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I. Overlapping First Words in the Lives of Writers Alice Walker and Sapphire

African American literature is drawn from a sociocultural and historical group that seeks to denounce and display how oppression resulting from colonial procedures developed; and how they are depicted in social structures until the present. New and unique ways of reflecting and acting are suggested in narratives of Alice Walker and Ramona Lofton, artistically known as Sapphire. The novels *The Color Purple*, written by Alice Walker and *Push,* written by Sapphire contain, apart from social denunciation, the possibility of reading the history of African descended women who lived in the 20th century.

In conversation with Mikhail Bakhtin (2013), based on his work Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, it can be inferred that Alice Walker and Sapphire's works can be interwoven with the stories of their lives, or can be exchanged with their experiences. They produce meanings impregnated with "the words of others. They introduce their own expressiveness, their evaluative tone"[1] (BAKHTIN, 2013, p. 314). In her narrative, Walker rescues the history of her African American ancestors; Sapphire uses as a basis, testimonies of her young students who suffered violence, abuse, prejudice, silencing, and familial/social exclusion.

The Color Purple, first published in 1982, is configured as epistolary fiction, whose adaptation to the cinema was produced by Steven Spielberg[2]. This is a novel that considers the southern makeup of the United States in the early years of the 20th century. Walker's work is a chronotope of how her ancestors lived in a historical time of oppression of black women. By interweaving other Walker scriptures with *The Color Purple*, it is possible to add what Margaret Homans clarifies in her article entitled "Racial *Composition" Metaphor and the Body in the Writing of Race;* 'Walker mentions her claim to embody the 'ancestors' whose blood runs in her veins'[3] (HOMANS, 1997, p. 85). The basis on which Homans is capable of understanding that Walker overlaps the story of her family to its literary production and thus trajectory values, the culture, and the memory of their ancestors.

The work *Push* may be related to Sapphire's teaching experiences, as the author states in a *YouTube* video[4], that she listened to her students when they told their sad life stories. Sapphire displays elements in her interview that are easily identified in the narrative of *Push*. Although the novel is considered fictional, in another interview conducted by Kelvin Christopher James (Bombmagazine.org) Sapphire states that her literary work was born when she was writing to save memories of her students in Harlem. What the author did not imagine is that her scripture gave voice to oppressed women and transmuted into a winning novel, and an Oscar winning Lee Daniels film produced by Oprah Winfrey.

In this scenario, the objective of this text[5] is to show that two fictional literary works, such as *The Color*

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[1] All cited translations from the originals and the titles of the books translated, which were in the Portuguese language, are responsivities from the author of this paper.

[2] The film, nominated for 11 Academy Awards, featuring Danny Glover, Whoopi Goldberg, Margaret Avery, Oprah Winfrey, Willard E. Pugh, Akosua Busia, Dana Ivey, and Leonard Jackson.

[3] Walker mentions his claim to incorporate the 'ancestors' whose blood runs in his veins.

[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hj5gbFecRFw

[5] This text is an offshoot of the thesis *African American Literature: dialogical relations between the novels The Color Purple, by Alice Walker and Push, by Sapphire,* defended at the Department of Letters:

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Purple and *Push,* written by African American women, activists, and novelists can project critical reflections from the proposed representations; ultimately showing that there are dialogic relations between these narratives. In order to trace a relationship with the objective, the text brings representations that make explicit the life of the protagonists Celie and Precious, the invisibilities and the possibilities of overcoming trajectories of young women.

Methodologically, the analysis is organized from the narratives of Alice Walker and Sapphire (1997) and from the scope of theoretical studies linked to literary and sociocultural criticism: Davis (2016), Cândido (2011), Santos (2000), Carneiro (2005), Bakhtin (2010a, 2013), Freire (2001) and bell hooks[6] (2017), among others. The present text is organized with this initial approach, followed by a theoretical dialogue with the sociocultural and historical contexts and a theoretical-analytical discussion based on fragments of the literary narratives *The Color Purple* and *Push* that embrace the American contexts at the beginning and end of the twentieth century, respectively, and that display representations of family and social violence.

II. From Silence to Literacy and Sorority: The *Color Purple* and *Push* Novels

When embarking on the first pages in the narrative of *The Color Purple*, the reader identifies that Celie, the protagonist, lives in a context of violence and injustice. Similarly, in relation to the narrative of *Push*, it is possible to identify that the protagonist Precious also lives immersed in prejudice and oppression. Celie and Precious narrate predominantly in first person and tell their life stories in a complex scenario for black women, specificity of the American context in the twentieth century.

