

NEGRITICENESS AS A METAPHOR FOR INTERCULTURAL IDENTITIES IN AFRICAN-DESCENDENT LITERATURE

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NEGRITICENESS

This coined word encompasses African-Descendent experiences in literature. By combining “the positive aspects of Negritude with the negative configurations of negriceness” (MARTINS, 2003, p. 15), *Negriticeness* examines intercultural identities. Formally, negriticeness fuses two other words: negritude, which refers to a culture coming from an African origin; *negriceness*, which denounces the colonizing aspects of Western culture. As a result, negriticeness is seen as a set of literary discourses, which highlight both intercultural and interracial encounters – mis-encounters also – and thus explain the African-descendents’ experiences in the white world. It also proposes the mobility of identity characterized by three specific aspects: an africanist negritude; a westernized negriceness, and an afro-westernized negriticeness.

Within the realm of *negriticeness*, in particular within the oscillation between *negritude* and *negriceness*, African-descendent experiences become a celebrated mobility. Hall (2001) explains that, involved in such a kind of moveable identity, “the subject develops different identities in specific moments. These identities are not unified around a coherent ‘self’” (HALL, 2001: p.13). Mobility as a crucial feature of African-descendent identities is motivated by *double consciousness*, the existential experience that instigates the Negroes to move within the Africanized and westernized worlds. Du Bois (1994) explains that when he lives *double consciousness*, the Negro “feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (DU BOIS, 1994, p.2). In fact, for Du Bois, *double consciousness* becomes a sick and negative sensation. However, for African-Caribbean Glissant (2005), such a feeling of duality prepares us for the instigating and invigorating aspects of *creoleness*, an experience that makes the composite identity possible, thus giving room for the kind of “rhizome-like identity, an identity not like a single root identity [Negriceness, or Negritude], but one like a root moving towards the encounter with other roots (Negriticeness)” (GLISSANT, 2005: p.27).

In the literature of African descendent writers, double consciousness, creoliness, or negriticeness share common experiences: slave trade, slavery, and diasporic dispersion. From

West's (1993) perspective, these situations lead the Negroes to assume a triple attitude: sympathy for "the Western Parent"; love for "the African Parent"; a wish to join the two parents. He explains what is expected from the Negro:

The future of the black intellectual [of others' too] lies neither in a deferential disposition toward the Western parent nor a nostalgic search for the African one. Rather it resides in a critical negation, wise preservation and insurgent transformation of this black lineage, which protects the earth and projects a better world (WEST, 19993: p. 85).

Shakespeare's (1994) play *The Tempest* and African-Descendent religion provide the metaphors appropriate for the attitudes envisioned by West. Ariel represents the negro who sympathizes with "the Western parent", depicting negriceness. In the play, Ariel's alliance with Prospero shows his adherence to the European's project to dominate the island. He presents his behavior, saying to his master:

All hail, great master, grave sir, hail: I come
To answer by the best pleasure; be't to fly,
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
On the curled clouds, [alighting and bowing] to thy
Strong bidding task
Ariel, and all his quality. (SHAKESPEARE, 1994: p. 13).

Different from Ariel's decision to cooperate with Prospero is Calibán's. He affirms his love for "the African Parent", subscribing to negritude, when he decides to confront Prospero's wish to become the owner of the island. Calibán reacts, saying to Prospero:

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me: (...)
You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know to curse: the red-plague rid you
For learning me your language (SHAKESPEARE, 1994: p. 19).

Finally, as the deity of African origin, Esu suggests an attitude that is different from both Ariel's and Calibán's extremist positions. Esu's duality gives him the chance to combine these two

extremist positions that Ariel and Calibán occupy. Gates (1988) argues in favor of Esu's duality and multiplicity of encounters, saying

Each version of Esu is the sole messenger of the gods (in Yoruba, *iranse*), he who interprets the will of the gods to man; he who carries the desires of man to the gods. Esu is the guardian of the crossroads, master of the style and of the stylus, the phallic god of generation and fecundity, master of that elusive, mystical barrier that separates the divine world from the profane. (...) His legs are of different lengths because he keeps one anchored in the realm of the gods while the other rests in this, our human world (GATES, 1988: p.6).

ARIEL-LIKE NEGRICENESS: A SEARCH FOR THE WESTERN PARENT

Within the realm of negriceness, the search for the Western Parent makes the African-Descendent character adhere to Western cultural values and neglect his black culture. As he develops identities, he goes through a process of assimilation and colonization. His Ariel-like behaviors within the community turn into the generating forces of conflicts with the calibanist individuals, who fight to guarantee the validity of the pure values of the black race. In their fictional texts black writers from Africa, USA, Brazil, the Caribbean, and Europe depict the ways by means of which black identities are built. Some of these characters' Ariel-like identities are examined now.

