

Chapter 231

Thessituras of memory: Literary readings and the black being by the gaze of teachers of a high school in the region of Cariri-Ceará

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ABSTRACT

The present work aims to identify memories about the presence and characterization of black characters in the trajectory of literary reading of high school teachers of a school in the Region of Cariri-Ceará. For this purpose, we used the research format of exploratory, quali-quantitative approach, performing bibliographic studies in books, scientific articles and dissertations, in addition to the application of a data

collection questionnaire for educators of the aforementioned educational institution. Thus, the analysis of the collected information was based on the readings made during the bibliographic study on the theme and considering the human being as a subject that is constructed from the historical-social relations. As results, we obtained elements that indicate the black character's payment of memory, the ratification of the myth of racial democracy and the whitening of the Brazilian population, the identification of the black with the marginalization, misery, submission; but components were also obtained that indicate a (re)reading of history and point to the process of combating racism and to the affirmative of black culture and identity. components were also obtained that indicate a (re)reading of history and point to the process of combating racism and to the affirmative of black culture and identity. Thus, the literature is shown as a powerful interventional instrument for the construction of new knowledge and experiences.

Keywords: Literature, Memory, Be black.

1 INTRODUCTION

The way black characters have been represented throughout history contributes decisively to the updating and maintenance of racism in Brazil. This is because, according to a historical survey by Silva (2009), it is observed that the representation of blacks in literature refers to the slave past, reveals a relationship of servitude towards whites and, even when a process of denunciation of racism was initiated through literary texts, there are still marks of sulbaternization and/or approach of the black character by the bias of commiseration.

In line with this context, Adichie (2019, p.23) asserts that "just like the economic and political world, stories are also defined by the principle of *nkali*¹: how they are told, who tells them, when they are

¹ Ethnic word Igbo than, in free translation, means "to be greater than the other".

told and how often they are told depends very much on the power (influence) of who tells the story. Power is the ability not only to tell someone else's story, but to make it your definitive story." In such a way, we realize how much Eurocentric canonical literature contributed to the stigmatization of blacks.

Starting from the question: How is the image of "being black" present in the trajectory of literary reading of high school teachers²? the objective is to bring to light elements necessary for discussion about the image of black characters in literary texts read by high school teachers, discussing how this can reinforce the structures for constant updating of racism.

Recognizing that our imaginary mobilizes external positions (attitudes, words, behaviors), as well as internal (values, beliefs, emotions), we will treat memory as a constituent element of the feeling of identity and that strongly interferes in the way of perceiving the world and making decisions, so we decided to investigate what reveals the path of literary readings made by teachers of a high school regarding their view of being black (SOUSA, 2005).

In this way, the importance of this study lies, at first, in the possibility of revealing, from the report of memories and the bias of literary readings, the creation and maintenance of stereotypes about "being black" in Brazil. It is also noteworthy that the discussion of this theme is relevant to society because racism is present in its structures, so these investigations make it possible to know it and help in the process of seeking interventions to combat discrimination and racial prejudice, structural social problems faced in all areas of the country, including in schools through books and school activities.

The work presented here has as general objective to identify how the literary texts read by high school teachers represent the "being black"; and specific objectives: to identify, in the profile of literature present in the trajectory of educators, the existence or absence of black characters and how these are portrayed by high school teachers.

2 METHODOLOGY

This article presents reflections on the relationship between literary reading, practiced throughout life, by educators of a high school, located in the Cariri region of Ceará, and the formation of the concept of "being black" from these readings.

To this end, a bibliographic research was carried out, through consultations in books, articles and dissertations present in databases and virtual libraries, using as descriptors: *literature, reading, racism, memory, teacher* and their combinations.

In addition, answers to a questionnaire were used, an integral part of the research "Black-Brazilian literature and ethnic-racial relations: possibilities in "Olhos d'água", by Conceição Evaristo.", which has been developed in the course of the Master's Degree in Teaching and Teacher Training UNILAB/IFCE.

