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SÉRGIO LUZ E SOUZA

"I'M A DECENT *CRIOLA*": REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN AFUA COOPER'S AND ALZIRA RUFINO'S POETRY

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Orientadora: Profª. Drª. Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

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Sérgio Luz e Souza

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____

Prof.ª Dr.ª Viviane Maria Heberle

Coordenadora do Curso

Banca Examinadora:

____

Prof.ª Dr.ª Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

Orientadora

UFSC

____

Prof.ª, Dr.ª Eliana de Souza Ávila

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

____

Prof. Dr. Magali Sperling Beck

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

____

Prof. Dr. Tacel Ramberto Coutinho Leal

Universidade Estadual de Londrina

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ABSTRACT

The intersection of race and gender represents specific site of oppression that concerns constructs of women's inferiority to men in addition (is about) to discourses of racial inferiority. Such situation is replicated in all spheres of social participation, including literature. Thus, black women are many times represented through men's voice. Afua Cooper, in Canada, and Alzira Rufino, in Brazil, are representative of black women's resistance to this white dominant patriarchal society. In this study, I discuss poetics of resistance in depictions of women in their poetry. Additionally, I make a comparative analysis of their poetics.

Keywords: Cooper. Rufino. Resistance. Poetry

Number of words: 29.816

RESUMO

A intersecção de gênero e raça representa um lugar específico de opressão, pois se refere à construção da inferioridade da mulher em relação ao homem, a que se acumula o discurso de inferioridade racial. Tal situação é reproduzida em todos os setores de participação social, incluindo literatura. Nesse sentido, a mulher negra é tantas vezes representada através voz do homem. Afua Cooper, no Canada, e Alzira Rufino, no Brasil, são representantes da resistência das mulheres negras a essa sociedade de formação patriarcal sob domínio do homem branco. Neste estudo, discuto poéticas de resistência na representação da mulher na poesia das duas escritoras. Além disso, faço uma análise comparativa das poéticas usadas pelas duas poetisas.

Palavras-chave: Cooper. Rufino. Resistência. Poesia

Número de palavras: 29.816

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INTRODUCTION

The Black Woman is an image frequently present in the constitution of Western societies along the centuries, and for all this time they are included in literature. However, due to the underestimating condition this participation occurs, with a few exception, they have been given voice by men, and consequently, for the most part, kept in silence. Such historical development produces the way individuals in this intersection of race and gender are seen. Being black, a race that emerges to Western society as something in need of being healed, fixed, domesticated, and woman, which, according to the rules of this same society is considered as inferior to men, is not just a sum of specificities, but the very demonstration of a wide range of inequalities. As a result, for a long time blacks do not have voice, and when they finally conquer their right to express their own ideas, women still have less opportunity than men to express their view of the world.

In spite of the obstacles, black women resist, and keep expressing their thoughts, producing, both in Canada and Brazil, a long tradition of African-descent writers. George Elliott Clarke affirms that Mary Ann Shadd, who lived in the nineteenth century, is Canada's "first major black female writer" (29) and Luis Mott mentions Rosa Maria Egipcíaca in the eighteenth century, allegedly the first female black Brazilian writer (246) which are evidence of women's participation in the construction of black literary history of those countries.

The rapid expansion of the literature produced by black women gives the opportunity to observe more carefully particularities that emerge from such production, as for instance how black women writers, in Canada and Brazil deal with the representation of the black woman. Women are workers, lovers, mothers, have political participation, and are signified in many other ways. According to Judith Butler, all of these social roles have an engendered alternative available, which means that there is a politics of gender prior to the being, and the repetition of the norms is what guarantees the continuity of notions associated with the gender (185). Jamaican-Canadian Afua Cooper and Brazilian Alzira Rufino portray women in social positions that provide the opportunity to re-discuss, or even broader predefined regulations. This research investigates viewpoints and poetic devices used by the two authors in such depiction.

The overall context of this investigation refers to Poetics of Resistance, which, according to Fred Wah

(1997) represents an "opposition to a nationalistic aesthetic that continually attempts to expropriate difference" (60) and in its applied sense, is characterized by the poetic mechanisms to make difference. They receive different terminologies, such as "oppositional poetics, ethnopoetics, poetics of diaspora, poetics of gender, poetics of the hyphen," mentioned by Susan Rudy and Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins (9-10). The specific context of this research is Poetics of Resistance in Cooper's and Rufino's poetry. In both Canada and Brazil, blacks have their participation in history registered, but such historical contribution has mostly been written by white hands. Cooper, who follows an academic career in History, has been contributing to rewrite that part of Canada's history. Black participation in the history of Canada is formed by pieces selected by the white dominant hand as part of a veiled policy in favor of a unified society around the white man as representative of the ideal citizen. Such view finds support on the way Dionne Brand manifests her position to discourses that dominate Canadian culture. For her, responses "to criticism from people of colour, women, lesbians and gays and progressives has been to try to assimilate a few voices into the discourse without overturning it fundamentally" (131).

Cooper offers resistance writing a black poetry that includes homage to ancestors, some of them *Yorubas*, and usually addresses women in different cycles of life. She questions the boundaries in which women are usually restricted, and places them in the center of attention, proposing a reality built upon a new discourse that allows women to live life as complete as possible. Rufino is a poet who offers resistance elaborating on the paper all she experiences, specially working with the poorest people. As a black woman from humble family who grew up in the Brazilian 1960s, did the most basic jobs since childhood, occupied ordinary posts in hospital until getting a nurse degree, she has experienced life as a hard reality. Her activism starts in a period when more democratic winds blow Brazil, though, "proportionally democratic," it has been less democratic for blacks than for whites.

The main theorist guiding my analysis is Fred Wah, more specifically, his discussions on poetics of resistance in "A Poetics of Ethnicity," and "Half-Bred Poetics." I also draw on Stuart Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in which he discusses the flexibility and plasticity of identity to make possible the production of personal ways of expression. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* supports a view that questions social norms that

define roles according to gender. Domício Proença Filho's "A Trajetória do Negro na Literatura Brasileira" analyses Brazilian literature in which the black is the central theme. This work also draws on the contribution of voices that call into question the Canadian multiculturalism policy for understanding that it fails to consider the ethnic diversity of the country with the complexity it requires. In Brazil, black voices make resistance to a social-political system that pretends to be democratic, but is indeed just a political adjustment to a new liberal world in which blacks are still seen as inferior.

My objectives are the investigation of: 1. Cooper's and Rufino's poetry in the context of resistance in Canada and Brazil, and implications of their political positioning; 2. Cooper's and Rufino's poetics of resistance, especially applied, in depictions of women. In order to investigate most part of what has been produced by both poets concerning my focus of interest, the corpus includes: *Memories Have Tongue* (1992) and *Copper Woman and Other Poems* (2006) by Cooper, and *Eu, Mulher Negra, Resisto* (1988) and *Bolsa Poética* (2010) by Rufino.

The distribution of the issues to be discussed in this study is in the following sequence: In chapter one, I make a theoretical discussion on poetics of resistance, and discuss poetics of resistance in Canada, offering a view on Multiculturalism and poetics of resistance, especially in regard to Canadian women's voices expressing their view on ethnicity and gender. In this chapter, I also make a panorama of the black literature in Brazil, discussing how black women voice their experience of resistance in the country. In chapter two my focus is on Jamaican roots—Patois and Dub poetry—, and I make an analysis of Afua Cooper's poetry. Chapter three examines *Candomblé* roots and *Eparrei* Magazine, and makes an analysis of Alzira Rufino's poetry. In chapter four, I compare Afua Cooper's and Alzira Rufino's poetry.

POETICS OF RESISTANCE: THEORETICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

In this work Poetics of Resistance is used according to the notions defined by Fred Wah. Canadian, son of a Chinese father and a Scottish Irish Swedish mother, because he carries the name of his father, in some circumstances along his life he is identified by people who, in Canada, are considered "unmarked," or not belonging to any ethnic groups, as Chinese. In such moments, Wah experiences the result of notions of Chinese "undesirability" produced in Canada. As he says: "And even though the blood quantum shows only one quarter Chinese, that name, Wah, is enough of a shade to mottle an otherwise transparent European background" (1997 61). The other three quarters of his blood, the European quantum, grants him a white skin and undetectable traces of Chinese ancestry. In other words, he does not look Chinese. Because he is a multi-ethnic poet, the hyphen is the element from which Wah departs to investigate poetic recourses that unlock difference and put into question a way of thinking that works to establish a central and stable white reference.

In "Half-Bred Poetics" (1997) Wah provides a variety of images and ideas concerning the hyphen. The initial dimension of his proposition is the grammatical representation of hyphenated people. Because it represents the interconnection of two or more identities in a hierarchic condition, the hyphen separates and unites, becoming an ambivalent signal. The hyphen brings into the same space the difference represented by the features of distinctive cultures and the homogeneity provided by notions of nationality. If, on one hand the hyphen represents the association of a world multiple in meanings and references personified by people from different ethnicities, on the other, is able to denounce a project that aims at bringing all these voices into a single discourse. Based on that association, Wah elaborates on many images that represent the condition of hyphenated people, as for instance: "a property marker, a boundary post, a borderland, a bastard, a railroad, a last spike, a stain, a cypher, a rope, a knot" (60).