African Nwoye, a character in Nigerian Achebe's (1994) novel *Things Fall Apart*, searches for the Western parent when he decides to become a member of the Christian Faith brought into the village by English colonizers. His decision defies his father's will. Not only does Nwoye admire the Christians, but he also wants to enter the Christian school in another village, where he may learn how to read and write. He believes his education will help him convert his sisters and mother to the Christian faith when he returns to his family.

Black American Pecola Breedlove follows Nwoye's steps toward the Western parent, in Morrison's (1994) novel *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola's adherence to the Anglo-American values leads her to equate happiness and love with the possession of beauty and blue eyes. Eleven-year-old Pecola thinks that if she has blue eyes and is beautiful her life will turn into something gorgeous and her family will live a happy life. She, then, during an entire year, prays for God, and asks Him to give her a pair of beautiful blue eyes. Soaphead Church is the man she consults to have those miraculous eyes.

Black Brazilian Bertilia, like African Nwoye and Black American Pecola, is motivated by the quest for the Western parent in Martins's (2003) play *The Eye of the Color*. German-descendent

Traudi's and Nati's blue eyes are the activating elements of Bertilia's refusal to accept her black features. She despises her body, flat nose, nappy hair, and thick lips. She confesses to her sister Benedita that only with the possession of blue eyes will she be able to transform her life and give sense to her existence.

Black Caribbean Cathy is not unlike Nwoye, Pecola and Bertilia in what she is looking for. In Condé's (1995) novel *Windward Heights*, she marries rich white Aymeric Linsseuil, a fact that gives her the chance to replace her boring and common things for speaking French, reading, dancing, loving music, and wearing silk dresses and plume hats. Besides, she has two beautiful white children by her French-European husband.

Finally, Black British Tyrone's quest for whiteness is associated with formal education, in Zephaniah's (2004) novel *Gangsta Rap*. A hip-hop musician, he decides to return to school, after expulsion for indiscipline. Back at school, Tyrone assimilates the teaching of the white world, in particular, the one that he finds in the subject matters he studies, English and Math.

CALIBÁN-LIKE NEGRITUDE: A SEARCH FOR THE AFRICAN PARENT

Different from the Ariel-like characters depicted, in the previous paragraphs, as those Negroes who assimilate Western cultural values, the Calibán-like Negro adheres to the African Parent, and lives fully the values of his own black culture. By acting so, he refuses the Western parent, and becomes an alternative to the assimilationist Negro, creating a barrier to integration.

African Okonkwo, the major character in Achebe's (1994) novel *Things Fall Apart*, fights the Christians' presence in the village in which he has become the leading figure. He organizes resistance, by insisting on the relevance of his ancient gods, but fails to convince his people to participate in his battle. He kills an English soldier and does not submit to them by killing himself.

Black American Baby Suggs, in Morrison's (1987) novel *Beloved*, is the preacher who teaches black people to reinvent their body as a way to resist White domination and physical destruction. She preaches to her own people that self-love and love for the black body are the only prizes they can get. Guitar Bains, in Morrison's (2004) novel *Song of Solomon*, radicalizes Baby Suggs's racial concerns, by claiming the death of all whites. His justification is his belief that this is not hate for white people, but love for the blacks.

Black Brazilian Benedita is the character in Martins's (2003) play *The Eye of the Color*, the drama, in which she makes all efforts to help her sister Bertilia free herself from the wish to be white. Benedita's decision leads her to confront the two white German sisters who become the

ideals of beauty for Bertilia. Besides, Benedita pokes the blue eyes of Nati's and Traudi's blond dolls, wanting to demonstrate to Bertilia that poked eyes are also ugly.

African-Caribbean Razyé is a major character in Condé's (1999) *Windward Heights*. In the novel, he is a militant politician who burns sugar cane plantations in order to weaken the political and economic power of the white plantation owners in Guadeloupe. He wants black people and mulattoes to take hold of the political destiny of the country.

Black young Ray in England is the major character in Zephaniah's (2004) novel *Gangsta Rap*. He is the musician, who employs Hip-Hop to build black identity. He argues that the music puts him and his fellow musicians in contact with other black Hip-Hoppers all over the world. The songs he composes and sings with his band Positive Negatives focus on the culture of African-British matrix.