With the analysis performed, silencing, oppressive, violent, prejudiced, excluding, racist social and institutional structures are evidenced, which cause suffering to Celie and Precious. They internalize feelings of inferiority because of the depreciation they face when people from family and society silence and exclude them. Socially structured mechanisms legitimize oppression, generate and control it so that violence is maintained, in different guises; a fact that the history of humanity has recorded with colonization, racial segregation, and the degradation of people. From the literary manifestations *The Color Purple* and *Push* and the issues related to the sociocultural and historical environment of the United States, educational, family, and social exclusion suffered by the protagonists can be identified.

The narrative of *The Color Purple* features the rural American chronotope and is narrated by Celie, for the most part. Through a structure of 92 letters, the reader follows the trajectory, memories, and testimony of the protagonist and her sister, Nettie. Of the total epistles, 56 are Celie's writings to Dear God. Through the course of the narrative, as Celie becomes emancipated, she declares to God, "You must sleep" (WALKER, 2003, p. 178). In this enunciation Celie demonstrates that she has given herself that she is not heard, and she goes on to add other recipients, such as her sister Nettie. Later in the last epistle, the protagonist enunciates: "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God" (WALKER, 2003, p. 291). Walker's work is an epistolary narrative, which draws on approximately 40 years of Celie's life; time that almost in its entirety, the protagonist confides to God her suffering and imagines reuniting with her sister Nettie.

In addition, the epigraph of the novel, it is possible to identify that Celie suffers domestic violence and that she cannot confide in anyone. The protagonist hears from the one she imagined to be her father, but who was her stepfather, Pa, who threatens her: "You better not ever tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (WALKER, 2003, p. 1). In The *Color Purple* there is the representation of violence, such as rape that resulted in Celie's two pregnancies and the separation between her and her children, carried out by Pa, who took them to the city as soon as they were born. The protagonist relates that she "[...]was in town sitting on the wagon while Mr. __was in the dry good store. I saw my baby girl. I knew it was her. She look just like me and my daddy" (WALKER, 2003, p. 13). In this silencing, Celie declares to God: "Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happining to me" (WALKER, 2003, p. 1). In the epistle number 47, Celie demonstrates her anguish and loneliness experienced in the family: "My mama die [...] My sister Nettie run away. Mr. _____ come git me to take care his rotten children. He never ast me nothing bout myself. He clam on top of me and fuck and fuck, even when my head bandaged. Nobody ever love me [...]" (WALKER, 2003, p. 114).

Celie also suffers in social contexts, when she is excluded from school during her pregnancy. The narrator says: "The first time I got big Pa took me out of school. He never cared that I loved it. Nettie stood there at the gate holding tight to my hand. I was all dressed for first day" (WALKER, 2003, p. 9). In The *Color Purple* narrative, Celie's departure from school is represented in the moment the teacher Miss Beasley comes to Celie's house to find out why she was not at school. Pa determines that only Celie's sister could continue

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[6] The author's name is written in lower case because the author identifies herself that way.

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studying, because Nettie would be intelligent. In this scenario, the denial of educational opportunities for the young girl is identified in the epistemicide practiced by Pa.

From the perspective of analysis, one can approximate the representation of *The Color Purple to* the studies of Angela Davis, from the chapter "Education and freedom: the perspective of black women" of her work *Women, race, and class* (2016). Davis records the story of Susie King Taylor, whose writing of self exhibited "her persistent efforts as a self-taught woman during slavery" (DAVIS, 2016, p. 114). According to Davis, Taylor autobiographed that

> [...] many female slaves took the risk of passing on clandestinely acquired academic skills to their sisters and brothers. Even when they were forced to teach in the early morning hours, the women who managed to gain some knowledge tried to share it with their people (DAVIS, 2016, p. 114).

If we immerse Davis's text into the narrative of *The Color Purple*, we can recognize Walker's suggestion of her protagonist Celie's literacy, as it appears through reading letters, books, and reading the world, in addition to her sister Nettie's hidden efforts. Before Nettie was taken away from Celie by Ms___, literacy was the responsibility of the protagonist's sister, who secretly teaches Celie what she knows, encouraging her to reflect and emancipate herself so that she no longer needs to be at the mercy of her oppressive husband.