Metaphors for the hybrid experience, it is from those images that he moves to propose that hyphenated writers, usually occupying an opaque space where they do not vibrate their position, pass to be visible and audible. His notion consists on a way to make the hyphen become a problem for mainstream discourses instead of bringing into harmony the many differences. In a strong statement he declares:

> In opposition to a nationalistic aesthetic that continually attempts to expropriate difference into its own consuming narrative, writers of colour and aboriginal writers gain a significant social empowerment by engaging in dialogues that relocate the responsibility for their own subjectivity within themselves (60)

In order to discuss how such opposition takes place, Wah provides examples of poetic devices used by some hyphenated writers. He departs from the particular circumstance of his own multi-racial condition, which results a white skin and a Chinese name, to discuss how names allow writers to exercise camouflage. Wah mentions as an example Mary Louise Pratt's study of *La Malinche*, mix of history and legend about a woman who would have helped the Spanish to conquer the Aztec empire-in some versions, *Malinche/llorona* (weeping) a woman who is left after being involved in a romantic relationship. According to Pratt, such legend works to associate the figure of the woman with that of a traitor in the highly patriarchal Mexican society. She also mentions that *Chicana* women writers have been working to transform the name *La Malinche* into a strong tactic to face sexism. Also in the "poetics of naming," Wah provides the example of poet Jamila Ismail, who plays with identity through mixing up personal information with citation of places in different parts of the world: "young ban yen had been thought Italian in kathmandy, filipina in hong kong, Eurasian n Kyoto, Japanese in anchorage, dismal in London England" (62).

The example of La Malinche also serves to mention the tactic of "code-switching." The strategy is very useful for bilingual writers which linguistic context involves some form of oppression because it permits the writer to open passage in the oppressor's language to install particular and meaningful linguistic registers that transgress that language. In practical terms, writers who use a second language insert terms of their first language in their work as a form of "invading a territory." Wah provides an example for that through a poem in which Gloria Anzaldúa uses terms both in Spanish and English to define a *mestiza* identity. She entitles the poem "To live on the Borderlands means you," and each stanza tells a bit of such experience. The excerpt Wah quotes is: "are neither hispana india negra española / ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half- / breed caught in the crossfire between camps" (62).

A helpful contribution to this discussion is Isabel Carrera Suárez's "Hyphens, Hybridities and Mixed-Race Identities: Gendered Readings in Contemporary Women's Texts," which discusses the hyphen focusing on

the specific condition of the women. Of specific interest is the association of Pratt's "contact zone," mentioned by Wah, with interviews of geographer Millene Mahtani. According to Suárez, in these interviews "ordinary" women declare how they negotiate identity, sometimes making use of camouflage: "'I'm half-white'," or "'turning ethnicity on and off' depending on context," or "being taken for an 'insider' (rather than outsider) when travelling" (31). For Mahtani, this "identity game" constitutes a way to demonstrate power in circumstances in which a specific location plays a particularly interesting role. Suárez understands that such flexible position adopted by those hyphenated women enable relations of contact, and not just the conflictive paradigm colonizer/colonized, that Pratt talks about.

Among other poetics that oppositional writers, be they feminists, sexual, racial or others, have been using is the one Wah calls poetics of the "trans." It is made possible through texts that, instead of a smooth reading, problematize context. For "trans" it is meant a space that provides writers the opportunity to include paradoxes, contradictions, incoherence. For that, Wah proposes an image/paradigm: "How to pass through without being appropriated" (64). And his answer for that is the lack of definition as strategy, which turns the space a constant site of rethinking, likewise active. Among other forms to produce such problematization is the blank space, which is able to provoke silence, and paradoxically keeps the hyphen audible.

Other reference that supports discussions in this work is Fred Wah's "A Poetics of Ethnicity" (2000). In this essays Wah also discusses the poetic position manifested in works developed by ethnic writers, naming them "immigrants, ethnic and native writers in Canada" with a closer focus on the distinction between those affiliated with conventional poetics and those who adhere to disruptive poetic forms to express their hyphenated position. In this sense, he is interested on an applied poetics, which refers to specific forms of representation "the cultural marginalized writer" (51) elaborates on to express a specific hyphenated experience that makes the space of the hyphen become a significant place of movement. He calls this type of work "alienethnic poetics."

In a country such as Canada, where ethnicity has become one of the main public issues is fundamental to define what is meant when talking about people whose origins are markedly from outside that country. Wah expresses his aversion to notions that proposes all Canadians can be considered immigrants because such generalization reduces constituents, such as genetic, cultural, biographical, which are particular of each writer,

to the sameness that transforms hyphenated people into a single one. Against that, he mentions some hyphenated writers creating ways of expression through the articulation of their ethnic particularities, as he exemplifies, once again drawing on the chicanery: "double-voicing and polyphony […] parody; polemically coloured autobiography and confession; hybrid languages; carnivalization; inserted genres such as diaries, letters, found documents" (53). Among the figures Wah creates is that of "ethnopoetics toolbox," in which writers get their "tools" to make resistance. Such illustration helps to make meaningful the applied sense of his poetics.

Associated with the value of being ethnic is that of being ethic, which rearticulates the discussion about alignment with, or opposition to, uniformities. Here, Wah insists on the importance of being "the other." Such move represents an investment to fill in the space with a hyphenated innovative diction. In other words, the "synchronous foreignicity" represents a strategy to keep an ambivalence that develops into a "poetics of paradox." In this sense, tactics such as "antithesis, polarity, confusion, and opposition as the day-to-day household harmony" (61) provide a narrative that because of its assault to mainstream writings becomes a coherent form of reterritorialization. This way, conflict and fragmentation too are articulated as considerable forms of experimentation that contribute to construct an alien identity.

1.1 Resistance in the context of multiculturalism in Canada

Canada has been occupied over the centuries by different ethnic groups. First Nations were already living there for thousands of years when the British and French arrived in the seventeenth century. After that, slave trade, the gold rush, the railroad construction, immigration policies, among other factors contribute for people from different parts of the globe to compound that country's population. In spite of its ethnic diversity, by the mid-twentieth century many people in Canada are still fenced in their origins, with little or no cultural sharing, living as separated nations. Such division between so many groups does not exist without conflicts. Among them are: aboriginals advocating their right for a land that is considered stolen from them; Francophone population, mainly from Québec, seeking for its independence; and the many so called "ethnic minorities" that

keep attached to their origins.

During the WWII Canada lives a moment of racial persecution against Japanese, Germans and Italians, but an "adjustment" is made necessary after the war because Canada's economy needs workforce. Additionally, the country is morally obliged to recognize the UN Treaty (1954) in what it defines concerning war refugees (168). On the other hand, the high number of immigrants, discussed in popular magazines such as Maclean, puts locals on alert (Mackey 66). Trying to contain "undesirable immigrants," the Canadian government formulates documents such as the "Order-in-Council P.C. 2856," which defines preference for British, Irish, French, and Americans, while "Blacks were still considered inadmissible unless they came under the preferred-class designation" (Knowles 169). New policies for mass immigration bring many from the shattered Europe, but specific conditions define the Canadian preference. Pendakur mentions examples of such restriction in the "Immigration Act 1952," which gives the Minister of Immigration "unclear" powers, yet, according to the author, prohibition was "based on nationality, citizenship, ethnic group [as opposed to race in previous acts][1], occupation, class, habits, modes of life or holding property." At the same time, the author continues, immigrants were considered unsuitable according to: "climate or other social or economic conditions, or inability to assimilate" (28). Even so, the number of immigrants from "less desirable" countries is noticeable, specially because newcomers group along with those they feel identified with, forming "visible minorities," which strengthens their relations and provides them political power. In addition to such internal conflicts, the neighbour US, with its strong sense of identity and assimilation, represents a constant menace to Canada.

In other words, Canadian government in the post-war deals with two capital issues: one is internal, and the other is external. Internally, it has to manage a population formed by different ethnic groups that now are all Canadians. Among them are the "whites," considered "unmarked" or not belonging to any ethnicity, and others, the ethnic-identified groups; all groups claiming space for their identities. Externally, the Americans continue to hover over Canadian nationalism. Indeed, the myth of the Canadian identity is the main aspect fuelling all this discussion because the country seeks for a way of identification, but in terms of a unity that clash with the many "nationalisms" that each specific ethnic group represents. In order to deal with such circumstance all at once, the

[1] Brackets from the original text.

government decides to increase Canadian's sense of identity. For that purpose, national symbols are of paramount importance, and in the 1960s feverishly debates about a new flag relights an old opposition between those who support a country tied to the British Empire and those who wish an independent Canada. Finally, a new flag is chosen and a new national anthem, a composition that combines English music and French lyrics, is established. Canada is now prepared to the centennial celebrations, a colossal event that allocates proportional fund. Mackey gives her testimonial on that:

> Thousands, if not millions, of schoolchildren like myself went on school-sponsored visits to Expo '67, buses packed with children from all areas of Canada converging on Montreal. These trips can be seen as 'pilgrimages of patriotism', that combine the ritual of participation in patriotic performance, with the pedagogical practice of learning about the nation, its relationship to the world, and one's role as a citizen and national subject. (72)

As the author describes, governmental pedagogy is careful with biculturalism since relations with francophone Canada is crucial and delicate. The Centennial Celebration of 67 also gives space to ethnic minorities, but in a different way.

Fig. 1. Ethnicity at the centennial celebration. (Mackey 74).

According to Champion, "ethnic groups were by no means marginalized" (139) but such treatment is part of a process of political courtship that speaks in the name of Canadian integration. That is part of the political scenario when Canada advances towards multiculturalism.

