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### **ABSTRACT**

This scientific article seeks to discuss the fallacy of the superiority of the colonizer and the inferiority of the colonized in the context of the promised land of the Amazon. Dialoguing with the theoretical field of Cultural Studies, we weave a treadmill of memorialists and/or historical nature to diagnose,

through bibliographical research, the possible changes in the vision of the colonizer, from his arrival in Brazil to this historical moment, about the colonized, that is, the natives. In the attempt to obtain a position in the face of the colonialist discourse, as a reductionist vision of the Amazon region and a mistaken view about the subject and the Amazonian space, we wish to guarantee representativeness to the multiple voices of the "identities" of the subjects who inhabit the Amazon. We think of the Amazon as the between-place, a means of excellence for dialogue between the present and the past, between the native and the foreigner, between the colonizer and the colonized. A unique place that transcends the boundaries of space and time.

**Keywords:** Amazon; cultural studies; colonialist discourse.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Amazon for a long time was seen as an unusual place, a between-place, inhabited by "alien" beings that populate the European imaginary. The term between-place is widely used in the discursive field within the humanities in what is often called Cultural Studies. This, in turn, marks a moment of changes and relationship of the human sciences for a better understanding of the current world, which, sometime later, came to be called interdisciplinarity. This conception opts for historical details, highlighting the realities considered minor in the face of the struggle of class struggle, including in the deconstruction of those "great narratives", present in the chronicles of colonization, in the heroic accounts of the imperialist nations, in the literary histories.

The postcolonial thinker Homi Bhabha (2005) says that the term between-place can be defined as a transit space that generates "complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, interior and exterior, inclusion and exclusion" (p.10). We suggest, in this present article, that the Amazon is then seen as this between-place and consequently favorable environment for the experience of monstrous beings that cause estrangement.

This article aims to perform an analysis of the Amazonian space as a marginal between-place and its inhabitants that results in the confrontation of two cultural systems that dialogue: that of the colonizer and the colonized.

The theories of racial and geographical determinism affirmed that blacks and Indians were abnormal, strange, monstrous beings and, therefore, possessed the perfect profile to live in an inhospitable place like the Amazon. In literature, monsters represent all that is dangerous and horrible in the human worldview. They help us understand and organize the chaos of nature and our own. In the oldest and most diverse cultures, the monster appears as a mark of the relationship of strangeness between human beings and the world around them. From outer space come Martians and aliens who personify the fear of the other, whether he comes from a distant planet or a foreign country.

Literature reserves for aliens and monster's hostile, sometimes suburban, spaces. On the margins of the centers of power, as Ceserani (2006) points out in his work *The Fantastic*, which explores a very peculiar area of literature and art, which is that of the disturbing and fantastic imagination. According to this author, "It is typical of the fantastic not to stray too far from the dominant culture and to look for the somewhat marginal geographical areas, where the relations between a dominant culture and another that is withdrawing are well glimpsed" (p. 74). Amazon fits well into this profile described by Ceserani.

All this discussion leads us to a very old conflict: that of the civilized against the barbarian, of the colonialist and the colonized, and that of Europe and the New World. According to Neide Gondim (2007) in *The Invention of the Amazon*, a work that deals with the mental and material appropriation of society about the Amazonian space, the narrative about the emergence of the Amazon is made through the writings of the first chronicler travelers and the fictionists who built an Amazonian identity based on fantasies and imaginations.

There was not, in fact, on the part of the colonizers, a desire to know and study the New World and its residents, there was only the clear intention to dominate that place and impose an Imperialist ideology on those who were there (TODOROV, 2002, p.28). The Imperialism I quote consists of a social process through which the economic interests of a country promote its expansion, economically exploiting other peoples, to obtain wealth, through violence and threats, to feed national luxury. To establish such a regime, it relied on government incentives and the help of Christianity, which functioned as a façade for the conquest of the monopolistic interests of big capital (SAID, 1995, p.42).