Walker's literary manifestation provokes reflections about what has been enacted around the world education, which raises apprehensions about the lack of valuable options for all in the social structure. According to Boaventura Santos (2000, p. 329), "after modernity was reduced to capitalist modernity, there preceded the systematic liquidation of alternatives, when they, both epistemologically and practically, are not compatible with hegemonic practices" (SANTOS, 2000, p. 329).

Besides having her possibility of literacy suppressed, in the trajectory of the young protagonist, she is traded by Pa for a cow and begins to live as the wife of Mr___, a widower and father of four children. Celie narrates: "I spend my weeding day running from the oldest boy. He twelve. […]. He pick up a rock and laid my head open. The blood run all down tween my breasts" (WALKER, 2003, p. 12). It is observed that there are no options for the protagonist, as if there is a key point between the oppressors and the protagonist (hooks, 2017). Violence and oppression continue in the life of the protagonist, who does housework and takes care of Mr___'s children. In return she suffers from violence from everyone in the house.

By interweaving the history of the enslaved into the narrative, it is possible to identify that the structure of slavery still spills over into humanity, behaviors, and prejudices. The works The *Color Purple* and *Push* can be literary manifestations that make explicit the violence and its different discriminatory garments throughout the history of humanity.

This violence is also present in the family environment, when analyzing the narrative of *Push*, whose setting is between 1983 and 1989, in Harlem. Precious' mother is exploited by her husband, Carl, Precious' abuser. Mary herself relates: "Carl come in the night, take food, what money they is, fuck us bofe" (SAPPHIRE, 1997, p. 85). The protagonist of *Push*, besides contracting the HIV virus from these rapes, gets pregnant and suffers school exclusion similar to that suffered by Celie. It is identified that the prejudices and oppressions are renewed in the works, which is in line with what Martins Fighera (2021, p. 152) states, the "acceptance of the condition of exclusion, passive attitudes and excluding speeches of teachers and managers have marked school violence". In this vein, one can apprehend that the violence suffered by Precious may have been experienced by her parents, since the black and poor class of American society has been socially oppressed and considered incapable.

In attempting to analyze the novels *The Color Purple* and *Push*, approximations appear in the study. Just as Celie suffers denial of educational opportunities, one day Precious is called out by Mrs. Lichenstein, the principal of the 146 institution, and is expelled from school. Precious's exclusion is linked to her pregnancy, but *Push*'s protagonist also feels excluded when she takes assessment or grading tests because she feels stupid and incapable. For Precious the student, "[...] nuffin' new. There has always been something wrong wif the tesses. The tesses paint a picture of me wif no brain. The tesses paint a picture of me an' my muver - my whole family, we more than dumb [...]" (SAPPHIRE, 1997, p. 30).

It is in the 146 school setting that Precious occupies the lowest class, does not see the picture and it is also not seen, and is thus silenced and excluded. She mentions her sadness at the invisibility that the educational system and the exclusionary tests bring her. These tests and evaluation structures used in schools all over the world are ways to classify human beings; to take away from teachers' autonomy and the possibilities of contextualization and democratization of teaching.

The structure of education, through exclusionary assessments, removes hope and perspective for people like the protagonists of *The Color Purple* and *Push* to be emancipated and build their free trajectories. The denial of educational opportunities in the literary representations of *The Color Purple* and *Push* can be imbricated to what Boaventura de Souza Santos (2000) defines as epistemicide. For this author (2000, p. 329), epistemicide is one of the great "crimes against humanity". Besides the unspeakable suffering and devastation, it has produced in peoples, groups and social practices targeted by it, it has meant an

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irreversible impoverishment of the horizon and possibilities of knowledge. In this context, there is an epistemological model that denies other knowledges and manifests the colonialist purpose of extinguishing and excluding certain knowledges and cultures.

In this vein, Sueli Carneiro (2005), a Brazilian philosopher, studies the occurrence of epistemicide in the Brazilian scenario and describes it as the absence of opportunities for black men and women to build their own knowledge. For the author, the opportunities were denied "by devaluing, denying or hiding the contributions of the African continent and the African Diaspora to the cultural heritage of humanity; by imposing cultural whitening and by producing school failure and dropout" (CARNEIRO, 2005, p. 324).