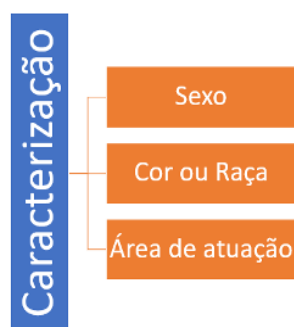
² Term from the work of Silva (2009). In this work, it was taken to signify the condition of the one who is black in Brazilian society.

This instrument was developed through the *Google Forms* platform, applied in November 2021, by sending a *link*, via Whatsapp, to teachers.

We decided that we would approach teachers from the four areas of knowledge: Languages, Mathematics, Human Sciences and Natural Sciences, because we understand that everyone has built, throughout their personal and professional trajectories, a history of reading, although some do so to a greater degree and others to a lesser degree. In addition, taking into account what is provided for in Law No. 10,369/03,³ which amends Law No. 9,394/96 to include in the official curriculum of the Education Network the obligation of the theme "Afro-Brazilian History and Culture", since this legal device ensures that "the contents referring to Afro-Brazilian History and⁴ Culture will be taught within the scope of the entire school curriculum, especially in the areas of Art Education and Brazilian Literature and History".

This data collection instrument was presented as viable, due to the care in relation to the prevention of COVID-19, as well as the exhaustive process to which most educators are subjected due to remote or hybrid teaching. However, the use of the questionnaire in a virtual platform also carries some limitations, such as generic or evasive statements on the part of the participants and the impossibility of having a dialogical exchange between researchers and interlocutors to deepen such answers, which did not allow us to work with more detailed information. Of the fifty-six teachers who received the questionnaire, thirty-six answered the form that is presented as shown in Figures 01 and 02:

Figure 01
Part 1: characterization of the participants.



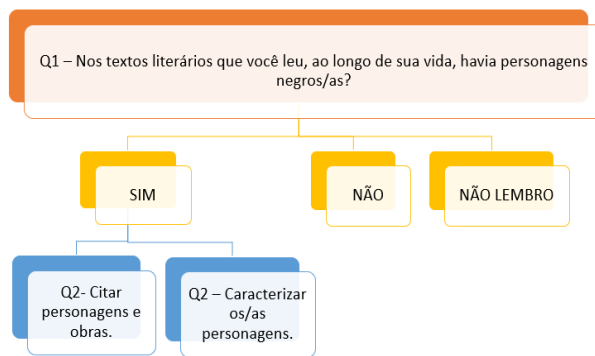
Source: from the survey (2021)

³ On 03/10/2008, Law No. 10,639/03 was replaced by Law No. 11,645/08, which includes indigenous culture. We decided to cite, in this work, the first instead of the second, considering it the main milestone in relation to the insertion of African and Afro-Brazilian culture and history in the curriculum of Basic Education.

⁴ Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education.

Figure 02

Part 2: Questions about literary reading, memory, and the image of "being black."



Source: from the survey (2021)

In this text, we will use the term "question 1" to deal with Q1, and the term "question 2" to deal with what refers to the information contained in Q2. In the answers given to question 2, each respondent is identified by the letter "E" (educator), followed by the number that corresponds to the order of interaction with the data collection instrument.

From the answers collected and in the light of the information from the selected bibliographic collection, we analyze to what extent these black characters were and/or are present in the literature read by the educators, what the perception of these characters is and what memory was constructed by the teachers from them.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

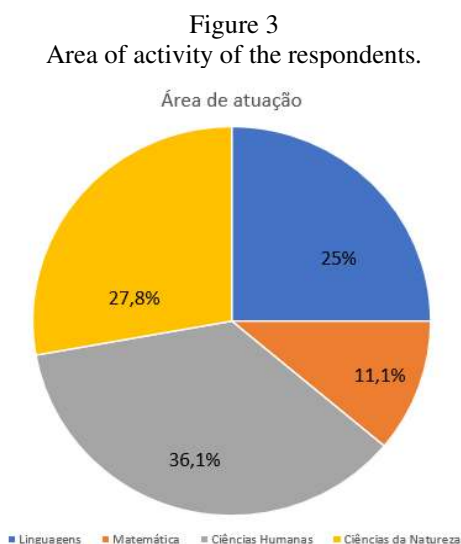
According to Cuti (2010, p. 15) "in Brazil, during the first four centuries, writers were at the mercy of Portuguese letters. The political and economic domain was also reflected in the cultural domain, including literature." This fact contributes decisively to the elaboration of individual and collective memories about what it is to be black in Brazil, as well as has an impact on the formation of black identity and also results in the constant updating of the categories of white supremacy, prejudice, discrimination and racism.