For Said in his work *Culture and Imperialism* (1995), Imperialism functioned based on the general idea of the need for subordination and victimization of the native. According to him, there is, on the part of the colonizer, a pleasure in using power, in controlling. Said also realizes that there was an ideological principle of reducing and then reconstructing the native as an individual to be governed, and finally, the thought was cultivated that the colonizer has a civilizing and liberating mission.

As the main point of this ideology, the violence practiced by Imperialist ideas was almost always not perceived, thus making it difficult to observe the unhealthy consequences of its

perpetration. Finally, Said (1995) draws our attention to the process of rewriting the history of the natives in the function of the hegemonic history, intending to disperse the memory of the autochthonous, presenting it as violent and unintelligent, and treating the domination of the colonizer as an irrefutable necessity.

## 2 THE COLONIZER'S VISION

Many intellectuals, writers, and critics of Colonial Politics have developed an effort that Said (1995) calls an inward journey, to show Europe and the West, through their works, the marginalized and suppressed figures of history. It is a conscious effort to "enter the discourse of Europe and the West, to blend with it, to transform it, making marginalized, suppressed or forgotten histories recognized" (SAID, 1995, p. 274).

Todorov, in his work *The Conquest of America* (1999) in which he reveals a study on the foreigner's view of the New World, to justify the Imperialist view, which treated the native as slaves and not as the owners of the land, it was necessary to call the colonized "barbarians", "savages", "animals". In employing these words to describe them, the Portuguese, Spaniards, English, and other colonizers demonstrated all prejudice and unwillingness to know the true owners of the so-called New World. Here I define prejudice as an opinion formed by anticipation, usually without deep analysis of the subject, this is related to ignorance, understood, in this context, as a lack of knowledge about something or someone.

Márcio Souza (2002) in his book *História da Amazônia* makes a summary of the various fantastic theories that surrounded Europe about the Amazon occupation:

Many imaginary hypotheses have been raised regarding the occupation of the Amazon. The most curious, for example, speak of the audacious voyages of certain navigators from the Near East, such as Phoenicians, Hebrews, and Arabs, without forgetting the supposed trade that the inhabitants of the disappeared Atlantis would have maintained with the region (p.27).

The time of discovery of the Americas took place at a time of great ambiguity for Europe, because it was the end of the Middle Ages, or as many called the "Dark Ages", the end of the inquisitions, witch hunts, bonfires, Hell and the beginning of the Renaissance, time of light, of scientific growth, economic and transoceanic trade.

The discovery of Brazil followed the same logic between light and darkness, Paradise and Hell. According to Laura de Melo Souza (1986) in her work, *The Devil and the Land of Santa Cruz* deals with witchcraft, magical practices, and popular religiosity in colonial Brazil, attests that Europe received from the Brazilian territory precious loads, shining stones, and was called Land of Santa Cruz because all this wealth referred to the colonizers the idea of paradise. However, from Brazil also came those condemned for witchcraft, the stories of the dangers of death through diseases and wild animals,

and also the change of the name Terra de Santa Cruz to Brazil, a word that originated from the tree "Pau Brasil" from which a red substance was extracted that was used to dye fabrics. The color red was soon associated with the devil and the conclusion drawn by Friar Vicente de Salvador and quoted in Souza's book (1986) is that the devil won this battle and the name that prevailed for the discovered land was Brazil:

Probably Friar Vicente do Salvador was not aware of the presence of Brazil in medieval letters, and seems to me to have been the first to explain the designation by the presence of reddish-colored dyeing wood. However, it is curious to note that, in doing so, he provided a very complicated explanation of a religious nature, alluding to the clash between Good and Evil, Heaven – the kingdom of God – and Hell – the kingdom of the devil (p.28).

According to the author, the name Brazil had already been mentioned in many maritime charts from 1351 to 1508, but in giving his opinion on the subject the friar makes clear the association of the discovered land with hell, perhaps intending to undo the reports that attributed to the New World the idea of earthly paradise.