Biculturalism and bilingualism program, which aims at a national identity that recognizes both English and French as the official languages of Canada, is decisive for the nation-building policy. As a consequence, the 1969 Canadian Official Languages Act is created. However, as pointed out by Smaro Kamboureli, "establishing

French and English as the official languages of the country, this Act further reinforced the notion that the French and British were the two founding nations of Canada". For that reason, in 1971 Prime Minister Trudeau introduces his multiculturalism policy, which, also according to Kamboureli, "does not mention the First Nations peoples." Additional documents tried unsuccessfully to actualize the participation of these and other groups, but indeed, "the 1988 Act specifically excludes [First Nations peoples]" (12) says Kamboureli. It does not mean aboriginals are not mentioned in the document; they are mentioned:

> AND WHEREAS the Constitution of Canada recognizes rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada; (1)

But, as Kamboureli highlights, not in the same condition of British and French Canadians:

> AND WHEREAS the Constitution of Canada and the *Official Languages Act* provide that English and French are the official languages of Canada and neither abrogates nor derogates from any rights or privileges acquired or enjoyed with respect to any other language; (1)

As a political battle, Trudeau's multiculturalism is victorious. Canada officially recognizes its multiethnic composition, and the 1988 Multiculturalism Act as a distinctive mark between the American melting pot and the Canadian plural society, considered one of the main goals towards the Canadian identity is implemented.

It does mean that ethnic demands have been attended, which provokes articulations from writers of hyphenated origin. Neil Bissoondath denounces that policy as a strategy that "seeks to seduce" (38). For him, that is the profile of a liberal policy, which acknowledges that modern governments do not clash against opposition, but instead persuade them. Bissoondath creates an image that summarizes the relation of the government with ethnicity in its policy. "Impossible to ignore the image of colourful butterflies pinned to black velvet by careful and loving hands all for the great glory of [. . .] the butterflies?" (39). For Bissoondath, despite the gentle words in the document, such policy, created to save Trudeau's government, uses the Canadian ethnic population for its own political purposes.

Smaro Kamboureli's comments on documents produced along of decades provide evidence of multiculturalism as a policy that leads to different directions but reiterates its paradoxical character. It means that, although documents published since 1971 White Paper defend equal rights for all ethnic groups, only French and British Canadians are represented. Indeed, mentioning the United Empire Loyalists as composed of "diverse ethnic groups" and citing George Elliott Clarke about the arrival of blacks in Nova Scotia back in the

eighteenth century, associated with the 1906 Immigration Act, not just conclude that these are "discriminatory practices that belong, in effect, to the history of Canada's multiculturalism, but is also further evidence that the cohesiveness of Canadian identity has always been imaginary" (12) it has always been a myth.

In opposition to such cohesive expectation, Wah, son of a Scottish-Irish mother and a Chinese father, applies acid irony to explore the "in between" of his multiple nationalities, as in the section "But I'm half Swedish. My mother was Born," from *Diamond Grill*.

> And what can I do for you sir?
>
> My name's Fred Wah. I talked with the recepcionist
> on the phone this morning about getting a visa.
> She told me that, even though I'm Canadian,
> because my racial origin is Chinese,
> I'll have to apply under the Asian quota.
>
> But you don't look Chinese.
>
> That's because I'm half-Swedish. I'm only quarter-Chinese.
>
> Well, that makes all the difference then. If you're less than
> fifty per cent you can enter the us as a Canadian.
> Just ask the girl out front for the forms, it shouldn't take
> more than a few day. (42)

Wah also analyses how other ethnic authors create strategies to make their words more meaningful. He proposes a distinction between a general idea of an ethnic poetic expression in Canada and particular mechanisms developed by individuals. In his "A Poetics of Ethnicity" he says "a practical and applied 'poetics' is a singular and personal toolbox and a writer who seeks to articulate a distinctive ethnic and, as I shall suggest, ethical sensibility requires particular and circumstantial poetics, the right tools" (52). For Wah, "To write (or live) ethnically is also to write (or live) ethically, in pursuit of right value, right place, right home, right otherness" (58).

Himani Bannerji (1990) is another voice criticizing Canadian multicultural policies. Bannerji focuses the distinctive way non-white people is homogenized and blamed for all social problems:

> Due to its selective modes of ethnicization, multiculturalism is itself a vehicle for racialization. It establishes anglo-Canadian culture as the ethnic core culture while "tolerating" and hierarchically arranging others around it as "multiculture." The ethics and aesthetics of "whiteness," with its colonial imperialist/racist ranking criteria, define and construct the "multi" culture of Canada's others. (78)

For Bannerji there is an entire structure, involving government and media, to establish colored people as the cause for any social-economics unbalancing, which results the opinion ordinary people form about the immigrant. According to Bannerji, the multicultural context is even worse for women. When they suffer violence, usually the state does not take any measures, alleging that the contrary would be a transposition of a cultural space. In other words, saying that violence against women is part of the culture of colored immigrants, Canadian authorities many times do nothing when violence occurs (79).

Cultural diversity is a reality in Canada, but it could not be equated with multiculturalism as a government policy in the way it is elaborated. Most part of those critically viewing such policy (Smaro Kamboureli, Neil Bissoondath, Dionne Brand, Himani Bannerji, Fred Wah, to name a few) indicates that there is a chasm between the terms in the policy and what is really implemented. The Multiculturalism Act (1985) itself is open to interpretations, since it repeats ideas of equal rights for all ethnic groups in many articles, but defines English and French, written in this order, as national languages. It reinforces the very notions of "non-ethnic," "unmarked" (Hutcheon 247 and Mackey 16) attributed to British and French-Canadians. "Unmarked" is a distinctive form of existing in Canadian society that allows the two founding groups to be considered as non-ethnic. Others are "marked," but "unmarked" groups are "normalized," which means that they are made "the' norm, "the" reference. However, oppositional unsilenced voices are giving ethnicity a different direction in Canada.

1.2 Poetics of Resistance in Canada: Non-White Women's Voices

In the preface of *The Hanging of Angélique*, Afua Cooper, a black woman, narrates her walking along the streets of Old Montréal imagining what it looked like back in the eighteenth century when another black woman, *Angélique*, the central character of that book, a slave, is tortured and hanged, accused of having set fire to her owner's house. While Cooper seeks for a transcendent way "to be in *Angélique*'s environment" (5) another black woman, the Haitian born Mme. Michaëlle Jean, is made general governor of Canada, a situation one could not expect to happen in the past. In the foreword of the same book, George Elliott Clarke declares that

such attention to the actual episode helps Canadians to feel better with, or even forget, black history (xii). The past takes Cooper "To walk the same streets [*Angélique*] walked. To talk to her ghost" (5) give her voice to tell her story in ancient Canada with its white exclusionary society. But, walking back to the past also suggests a question: has the white Canadian notion of society changed over the centuries? Women writers from different ethnicities have their voice on the issue.

Caribbean-born and many times awarded poet writer Dionne Brand does not permit herself to be seduced by the prestige she achieves. Her work remains addressing inequality in Canada, keeping her position as a hyphenated person. An example of such is the poem "Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater," based on a photo of Mammy Prater, a 115 years ex-slave. The first stanza of the poem is:

> she waited for her century to turn
> she waited until she was one hundred and fifteen
> years old to take a photograph
> to take a photograph and to put
> those eyes in it
> she waited until the technique of
> photography was
> suitably developed
> to make sure the picture would be
> clear
> to make sure no crude
> daguerreotype would lose
> her image
> would lose her lines and most of
> all her eyes
> and her hands (1-16 17)

Brand's interpretation of the photo rewrites the old woman's condition; instead of being focused, which means to be under the gaze of the photographer, in Brand's poem, Mammy Prater appropriates the new invention for the purposes of giving to know her image on her own way. Through poetic recourses, Brand recovers the subjectivity to a black woman, who, in life, even when she is free, never experiences. Thus, appropriation, which, according to Wah goes to the "ethnical poetics toolbox," is a strategy Brand applies to this poem in order to produce a different reading of that black woman.

Jeannette Armstrong also appropriates history to tell it according to the First Nation's view point. "History Lesson" produces a clash with official history:

> Out of the belly of Christopher's ship

> a mob bursts
> Running in all directions
> Pulling furs off animals
> Shooting buffalo
> Shooting each other
> left and right." (xxiv)

Armstrong's perspective reshapes the notion of colonization that is spread for so long. Representative of Okanagan, one of Canada's First Nation, she makes use of art to tell her people's side of History. Armstrong's perspective suggests an observer who is already in the place when Columbus arrives, what problematizes assumptions of an inhibited land. In addition to that, the narrator has a critical view on the implication of such arrival. Armstrong's criticism on the actions perpetrated by whites refer to a broader dimension, related with the earth as a whole, which her people understands as a harmonic and integrated space.

In fable "The Other Family," Himani Bannerji explores the genre and elaborates on imagery to denounce a situation experienced by immigrants in a dominantly white country. The language she applies to the text makes it sound like children's literature. It focuses on the relationship between a mother and her daughter threatened by the interference of the "other" culture. The narrative is triggered by a drawing made in school of "our family," as the child says, which she wants to show her mother. Bannerji first depicts a "remarkable resemblance" (160) and a close relation between daughter and mother. Once such image is created, the woman looks at the picture copied from a book. The picture does not depict their family, but that is all the reference the girl has in school: "all our books have this same picture of the family" (161) says the child. The family depicted has all the stereotypes of a "typical" "blond blue eyes" Canadian family. To better suggest how it impacts on the mother, Bannerji pictures her image: "what she saw made her feel distant from her daughter, as though she was looking at her through the reverse end of a telescope" (160). Later on, in another image, the child captures her own color in front of the mirror and in the following day decides to finish the picture including brown people.

