspond, in our days, to the search for an essence of its own. Thirdly, the present is not a continuity of the past and the African of today is not the same as the past African; consequently, the current Africa must be observed and understood from a pre-colonial temporality and not from presentism. Fourth:

The argument we are criticizing assumes that culture is a set of traits or attributes. Thus, capoeira, possession cults, samba, food, among others, would represent African culture in Brazil. This way of understanding human cultures is very problematic because, by subordinating the similarities of cultural traits to a geographical framework, the historical factor is neglected. The idea that specific cultural traits come from an Africa homogeneous and without history, and that they were transported to Brazil and here they remained, denies important characteristics of all human culture [...] (TRAJANO FILHO, 2007, p. 54).

Finally and in fifth place, in the absence of history to explain the cultural attribute, the implicit argument that samba, capoeira, possession, cuisine or anything else thought to be African is transmitted by blood, would correspond to understanding them as “something proper to the race”. In addition to essentialism and racialism, as Trajano Filho’s (2007) writing points out and accuses, as well as other articles against the adoption of positive affirmation policies published in *Divisões Perigosas* (2007), Clifford Geertz is providential:

The question is not whether humans are biological organisms with intrinsic characteristics [...], the question is how we should understand these indisputable facts when explaining rituals, analyzing ecosystems, interpreting fossil sequences or comparing languages (GEERTZ, 2001, 54).

In other words, what accompanies us as an external appendix to what we are: “Brazil is us”, the “generic African of the past”, and not mentioned by Trajano Filho (2007), enslavement and the black diaspora that make us deal, above all, with the “other” as an identity experience, manifests itself not in the sense of what we are, but in what we have become. Identity, from this point of view, seems to us to be intimately linked to what I am and what the “other” is. Therefore, the interstice between what I am and what the “other” is proposes a close relationship of dependence between identity, difference, and relational practices that are independent of our wills, as they do not occur separately from the space-historical moment, as well as symbolic meanings and the exercise of power and domination. Alberto Silva (2003, p. 75) observes that statements about difference in general “hide negative statements about other identities, [...] what we are and what we self-reference as a norm and by which we describe or evaluate what we are not”.

Therefore, studies indicate that the ties between Brazil and Africa were very tenuous during the four centuries in which human trade and the exploitation of enslaved labor continued. As Clóvis Moura (1993) states, here, as in Cuba, we could even say that, unlike the other colonies of Spanish America, the transatlantic traffic obeyed and established a uniformity of presence and continuity of slavery as colonial economies developed, as they were built into politically independent states, and as the last countries to declare the abolition of slavery.

Thus, for the purpose and understanding of social relations in our days, Roger Bastide (1974, p. 26) states that “slave ships brought on board not only men, women and children, but also their gods, their beliefs, and their folklore”, which proposes us to think and understand that the African presence would remain an indelible fact in the three Americas. In this sense, even though in 1850 there was a ban on the trade in human lives, and almost four decades later, the promulgation of the Lei Áurea - in line

with what came to be developed and characterized as a “de-Africanization policy”, implemented in Brazil since the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, Lopes (2004, p. 233) states that de-Africanization corresponds to the “process of removing from a theme or an individual the contents that identify him/her as of African origin”. Also for Lopes (2004), this process began on the African Continent due to the forced conversions to Christianity and which came to intensify with the African diaspora through different expedients in the psychological and cultural processes of deconstruction of their identity and of their descendants. There are many studies on de-Africanization state policies, such as Silva’s (2003). Understanding the de-Africanization process opens ways to understand what we were, what we are, and what we want to be, the future.

Memories and traces of a future

Who performs? Pedro Henrique, 31 years old, son of a black mother and white father, who discovered himself as black in the academic scene, still in his undergraduate degree, after joining the Black Sectorial (Setorial de Pretas e Pretos) at his university. He carefully observes the more than twenty people gathered in dialogue with Latifa and Cláudia Ayana. When your moment comes, you speak out...

Good evening! I am Pedro Henrique, a “black fag” who, after experiencing a second diaspora where, again, the possibility of being integrated and welcomed by my spaces of aquilombamento - family, community, black movements - was removed (VEIGA, 2018), I found the Black Sectorial. I want to start my reflection by asking a question. After listening to these two great black women, when we get here, what do we see? What do we hear? What do we feel? What flows through thought? What is the relationship between memory, oblivion and the future?

Upon arriving here, it is important to look back and return to the chart shown before, around the problem of memory and oblivion, considering that this last effect brings with it, as a manipulated memory, the fragility of identities, as noted by Ricouer (2002). From this point of view, when we deal with history confronting it with the State

policy of de-Africanization, it could be said that this imposed on us, black men and women, oblivion in words and by the force of words about who we were, as well as the invention of white civility for our black political body - the lived-myth of Brazilianness. Oblivion, silencing, invisibility, erasure that can no longer continue to flow in “white clouds” between the “white walls” of westernized universities in the Brazilian scene.

Who can say who we were and who we need to be? From what place do we enunciate our existence? In Brazil, the African presence remained something so familiar that very few situations cause strangeness unless we go against expectations regarding situations of occupation and permanence in white social spaces. Proposing us meanings of social navigation amid the contradictions inherent to our racialized society, maintained and expressed by the inequalities and hierarchization of the human and the social relations fundamentally arising with slavery and colonialism, we understand that social transformation is not possible without the critical analysis of: “[...] the longest process in our history, which we could not understand without studying Africa” (SILVA, 2003, p.85). Which university is so engaged? Which university is willing to entangle social places that are still internally so well defined and arranged?