In the eyes of many clergy, Native Americans acted as if there was no sin on the underside of the equator. It was as if Brazil were inhabited only by animals as Guillermo Giucci (1993) points out in the book *Sem Fé, Sem Lei ou Rei*, Brazil gathered, in the opinion of the Jesuit Simão de Vasconcelos, all the conditions of a paradise in reverse, that is, it was inhabited by anti-Adam and anti-Eve, since its inhabitants did not have any sign of civilization and, that is why they needed first of all a spiritual colonization.

Souza (1986) reports, however, that "the first movement – that of Pedro Álvares – was made in the direction of Heaven: to this, the colony would be attached, were it not for the successful efforts of Lucifer, putting everything to lose" (SOUZA, 1986, p.28). There was even a duality of thoughts and opinions about Colonial Brazil and this duality permeated the European imagination for many years. Souza (1986) also says that Brazil was discovered after Africa and Asia, so there was already an imagination formed by the experiences of the first discoveries. When setting out in search of the Americas what the discoverers wanted was confirmation of what they already knew through the accounts of past navigations.

Because of all this pre-existing European and Eurocentric vision of the New World, the images of the so-called Amazon were also picturesque. The travel accounts written by the explorers scattered throughout Europe were the first responsible for fostering this idealistic vision of this place and created, among Europeans, the repetition of the same image of the Amazon.

For Gondim (2007) this imaginary began to be built a long time ago. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when sea voyages were initiated, Europeans had to deal with realities that were very different from theirs. The ocean was a place where one could not have security, that is, no one

was sure what could happen, or what they would find on these trips. The information they had came from books by other browsers:

[...] contrary to what can be supposed, the Amazon was not discovered, nor was it built: in reality, the invention of the Amazon takes place from the construction of India, manufactured by Greco-Roman historiography, by the account of pilgrims, missionaries, travelers and merchants (p.9).

When in the late nineteenth century, and early twentieth century the interest in the Amazon arises, the context is the replacement of the East as a supplier of raw materials for the European continent. The Amazon then begins to play this role, sending to Europe latex extracted from rubber trees and also chestnuts. However, it is not only in this aspect that the Amazon is compared to the East, the strangeness and difficulties caused by the enormous cultural, geographical, sociological, and organizational differences make the explorers come to see the Amazon not only as different but mainly as inferior.

When we come across the Amazon being compared to the East, we need to refer to what Said (2007) defines as "Orientalism". Orientalism, according to him, is a set of diverse independent realities in which the academic and doctrinal construction stands out, developed mainly by the Western peoples over the Easterners. The East is understood in this context as a space of Islamic culture, expressed in the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages, corresponding, in a general way, to the Near East, to North Africa.

However, Orientalism today applies to every dominant culture that takes over the other, disfiguring it. We can also define it as a set of categories and values based on the political and social needs of a dominant group to the detriment of the concrete realities of the dominant group. Said (2007) says:

Orientalism is better understood as a set of constraints and limitations of thought than simply as a positive doctrine. If the essence of Orientalism is the indelible distinction between Western superiority and Eastern inferiority, we must be prepared to note how in its development Orientalism deepened and hardened the distinction (p.76).

The Amazon then can be considered this East, a place that was stereotyped, classified, and interiorized by the pathfinders. The contact with this different place raises speeches that demonstrate the dominant discourse of the colonizer magnifying his deeds while diminishing the qualities of the colonized.

### **3 THE OTHER AND THE COLONIALIST DISCOURSE**

It is clear that within this European description of the New World and later of the Amazon as an inhospitable place, there was the belief that only differentiated and strong beings could survive the harsh reality of the Americas. According to Gondim (2007, p.29) "parallel to the dreamlike veilities

of Edenic bliss, the bodily monstrosities were the terrifying counterpoint of man in this incessant imagistic game of hearing, seeing, reproducing, telling, rewriting."