The literary manifestations of Walker and Sapphire suggest that the American educational environment commits epistemicide, a gear that is connected to the history of the United States, to the racist structure naturalizes, to the human (un) valuation, to education. In this perspective, Angela Davis (2016), in *Women, Race, and Class* states that: "according to the dominant ideology, the black population was supposedly incapable of intellectual progress. After all, these people had been owned, naturally inferior when compared to the white epitome of humanity" (DAVIS, 2016, p. 109). The exclusion of educational opportunities is, in this way, one of the arms of epistemicide, because it prevents human visibility, social emancipation, and recognition of different cultures and people.

Davis (2016) further explains that the enslaved people desired to learn, and even though they were forbidden to learn how to read and write, they sought knowledge, and ventured secretly, since they knew they needed knowledge to free themselves. However, in the face of black men and women's desire and need for knowledge, "slave owners resorted to the torso and whip to restrain the irrepressible desire that slaves had for learning" (DAVIS, 2016, p. 113).

During the narrative of *The Color Purple* there are people who in a sisterly way help Celie in the construction of her emancipation and freedom. In addition to the important interlocution with the wife of her stepson Harpo, her friend Sofia, with whom Celie dialogues and builds resistance and strength to fight, it is Shug Avery, lover of Mr. __, Celie's husband, who encourages the protagonist in her self-discovery, her sexuality as a woman, and her boldness to leave home and confront her husband. Mr. ___ - or Albert - at one point brings Shug into the house, the place where he lives with Celie. Shug is sick and Celie is the one who takes care of her. In the narrative of *The Color Purple*, the letters that the protagonist receives from her sister, albeit belatedly, and the dialogue with other women, allow Celie to become aware of herself and the world.

This movement of awareness and encouragement also occurs in *Push*, when Precious goes to the Alternative school, where each class is taught by a student. This change brings anguish to Precious about what the new class will think of her: "I stays standing at door. I swallow hard, start to, I think I'm gonna cry. I look at Miz Teacher's long dreadlocky hair, look kinda nice but look kinda nasty too. My knees is shaking, I'm scared I'm gonna pee on myself[...]. I don't know how I'm gonna do it, but I am (SAPPHIRE, 1997, p. 39-40).

In the paragraphs that follow in the narrative, she describes her actions, reactions, and emotions in this new setting. It is possible to follow the insecurity and fear she has regarding the new school. She states: "An' my feet stop. At the first row. Na' for the first time in my life I sit down in the front row (which is good'cause I never could see the board from the back)" (SAPPHIRE, 1997, p. 40). Thus, the girl begins to be part of the chronotope of her own life story, where she lives another and distinct process of teaching-learning at the proposition of the teacher Ms. Rain, as noted by the protagonist herself, who says: "time is easy. Fractions, percents, multiplying, dividing is EASY. Why no one ever taught me these things before" (SAPPHIRE, 1997, p. 108).

Ms Rain is the one who introduces a critical methodology in her classes, negotiating knowledge as it is constituted, meant, and valued. In Ms Rain's pedagogical proposal, she explains to Precious that "Every day [...], we gonna read and write in our notebooks. How we gonna write if we can't read? Shit, how we gonna write if we can't write! I don't remember never doing no writing before. My head spinning I'm scared [...]" (SAPPHIRE, 1997, p. 49). Thus, with her journals and the sharing, the protagonist comes to recognize herself in a strengthened identity as she feels included and sees herself in her own story. In class, Precious meets people with similar problems to hers, classmates who slowly gain Precious' trust, and then she sets herself in a constitutive and emancipating movement. Sitting in class with Ms. Rain and her classmates, Precious related:

> Miz Rain calm. Rain, nice name for her. Ack like she don't mind cursing, say. 'It's just a way of breaking the ice, a way of getting to know each other better, by asking nonthreatening questions that allow you to share yourself with a group without having to reveal more of yourself than might be comfortable.' She pause. 'You don't have to do it if you don't want to.'/'I don't want to', beautiful girl say./Everybody looking at me now. In circle I see everybody, everybody see me. I wish for back of the class again for a second, then I think never again, I kill myself first 'fore I let that happen./'My name Precious Jones. I was born in Harlem. My baby gonna be born in Harlem. I like what color - yellow, thas fresh.' N I had a problem at my ol' school so I come here (SAPPHIRE, 1997, p. 46).

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In Bakhtin's (2010a, p. 109) notes, "to become actively aware of oneself means to cast upon oneself the light of the meaning to come, outside of which I do not exist for myself." The protagonist recognizes herself in a circle and admits she no longer wants to stay in the back of the classroom, she includes herself in the group and slowly visualizes herself. There are meanings imbued in the relationship between Precious and the experiences in the study group in class. Precious' pains are slowly shared in front of the understanding and close gaze of her classmates and teacher. In becoming aware of herself and the world, there is a shift that contributes to Precious' positioning herself in a new perspective in relation to her life.