ESU-LIKE NEGRITICENESS: AN ENCOUNTER OF THE AFRICAN AND WESTERN PARENTS

The Esu-like Negro is different from both those symbolized by Ariel and Calibán. First, he wishes to avoid the extremist racial position of both the former and the latter group of Negroes. He recognizes the validity of the two groups, but thinks those are limiting attitudes. He fights to eliminate whatever is keeping the Black Ariels apart from the Negro Calibáns. He replaces antagonism with solidarity. He mixes the African with the Western parent, their worlds and cultures.

African Akunna and English Mr. Brown, in Achebe's (1994) novel *Things Fall Apart*, perform Esu-like experiences. They decide to share the differences and similarities that exist in their own gods and religions. They think the gods that they worship and the religions that they follow are more alike than different. As a result, they become more tolerant.

Black American Sethe and white American Denver share experiences in Morrison's (1987) novel *Beloved*. These experiences are marked by solidarity and mutual support in a moment when the two women feel that they cannot go on without somebody else's help. When they first meet, pregnant Sethe is running from slavery and Denver is escaping from a rapist stepfather. Denver helps Sethe give birth to a baby girl and Sethe, in recognition, names her baby Denver.

The encounter of an African-Brazilian woman with an European-Brazilian woman in Martins's (2003) play *The Color of the Eye* is a creation of fiction, when they meet Vladimir and Estragon, the major characters in Samuel Beckett's (1954) play *Waiting for Godot*. Together,

the two Brazilian women characters and the two European men suggest that Esu should not only be seen as action or message, but also as text and language.

In Black Caribbean, Condé's (1997) novel *I, Tituba, Witch... Black from Salem* develops intercultural relationships between two Esu-like women: African-Caribbean Tituba and European-American Elizabeth Parris. While Tituba employs witchcraft and her special powers to cure Elizabeth's illness, Mrs. Parris protects Tituba against Pastor Parris's cruelty. The two women develop ways to confront the Pastor's brutality.

Finally, Black Hip-Hopper Ray and White Mr. Lang establish Esu-like relationships in Zephaniah's (2004) novel *Gangsta Rap*. Ray's love for Hip-Hop finds in Mr. Lang a way to express itself more effectively. Their action results in something good for both of them: Ray, for example, comes back to formal education where he can adjust the study of Math and English to his interest in Hip-Hop. As the director of the school, Mr. Lang creates the ideal conditions for Black Hip-Hop to be part of the school curriculum.

WESTERN PARENT'S NEGRICENESS, NEGRITUDE AND NEGRITICENESS

I have associated Arielist, Calibanist and Esuist identities to African-Descendent novels. European-Descendent novelists also bring similar discussions of black identities in their texts. Negríceness, Negritude and Negritíceness are also creations of the Western Parent and find their space and specificities in novelized discourses in the four continents.

In white South African Alan Paton's (1987) novel *Cry, The Beloved Country*, we find the three identities in the Black South-Africans Kumalos: arielist Absalom, calibanist John and esuist Stephen. Absalom assimilates the worst cultural values of the whites while he lives in Johannesburg. He sells the objects he steals, kills an important white man and is sentenced to death. Different from his nephew, John becomes the leader of the miners in the city and starts a campaign to defend the labor rights of the workers. His leadership is respected and admired by the miners. Priest Stephen, Absalom's father and John's brother, makes all efforts to establish cordial relationships between the blacks and the whites in his village Ndotsheni. Together, Stephen and rich white Jarvis manage to create better living conditions and opportunities for the population of their hometown.

White Philip Roth's (200) novel *The Human Stain* and his white countryman John Updike's (1971) fiction *Rabbit Redux* also deal with black identities in The United States. Roth's novel brings into discussion Black American Coleman Silk's assimilationist identity. Silk uses his light skin in order to pass for a white, to hide his black family origins, wins academic prestige and

fame, managing to get the position as the Dean of a well-known white university. Updike creates calibanist Skeeter. Living in the house of white conservative Rabbit, Skeeter teaches his host about the African-American experience in the country.

White Brazilian novels also show interest in the construction of Afro-Brazilian identities. In Antonio Callado's (2004) play *Pedro Mico*, the title character is close to Zumbi, which gives Pedro a calibanist identity. Such closeness of identity between the two African-Brazilian heroes becomes evident when, in order to escape from the police Pedro jumps into an abyss, thus repeating the act Zumbi did in order to escape from those who persecuted him. African-Brazilian identities are also found in John Updike's (1994) novel *Brazil*. In the novel, Black Tristão and white Isabel live dramatic interracial love relationships, marked by the ways the lovers manage to exchange their colors and races, which allow Tristão to be white and Isabel to be black. They live an Esuist type of love, which finds fertile ground in the ideal racial democracy that the novel intends to show.