Some African-descendent Canadian poets come from countries where two languages are regularly spoken. Usually, the official language is that one of the colonizer, and the other is a language that results from the association of the colonizer's language with aspects of the language spoken by slaves. That is the case of Jamaica, in which official language is English, but people regularly communicate through Patois. It is also a

strategy of resistance that some poets apply to their writings, as in this passage of Afua Cooper's "Di Apple of Har Y'eye":

> *Wen mi madda seh mi miserable*
> *an mi faada ignore mi*
> *an mi sista seh mi ugly*
> *an mi bredda call mi mawgah pickney*
> *an everybady tink seh mi is di worse likkle gal*
> *inna di worl*
> *an mi tink nobady love mi*
> *den mi granny*
> *mi only granny*
> *come fi mi an comfat mi* (1-10 54)

Based on the different linguistic register, poets also have the opportunity to use the code-switching. According to Mary Louise Pratt, such linguistic practice consists on a movement between two languages that enable bilingual writers to "invade" official language by inserting terms from their repertoire. In Pratt's terms: "code-switching lays claim to a form of cultural power: the power to own but not be owned by the dominant language" (177) as in the fragment of Cooper's "True Revolution":

> Revolution in *wi* heart
> revolution in *wi* thought
> revolution in *wi* house
> revolution in *di* street
> revolution *widin* and *widout*
>
> No Kamau
> there won't be a revolution because
> once again they have brought in the colonizers
> to whip the people into submission (1-9 71)

The first poem, a memory of childhood, is immersed in a language created and spoken by Jamaicans. In the second, readers find two distinctive movements. The first stanza is characterized by a persona who switches, "spontaneously and fluidly between" (Pratt 17) English and Patois. In this moment, revolution seems a very positive perspective. However, in the second, revolution is a frustrated idea because colonizers have proved more powerful. In this moment, Patois disappears, and only the language of the colonizer takes place.

Among the ethnic groups fighting for equality, blacks represent a group that gradually obtains respect from Canadian society. On Tara Burke's documentary "Sounds of Blackness: Black Canadian Women Sing & Speak Out," black Canadian female singers talk about their experience in the country. Asked if their identity is

rooted in Canada, Doreen Johnson says: "Although I never say that out loud, I'm black Canadian. We never made a big deal about that because it's easy to see." Nigeria born Toyin Dada feels similarly: "Nigeria and Canada. It's really half and half." Karen Burke says: "I don't have any sense of other identity besides Canadian, but when Canadians see me they see a black woman, so that black identity is a superposed African-Canadian." For Nicole Sinclair-Anderson her identity "is definitely rooted somewhere else." With the exception of Dada, all the four women are born in Canada, but all of them express some tension concerning a Canadian identity. While Sinclair-Anderson excludes the country from her origin, Burke is firmly rooted in Canada, but testifies how the "undesirable ethnicity," the same inscribed in official documents in the past, permeates society in the present. Both, Johnson and Burke sustain their opinion based on an outside perception. According to what they say, they are blacks, not Canadians.

The other question refers to black as something learned or imposed, which Johnson understands as "a combination of what you see in home and what society says: 'blacks do this, blacks do that', 'all black sing, all blacks play basketball.'" Dada, commenting on how blacks see her, is assertive: "Learned! … I really think that blackness is defined by the people. By how they wanna express their blackness because we are so diverse. People say 'I'm black; you don't act like I do. So, you're not black', and that's not right." Thus, a Nigerian born, of very dark skin, who feels half Canadian, is annoyed with Black Canadians demanding her to "act like black." It certainly represents a fixed way of understanding identity, but it is also an instance of the heterogeneity of the black community, which is made of fractures and disagreements. For Sinclair-Anderson "some are imposed; some of the negative things of black." It does not seem that the two processes are different because the final result is indeed that blacks in Canada are made different. The reasoning expressed by these women comes from their perception on how they are treated, specially by whites. Caribbean born Dionne Brand (1994) explains, or I would better say, teaches through her "assertive pedagogy" the reason for whites act like that:

> Canada national identity itself for many reasons is necessarily predicated on 'whiteness'. One key reason is the need to bolster an inferiority complex occasioned by Britain as its rich bully cousin. What distinguishes Canada from other ex-colonies of Britain and other subordinates of the United States of America is its status as a 'white' nation. (125)

Brand returns to the myth of Canadian national identity, which is based on regulations of identity that only find negotiation with a white identified world.

On a TV program "The Agenda with Steve Paikin" themed "Being Black in Canadian Culture," the host quotes black female freelance writer and actress Alyson Renaldo describing her notion of being Canadian:

> Yes, you were born here and lived here all your life, but everything–absolutely everything, from your table etiquette to your family pride–was figuratively imported. There was no anchor here, nothing to claim, at least not the way our parents claimed 'back home.'

One of the guests, literary critic, author and cultural curator, Donna Bailey Nurse, disagrees: "I don't necessarily feel that way. My parents are Jamaicans and I'm born here, but I still feel very Canadian. I feel Jamaican, but I also feel very Canadian." And she offers another perspective: "I don't think it's restricted only to black Canadians feeling that you don't belong. One woman I interviewed, a writer who was born in Briton doesn't feel Canadian." A similar position is of awarded novelist Esi Edugyan: "I feel deeply Canadian, specially when I go abroad. There're certain situations where some people think that's not what I'd think a typical Canadian looks like. I go Canadian with advantage." Edugyan's comment shows that there is a "typical Canadian," who is not black. Indeed, although she has a positive perception of her ethnicity, there is a mythical Canadian construction that eliminates blacks.

Jamaican born Poet Afua Cooper (1999) defines her identity through her position. Her themes are: "Political and social themes, like slavery, colonialism, Black liberation and the plight of the poor. Female poets [. . .] include familial and women's concerns" (7). As a hyphenated historian, writer and poet, she reviews the hidden chapter of blacks in Canada. An example of that is in this fragment of her poem "Negro Cemeteries":

> "Negro" cemeteries are surfacing all over Ontario
> ancestors rolling over
> bones creaking
> skeletons dusting themselves off
> dry bones shaking in fields of corn (25)

In The Dub-Poetry Collective International (D.P.C.) she says: "In Manhattan African Cemetery was uncovered (. . .) it's so ironic, the great paradox is African cemetery in Manhattan, the most expensive piece of real state in the world."

Recurrent in most part of the speeches gathered here is an estrangement with some notions of what means

to be Canadian. Some see themselves as rooted in other countries where blacks represent large majority. Directly or indirectly, most part of them assumes the existence of a black community, which represents a form of member identity as much as denounces separatism imposed by other members of society. Karen Burke mentions: "when Canadians see me they see a black woman." Even when Edugyan affirm her Canadian identity, it escapes a reference to others highlighting her as a black woman, which reveals a form of separation that she reads as advantage, but also represents an ideal to which she does not correspond.

These writers' perspectives are typically anchored in the past to comment on their situation in the present. This historical perspective is fundamental for ethnic women to project the future. An aspect that aggregates the vast majority of works related to ethnic issues is the resistance against imposed realities. The driving force behind this counter-attitude, reaction or opposition to an oppressive system is a sense of dignity that no process of colonization has been able to erase.

1.3 Resistance in the context of nationalism in Brazil

In the 1970s, period in which Canada implements its multicultural policy, Brazil suffers under a dictatorship regime. Apparently, a big contrast; while the Canadian government supposedly supports the expression of all and each ethnic group, Brazilian Military Government suppresses rights and concentrates on power. However, considering how the Canadian government uses that policy to manage differences and the alleged concentration of power in the hands of whites, situations in the two countries could be understood as different, but not opposed.

In one aspect Brazil and Canada are similar in that period: both countries put a lot of emphasis on nationalism to guarantee the maintenance of their policies. In Brazil, a governmental agency, *Assessoria Especial de Relações Públicas* (AERP). (Special Advisory Committee for the Public Relations) is created to centralize propaganda (Fico 137). All possible icons able to capture people's attention for the success of the plan managed by the military regime are used. In sports, Brazil wins the FIFA World Cup for the third time and the country stops to celebrate with its "heroes." Songs for the Brazilian national team of football and jargons such

as “Brazil, love it or leave it” or “Nobody stops the Nation” are spread everywhere.

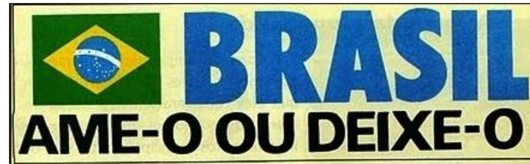

Fig. 2. “Brasil: Ame-o ou Deixe-o. Slogan attributed to President Emílio Garrastazu Médici.

The national anthem, the Brazilian flag and the colors green and yellow are emphasized, suggesting an identification of the population with a great country. Order, term that takes part of the national flag, is guaranteed with severe repression against oppositionists, but reported as a way to keep the country safe.

In the end of that decade, punctual movements such as strikes in ABC region in São Paulo State help to accelerate the process to put an end to dictatorship in the country. At that time, black movements are not connected with political parties. According to Albuquerque and Fraga Filho : “For the left wing, only socialist revolution could annihilate all and any inequalities, and for that reason a specific fight against racism would not make sense.” However, extreme violence against blacks take them to act. In 1978, “four black athletes suffered discrimination in *Clube Regatas Tietê*” (*Tietê* Rowing Club) (290). In addition, a black young man, Robson Silveira da Luz, is tortured and murdered in a police station. As a response, in the 7th of July of that same year an immense public act in front of Municipal Theater of São Paulo denounces those crimes, which represents the first step for the creation of the *Movimento Unificado Contra a Discriminação Racial* (Unified Black Movement Against Racial Discrimination), later known simply as *Movimento Negro Unificado* (Unified Black Movement). *MNU*, a movement with national visibility, states on its *Carta de Princípios* (Charter of Principles): “only we can command our fight for freedom,” which defines who, from that moment on, will write black people’s history in Brazil.