By entering this phase of self-recognition, Celie and Precious listen, share and, finally, are heard by women who contribute to their emancipation. Bakhtin's (2010a, p. 33) explanation collaborates in this sense, by understanding that in the "category of the self, my external image cannot be experienced as a value that encompasses and ends me, it can only be so experienced in the category of the other, and I must place myself under this category in order to see myself as an element of a plastic-pictural and unique external world."

In this direction, the literacy of the world allows the practice of freedom, which, equate to Nettie's attempts to help her sister read and learn about the world and her own story, and related to Ms. Rain's didactic proposal, make explicit the movements of a new consciousness based on engaged and altruistic methodologies. For Freire it is the possibility of the construction of "world-consciousness" (FREIRE, 2001, p. 31). Ms Rain states:

> Dear Ms Precious, You make my day! You don't just don't know how much I love having you in class, how much I love you period. And I am proud of you; the whole school is proud of you. I'm sure you'll be able to find a job when you get your G.E.D. And maybe your social worker could help you get a nice place for you, Little Mongo, and Abdul. I don't know what you mean by your question, "Why me?" Please explain. Ms. Rain 1/9/89 (SAPPHIRE, 1997, p. 89-90).

The construction of the word shared and signified in the praxis makes it possible to raise awareness and endorse courage in the face of the silencing suffered and imposed in patriarchal, sexist, and racist societies. For Ms. Rain, the student is an important person and, thus, the teacher motivates her to fight and become independent from the oppression suffered.

It is identified that the writing and reading of letters and diaries have important outcomes in the analysis, because they are means by which the protagonists Celie and Precious build literacy and encourage themselves in a new identity of being someone respected in family and society. The *corpus of* this study can be considered an example of the complex reality that was the twentieth century in the United States for black women, both in the rural and southern parts of the country, and in the urban areas, because the social complexity and oppression are current in the twenty-first century.

Therefore, literary art can be the space-time for humanity to reflect on social practices and can thus give visibility to unresolved asymmetries in contemporary world context. In this perspective, African American literature, representing themes that submerge from conflicts and tensions that mark global history in different times, becomes a means of disclosure of human social practices, apart from proposing reflection.

III. Final Approach to Text

In order to show that the literary works, *The Color Purple* and *Push*, present dialogic relations between their narratives and can project critical reflections from the representations of violence, silencing, exclusion and oppression. The *Color Purple* and *Push* present similar themes in their narratives: violence that happens in the family and in social institutions. If we observe the trajectories of the protagonists, Celie and Precious, both are African American and have their lives narrated from conflicting and prejudiced contexts of the twentieth century, as they seek to fight against the oppression suffered.

The oppression identified in the study of representations in *Color Purple* and *Push* can be connected to the history of the European invasion of America and, consequently, to the inferiorization that human and racial segregation generated. According to Martins Fighera's (2021, p. 151) studies, through "language, discourses, laws, systems of government and education, violence is articulated and realized in a visible or invisible process, architected to actualize itself in social relations."

The results indicate that the novels studied show human invisibilities and exclusions, such as epistemicide, as it permeates the oppressive structure. Significant contexts of sharing with other women were necessary for the protagonists, Celie and Precious, to become aware of themselves and, thus, to enter an emancipating and liberating movement, which is interconnected to the condition of the literacies constructed.

It is worth problematizing and highlighting, in this perspective, the importance of the presence of literary reading in school and university institutions of works by black writers. The results indicate that literature is a possibility to become aware of the social tensions and distortions that cause prejudice. Literary art "confirms and denies, proposes and denounces, supports and combats, providing the possibility of living dialectically the problems" (CÂNDIDO, 2011, p. 175). In view of this experience of analysis, it is opportune to demarcate.

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It is believed that debating and exposing the culture and social practices of humanity, democratically pointing out their successes and deviations, whether through literature or other historical and cultural sources, is one of the possible ways for tolerance in the face of diversity to be better undertaken. Therefore, literary art is an indispensable spokesperson when it comes to vulnerabilities, as those presented in *The Color Purple* and *Push*, in order to propose critical and reflective discussion so that humanity gets to know the victims of exclusion from family and social spaces and educational systems that are prejudiced, violent, and oppressive.

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