

"A History narrated in the first-person singular", by Isabella Rjeille

A story narrated in the first-person singular, presupposes a lived fact or a past history to the narrator. This subject, in turn, tells us, and through his oral performativity, reconstructs a situation in the listener's imagination. A History, narrated in the first-person presupposes an experience of the passing of time, and attentive listening to the echo of the past in the present, lived in the narrator's skin, which with difficulty departs from him. It is through orality that ancient mythologies are passed and are updated in their sacred narrators - Holy Fathers (Pais de Santo), Holy Mothers (Mães de Santo), Shamans, among others.

Language has operated an important role in the process of colonization in the Americas: First, men and women from different African nations were mingled, so as not to communicate; Second, the neo-Latin languages were imposed as mandatory languages and cultures in that diaspora situation. Thus, colonialism goes beyond physical and material subordination of the subjects, providing the colonized the means of communication and expression - this is an epistemological colonialism. In the first chapter of the book *Black Skin, White Masks*, martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), analyzes the relationship of the colonized black population with the language of the white colonizer. For him "(...) to talk is to absolutely exist to the other. (...) is to be able to employ a certain syntax, possess the morphology of this or that language, but it is above all to assume a culture, support the weight of a civilization." Language not only transmits information, but has an almost spiritual contingency upon the culture in which it is used - to intervene in language is to intervene in the subjectivity of a population. Thus, the Jesuits soon started using the word Tupanasu (derived from Tupã, means "God Almighty") to talk to the tupinambás about the Christian god. Sounds like Tupi, it signifies like Portuguese.

Thus, the historical process of tensions, which brought into contact religions of African origin with Catholicism, is the result of a very particular situation in which men and women, who were separated from their land, had to find some way to keep in touch with the spiritual, under this colonization process. Today, the Umbanda yards and the Candomblé fields, keep alive a way of understanding the world, transmitted and transformed by different agents and in different regions of the country, telling a History of resistance. It is also assumed that oral narratives are modified with time, as new words are encrusted into language, at times, symptoms of other colonization processes.

In *Autorretrato em branco sobre preto* (Self-portrait in White on Black) there is not an orally-narrated story, nor a proposal for the rewriting of History as it is told. The narration lies in lending the body and the representation of a story from the subject, towards the re-elaboration of a current History from within himself. After all, the self-portrait is a witness of the subject in a particular time and place, in it we see beyond his face, but also in the formal and compositional choices, the way the author creates himself to the other (and here I return to Fanon: "to talk is to absolutely exist for the other").

"I spoke of contact.

Between colonizer and colonized, there is only room for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory cultures, disdain, distrust, arrogance, sufficiency, rudeness, the brainless elites, the defiled masses.

No human contact, but relations of domination and submission, which transform the colonized man into a helper, whip and the indigenous men into a production instrument.

It's my turn to state an equation: colonization = objectification.

I hear the storm. They speak of progress, "achievements", cured diseases, high standards of living above themselves.

I, I speak of societies emptied from themselves, trampled cultures, mined institutions, confiscated lands, murders religions, annihilated artistic magnificence, and extraordinary possibilities suppressed. "

(CESAIRE, Aimé, Discourse on Colonialism, p. 25)

This exhibition also addresses a question about the ways of elaboration of historical traumas. And here I refer to the many different forms of domination derived from colonial Brazil, which still persist today, only performed by updated agents. How does the cultural apparatus elaborate this trauma? What is the role of museums and cultural institutions within this system? Is it to glorify the various cultures that have landed here as exotic signs of a distant past? Or, is it to investigate, unearth documents, archives, research and dialogues which elaborate a history of domination that goes beyond exposing handcuffs in a showcase, as if they were part of something that no longer exists? How does the meritocratic discourse feeds itself back from the discourse of mestizaje, and vice versa? How is history performed and updated upon myths and rituals? How does the logic of private property and the desubjectivation of bodies intersect?

In the work *Vocês nunca terão direitos sobre seus corpos*, (You Will Never Have Rights Upon Your Bodies), phrases engraved on wooden boards (those which once signaled sugar mills, today on farms entries in the outskirts of the city) are spoken by the new captains of the countryside, the military police. These phrases also remind us of the indignation of the farmers who owned slaves, which declared that signing the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law) hurt the "right of man over man."

In turn, in the work *Tratado #2* (Treaty #2) a hardwood log rests passively on a broken mirror, shattered into several pieces, in reference to the Treaty of Tordesillas, which came to regulate the dispute over the ownership of the lands of the New World. In these fragments, we see our dismembered image without a possibility of repair. The log lies over the broken reflections as if it was saying "don't move here, it is my domain", protecting a territory of forcibly separated pieces. In *Nessa Terra, Em Se Plantando, Tudo Dá*, (In This Soil, If You Plant, Everything Grows), (sentence from the letter of Pero Vaz de Caminha, reporting the profitable fertility of Santa Cruz Island), a small specimen of Pau-Brazil grows in a vivarium. Exposed as a museum object - a place that encompasses death par excellence - this symbolic plant grows with a promise to destroy the structures that traps it. This time around, it is science that serves as an instrument of domination: unraveling to understand, to trap in order to observe, used to produce profit and absolute truths (we cannot forget the eugenics discourses).

The ways in which today we review and present certain aspects of our history are reviewed in *Suplício* (Torment): arranged on a museum showcase furniture, elements of torture and seizure of the black youth, carried out by military police or by "justiceiros" ('justice makers'), replace the heavy shackles, on a disturbing update of colonization. Unrevised traumas are institutionalized, transformed in relics, and taken as being in the past, as "a necessary step for development" (as referred by Cesaire), but remain as open wounds in which often a handful of brine and lemon is played.

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