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Threads of memory: the historical novel in Suriname as a writing of resistance

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Abstract: This article aims to analyze *The free negress Elisabeth: prisoner of color* (2004), a historical novel from Suriname (country that is part of the Guiana region) written by Cynthia McLeod. The focus given to the research intends to problematize the way the place of speech acts in the construction of the fiction, highlighting historically silenced voices. In addition, the study of the place of speech of black women during the Dutch colonization in Suriname aims to contribute to the debate on racial and gender inequality that underlies colonial societies and remains to today. For the discussions, this research will be based on the reflections of Akotirene (2019), Morrison (2019) and hooks (2015), among others.

Key words: Historical novel; Intersectional feminism; Place of speech; Cynthia McLeod, Suriname; Guiana region.

Hilos de la memoria: la novela histórica en Surinam como escritura de resistencia

Resumen: Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar *The free negress Elisabeth: prisoner of color* (2004), novela histórica de Surinam (país que forma parte de la región de la Guayana) escrita por Cynthia McLeod. El enfoque dado a la investigación pretende problematizar la forma en que el lugar de discurso actúa en la construcción del tejido narrativo, destacando voces históricamente silenciadas. Además, el estudio del lugar de discurso de la mujer negra de la colonización holandesa en Surinam tiene como objetivo contribuir al debate sobre la desigualdad racial y de género que subyace a las sociedades coloniales. Para las discusiones, esta investigación se basará en las reflexiones de Akotirene (2019), Morrison (2019) y hooks (2015).

Palabras clave: Romance histórico; Feminismo interseccional; Lugar de discurso; Cynthia McLeod; Surinam; Región de la Guayana.

Fios da memória: o romance histórico no Suriname como escrita da resistência

Resumo: Este artigo pretende analisar *The free negress Elisabeth: prisoner of color* (2004), romance histórico do Suriname (país que faz parte da região das guianas) da autoria de Cynthia McLeod. O enfoque dado à pesquisa pretende problematizar a maneira como o lugar de fala atua na construção do tecido narrativo dando relevo a vozes historicamente silenciadas. Além disso, o estudo do lugar de fala da mulher negra durante a colonização holandesa no Suriname visa contribuir ao debate sobre a desigualdade racial e de gênero que está na base das sociedades coloniais. Para as discussões, esta pesquisa se apoiará nas reflexões de Akotirene (2019), Morrison (2019) and hooks (2015) entre outras.

Palavras-chave: Romance histórico; Feminismo interseccional; Lugar de fala; Cynthia McLeod; Suriname; Região das guianas.

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Sexism as a system of domination is institutionalized, but it has never determined in absolute way the fate of all women in this society. (hooks, 2015, p.197)¹

I would like to start this article with a provocation. I ask readers to imagine what life would be like in the colonial period. Conjecture about the day-to-day life in colonial cities and in the countryside, about the relationships of forced labor established either in commerce, in houses, or in plantation farms. Consider how ethnic racial relations would be like, that is to say, how white men and women related to black people, whether they were enslaved or not. Now, imagine the following situation: a black and not enslaved woman who in the middle of the 18th century had acquired an immense fortune in the exploitation colony where she was born. The provocation that I propose to the reader arises from that last picture and takes the form of a question: to what or to whom would you attribute this black woman's fortune?

According to Cynthia McLeod, one of the greatest writers in Suriname, several historians from her country talked about the life of Elisabeth Samson² considering that she would have obtained her fortune due to the inheritance from a white man with whom she had supposedly had a romantic involvement. This perspective, which for centuries permeated the imagination of the Surinamese people, was only recently revised thanks to McLeod's efforts when she decided to write a historical novel about Elisabeth Samson. To this end, the writer traveled to Germany and the Netherlands in order to consult the records on Elisabeth Samson's life in the archives of the cities of The Hague, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Keulen and Emmerich.