At that same year, a group of writers, most of them male self-identified as Afro-Brazilians, create the group *Quilombhoje*, title derived from the terms *quilombo*, territory occupied by runaway slaves, and *hoje*, “today” in Portuguese. Then the group launches a series of collections containing poems and short stories named “*Cadernos Negros.*” (Black Journal). The central theme is the condition of black people. In addition to the publications, the journal also promotes debates. Nationally known figures of the black community like Lélia

Gonzales, a professor, politician and activist, Esmeralda Ribeiro, Conceição Evaristo, Sônia Fátima da Conceição and Cuti (Luis Silva) publish their works in "*Cadernos Negros.*" In 2005 the last edition is published, leaving behind a remarkable legacy for the Brazilian history, specially black people.

Example of the works published in *Cadernos Negros* is a "sound" poem written by Cuti. The exploration of the sound attributed to the words represents a strategy detected in others of Cuti's poems and, as Wah says, gets place in his ethnopoetic toolbox. In "*Cravos Vitais*" (Vital Nails) According to Augel (2010) "Cuti reverses marks of stigmatization to something positive, refuses passivity, resignation and conformism, declaring to be ready to navigate the seas of moral and psychological annihilation" (163). Cuti applies to this poem a rhythm that, associated with the title, suggests a hammer hitting a nail:

> *Escrevo a palavra*
> *Escravo*
> *e cravo sem medo*
> *o termo escravizado*
> *em parte do meu passado* (1-5) [2]

This time is a black hand that holds the hammer to sound the story of his ancestors, sign of a time that blacks try to turn into a new one.

In the 1980s, movements for democracy gain force in Brazil, and in 1985 an electoral college chooses a civilian President, putting an end to the dictatorship. In 1989, direct elections enable Brazilians to elect a new President after twenty five years. It is not possible to affirm that all these events represent a democratic process taking place in the country when we know that some people and Institutions keep their place in power and wealth distribution is still tremendously unbalanced. What we can affirm is that with the end of dictatorship people are free to create organizations. As a result, according to Albuquerque and Fraga Filho, a Brazilian census "indicates the existence of 343 black organizations of all types in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Bahia and some other cities in 1988" (292). Also, in the last decades, some of the demands of black movements in Brazil were recognized as response to their efforts. Among these demands are: the mandatory inclusion of black history as part of the national school curriculum, criminalization of discriminatory acts, and

[2] I write the word / enslave / and I fearlessly nail / the slaved term / in part of my past(My translation).

quotas for black people in the universities.

1.4 Poetics of Resistance in Brazil: Black Women's Voices

In Brazil there are certainly as many ethnic groups as there are in Canada. However, perhaps because the country has an immense black population, blacks are usually the group associated with ethnicity. Blacks arrive in Brazil marked as slaves, a negative notion that still remains. This idea that equalizes blacks with slavery is so intense that even a black organization in the early twentieth century suggests blacks to abandon habits that connect them with Africa to reach social success (Albuquerque e Fraga Filho 265). The paradigms have been shifting, as it happens with any social groups. Blacks' contemporary discourses reiterate ties with African roots. The gradual rise of the black subjectivity in Brazil shows that black people are slowly occupying different sites of activities in the country, literature included. However, because there is still a chasm between blacks and whites concerning social participation, blacks keep articulated and resisting.

Domício Proença Filho, in "*A Trajetória do Negro na Literatura Brasileira,*" (The Trajectory of Blacks in Brazilian Literature) comments on the depiction of blacks throughout the history of Brazilian black poetry. He analyzes black people in Brazilian literature from two perspectives. First, blacks are depicted by Brazilian non-black writers. And then, blacks are depicted by Brazilian black writers. For the first perspective, starting in the eighteenth century, Proença Filho mentions non-black writers typifying blacks in their writings. The "*poor slave*,"[3] the "victim," the "child-like," the "servant and subordinate," the "exiled," and the "faithful" blacks (48). Proença Filho entitles the second part of his article "*O negro como sujeito: a atitude compromissada*," (Black as subject: a committed attitude) which focuses on the literature produced by blacks. According to the author, in this period of black literature, realism is loaded with personal experience, resulting in an engaged position (56). Frequent themes of the period are: Afro-Brazilian myths and culture, reflections about slavery, rebellions, and black participation in the socio-economical construction of the country (67).

Black literature, once written by black writers, has developed into a literary form that integrates the

[3] Italics in the original.

authentic experience of being black, assuming a committed status. Gradually, this literature passes to incorporate experimentation in combination with this literature that represents the perspective of black people. This new Brazilian black writing even provokes contemporary discussions about the way this literature will take, as we can see in Pereira. He understands that black literature is too much loaded with an ideological position according to which black writers have to make clear in their texts they are black, repeating a discourse in which, sometimes, only the black community interferes and only interests such community. According to the author, black, or Afro-Brazilian literature should review such constraints (Pereira 2010 30-2). Some authors are already doing it, as we can see in Alzira Rufino's "*Recado de Carmem, a prostituta*" (What Carmem, the prostitute has to say):

> *cadê a atenção social*
> *preocupam-se com o lado verbal*
> *que é a semântica total e dizem*
> *negra prostituta marginal*
> *falam as entidades*
> *falam mulheres de conceito*
> *prostituta fala* (11-7)
> (...)
> *cadê os débeis mentais cadê as ideias*
> *cadê a mulher negra altiva*
> *cadê a mulher branca guerreira* [4]

Transgression here concerns the issue being discussed, a black prostitute speaking up her view on social affairs. The strategy she uses is a colloquial speech. Duke finds in the poem evidence of the form of expression that Proença Filho mentions when blacks conquer their own voice. For Duke, Carmem is a militant trying to wake up people to strive for their rights (Duke 2002 50-1). That is Rufino's voice speaking through a persona that corresponds to so many women she is in contact with who does not have social attention. Rufino, through Carmem, demands all members of society to pay attention to a prostitute as a human being.

Rebellion, according to Proença Filho, is recurrent when blacks begin to produce their own literature. The theme, associated with Pereira's claim for experimentation, is present in Miriam Alves's "Mahin *Amanhã*"

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[4] where is the social attention / they are concerned with the verbal side of things / it's total semantics and they say / Black marginal prostitute / the entities speak / women of consciousness speak / the prostitute speaks / (...) where are the morons where are the ideals / where is the noble black woman / where is the white warrior woman (Translated by Dawn Duke. Duke 2002 50-1).

(Duke 2005 96) (Tomorrow Mahin). Mahin is known for participating in the organization of many rebellions occurred in the early nineteenth century in Bahia. Alves recreates the day before which Duke calls "the Great Insurrection":

> *"é amanhã, é amanhã.*
> *Mahin falou, é amanhã".*
> (...)
> *Arma-se a grande derrubada branca*
> *a luta é tramada na língua dos Orixás*
> *"é aminhã, aminhã"*
> *sussurram*
> *Malês*
> *bantus*
> *geges*
> *nagôs* (8-9,17-24) [5]

Alves transcribes the term "*amanhã*" applying the spoken form of the term, as it is used by some slaves. For Duke, this is not a simple effect, but the phonetic association between the term with and name Mahin, which transforms her name into a synonym for future, hope, and resistance.

Contemporary black women poets keep resisting and inventing their way of expression, but barriers are still there. Black women in Brazil experience problems that permeate different sectors of life, including literature. "The concept of female Afro-Brazilian literature is still polemic. Not just some segments of the media, but also the Academy refuse to discuss it. Writing, for that reason, is an act of resistance" (Gonçalves 59). Engagement is a notion that certainly appears the most in narratives concerning blacks in Brazil. Conceição Evaristo confirms this idea saying that:

> [...] if there is commitment linking the work of a writer and his personal, singular, unique experience, if a writer makes himself enunciated by enunciating his black life experience, marking ideologically his space, presence, and choice for an affirmative voice, different from an institutionalized discourse, we can read in his creation references of a black literature (136).

Social class is a third aspect usually associated with race and gender. Evaristo was born in a *favela* (slum), and her writing many times is used to depict miseries that poor people experience. According to Campos (2010) "*Da menina, a pipa*" ("Of the girl, a butterfly") calls into discussion what can happen when sexual

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[5] "it's tomorrow, it's tomorrow." / "Mahin has spoken, it's tomorrow" / They prepare the great white defeat. / The battle is plotted in the language of the gods. / / "it's tomorrow, Mahin" / whisper the Male / the Bantu / the Gege / the Nago (Translated by Dawn Duke. Duke 2005 96-7).

exploitation of poor girls becomes something banal. Evaristo offers a striking image, as we read in the last stanza of the poem:

> And later, always lacerated
> the girl expelled from herself
> a bloody doll that sank in an
> ordinary public toilet. (18-22) [6] (My translation)

Evaristo does not need any additional detail for readers to understand an abortion in a completely disqualified place. As it occurs in some of Rufino's poems, Evaristo illustrates the scene and give the reader opportunity to think about.