Postcolonialist thought then arises and in it the need to conceptualize the "Other". This current emerged influenced by Cultural Studies, and Literary Criticism and eventually became an important way of thinking about society because of cultural criticism. Colonialism conceptualized the Colonial through the analysis of the struggle and independence of the peoples living under colonial rule in India, Africa, and the Caribbean.

These current addresses, above all, issues of class, gender, and race. Hommi Bhabha (1998) in his work *The Place of Culture* problematizes the construction and deconstruction of the identity of the Other through Postcolonial Studies and argues about how the Other, colonized, is characterized by the discourse of European colonialism, that is, in a derogatory way.

The derogatory and distorted view of the native begins to emerge from the various beliefs that existed about the places that were being conquered overseas in the period of the great navigations. According to Todorov (1999), Columbus believed that "the earthly Paradise should be located in a temperate region beyond the Equator" (p. 27). Being then an enchanted place, a paradise, there is no reason to worry about understanding well the people who live there, because, for sure, they are cyclops, men with tails, Amazons, and mermaids.

The colonialist discourse concerning the native then begins to be constituted. One of the characteristics of this discourse is the formulation of absolute statements about the people it colonizes. These statements become "truths" through an eloquence marked by Manichaeism that imposes on different cultures fixed and reductionist meanings.

It is characteristic of colonialist thought not to take into account the history of the colony. This story is understood as something blank as if that land and its inhabitants lived only in the present. It is a small vision that the colonizer has of the colonized, it is an inability to see him as another, as a historical being. However, the colonizer sees himself as the savior of this people, capable of radical transformations and reforms.

The colonizer sees in the colonized a lack, a scarcity, which serves as a justification for domination and control. Said states that the colonizer believes he knows and knows more about the colonized than they do themselves: "They are a subjugated race, dominated by a race that knows them and knows what is good for them more and better than they could know themselves." (SAID, 2007, p.66).

Thus, discourse is constructed that the metropolis has the noble duty to civilize and evolve the backward peoples of the colony. The social imaginary of the metropolis assumes as its mission this task of colonizing that unfolds in duties and obligations.

The action of the colonizer on the colonized is preceded by a statement of the intercourse of colonization, which can be explained as "the colonized are inferior to the colonizers" and which functions as a specific discourse of the identity of the self (colonizer) and the other (colonized).

In the movement of construction of the senses, which always passes through the said and the unsaid, a sense is fixed by the saying and drowns out other possible senses. It is the capacity of action of the colonized and of formulating a sense about oneself that is silenced since we are talking about a discourse that gives only the colonizers the chance of actions and interpretations, placing them as agents of verbal processes.

It is up to the colonizers to "improve", "promote", "and benefit". This discourse creates the illusion of the erasure of otherness (character or quality of what is other). The term "otherness" was formulated by Bhabba (2005), as the other, the colonized, which is also present in the formation of the colonizing subject by the non-recognition of the space of the other.

This is one of the basic structures of the colonialist discourse that is also used to delineate the limits of this discursive formation: the enunciating subject places himself in the enunciative position of the (dominant) ruler who speaks of the place of the empire, that is, of the place of a power that does not need to legitimize itself or recognize the representativeness of the other, of the governed.

#### **4 THE SPACE**

There was no empirical attitude toward the New World, let alone the Amazon. What existed were speculations about what the early explorers wrote, and the latter in turn wrote based on a strong desire (not experience) that these lands were rich and lush. Todorov (1999) comments that one of Columbus' correspondents writes to him that "Most of the good things come from the very hot regions, whose inhabitants are black, where there are parrots..." (p.33). It is these comments, based entirely on imagination, that populate the European mentality about the New World and, consequently, about the people who live there.