After dedicating herself to studying those records, McLeod revealed that the historians' conjectures were wrong. Samson had inherited no fortune, on the contrary, she was the first self-made woman in the history of Suriname. This discovery implies that the historians's assumptions were full of racism and gender prejudice and that those aspects underlie Surinamese society even in the present time. Would it ever be conceivable for a (black) woman of the 18th century the enrichment obtained by her own dedication, intelligence and administrative capacity? In a sexist society that would probably never be conceived and that is why McLeod supposes that the historians – all men, it is important to note – did not bother to investigate the origin of the fortune of one of the most well-known historical personalities in the country.

McLeod's novel criticizes the sexist perspective of history and seeks to highlight Samson's life and achievements. The book fictionalizes the life of this historical personality, however, it is

¹ My translation from the Brazilian edition.

² Elisabeth Samson (1715-1771) is a historical personality who lived in the 18th century in Paramaribo, Suriname. She is also the main character in the novel *The free negress Elisabeth: prisoner of color* (2004) written by Cynthia McLeod. Samson was very famous for being one of the richest people in Suriname at the colonial period.

worth mentioning some real aspects of her life. In that sense, the paratext in *The free Negress: prisoner of color* is fundamental, because it brings information that complements the fiction. The first of these information concerns the number of blacks and people of color³ in the colony:

Naturally, many European men cohabited with black women, and from this union, a new group, the people of color, was born in Suriname. It subsequently increased in size and importance. Not every white man set his offspring free, but many did; and in the 18th century, the epoch of Elisabeth, the numbers of free colored people were already as large as that of the pure whites. The government did not like the fact that so many white man transgressed the decree and lived with black and colored women; but they had to tolerate it, because it happened all the time. (McLeod, 2004, p.6).

In order to prevent the black population from acquiring land or other material goods, marriage between a white man and a black woman was strictly prohibited and so the union between them took place only through concubinage. This obviously had moral implications for black women, which was constantly judged by the moral of white society.

People [were] raised in a society in which the color of a person's skin had an important role to play generally understand [...]. 'Colored' is a collective term for people of mixed black-white blood. Marriage between a white man and a colored woman was never prohibited by ordinance in Suriname. The prohibition was only valid for black people. (McLeod, 2008, p.4).

In addition to social discredit, they were banned from social circles: they could not accompany their partners at parties and during mass at the church they were to occupy the seats for immoral women. However, women of color had the right to marry white men:

It must have been quite an ordeal for this black woman living under the hypocritical Dutch colonial government, which on the one hand did not permit white men to marry their black mistresses, but on the other hand condemned the black mistresses for not being married and called them "whores", "sinful women". (McLeod, 2004, p.7).

Elisabeth Samson was black. As her mother had obtained the manumission letter, Samson was born free and raised by her sister Maria, a woman of color married to Frederick Bosse, a liberal white man. Both of them spared no effort to provide Elisabeth with quality education. McLeod's narrative describes the main character's level of education, pointing out how she mastered the exact sciences and managed to be of great support in the management of her sister's and brother-in-law's lands. It would have been due to this professional experience that, according to the author, Samson acquires business expertise and develops administrative skills to buy her own lands and manage her

³ I adopt a translation policy that respects concepts given by black feminists. "People of color", when translated into English, is more representative than "non-white people". For more information on this, you can read "Quem nomeou essas mulheres 'de cor'?" (2017), from Tatiana Nascimento.

own assets. Throughout her life, she would have acquired several coffee and tobacco farms, she would also have entered the real estate business, the import and export trade with Holland – selling clothes, wigs, silverware etc. in the colony – and finally she was allowed to legally harvest timber.