Alzira Rufino is another example of the convergence of race, genre and class in the writing of a black woman. However, Rufino's discourse, at the same time that denounces miseries, repeatedly mentions her pride of being black, as in this fragment of an untitled poem from the collection *Eu, Mulher Negra, Resisto* (*I, Black Woman, Resist*):

> *Eu sou criola descente*
> *não sou vil*
> *estou nas cordas*
> *em equilíbrio*
> *de um Brasil*
> *a minha cor apavora*. (1-6 16) [7]

In this fragment, the focus of attention is an "I" that represents a strategy which aims at bringing into the poem the persona's subjectivity. It is a very good illustration of the way resistance can be made because the insistent repetition works against discourses formulated and disseminated by whites that along history has been working for the construction of a negative image of blacks. As an opposition to such discourses, the persona reaffirms her position as a black woman by stressing the effect of her color on white people in order to revert it into a positive view.

A more specific issue is how female writers have been experimenting with eroticism, a theme for a long time avoided by black female writers because of the historical abuse of their bodies. If in the past slaveholders, understanding his slaves as properties, made use of women to satisfy their sexual necessity, in the present, black

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[6] *E depois, sempre dilacerada, / a menina expulsou de si / uma boneca ensangüentada / que afundou num banheiro / público qualquer*. 280.
[7] I'm a decent Creole / I'm not vile / I'm on the ropes / of Brasil / balancing / my color frightens. (My translation).

women satisfy fantasies, but there is a shift in the way it is publicly presented. Black women in Brazil were made "*mulatas*," one of the most recognizable postcards of the country. In the 1970s, Osvaldo Sargentelli creates his famous show "*Sargentelli e suas mulatas*" (Sargentelli and his mulatto women) in which black hot women were supposed to smile and shake their bodies. The "brown" body is exposed in Brazilian Carnival, event in which they perform the mulatto woman, which perpetuates notions that they can only be expressive through the curves of their bodies. The mulatto woman, central element of erotic tourism, not just satisfies sexual needs, but, "performing the mulatto woman," perpetuates the erotic myth. As a result, many black woman writers avoid the presence of the body in their writings. Miriam Alves, a known black writer, who signs her poem "*Testemunhas de Safo*" ("Sappho's Witnesses") under the pseudonym Zula Gibi, not only exposes the black woman body, but depicts this body performing a sexual act:

Eu me entrego no tesão
tensão de fios esticados
condutos de vozes e desejos
controlados
contornados
pela distância
Entrego-me vítima do meu sorrir
do adocicado de sua voz
das mensagens e do silêncio

vou me entendendo
esticando
aconchegando-me a você
toque e imagens
suadas
de um dia sermos
servas de nós mesmas
tendo safo como
testemunha. (Gonçalves 1-18 269) [8]

In the poem, two women make love. This is clear in Portuguese because "sweaty" (in Portuguese, "*suada*") and "servants" ("*servas*") indicate the female gender. Gonçalves quotes Silva (2010) affirms that usually black poetry is "unable to see [eroticism] in its analysis of racism, unless as a denouncement of sexual

[8] I'm feeling randy, and surrender / tense stretched threads / conductor of voices and wishes / controlled / deviated / by distance / I surrender, victim of my smile / of the sweetness of your voice / of the messages and of the silence // I learn of myself / I stretch / snuggling with you / touch and images / sweaty / of one day being / servants of ourselves / having Sappho as our / witness. (My translation).

abuse; Puritanism still permeates militant discourses" (269). Gibi is a transgressor because she inscribes the female black body in a homosexual relationship. Gibi marks her position in a sexist-male dominated world as a black woman free to say whatever her creative language makes possible.

In the article "*Com a palavra*, *Miriam Alves*" ("And now, Miriam Alves") to the blog "*Literatura Subversiva*" ("Subversive Literature") after launching her book *Mulher Matriz* (*Woman Matrix*) during a seminar at Brasília University, Ana Paula Fanon asks Alves: "In your opinion, what's the political role of the black woman in the literary field?" The writer reflects on the issue:

> (…) the names of all female white writers honored in prior editions were in the programming, but blacks appear as a group named Afro-descendents (…) Moreover, we hadn't space to talk during official homage, not even to thank people. That's curious in an event which claim is "The Power of the Word." It means that in the society where we live blacks are always excluded, even in a circumstance apparently of inclusion.[9]

Predominantly, the black female voice in Brazil represents itself in circumstances of difficulty, which means that race, gender and class problems usually come interlaced, but sexuality is constantly avoided because of a long history of abuse. In Canada, Bannerji (2000) tells that a civil servant proposes her to have sex with him in an interview for immigration (89); in Brazil, Evaristo mentions an abortion in a public toilet. It is hard to say which context better promotes inequality.

[9] My translation.

AFUA COOPER

To those women who rise
At five in the morning to prepare
food for their children and send them off to school
while their men lie
in bed

To those women who have no food to give
Their children, cannot afford to send them to school
And whose men have disappeared

To those women who, in order to raise their children,
sweat inside oppressive factories
lie on cold sidewalks
hack an existence from rocky hillsides
take abuse from men who are their only source
of survival
this poem is for you

To those whores at Half-Way-Tree
with their mobile hotel rooms

To the young office girls who think
they hold they key of life in their hands

to those schoolgirls with their bright faces
whose dreams are sometimes betrayed by men
twice their age
to the unnamed
who by their unceasing work and action
case life to flow unbroken
To those daughters of Nanny
who are beginning to realise the power
they hold in their hands
This poem is for you

(Afua Cooper 1992)

2.1 Jamaican Creole, Patois or Patwa

In the first chapter I discuss Canadian multiculturalism and introduce some black voices declaring how they see themselves in the country. There is not a unanimous notion about the issue, but for their most part blacks declare they experience segregation because of their skin color. At that North American country blacks are not the dominant population and their voice proportionally powerless in relation to the white ones. In contemporary Jamaica, a country in which blacks are the dominant population, voice is also a theme that promotes disputes. However, in the Caribbean country the dispute is between those who defend Patois to become the official language of the country on one side and those who remain loyal to the British English. In order to discuss this, let us take a brief look at the formation of the population and the role of language in the country. The first known inhabitants of the island are the *Arawaks*, who called their land *Yamaye*, term that Spanish understood as *Xaymaca*. The *Arawaks* have been decimated by Europeans. In the middle of the seventeenth century, the British take control of the island from Spain, increasing the black slavery trade as the sugar cane plantations are in demand. In the early eighteenth century, black slaves outnumber other ethnic groups in Jamaica, and in the following centuries black population continues to grow. African languages spoken by those people are mixed with English, resulting in the Jamaican Creole, Patwa or Patois.

Martin Montgomery demonstrates that there are morphological, phonological and grammatical differences between the two languages (84). Montgomery's notion confirms Nerys Williams's discussion about Kamau Brathwaite's view of Jamaican Nation language. Williams quotes Brathwaite saying: "English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words" (109) are derived from English. Williams emphasizes that Brathwaite's statement situates Patois on its right place as a language, in opposition to ideas that define it as an extension of English. The presence of English in Patois is one of the most detectable marks of the colonization. But together with it, one can easily notice an African accent. It means that traces of the African continuum, such as history, memories, gestures, topics, intonation, and other features that the subject recognizes as its own (Kramsch 7) persist in the people's speech.

In spite of a legitimate language, three main factors contribute for the rejection of Patois. First, people who benefit from trading and tourism see Jamaica getting apart from the world, missing opportunities, available for them exactly because of the role of English as a lingua franca. Second, although created by the people, ordinary Jamaicans consider Patois the language of those who do not know how to correctly express in Standard English (SE). Such notion is understandable when we look at the different status of the two languages. Patois, a language created by slaves, emerges from the necessity of communication between illiterate people, and just recently became a written language, while SE, the language of the conquerors, which long written tradition supports its reputation as a language of the higher education, is learned by Jamaicans who have the opportunity to study. Today, there is a grammatical description of Patois, online dictionaries, and publications such as the Bible, a dictionary, and newspapers with articles written in that language. Patois, now written, is the language that people understand, but better social positions available depend on SE skills, which many Jamaicans do not have. Thus, SE becomes a factor of exclusion, while Jamaicans have a language of their own.

Paradoxically, excluded people support SE. Not only because they aim at inclusion through language acquisition, but also because of memories of a glorious British colony. That is the third factor, the role of English in Jamaican imaginary, highlighted in the hard times the country is going through. According to a poll, Wallace reports, most Jamaicans think their country would be "better off as a British colony" because of Jamaica's drastic financial crisis. Consequently, many people find resort in the image of the country as a prosper colony. He quotes a pollster saying: "'The point obviously is that people's main concern here is the struggle to survive, finding food for the bellies of their children.'" Claire Kramsch states: "Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity" (3). Thus, we see three different groups: the first group is formed by poor people, who recognize in SE an opportunity to return to a period of prosperity. The second group, formed basically by entrepreneurs, identifies with that language because it inserts them into the world. The third group is composed by intellectuals and artists identified with their culture, who find in Patois a meaningful device to keep their subjectivity, voice, and cultural heritage, which must be spoken and applied to their writings.

2.2 Dub Poetry

Back in the late 1940s, Louise Bennett, also known as Miss Lou, is one of the first artists to consider Patois, applying it to her pantomimes on radio and TV, which takes her to travel to many countries, spreading Jamaican people non-official language. In the collection *Utterances and Incantations: Women, Poetry and Dub*, edited by Afua Cooper, it is included the poem "Dutty Tough," in which Miss Lou applies Patois:

> Sun a-shine but tings noh bright,
> Doah pot a-bwile, bickle noh nuff,
> River flood but water scarce yaw,
> Rain a-fall but dutty tuff! (1-4 14)
>
> (The Sun is shining, but things are not bright,
> Though a pot boils, the food's not enough,
> The river floods, but water's scarce, yes,
> Rain is falling, but the dirt is tough!)