In this way, much of what we reproduce today in discourses, behaviors and practices are the result of memories built throughout life. So considering what Xavier, Fialho & Vasconcelos (2018, p. 89) precept when they state that "[...] the Memoirs, when evoked, can shine and translate an immensity of traces, marks and points that the writing overshadowed and did not bother to register them, either by prejudiced contempt of the official History, or by ignorance / irrecognition", we proposed this investigation about the memories about the "being black", built by high school teachers, of a school in the region of Cariri Ceará.

The sending of the questionnaire to all teachers of the school was based on the assumption that this work must cross the curriculum in all disciplines and that the memory about "being black" will imply the pedagogical practice of the teacher, impacting or not on the affirmation of black culture and identity and for the fight against racism. From this relationship derives the urgency of an anti-racist pedagogical work,

since studies (VALENTE and DANTAS, 2021) point out that most teachers do not put the exercise of teaching in favor of working with ethnic-racial relations and that many do not feel prepared to deal with such a subject as will be verified in the following results.

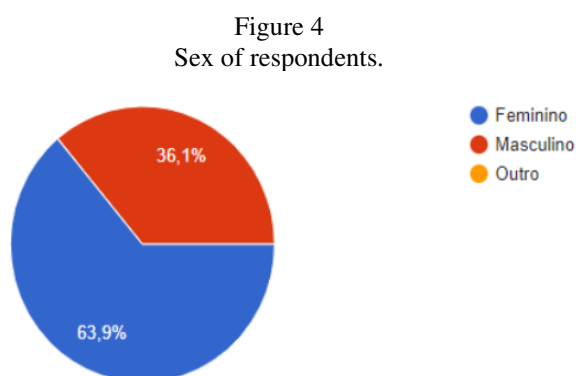
Thus, the subjects of our study are distributed by teaching area, as shown in the following graph:



From research (2021)

It is noted that the participation of teachers in the area of Human Sciences, very commonly evoked as the main responsible for the work with African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture, is much higher than the others. In addition, added the percentages of the following areas: Languages and Human Sciences it is perceived that the result found is 22% higher than the sum of the percentages of the areas of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, areas of knowledge, typically, considered less involved with anti-racist practices.

The subjects were cut according to gender, which is observed in the following graph:



Source: from the survey (2021)

For the question about the presence or absence of black characters in the works read by them, there was no significant difference in relation to what was answered, taking into account the sex of the participants, since of the 36 participants, 23 answered affirmatively to the presence of black characters and 13 answered that they did not remember these characters, of the last group 06 were male and 07 were female. In this perspective, it is found that 36.1% of the participants revealed that they did not remember to have, in their literary readings, the portrayal of black characters.

This absence can be understood from the historiographical contextualization carried out by Gouvêa (2005, p. 84), when he describes the literary productions of the first two decades of the twentieth century, in which the erasure of the black is evidenced as a reflection of their marginalization in the post-abolition period, in which it represented the mark of enslavement that should be forgotten, replaced by the new social order based on the ideals of progress and civilization. Thus, the black man was "an almost absent character [...] mute, devoid of a characterization that went beyond the racial reference" (Gouvêa, 2005, p. 83). From this perspective, we can reflect on the purposes for which this way of constructing the narrative around the black character served, and how it had repercussions in later productions, when demonstrating in the answers given to question 2 of the questionnaire performed, a portion of participants who do not remember black characters in their literary readings or are not able to characterize them, noticeable in the following statements:

Table 1. *Evasive answers.*

Responder	Answer given to question 2 - Characterization of black characters in literary works.
E1	I don't remember well.
E5	All are striking.