McLeod provides - also as a paratext - the inventory of Samson's fortune. At her death, in addition to an amount of 23,000 Surinamese guilders, she was said to have left the following assets⁴:

Chart 1⁵

Elisabeth's Samson's property	Amount in Surinamese guilder
Plantation Clevia	fl 200.000
Farm and country house La Solitude	fl 110.000
Plantation De Goede Vreede	fl 85.000
Plantation Toevlugt	fl 55.000
Plantation Welgemoed	fl 55.000
Half plantation Belwaarde	fl 215.000
Half plantation Vlaardingen	fl 140.000
Half plantation Catharinasburg	fl 35.000
Half plantation Houtgrond Onverwacht	fl 50.000
One quart of plantation Saltzhalen	fl 70.000
Twelve big and small houses in Paramaribo	fl 125.000
Total value approximately	fl 1.140.000

As it was said earlier, racism and gender discrimination have led historians today to undermine Samson's ability to generate wealth. This point is strongly emphasized by McLeod in the introduction to the novel:

The Free Negress Elisabeth [...] ensured herself a permanent and unrivalled place in the annals of colonial history – on 2 counts: First, her request in 1764 to marry a white man; and second, on account of her extreme wealth – she was a self-made black business magnate in the 18th century at the height of slavery. Many historians wrote about this fact. Although they did not write in the same words, they all assumed that Elisabeth Samson was a slave woman who had cohabited with a white or Jewish man, who set her free and made her his heir. [...] I searched in the National Archives in The Hague, in the district archives of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, in the archives of Keulen and Emmerich in Germany. After a while I had collected so many documents, that I could prove that the historians were absolutely WRONG, and the statements that she surely must have inherited her wealth from a slave master who set her free, told us something about the historians, but not about Elisabeth. It was excellent proof of machismo and white supremacist thinking: “When a black woman is rich, she can only have gained her wealth thanks to a White Man, who made her rich!” In Elisabeth's case it was the contrary!!! (McLEOD, 2004, p.06).

It is through the porosity existing between the literary and historical fields that McLeod criticizes the patriarchal and racist society. In this sense, the historical novel, a hybrid narrative

⁴ According to the data provided by Morningstar and the cryptocurrency by Coinbase, one Surinamese dollar, which is the current currency of Suriname, equals 0.24 Surinamese guilder, which is the currency of Suriname in the 18th century.

⁵ Information extracted from McLEOD, 2004, p.431.

form through which a historical character gains a voice, is essential to reverse the traditional point of view of history and show a new perspective of it. Linda Hutcheon (1991) points out that the writing of history is a limited and historically determined discursive construction. This obviously goes against the notion of Aristotle, to whom the historian should speak only of what happened while the poet was allowed to speak of what could happen. For Hutcheon, the construction of the historical discourse is subjected to different interpretations of historical facts over the centuries, always regarding the “desire to rewrite the past within a new context” (HUTCHEON, p.157).⁶

In another perspective, about the construction of the historical discourse Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010) famously points out that post-colonial studies always seek to interrogate the limits of categories such as subject, agency and voice to think about different social sectors that are based on the Grand historical, political and economic narratives of modernity and its various peripheries. Thus, far from being limited to a fixed historical periodization, postcolonial studies seek to reorganize historical periods, hegemonic geographies and mechanisms of power in order to question the supremacy of certain epistemological paradigms. Therefore, similar to all critical thinking about the historical periods, spaces and imaginary that we co-inhabit, the forms of the historical speech are also part of the material that the postcolonial studies seeks to review and theorize.

In this sense, I call attention to McLeod's attempt to rewrite the history of Suriname with a woman's perspective in mind. This is a project that can also be seen in the author's other novels that have been translated into English⁷. *The cost of sugar*, a narrative originally published in 1987 and translated into English in 2007 by The Waterfront Press, was the author's debut book. In six weeks, the novel was already sold out in the country and this was the first Best Seller produced on Surinamese soil. In fact, the novel gained a cinematic adaptation in 2013. The novel takes place in the 18th century and talks about the lives of Jewish farmers who colonized Suriname. From the perspective of two sisters, Elza and Sarith, it is revealed the social hypocrisy and mistreatment of enslaved peoples in a period when sugar plantations moved ambitions despite any human cost.