IN SEARCH OF LITERARY TRANSNATIONALITY

The kinds of interracial identities and interculturalities designed in the tripled movement of negriceness, negritude and negritiveness present in the texts of African and European descendent writers point to the need for more consistent considerations. One of them refers to the phenomenon of traveling identities and cultures, coming from Africa, moving to The United States, going to the Caribbean, continuing to Brazil and advancing to Europe. In slavery and during the more recent migratory moves, African-descendent people find themselves involved in the process of migration, displacement and diaspora. In such an experience of leaving one place in order to reach another, the ship – slave-ships and others – transforms itself into the metaphor for the African-descendents' displacement. Gilroy (2001) argues that, in such a context, the ships are able to build interculturalities and to develop alterity. He suggests that the ships

Need to be thought of as cultural and political units instead of abstract incorporations of triangular commerce. They were something else – a way to transmit the political dissention and, maybe, a distinct mode of cultural production. The ship is the chance to explore the articulations between the discontinuous stories in England's ports, their interfaces with the rest of the world (GILROY, 2001: p. 60).

Inside the metaphor of navigation and dislocation that the ship represents, intercultural and identity suffering, losses and gains are associated with the concept of *the middle passage*. On

the one hand, Glissant (2005) links the ship and the middle passage with African-descendants' losses, arguing that

Because the womb of the slave-ship is the place and the moment, in which the African languages disappear, as they never put together in a slave-ship, nor in the plantations, people who could speak the same language. Thus, the persons found themselves dispossessed of all kind of elements of their daily life (GLISSANT, 2005: p. 19).

On the other, Mintz&Price (2003) argue that, during *the middle passage*,

We think less of the many individual heroic deeds and resistance that occurred during that period than of some efforts of cooperation, ordinary but highly significant ones, which, seen in retrospect, can be taken as the true beginnings of the African-descendent culture and society (MINTZ&PRICE, 2003: p. 65).

Lived as losses, gains, or as both, displacement from Africa to the Americas, and from there to Europe, by means of slave trade, slavery or migratory waves, allows the phenomenon of traveling cultures to exist. The traveler's culture moves itself, displaces itself, loses itself in, resists to, and mixes with, the receptive culture. Clifford (1997) argues that culture travels through "specific histories of population movement, exile, and labor migration" (CLIFFORD, 1997: p. 27). Traveling culture becomes diasporic culture, which for Clifford, results from "the ways people leave home and return, enacting differently centered worlds, interconnected cosmopolitanisms" (CLIFFORD, 1997: p. 27-28). The literary cases examined above tend to work as evidence of the phenomenon.

The second consideration brings the concept of *signifyin(g)*. *Signifyin(g)* requires the idea of traveling and navigating cultures (Gilroy, 2001; Glissant, 2005; Clifford, 1997). Influenced by cultural mobility, *signifyin(g)* intends to account for intertextuality in African-descendants' experiences. Ariel-like, Calibán-like and Esu-like attitudes and their connections with negriceness, negritude and negriticeness exemplify the encounters and mis-encounters between characters and cultures originated by African and European environment, thus dramatize the process of *signifyin(g)*. Gates (1988) clarifies that *signifyin(g)* points to the ways an African-descendent text talks with another African-descendent text by means of the repetition and revision of textual elements, in the content, form and style levels. He argues that from the moment the African-descendent left Africa he signifies in order to make sense of the cultural dislocation he had to go through. He signifies upon the culture he leaves in Africa and on the

culture he finds in America, the Caribbean and Europe. In the African-descendent literary environment, *signifyin(g)* explains “how black texts ‘talk’ to other black texts” (GATES, 1988: xxvi). He continues: “one text Signifies upon another text, by tropological revision or repetition and difference” (GATES, 1988; p. 88).

In the Arielist, Calibanist and Esuist fictional texts studied, written by African or European-descendents, revision, repetition and difference demonstrate how black characters’ identities are articulated by the processes of negriceness, negritude and negriticeness. Through these three elements, the characters and the texts talk to each other. For instance, on the one hand, Nwoye, Pecola, Bertilia, Cathy and Tyrone repeat, with difference, the assimilation of western cultural values such as the religion, the blue eyes, the language, and the formal education; on the other, Okonkwo, Baby Suggs, Guitar Bains, Benedita, Razyé, and Ray reaffirm and revise black experiences of culture and resistance like tradition, the body, love, solidarity, politics and music; finally, Akunna in Okonkwo’s village, Sethe Suggs, women, Tituba, and Ray in communion with some white characters like English Mr. Brown, Amy, Estragon and Vladmir, Elizabeth and Mr. Lang build bridges of togetherness leading to the suppression of intercultural and interracial conflicts.