The meanings of place, of belonging in class society, of racial division of labor, of subordination and subalternization in a double and permanent reproduction need to give way to existential, ontological, ethical, epistemological perspectives that started to open fissures in the white walls of our universities. *All th Paulos need to hear us! It is a path of no return.* The myth-ideology of national consciousness which, in its appearance and as a lived-myth, under the *skin of the words* and through words, it materializes in racially harmonious situations and practices, which allow to affirm and establish the meaning of *our things*. Although appropriate, through oblivion the agency of the black woman and the black man who, stripped and ontologically disqualified as human beings, were and are, in fact, producers of new cultures, political projects, and resistances, but also hope - “it is a lot of *milonga* (chatter) for just one *mironga* (spell)” (BERNARDINO-COSTA, 2019; GONZALEZ, 2020, p. 88).

The knowledge and white walls that surround all of the Paulos are no longer so white due to the insurgent presence of our black political bodies who, when performing memories, enunciate footsteps of a future in the university scenery, demarcating our

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Afro-diasporic and Ladino-Amefrican histories. Escrivivência in *oraliture*, here performed in fictional narratives by Latifa, Cláudia Ayana, and Pedro Henrique, marks the to be-being in the production of knowledge of many black women and men at the university; it marks the future of knowledge produced from black experiences. *Let's go on!*

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Notes

¹ A concept discussed by Lélia Gonzalez (1988/2018a) which deals with the connections between experiences of resistance, struggle, and inscription of a cultural complex in America as of the indigenous and Afro-diasporic peoples.

² On the Amnesty movement in Brazil: Araújo; Silva; Santos (2013) and Montenegro; Araújo; Rodeghero (2012). Regarding the movement in favor of direct elections and the convening of the Constituent Assembly (1988): Carvalho (2001), Reis (2014). Theoretical-methodological renovation, see: Gomes (2004) and Rubim (1996).

³ Brazilian society is made up of at least three civilizational matrices: indigenous, African and western European. However, there is a hierarchy of the Western European civilizational matrix over the other two. Black and indigenous social movements have been fighting for over 500 years against this hierarchy and against the subordination of their peoples by the colonial logic, still embedded in our country.

⁴ Approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine of UFPel, through opinion number 4.127.275.

⁵ In the Portuguese language, the word “cisgênero” does not have gender inflection, being used only in the masculine, however, in line with the transfeminist criticism, we chose to write the word “cisgênera” affirming and enunciating the ethical-political position of intellectuals such as Letícia Birth (2021).

⁶ Amends Law N. 9.394/1996, which establishes the Guidelines and Bases of National Education, to include and make mandatory the study of African and Afro-Brazilian History and Culture in the curricula of the education network.

⁷ Nucleus of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous Studies.

⁸ Passage of the title track of the CD recorded by Chico César, in 2002, “Respeitem meus cabelos, brancos” [Respect my hair, whites]. In this article, the expression “with velvet in the clogs” alludes to the process of silencing, invisibilizing and erasing black political bodies in the university space - a clog with velvet on the sole does not produce noise when touching the ground, thus contributing to the maintenance of the classroom silence.

⁹ Vessels that, in the slave trade, crossed the Atlantic transporting kidnapped and enslaved Africans from the African Continent to the Americas, besides transporting products and goods to Europe. 1538, first documented landing of slaves (JOFFILY, 2000)

¹⁰ In several moments of *A memória, a história e o esquecimento* [Memory, History and Oblivion], when referring to Weinrich (1999), Ricoeur (2007, p.510; 74) observes that the author is of fundamental importance to understand and propose the “[...] art [of oblivion] as it were symmetrical to *ar memoriae* [art of memory] celebrated by Frances Yates. While [...] essentially more a technique of memorization [than] an abandonment to remembrance and its spontaneous flashes, the opposite art would be letatechnical”. Not as something learned by heart [...] from the dialectic of the master disciple that depend [on] the memorization exercises inscribed in a program of education, of *paideia*”. The art of oblivion would allow dealing not only with the excess, but also with the insufficiency of memory as a manipulated narrative.

¹¹ According to Moore (2012), the Blackphobia view is inscribed on a global scale in all Euro-Semitic peoples in Europe and the Middle East.

¹² Work by Modesto Brocos, from 1895, which addresses the whitening process in Brazilian society.

¹³ For a better understanding, see the theses approved at the I Congress of the Black Brazilian held in 1950, in Rio de Janeiro, and the questions about teaching the history of Africa and the African diaspora (NASCIMENTO, 1982; 1980). These theses were presented by Abdias Nascimento, as a Federal Deputy for the PDT, in the form of Bill 1332/1983 (Compensatory Actions) and, although approved in the various commissions, it was never voted on by the National Congress (BRASIL, 1983; FLORES; MELO, 2014).

¹⁴ “UOLOFES (Ouolof, Woloff). West African people located in the Senegambia region and parts of present-day Mauritania. Origins. According to some theories, the Woloffs and the Serers, related to them, would have originated in the Futa Toro region, north of the Senegal River, from where, pressured by the Fula and Berbers, would have migrated south. Other hypotheses consider them an amalgamation of different peoples, such as Sereres, Tuculeres, Fulas, Saracoles, etc. (LOPES; MACEDO, 2017, p. 163).