In *Tutuba: the girl from the slaveship Leusden* (2013), a young woman is abducted in her village in Ghana and brought into forced labor in the fields of Suriname. The report of the treatment of the enslaved peoples during the trip from Ghana to Suriname and the report of the sinking of Leusden – the largest shipwreck in the history of this type of vessel (and yet, tragedy that remained unknown to us) is narrated from the perspective of Tutuba and Captain Oujtes, the ship's captain. The narrative strategy used by the author focuses on the perspective of these characters because

⁶ My translation from the Brazilian edition.

⁷ The novels originally written in Dutch and not translated into English have not been studied.

they reveal, on the one hand, the coldness with which Outjes treated abducted men and women and, on the other, the construction of an identity born from the rape, violence, and human trafficking. This different points of view unmasks the mechanisms of debasement of black identity by Captain Outjes and sheds light on the resilient strength of African women who are forced to reconstruct their lives.

The process of reconstructing the historical view from new voices or a new perspective is also committed to denouncing what has been erased. That is because what is intentionally present in the written history also reveals what has (un)consciously been obliterated according to certain ideological biases that accompany the narratives of those who have the right and the power of speech. Thus, in *Tutuba's* preface, McLeod indirectly criticizes the erasure of the historic event that was the sinking of the slave ship *Leusden*. It leaves the attentive reader to question why the greatest nautical disaster involving a large number of abducted enslaved people had never been registered in the compendiums of Suriname history. She states:

The sinking of the slave ship *Leusden*, in which six hundred and sixty-four prisoners and abducted African lost their lives, attracted hardly any attention at the time. In the ensuing years, too, no mention has ever been made of it. In fact it was the greatest disaster involving a slave ship in the whole three-hundred-year history of the transatlantic slave trade, and involved the greatest loss of life. Dr. Leo Balai “discovered” this disaster by chance. Thanks to his research, spanning several years, the *Leusden* has been “salvaged” after almost three hundred years (for the moment still figuratively, but hopefully literally). (McLEOD, 2013, p.5).

This task of revealing and/or denouncing historical events is at the basis of McLeod's literary project, which recognizes the need to give voice to marginalized groups. She destroys hegemonic discourses to shed light on the diversity that makes up groups that are inscribed in the difference. Thus, if according to Hutcheon “both fiction and history are cultural systems of signs, ideological constructs whose ideology includes their appearance as autonomous and self-sufficient” (1991, p. 149)⁸ McLeod's writing delegitimizes and denaturalizes patriarchal historical discourse in order to create a new one. She also recognizes that her literary project is a two-way writing of the margin: as production inserted in a geographical, political and economic periphery – which is Suriname in relation to the countries of South America⁹, with implications for the circulation of scientific, cultural and literary production in the country; margin also as a writing of feminine authorship that gives voice to silenced black women. It is necessary to take into account the implications of intersectionality in the validation of speeches. Intersectionality is an aspect of

⁸ My translation from the Brazilian edition.

⁹ On the geopolitical situation of Suriname, I recommend reading “Um país de costas para a América do Sul” (CORREA, 2015) e “Breve história do Suriname” (CAVLAK, 2016).

feminism that analyzes gender discrimination necessarily taking into account issues of race and social class. Racism, prejudice and socioeconomic inequality add to gender discrimination and therefore black women or women of color suffer more intensely the consequences of machismo. The term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an academic specializing in gender issues, but other important names are bell hooks and, in Brazil, Carla Akotirene.