Source: from the survey (2021)

On the other hand, 63.9% of the participants stated that there was the presence of black characters in the literary texts read. Based on this data, we directed ourselves to the answers given to the last question (question 2) of the questionnaire, which asked the teacher to describe the characters in the literary works, in continuity with when the affirmative answer of question 1. The reports obtained reveal the representation of these characters, help us to outline the profile of their characteristics and think about how the narrative and aesthetic construction of the characters contribute to the reproduction and maintenance of stereotypes around being black, as can be seen with the information in table 2, reproduced below:

Table 2. Answers that meet the negative stereotyping of the black character.

Responder	Answer given to question 2 - Characterization of black characters in literary works.
E3	Always low-income and submissive to whites.
E7	Childhood memory: Saci Pererê and Dona Anastácia da Obra de Monteiro Lobato.
E8	She was a slave who was exploited in every way by her masters.
E9	Usually, they were characters excluded from society. They had a very difficult life, with almost no opportunity.
E10	The character who lived in a tenement. He suffered greatly because he was poor and black.
E11	Raimundo, a character in "O mulato" even though he was rich and graduated in Law, was a victim of racial prejudice in the city of São Luís do Maranhão.
E12	The discrimination is evident in the difficulty, (common to all the characters), which arises in conquering space in society.
E14	In some of the books I've read, they've always been characters without such importance in the plot, because they were either slaves or manual laborers on mills, farms. They were never in evidence for always being in an inferior social position.
E15	Usually these characters were secondary, or were in the kitchen or on the farm.
E19	It reminded me of the site of the yellow wooden pica, where Saci was always called "your little black", etc.. 🤔 kk
E22	Tia Nastácia do sítio do Pica-Pau amarelo, a character by Monteiro Lobato. She's black, illiterate, she's always, I said, always in the kitchen even though she's part of the family.
E23	Usually black characters are marginalized in fictional narratives.

Source: from the survey (2021)

Oliveira (2017) by proposing in his work the analysis of literary productions in a given historical period, seeking to trace the appearance of black characters in the plots, manages to establish categories that synthesize the characteristics predominantly attributed to these characters, such as: appearance, professional activity, social space where he is inserted, family origin and identification. Although her research is directed to children's literature, what the author can infer about the personalization of the characters, is also reflected in the statements of our interlocutors: "they are, yes, several stories, but intertwined by the same threads that weave the black characters" (Oliveira, 2017, p. 9).

With regard to professional activity, it is verified in the assertions of respondents E8, E14 and E15, present in chart 2, the characters associated with works considered socially discredited, or even related to enslavement, such as manual exercise in farming, mills, farms, women in the role of maid, restricted to the kitchen space or having their bodies exploited and hypersexualized. In relation to space and social condition, still in table 2, in the answers E3, E9, E10, E12, E23, in the narratives the link to poverty, marginalization, immersed in a context of submission, hunger, misery, exclusion, suffering, living in favelas, hills, tenements, deprived even of their humanity, are repeated.

On the other hand, even when the plot around the character embarks on a certain ascent, it is still marked by the ills of structuring racism, visible in the speech of respondent E11 (chart 2), when he

highlights the character Raimundo from the work "The mulatto" by Aluísio de Azevedo, in which even managing to ascend and occupy a socially esteemed position, he is not exempt from going through situations of discrimination, veiled or blatant prejudices, motivated by his family origin, since Raimundo is the son of an enslaved woman, as well as by the color of his skin.

It is significant to address the various mentions of Monteiro Lobato's characters by the respondents, especially the widely known work of the *Sítio do Pica-Pau Amarelo*, in which we enter the memory of access to children's literary productions. As Gouvêa (2005, p. 83) elucidates, the image of the black was from absence to mythification, from the transformations in the cultural field, where it was sought to reinforce through the productions the idea of national identity. Thus, "blacks emerged in the narratives, in a mythologized way, identified with the roots of the country" (Gouvêa, 2005, p. 84).