In this poem, probably written around the middle-forties and first published in 1966, Miss Lou talks about the tough life of those who live from working on the land. Later, the reggae band Bob Marley & the Wailers borrows the last line to its 1974's song "Them Belly Full." From Miss Lou to reggae, language becomes a strategy to fight against oppression, and a form of expression that blurs the boundaries between song and poetry emerges, that is the Dub poetry.

Because Dub is somewhat a result of reggae, as I will explain, it is better to start talking about the emergence of the latter in order to discuss the former. In 1962, Jamaica has its independence recognized by the British, remaining member of the Commonwealth of Nations. According to Glaister Leslie, that is also the beginning of a period of rise in gang violence in Jamaica, especially in Western Kingston. Starting in the 1940s, when political supporters of the two main rival parties form communities, the "garrisons," and opponents are treated with violence, in the 1960s, politicians, now called "dons," begin to apply armed groups to protect their supporters (12). This time, some Jamaican musicians are trying a new rhythm, influenced by jazz and blues, but mainly by Jamaican rhythms like ska and rocksteady. Instead of a 3/4, the new rhythm has a slower 4/4 time pattern. By the late 1960s, the Rastafarian movement, a creed originated in Jamaica in the 1930s, gains many

adepts. It is marked by messages of love and self-respect associated with the Nyabinghi rhythm, which is part of Rastafarian rituals. Reggae emerges from the association of the 4/4 rhythm with Rastafarian messages as a sort of pacific resistance to violence. Along with reggae, its ritualized approach and its message, grows the Dub music, which has also some of those features.

Dub music is not exactly created, but results from a happy accident. In 1964, a sound engineer forgets to turn on the audio track when "The Paragons"[10] are recording "On the beach," a Jamaican popular song of the period. When the song is played in a dancehall without vocals, instead of complaining, people dub it, and a new genre appears. From then on, Deejays pass to repeat the same operation using the side "B" of LP albums. Because this side of the album is considered less important than side "A," they dub it with sound effects or their own voice. Later, DJs will use the same strategy, sometimes adding one more turntable, for their performances with rappers. Cooper, whose collection *Utterances and Incantations: Women, Poetry and Dub* highlights the importance of Dub women poets, explains that poets such as U-Roy, I-Roy, King Stitt, and Big Youth are among the first to experiment their speech with sounds produced with the "B" side (2). Then, Oku Onoura incorporates the style to his compositions, and labels it "Dub." Dub poets see a new possibility in the idea, initially "chanting" their verses over instrumental vinyl records, and later having the accompaniment of musicians, which emphasizes the rhythm and helps to convey their speech.

Since its origin, this poetic genre intends to move people to think about what is happening in the country in a language they understand, taking into consideration popular language varieties in Jamaica. Katherine McLeod explains that Rastafarians, for instance, apply specific phonemes that cause a shift in some expressions, e.g., "tread" into "trod." (5). The important opposition pointed out here is between a language that belong to the most part of the people and the Standard English, offering a view of language as a tool of paramount importance to fight against oppression. If Miss Lou makes Patois known outside Jamaica with her pantomimes in the 1940s, in the 1970s Mutabaruka, fuels poetics of resistance heavily writing in the Jamaican language, and in the 1980s, names such as Lilian Allen, and Afua Cooper help to disseminate the Jamaican-born genre in Canada.

[10] The Paragons were a ska and rocksteady vocal group from Kingston, Jamaica.

The direct contact with the people shows a more effective strategy to take people to reflect about reality, an ever-present characteristic of the Dub. This, takes poets to public performances that, in a way, resurrects the oral traditions represented by griots, highly respected members of some African societies for their abilities to memorize long narratives of their people and chant them in special ceremonies. In this sense, Dub poetry represents a return to the basis of lyricism concerning the intrinsic relation between text and music. In addition to that, Dub is a poetic form created not to rest in a paper, but to be performed, challenging conventions, such as punctuation or using informal language, as we can see in Mutabaruka's "Columbus Ghost":

> i thought i'd discover
> that which was never
> how clever of me to see the land
> beyond
> i came to tame
> and claim
> in the name of spain (5-11) [11]

Dub poetry faces discourses repeated by black people about/against black people that serve as the basis for Franz Fanon's criticism in "The Negro and Language." In his essay, Fanon points out some black Antilleans in their country "parroting" the standards of life in France. In such circumstances, French life and culture are given so much importance that Antilleans who return home try to impress their countrymen by pretending acquisition of a different accent. Other typical situation is that of people who use to associate educated people with those who have lived abroad. In Jamaica, the same cultural practices try to "normalize" Miss Lou's poetry. Because of her language, she has never been invited to be part of the Jamaican Poetry League, institution, in MacLeod words, "of standardization in following conventions of English poetry" (10). Kramsch offers two examples that dialogue with such notion of writing and power. One of them is the Catholic Church, which for a long time holds "the" interpretation of sacred writings until Luther translates it in a language that the people can understand. The other refers to the power ensured to the academy to legitimate what is knowledgeable and what is not (54). The appropriation of the genre in the written form represents the insertion of Patois in a space of power. Although culture, language, and identity are sites of struggle for Jamaicans in face of economic troubles, Jamaican language is a "place of negotiation" that Jamaicans can use and identify as created by their people.

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[11] Mutaburaka. "Columbus Ghost." http://www.ireggae.com/columbus.htm.

2.3 “Finding my Voice”

Afua Ava Pamela Cooper was born in 1957 in Whithorn, Westmoreland, Jamaica. At the age of eight she moves to Kingston, where she first learns about Black Power. In 1980, the political violence in Jamaica forces her to move to Canada, keeping in memory social-political experiences that support her way of seeing the world. She, like many other Jamaicans, experiences part of the agitated history of the country. Historian, poet and activist, Cooper has been dedicating her life to uncover the hidden history of blacks in Canada and give them voice to raise awareness about their participation to the formation of Canadian history and society. This objective appears in her PhD dissertation: “Doing Battle in Freedom's Cause: Henry Bibb, Abolitionism, Race Uplift, and Black Manhood, 1842-1854”:

> (...) I intend to restore Bibb to his rightful place as a leading American and Canadian human rights worker, and unsilence important aspects of his history. This introduction, which is also chapter one, delineates the sources for studying Bibb's life, and the various interpretations put forward by historians of his life. It introduces the main arguments of the thesis, and more importantly, it challenges the dominant interpretations of Black abolitionism in Canada (6).

That objective is also found in the preface of her *The hanging of Angélique: the untold story of Canadian slavery and the burning of old Montréal*:

> *The Hanging of Angélique* is a story that must be told. For one thing, it is not simply “Black” history, but is also a Canadian story. In fact, it is a global narrative, one that belongs to all of us, whether or not we want to claim it, or feel good about it. The story of Angélique provides an opportunity for us to reclaim a hidden past. Since much of the Black past has been deliberately buried, covered over, and demolished, it is our task to unearth, uncover, and piece it together again. (10)

And that objective is once again in *My Name is Phillis Wheatley* in which she assumes the voice of the main character: “Many will claim they know Phillis Wheatley, but only I can relate the authentic narrative of my past life” (7-8).

Along her work, Cooper reiterates her claim for a Black perspective able to contest notions developed by dominant groups that exclude black people. In order to spread such notion, the author occupies different spaces and expresses her ideas through different genres. In the Academic sphere, she is a Professor, lecturer,

consultant, and historian. In the field of literature, she has published collections with her poems and with poems of other women and a fictionalized book. In both, poetry and prose, children's literature is included. She also organizes exhibits and performs her poems in events usually related with the Dub poetry. In "Finding My Voice" Cooper defines: "Three main energies are evident in my work. These are the lyrical, the spiritual, and the historical" (303). It is through imagining, listening, and sensing these features in their dialogue with the representation of the black woman that I analyze Afua Cooper's poetry. All poems analyzed in this section can be found in "APPENDIX A – AFUA COOPER."

2.4 Lyricism, Spirituality, History in Afua Cooper's Women Representation

As a feminist, Cooper usually focuses on women, occupying the position of a mouthpiece for the female condition, or giving voice for women to speak. Traditionally, the role of women in society is related, firstly, with procreation and, then, with child care, as an obvious follow up obligation. Cooper interrogates such notion. In this section, Cooper depicts women from different ages. Blood and sweat, either mentioned or suggested, are recurrent elements. In the poem "Womanhood" Cooper captures the thoughts of an agonizing girl who is tossed into the adulthood without any support to make this crossing:

> We who were thrust out of dark caverns
> into a maddening light
> We who know no truth
>   no honour
> we who go through this madness called life
> into the estate of adulthood
> crossing no dividing line
> experiencing no period of transition
> having no celebration for our puberty
>   our blood
> No rites of passage
> no lovesong
> only a shameful quietude
> an impatient sadness
> Now here we hang - suspended
> between madness, agony and absolute truth
> becoming women
> suddenly thrust into a sphere we do not understand

> becoming women (1-19)

The poem reveals the loneliness, anger, melancholy experienced by a girl who has not been prepared to deal with the transformations that occur to a female when she becomes a woman. With the expulsion of the first blood comes the expulsion from the secure place of childhood, as if she is reborn, transformed into a new person, although feeling undesired. It is not the bleeding itself that takes the girl to experience all those terrible feelings, but the way people see her from the moment it first happens. Her first menstruation could have been received with joy, but the rise of a young woman results in sorrow. Cooper isolates two lines, "no honour" (4) and "our blood" (10). That is the girl's perception of what means to become a woman: isolation and dishonor. She is lonely, suffering with a silent pressure in the ignorance of a new life.