The considerations of Akotirene (2019) and hooks (2015) help us think about the impacts of the place of speech occupied by McLeod's character. Akotirene points out the intersectional location of black women who, subjected to the structural marginalization of society, differ from white women because black women are affected by an "overlap of gender, race and class" (2019, p.19). The academic rescues the famous speech by Sojourner Truth *Ant'I a woman ?* in 1851 at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention¹⁰. In her speech, Truth argued against the idea that female fragility was not compatible with the right to suffrage and, most important to the discussion proposed in this article, Truth questioned the category of "universal woman" when denouncing that, in the period of slavery in the USA (and, we can say, anywhere else where black women were enslaved), it was the sons and daughters of black women who were sold as slaves in the markets, black women were also those who plowed the land, planted and filled the barns, often more skillfully than men. And despite being a woman no man would ever help her get on carriages or jump in muddy puddles as they used to do for white women.

By analyzing Truth's speech and reflecting on intersectionality, Akotirene shows that the difference between black women and white women has remained over the centuries because it is supported by the structural inseparability of racism, capitalism and a cisheteropatriarchal society. In the author's words, "black women were workers in the homes of "educated white women", when they came back to their homes they had the money taken by "idle husbands" quite offended because there was no "ready food in the house" (AKOTIRENE, 2019, p.26).¹¹ In the same direction of thought, bell hooks (2015) discusses the oppression of black women stating that sub-oppressions are formed within marginalized social groups. Thus, some of the individuals who are excluded from the market, from political and legal representation and unable to fully participate in the dominant social extract, like white women and black men, can practice racial or gender discrimination and exploit the work of black women. In other words, black women can suffer oppression from other women and from men – even from black men:

¹⁰ You can find Truth's speech in hooks, 1987.

¹¹ My translation.

As a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society, for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupation ladder, but our overall social status is lower than that of any other group. Occupying such a position, we bear the brunt of sexist, racist and classist oppression. At the same time, we are the group that has not been socialized to assume the role of exploiter/oppressor, in that we are allowed no institutionalized “other” that we can exploit or oppress. [...] White women and black men have it both ways. They can act as oppressor or be oppressed. Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of women. White women may be victimized by sexism, but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people (hooks, 2015, p.207)¹².

So for hooks, Betty Friedan’s famous phrase from *The feminine mystique* (1963), “the problem that has no name”, quoted to describe the condition of women in the mid-twentieth century who wanted something more than taking care of the house, the husband and the children, cannot be used to describe the condition of black women. Since the colonial period black women have always worked. Furthermore, when white feminists left their domestic duties to work and study, it was black women or women of color who assumed the role rejected by them. This means that when the first feminist discussions about the oppression of women emerged, they were far from including the needs of black women or women of color.

Resuming McLeod's writing project from the perspective of intersectionality, the Surinamese author calls into question the phallogentric view through a novel that seeks to deconstruct prejudice against black women, who suffer double and most cruel discrimination: gender and race. According to Costa e Silva (2019, p.82-83) Samson's qualities as an educated woman, diligent in conducting business and, above all, aware of her different status from the other black people of the time are crucial in the construction of the plot. In the introduction to the novel, the author tries to explain the idiosyncrasies of the Surinamese colonial society in order to situate the reader in relation to the difficulties faced by black people who, besides suffering severe punishments, were prohibited from marrying white people, even after being freed from slavery, under penalty of capital crime.

In this respect, Elisabeth was revolutionary because she fought for interracial marriage to be sanctioned. She thus used the legitimacy that money can gain in favor of the transformation of a society. Samson understood that social change would only happen when introduced in the rule of law and for this, she made no effort to succeed. At the end of her life, she proposed a wedding alliance with the young Hermanus Daniel Zobre. According to the author, in exchange for the arranged marriage, he would inherit all her properties. Her marriage proposal was analyzed, judged and approved by the Dutch court. As Suriname was a colony, Surinamese people had to endure that decision despite the prejudice.

¹² My translation to the Brazilian edition.

On December 21, 1767, Elisabeth Samson and Hermanus Daniel Zobre were married. The bride was fifty-two years old, and the groom, thirty. The extravagant and expensive marriage celebration took place at Elisabeth's mansion: Something only the rich could afford. [...] Some of the guests hailed the celebration:

"Unique!"