In the movement to make a brief history about the protagonism of black characters in children's literature, Silva *et al* (2020, p. 179) highlight the important place that Monteiro Lobato's literary writing began to exercise by becoming a landmark for the emergence of Brazilian children's literature, with the creation of a magical universe, fanciful, characterized with folkloric elements of Brazilian nationality. However, the authors call our attention to the ambiguity present in the works produced by Lobato, especially in the construction of the discourses and representation of black characters:

Literature, as well as other artistic productions, tends to reflect the values and ideologies present in society. Linked to the eugenicist mentality, the Lobatian works tend to reflect positions of inferiorization of their black characters (aunt Nastácia, Barnabé, Saci Pererê), endorsing stereotypes commonly attributed to this population in positions of servility and subalternization. (Silva et al., 2020, p. 179)

We can infer what the authors address, when respondent E19 (chart 2) quotes: "*it reminded me of the site of the yellow woodpecker, where Saci was always called 'your little black' (...)*". As Gouvêa (2005, p. 88) points out, the black reference was that it positioned the characters in the narrative, confirmed their identity, distinguishing them from the others, different from what happened with white characters, whose racial marks were not named. It is possible to perceive the negative connotation that carries the term "your little black" attributed to the figure of the Saci in a derogatory way, in order to demarcate his otherness.

Gomes (2005, p. 43) when dealing with the concept of black identity, argues that it can be understood as "social, historical and plural construction", and that it is necessary to "consider it not only in its subjective and symbolic dimension, but above all in its political sense". Agreeing with what the author affirms, it is a challenge imposed on the black Brazilian population to build a positive identity, in the context of a society marked by structural racism and the fallacy of racial democracy, which historically teaches that to be accepted it is necessary to deny oneself, to deny oneself, one's traits, one's culture, one's identity (Gomes, 2005, p. 43). In this sense, Oliveira (2017, p. 4) incisively teaches us about the necessary resignification of the term "negro", as proposed by the Black Movements, in order to deconstruct the

diminutive meaning placed on it over the years, claiming all the struggle, memory, history, the social subjects to whom it represents.

Still dealing with the Lobatian work, we also have the figure of Tia Nastácia, recalled in the answer E22 (table 2) that describes the character as black, illiterate and forcefully reiterates the fact that she is always in the kitchen. Thus, as Gouvêa (2005, p. 84) explains, black and old black became constant characters, socializing agents of white children, such as Tia Nastácia, who in a brief moment of Monteiro Lobato's work was invited to be a storyteller, but it was soon found that it was not suitable for such an occupation, and resumed her place in the kitchen, "in a position of servitude that reveals continuity with the slave model."

In addition, the response of participant E20, present in table 3, reproduced below, presents indications that may reveal the ideal of whitening of Brazilian society. According to Bernardino (2002) "the ideal of whitening presupposed a solution to the Brazilian racial problem through the gradual elimination of blacks, who would be assimilated by the white population." Thus, the idea that, due to miscegenation, the Brazilian population would be on its way

of whitening and that this condition would be necessary to present a positive character and be capable of good deeds is reinforced in works, in some moments, taken as abolitionist novels, as is the case of "A escrava Isaura", by Bernardo Guimarães.

Table 3. An answer that matches the idea of whitening blacks.

E20	The slave Isaura, by Bernardo Guimarães. There were black characters, even though Isaura was not black, she contributed to impact society at the time, in relation to the abolition of slavery.
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Source: from the survey (2021)

On the other hand, it is possible to perceive, in some reports, the presence of characters and authors who point to the rupture of the pre-established idea about "being black", as stated by Cuti (2010, p. 25) "[...] the ruptures of this circle have been carried out mainly by their own victims and by those who do not refuse to reflect deeply on race relations in Brazil." As can be seen in Table 4:

Table 4. Answers that go against the negative stereotyping of blacks.