Stuart Hall (2003) in his book *Cultural Identity in Postmodernity*, states that there is always something "imaginary" or "fanciful" about identity statements. In the case of the Amazonian identity that was formed, there was an oscillation between the paradisiacal ideal and the place of the "hiding place" of the devil where he exercised his dominion over men. Europeans, at first, were enchanted by the Amazonian exuberance and called it the "paradise lost", the "tropical Eden", but over time they discovered the hardships of living in an inhospitable place, with peculiar geography and changed their minds to call it "green hell".

Gondim (2007) describes with mastery the feeling that arose and confused the first pathfinders who arrived here fleeing from diseases, the swelling of cities, and the wear and tear of feudalism in the late Middle Ages:

It was as if heaven and hell touched each other and the two poles sprouted and for themselves flowed and ebbed the conception of life, mysticism, and the chivalrous ideal, formally accommodated on abstract foundations that pointed to the abandonment and improvement of the world. The escape from the plagues, from the violence of greed, from the demons of injustices; the fear of hell, the end of the world, and witches would have for the dream that there was that would make possible a more beautiful life (p.15).

There was always the issue of exaggerations very present in the accounts of the navigators and explorers of the Americas. In his article *Foreign Looks in the Amazon: in the Jungles of Brazil Revisited. A critical reading of Theodore Roosevelt's travel account to the Brazilian Amazon*, Juarez Caesar Malta Sobreira (2001) talks about the somewhat positive vision of the "other", this time the foreigner, under the sensory impact of the forest, the vision of the unknown, who does not know, but still ventures into the Brazilian jungle and is ecstatic before the exuberance of the Amazon.

In addition to this exaggeration of the beauties of the forest, there was, mainly, the capitalist and imperialist interest that aimed at profit through the exploitation of this place that was being explored.

Sobreira (2001) points out that in his travel reports, former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt comments: "There are mines and waterfalls and an abundance of rich soils. Soon this zone will be cut by rail. It, therefore, offers all the possibilities of colonization. It is an area of great future" (p.23). In making such a comment, Roosevelt is not necessarily interested in the future of the region, but rather in the intention to exploit to the maximum the profit capacity that that place could bring according to the colonialist vision of the time. What the pathfinder wants in the new land is to make the natives productive workers and provide the colony with more profit, because the desire of the colonizer is profit, usurpation, and privilege in the land of the colonized, as suggested by Albert Memmi (2007) in his work *Portrait of the Colonized Preceded by Portrait of the Colonizer*, an essay that deals with classical colonialism.

According to Memmi (2007), the colonizer has an interest in exploiting the natural resources of the place and the native labor for the lowest possible value. It intends to make the colony a place of production of raw materials, and tropical products, and also, an importer of products manufactured by the metropolis.

The colonized, on the other hand, dream of seeing their land independent, economically developed, dominating modern technologies and science, with its people acquiring a quality of life and maintaining a national identity.

These interests are completely incompatible. By "cohabiting", a word used by Memmi (2007) to designate coexistence, this incompatibility is increasingly fierce. To achieve his main goal which is to make the colony a highly profitable place, the colonizer sees the need to create an ideology of colonialism that tries to justify all the ills committed by him in the name of development. This development, in turn, is justified by the fallacy of the superiority of the colonizer and the inferiority of the colonized. Memmi (2007) says:

Admitting this ideology, the dominated classes (or peoples) confirm, in a certain way, the role assigned to them. This also explains the relative stability of societies, in which oppression is, for better or worse, tolerated by the oppressed themselves (p.116).

However, this distorted vision of a splendid Amazon, which would bring him an easy and quick profit, soon fell apart. A clear example of this was when, at the end of the nineteenth century, the English began the construction of the Madeira Mamoré Railroad in the middle of the Amazon jungle and had a great surprise when they realized the numerous difficulties, they would encounter to clear the closed forest. An alarming number of construction workers have died due to the unsanitary conditions of working in a place like this.

The colonizers had no idea what they would face in the Amazon. Factors such as the great isolation of the region, indigenous attacks, and especially endemic diseases contributed to the difficulties of colonization.