"The wedding of weddings in Paramaribo!"

"Unbelievably splendid!"

However, Elisabeth was quietly disappointed because many of the people she had hoped would have come did not do so. [...] When all the guests had departed, Elisabeth invited her husband to her bedroom for a moment. He was certainly not sober and wanted to embrace her.

"My darling, now we're going to party", he said in a heavily slurred voice.

Elisabeth pushed him back and said with a serious voice, "Come to your senses, Masra Zobre. Our marriage is a paper matter that will bring you many benefits. I'm sure you know it. In the circumstance, I do think it's better for you to have your privacy, and I, mine. Your room has been prepared upstairs; we'll talk tomorrow. Goodnight". (McLEOD, 2004, p.397-398).

The aim of this arrangement was not only to change the unfair condition suffered by black women, but also because it was the way she could be accepted by the upper colonial class. According to the narrative, even after the wedding, to which a good part of the colonial elite preferred to be absent, Samson did not get invited to parties or dinners. Despite her marriage the racism that corrupted the foundations of society did not admit her in. The invitations that arrived were intended only for Daniel Zobre, her husband. Although this treatment represented a flop according to the social code, it would be more inelegant to have a black woman in the upper parties of Suriname. The narrative features Samson's unique participation in a New Year's Eve party at the governor's house that resulted in symbolic violence against her:

Masra Zobre, who had stood, somewhat uncomfortably with his wife for a time, eventually went over to his male friends to chat as other cliques and those of a similar ilk gathered to talk. Elisabeth, however, was standing alone. Nobody looked at her. [...] Elisabeth blotted some facial perspiration with her handkerchief and decided to move towards one of the larger and more animated groups. But the conversation halted instantaneously when she drew close. The ladies simply froze and busied themselves by either sipping from their glasses or fanning themselves and observing others. Obviously unwelcomed, she drifted along, looking around the room – knowing full well of course that she would be the only black woman. [...] In her search for inclusion, at a certain moment she walked towards a group that had gathered around Susanna Duplessis. But when Elisabeth walked past them she clearly heard one woman say to the others: "she looks just like her sunken frigate!" (McLEOD, 2004, p.419-420).

The situation described above by McLeod shows more than the difficulty of acceptance in a circle of racist people, it reveals a social neurosis that works in the construction of an oppressive and marginalizing order for the black individual. In "Racismo e sexismo na cultura brasileira"

(1984), Lélia Gonzalez describes her experience as a black woman. She reports that it is very common when opening the door to assist street sellers for them to ask: "is your Madame at home?". According to her, this is a very common experience to other black women who do not live in slums or underprivileged communities. This situation represents the way black women are seen by Brazilian society: always in a position of subordination. Thus, for Gonzalez, "like all myths, the one of racial democracy hides something beyond what it shows. In an initial approximation, we find that it exerts its symbolic violence on black women in a special way"(p.228)¹³. In Suriname at that time, just as in Brazil, a black woman was expected to serve at a white people party. She was never expected to be a guest.

The New Year's Eve party scene reports the indelible nature of racism and through the figure of Samson it exposes what it means to exist beyond the boundaries of the white privilege. The basis of that thought is what Toni Morrison (2019) calls "the construction of Others"¹⁴. For her, "to construct Others" means to make a minority group abject in order to confirm the identity of a group that benefits from power – and this group is generally represented by the heteronormative white people. Ultimately, it is a matter of promoting inhumane acts in favor of maintaining privileges. The naturalization of the subjugation of a minority group would take place through a discursive construction that demeans the black individual and alienates him or her from his or her own humanity. As an example of the consequences of this act of symbolic violence, at the end of the *soirée* in which Elisabeth Samson was ignored by the hosts and depreciated by all the other guests, she comes to the following conclusion:

Suddenly she had the feeling as if she were observing the room and its occupants from a distance. She could clearly see with perspicacity everyone who was present in the ballroom including herself – all from a close-ranged distance. [...] Elisabeth looked at herself in the midst of them all: a vain old negress grotesquely dressed – in pursuit of acceptance [...] (McLEOD, 2004, p.420-421).