E2	<p>There were so many: in Becos da Memória de Conceição Evaristo I highlight - Negro Alírio, Maria Nova, Tio Totó all residents of the favela that was in the precession of urbanization living the pains of not accepting to lose their place, their identity, their space.</p> <p>A Color Defect - Kehind, the girl who was captured in Africa along with her grandmother and sister, was made a slave in Brazil, became involved in the revolt of evils and lived the pain of having the son who was born free have been sold as a slave by his father.</p> <p>Torto Arado - relates the saga of the sisters Bibiana and Belonisa who fight for the right to live with dignity in the countryside taking from the land the sustenance for their families, also fight for the right of their religious traditions.</p> <p>The Glorious Family - The unnamed writing, identified in his words " my owner Baltazar Van Dun who managed to play fool, idiot and the owner said that he knew nothing, read mistake, the slave knew everything, everything even, even knew French.</p>
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E4	Many stories, especially of the formation of our country. They are sad and we experience to this day this denial of rights and prejudices.
E6	Carolina Maria de Jesus wrote "Eviction room: diary of a favelada". It deals with the story of a black woman, living in a favela who made a living with recycling who faces many difficulties in life but manages to win.
E13	Unfortunately, the characters were treated as mere supporting characters.
E16	They are characters marked by resistance, by faith, by struggle.
E18	Characters of strong personality and fearless.
E21	In a color defect, Alleys of memory, Olhos d'água, Ponciá Vicêncio, Room of eviction, Father against mother and so many others I see the prejudice and discrimination they suffer, but I also see and applaud the strength of resistance of this people that I admire so much.

Source: from the survey (2021)

It is possible to perceive that in the speech of the respondent E4 there is an awareness of persistence, over time, of the inequality of conditions by the color/race of the subjects, when he states that "... we experience to this day this denial of rights and prejudice." This is revealing of the break with the myth of racial democracy, widely disseminated after the publication of the work *Casa-Grande e Senzala*, by the sociologist Gilberto Freyre, which brings a structuring idea of Brazilian nationalism, to the point of disregarding the different social strata of society and proclaiming the notion that the professional, personal, social performance of the subject is linked only to personal effort, which is not consistent with reality. (BERNARDINO, 2002, p. 250)

In addition, there is the recurrence of positive words to characterize the black characters, in the words of respondents E16 and E18, ratifying what Santos (2018) points out when he states that "it becomes important for the reading public to have contact with positive ideas (so rare) of black Brazilians". It is also inferred that speeches such as these are also made possible by the irreversible and powerful literary movement experienced in Brazil, especially by the production of black women, as can be seen in the statements of respondents E2, E6 and E21. In such a way, these works contribute to unveil history, build new narratives, decolonize knowledge, corroborating the thought of Adichie (2019, p. 33) when he states that "... when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about anywhere, we regain a kind of paradise."

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the Brazilian context, there is a clear negative identification about the idea of "being black" and this is related to the memories that have been constructed throughout history and to the fact that they were elaborated based on Eurocentric and discriminatory thinking towards black peoples. There is talk of the contributions of African culture to the Brazilian people, but critical reflections on how our history was told and even on the unequal reality in which the black Brazilian population lives are still little possible, and there is still ample defense of conceptions that affirm that we enjoy a racial democracy.

The present work presents data that allow us to reflect on the figure of the black in the trajectory of literary readings made by high school teachers of a school institution in the Cariri region, providing the opportunity to reveal that the path of elaboration of what it is "to be black" is crossed by literature and that for interventional actions for the problem discussed in this article, this area of knowledge becomes a powerful instrument.

It was verified by the statements of the educators that the slave and unequal past still persists in our society, not only through alarming data, but also in our imaginary that is reflected in our discourses, positions, practices, attitudes. In such a way, in order to correct the distorted recognition and stigmatization, the teacher presents himself as fundamental agents in this process, because they are those who through their practices will provide a different path from that dictated by the "unique history".

Thus, it is of fundamental importance that new studies on this theme are developed, especially with regard to the relationship between the teacher's view of "being black" and his pedagogical practice and this with ethnic-racial relations.

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