Suggested here is the fact that *signifyin(g)* must not be restricted to the fictional texts provided by African-descendent novelists. On the contrary, the enlargement of the concept to the novels by European-descendent writers is a necessary decision. In doing so, one can notice how white and Black texts converse. One can also see how Absalom, John, Stephen, Coleman, Skeeter, Pedro Mico and Tristão keep talking with white characters like Jarvis, Zuckerman, Rabbit, and Isabel. Such an enlarged perspective in the notion of *signifyin(g)* enriches the triple experience of the African-descendent subjects as they are able to move inside the black and white worlds, symbolized in the concepts of negriceness, negritude and negriticeness.

FINAL REMARKS AND TEACHING AWARENESS

The study of the African-descendent experiences, considering the connections between negriticeness and literature makes room for the proposal of a literary pedagogy, which focuses on the teaching of the literature of African descent as the source of imagined communities marked by the differences in attitudes among the African-descendent people, visible in the narratives studied. Hall (2001) argues that we should not “look at national [transnational] cultures as something unified” by some values to which we are obliged to submit to. On the contrary, he suggests that nations/transnations “are crossed by profound internal divisions and difference.”

He also suggests that “we should think of the [national/transnational] cultures as a discursive production representing the difference as unity or identity” (HALL, 2001: p. 61-62).

When focusing on the Arielist narratives of difference, the teaching centers itself on the Black people’s quest for the Western parent. The second group of fictions requires a set of pedagogical practices that are addressed to the Blacks who search for the African parent. Due to their isolationist and closed positions, both Black Arielism and Calibanism can be associated with the notion of an atavistic identity. Glissant (2005) calls atavistic a “one-rooted identity” which “excludes the other” (GLISSANT, 2005: p.27). The third set of fictions calls for an educational practice whose center is taken by the reciprocal solidarity that goes between the Western and African parents. Here, the identity is open – an Esuist attitude – and develops a double root, which, according to Glissant (2005), is the identity that comes from creoleness, “that is, from the rizome-like identity, from the identity no longer as one solitary root, which but as a root moving toward and encountering other roots (GLISSANT, 2005: p. 27).

Teaching African-descendent literature from the perspective of the tripled difference places emphasis on three types of movement: geographical, cultural and identity. The geographical one indicates that the African-descendent literary text moves from Africa to America, to Europe; the cultural one points to the fact that the African-descendent culture develops itself in its connection and disconnection with European-descendent cultures. Finally, the movement of identity requires the change in African-descendent experience that is close to the idea of West’s (1994) *politics of conversion*. West writes that *a politics of conversion* asks for

New models of collective black leadership [and] a chance for people to believe that there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle. This chance rests neither on an agreement about what justice consists nor on an analysis of how racism, sexism, or class subordination operate. Such arguments and analyses are indispensable. But a politics of conversion requires more (...) Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one’s soul. This turning is done through one’s own affirmation of one’s worth – an affirmation fueled by the concern of others. A love ethic must be at the center of a politics of conversion (WEST, 1994: p. 29).

A politics of conversion in connection with the creoleness of different cultural roots can enact the overcoming of geographical, cultural and identity isolation in the field of African-descendent experiences. Both Ariel-like and Caliban-like self-isolation must be fought against because it is associated with *nihilism*. West (1994) defines *nihilism* as “the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness and (most important) loveliness. (WEST, 1994: p. 23). He argues that there are ways to defeat the *nihilism* that isolates the Blacks from other Blacks and whites, because “nihilism is not overcome by arguments and

analyses; it is tamed by love and care.” West goes on to say “any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one’s soul” (WEST, 1994: p. 29).

When one tries to analyze the three African-descendent identity matrixes in literary texts, one thinks that the openness to alterity and to others is always a movement toward a creative, productive and liberating interculturality. Thus seen, the study – teaching and learning – of African-descendent literary experiences must be developed through a pedagogical practice that takes the intercultural dialogue into consideration. This mutual conversation of different cultures, in West’s view, “protects the earth and projects a better world (WEST, 19993: p. 85).

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