This mistaken idea that everything would be easy in the Amazon was built at the beginning of the expeditions to the New World. At that time, as has been said before, there were many exaggerations, on the part of the pathfinders, when they came across the long-awaited promised land. Todorov (1999) notes this unbalanced attitude in the early accounts of travelers when quoting short comments by Columbus to describe his admiration for the nature of the cleared lands:

The trees there were so powerful that their leaves ceased to be green from so much greening. (16-12-1492)

From the earth comes a perfume so good and so soft, from the leaves or the trees, that it is the sweetest thing in the world. (19-10-1492)

He says he has never seen anything more beautiful than that valley in the middle of which the river flows (15-12-1492) (p.15).

It was probably these descriptions that encouraged many other adventurers to pursue their ideals of exploring faraway lands. These travelers, however, when they landed at their destination and encountered adverse situations, which conflicted with the descriptions they read, did not deny them, on the contrary, they continued to pass them on and validate them, thus keeping the European imaginary always very sharp with the New World.

An example of this is what Reginaldo Gomes de Oliveira (2012) tells us, in the article *The Dutch Presence in the Caribbean Amazon between the Sixteenth and eighteenth centuries: from the Wild Coast to the Rio Branco*, about the Emergence of the Myth of *El Dorado* during exploratory expeditions in the Caribbean Amazon region. The 1st information about the myth came from Juan Martinez de Albuja who, according to his statements, was the only survivor of the expedition in which he participated. Martinez said he was kidnapped blindfolded and taken to Manoa City, where he met the city's prince, his palace, and treasures. He was tried, freed, and lived peacefully among the Indians until he managed to escape and return to the islands of Trinidad and Margarita where he spread the story that continued to stir up the Europeans. More expeditions took place and although concrete evidence was lacking, the previous information was confirmed.

*El Dorado*, according to reports of the expeditions of the time, was located in the region of the Orinoco River (Venezuela) near the Pacaraima Mountains. It was a place that, according to the pathfinders, had buildings and roofs covered in gold and its prince used to cover the body with powdered gold. Lake Parima was supposedly located in front of the town of Manoa or *El Dorado* as it was better known. During the century. XVIII the Portuguese arrived in the region and did not find the lake, but found a river called Parimé.

*El Dorado* has never been found, but much has been written about it, and the idea that riches and prosperity are waiting for those who have braved the Amazon continually stimulates the migratory process in the region.

The Amazon is then that between the place where the wonderful and the strange meet. The between-place is a space of articulation of differences, plural and fragmented, marked by decentralization and heterogeneity, capable of behaving even the contradictory, and perceived, therefore, as an environment characterized by inherent duplicity (BHABHA, 2005, p.52). The colonizer sees the Amazon as such, a fantastic space where the beauty and richness of the forest coexist with the monstrosity of its residents and hardships for survival.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Certainly, the first look at the Amazon was the look of the foreigner, more specifically the European. Even today we observe echoes of these looks of the early sixteenth century on this region so complex through legends, travel reports, and fantastic stories. These stories always bring to light strange peoples, often associated with monstrous figures, and in lands where reality and fantasy are mixed. All this form, for the most part, from the mythologies coming from India and the Greco-Roman culture (GONDIM, 2007).

We perceive that the historical narrative of Europeans is still imposed today and is the history of the hegemony of European culture. The stories told by the colonizers about the American continent are very similar to the European thought of the time and also today.

The analyses are a *work-in-progress*, they meet a question about this historical moment. A babble, an attempt to guarantee representativeness to the marginalized Amazonian subject. However, this present study is open to complementation and/or contestations,

Thinking about the colonialist discourse in the Amazon led us to diagnose a few changes in the vision of the colonizer and the Amazon even today. We need to position ourselves in the face of this colonialist discourse that has a reductionist vision of the Amazon region and emphasize that this is a mistaken and insufficient view of the space and "identity" of the Amazonian subject.

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