In the excerpt above, the third-person narrator assumes the character's point of view to manifest in free indirect speech the psychological effect of the "construction of Others" to which she was subjected to. Despite claiming to see clearly and perspicuity all guests present at the party, the distortion of Samson's vision is evident when she looks at herself and does not recognize the greatness of her achievements and the strength of her struggle, but instead she thinks herself to be grotesque, old and useless. This feeling does not mean the internalization of a racist discourse, but it

¹³ My translation.

¹⁴ Translation of "processo de outremização".

is about the creation of a misrepresentation of her reflected self-image in the white patriarchal society shattered mirror.

As it is well known¹⁵, an 18th century white woman should submit herself to her husband's needs and desires, should be responsible for raising the children and organizing the house. Everything related to home care concerned her with the exception of financial decisions. But an 18th century white woman had at her help the enslaved women to serve her. Thus black women had to do all the housework, from cleaning and cooking to taking care of their “madam's” children. This means that the level of oppression of black women is double as they suffer from gender and race prejudice.

In the sense used by Morrison this double oppression system naturalizes and reiterates the process of creating black women as the “Others”. Elisabeth Samson is immersed in this society that under moralistic, religious and scientific pretexts (considering the biological racism discourse) does not recognize the existence of loopholes in the system through where marginalized groups can penetrate and establish themselves as equals. Thus, if Samson's economic activities and commercial relations are tolerated only because they heat up the economy, her social existence is forcibly erased.

McLeod's writing as a political act largely combines awareness of gender and race difference with the need of thinking about one's identity. Thus, the writer's quest is to revive through her historical novels the memory of a people, their origins and struggles but from a brand new angle of history: from the oppressed point of view or, as in Spivak terms, from the subaltern perspective. Not rarely in her narratives the language deconstructs socially widespread patterns. This posture engenders the creation of spaces of resistance and representation. Her novels tension the boundaries of fiction once in the prefaces or presentations McLeod admits she is in favor of revising the ethnocentric perspective that guides the historical and literary texts. In addition to criticizing the established colonization model, for McLeod the historical rescue of the slavery period reveals, even indirectly, the cultural mosaic that underlies Surinamese society and the appreciation of language as an identity element.

It is necessary to understand that literature, as a form of representation, conveys interests, values, perspectives. It is up to us, researchers in the field, a greater awareness of the important role we play in the legitimation of these literatures that challenge the current paradigm. This is not to say that as a researcher in the field of literature one must speak for minorities, but one must question the

¹⁵For more information on this, you can read PERROT, Michelle. *Minha história das mulheres*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2007.; BUTLER, Judith. *Problemas de gênero: feminismo e subversão da identidade*. 2º ed. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2008.; BOURDIEU, Pierre. *A dominação masculina*. 6º ed. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 2009.

very place from which one theorizes. Remember that, according to Spivak (2010) the term "representation" in German has two meanings: "vertretung", which refers to the act of taking the place of the other (and in this process the word has a political meaning), and "darstellung", linked to an aesthetic view. This means, in Dalcastagnè's words (2012, p. 17), that "what arises is no longer simply the fact that the literature provides certain representations of reality, but rather that these representations are not representative of the whole of social perspectives"¹⁶. Finally, regarding McLeod's literature, it is possible to say that the common element of her novels is the creation of "true 'universes of speech' (BOSI, 1979, p.27)¹⁷ in which the past, when re-signified in the light of the present, when pronounced by voices once silenced, illuminates hidden aspects in a story that used to select only certain points of view and promoted a consecrated version of events. In McLeod, memory, race and gender emerge as identity trait, highlighting the appreciation of another story and other voices.

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¹⁶ Translation from the Brazilian edition.

¹⁷ Translation from the Brazilian edition.

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