When loneliness ends, and a girl is perceived by people, older women offer orientation for life, as we can see in the poem "More Bad Advice." The understanding here is that of inexorable dependence of woman on man:

> We were also told that a sore foot man is better
> than having no man at all
> that a one-foot-man is better than no man at all
> that the worse kind of man is better than no man at all. (1-4)

If the prior poem reveals loneliness and agony a girl experiences when she becomes a woman, this one refers to "the" following step in a woman's life. In the poem, young women are "instructed" to marry and bear children, repeating the social role as it is prescribed for women. According to such notion women are considered human beings only after the existence of the opposite gender and dependent on a man's wish and volition. Because old female are those who take the responsibility to guide the young generation, ironically, in this poem women are the social members who support patriarchy. The poem is finished with a very sad conclusion: "we were not taught to see the shining beauty of our souls." (69)

Still discussing the theme, in the poem "Aunts" we see a different perspective. The persona is not alone; older women give her orientation, from their point of view, about the female body:

> Aunts sometimes are life-savers
> they make sure they tell you things like the facts of life
> bloody things like your period

> and what to do when it comes
> and what that means for your whole life
> they tell you, that if you go with a boy
> you can get pregnant (1-9)

Here again Cooper portrays a girl amid with her thoughts. Lines initiated with lower case letters suggest needless attention to formalities; what those aunts told her is far more important. These elder guides know what "is reserved" for a woman in life. The arrival to this new moment is not cause for celebration as it is in Phillis Wheatley's narrative about "the return of the initiated girls from their seclusion, when the entire town [makes] a large celebration for them" (Cooper *My Name is Philis Wheatley* 13). This is a different culture, and aunts focus their attention on the "male threat," which reveals female "self threat." In other words, blood becomes a representation of the physical ability to procreate and it also represents that sexual desire and feelings emerge:

> one aunt have told me
> that she married such a man
> she fell in love with his looks but he was in fact a beast
> he abused her for many years
> until one day she packed her bags (20-4)

In this piece we already see some light of freedom against a submissive condition spark in the narrative the aunt makes of her own life. This "turning point" is seen in some poems by Cooper along of this analysis.

The three poems "Womanhood," "More Bad Advice," and "Aunts," analyzed in a sequence, propose a reflection on cultural norms, and "the social role" related with such norms. In the first and second poems we see an indoctrination that is passed through generations. The guidance aunts provide repeats, and consequently, support submissive processes that legitimate suffering. In contrast to that, the woman in the last poem makes the decision to give her life a different way from that she was prescribed to follow; she breaks "the submissive cycle." Butler's reflection concerning cultural norms that can define a woman collaborates on the discussion: "Does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative act?" (*Gender Trouble* xxviii-xxix). The poem "Aunts" reveal that discourses do exist, but along with them there is the individual. Thus, there is not a "given" condition that defines a woman. The woman finds dignity enough inside herself and decides to leave. It is possible to be a woman without being submissive.

In addition to the changes of the body, with the implications it brings, there are also other social constraints that toss a girl into womanhood, such as experience life as it is usually reserved for adults. The poem "Oh Canada," an ironic use of the title of Canada's national anthem, contains a series of ten smaller poems about the experience of a Jamaican girl in Canada. The girl is shocked at the weather: "she never thought snow could fall so much" (III,1) and learn new stories: "looking at the tv / shampoo to make the girl's hair silky" (IV, 2-3). Like many others, she is there to work:

> cooking
> cleaning
> washing
> ironing
> her weekend began saturday night and ended
> sunday evening
> at five, and this was every other weekend. spring.
> time for spring cleaning
> her missis told her to climb on the ladder
> so she could reach the top windows. she said she was
> not used to climbing, saw herself falling off
> missis ask if back home she never use to climb trees (VII,1-12)

After all that suffering, she wants to return to Jamaica, but an aunt who receives her in the country, teaches about persistence through a Jamaican proverb: "you *haffi* suck salt *thru* wooden spoon" (X, 5) which, according to Cooper, corresponds to: "hard work is necessary in order to achieve what you want" (46). Rather than indoctrination, this is a realistic view that a black immigrant girl must learn in a white patriarchal dominant country.

The next two poems selected here reveal an association between woman and nature in which women appear as the center for transformation of life. In "Woman a Wail" the woman is nature itself in a loud, agitated, insurgent, swingy, and spiritual atmosphere. Mother earth is in convolution, using voice and body to announce that a new form of existence is coming:

> And what shall she bring forth from her travail
> what shall she bring forth from her travail?
> A new way of thinking
> a new way of living
> a new understanding
> a new way fi si tings
> a new way fi do tings

> and a new new new Creation (50-8)

The poem is loaded with musicality, which favors the performative characteristic of the text as it usually occurs with dub poetry. The title and the term "dance" are repeated throughout the poem, as it happens in songs, and because of the title, it sounds like blues. The entire poem contains seven stanzas with variable number of lines that do not follow a cohesive narrative, but rather a torrent of thoughts as in an improvisation. Nonetheless, its main idea is conveyed. It creates the image of the earth as a pregnant woman, comparing both internal movements and secretions of a woman to those in the interior of earth. The poem suggests this woman is bearing an era in which a new kind of thinking will take place.

In "Bird of Paradise" connection between earth and woman/mother is also present, but in this poem the mother is a land worker who comes to be known through the narrative of her daughter. The poem starts with the description of the "magical abilities" of the mother: "At dawn my mother stands on the hill / behind our house / and invokes the sun to rise" (1-3). Her admiration for the deeds of her mother reveal a woman who works hard:

> My mother sells fruits and flowers in the market
> stuff she grows with her own hands
> she does not solicit customers
> they come to her of their own volition
> and at the end of each day
> her items are all sold out (7-11)

The images Cooper constructs through the ability of this woman to transform seeds into fruits, evokes strength to work the soil. This strength is also necessary to take her "stuff" to be sold in order to make worthy the cultivation of the soil. The mother is a representative of the many women responsible for their families. This, no doubt, contradicts patriarchal discourses about who has the ability to be the chief of a family, and serves to exemplify what Butler (*Gender Trouble*) means with "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (33). According to Butler, the doer is not the creator of the characteristics attributed to the gender, but someone who contributes performing such gender. The repetition of certain attitudes inscribes a person to that gender. This way, once defined the gender "woman," it is supposed that women will correspond to the actions "women shall do." When Cooper depicts the mother as a regular worker who lives out from the hard work on the land, she reinforces the inclusion of that characteristic as part of

the female gender.

The close relationship between the mother and her daughter allows readers to "see" the result of what Miss Lou called "tough *dutty*" in the body of the mother. Now, the way of understanding is not only visual, but tactile:

> When my mother's back and feet grow tired
> so I anoint them with coconut oil
> her feet a detailed map
> her back the star apple tree outside our front door (18-20)

Cooper provides harsh, but realistic images that are able to capture the result of many years of hard work. Her illustrations show a fustigated body that resembles an enormous tree, and hard dry cracking feet so filled with fissures that it is possible to find directions on it. But, the author also provides some relief. In this moment, the focus is on care itself. The scene proposes a contrastive atmosphere involving suffering and relief. What causes that moment is the exhaustion provoked by the hard labour, a physical condition that moves a daughter to be devoted to her mother.

The aforementioned "magical abilities" reappear at the end of the poem, and with another rite the woman returns her children to the realm of the dreams:

> In the evening when she grows weary
> my mother sings lullabies to the sun to entice it to sleep
> so the dark can come and we can be rejuvenated
> "It's in the darkness that we grow strong," she tells us (38-41)

As a worker and a mother, as it happens to so many women worldwide, she carries a double journey. The "Magical abilities" the daughter finds in her mother, seen through realistic lenses, is the way that woman has to survive and raise her children.

The hard workers in the poem "Night Ease" (*Copper Woman And Other Poems* 20) correspond to a group of old women. Former workers, they also represent what hard job can do with people. The images Cooper creates are neither sweet nor nostalgic, or romantic. They are rather an accurate realistic observation:

> Grandmothers carried loads on their heads
> babies in their arms
> men in their hearts
> cut sugarcane until their palms became calloused and bruised
> their backs sent, necks stiff, spines misshapen and a permanent hurt

lodged itself in their shoulders (1-6)

Here too testimony of a tough life resides in the body. The deformity of their bodies and the pain they suffer as an outcome of the only way of living they had counts as evidence of the historical exploitation of black people. Cooper is not talking about an isolated woman, but a generation who has been "shaped" by the sugarcane plantations.

Woman representation is also present in Cooper's poetry through the association between motherhood and divinity. In "*Atabeyra,*" "Great Mother Goddess of the Taino people, one of the indigenous people that Columbus met when he arrived in the Caribbean," (*Copper Woman And Other Poems* 38) the divine is present, and related with the figure of the mother, but, different from "Bird of Paradise," in this case Cooper evokes an entity. A prayer claims the presence of *Atabeyra* by calling upon her powers as the mother of an entire Nation. Instead of a tough reality in the present, all that is left are memories of a pleasant past. The poem starts with a prayer solemnly appealing for *Atabeyra*'s greatest powers:

Atabeyra
Great Mother of the *Arawaks*
mistress of all moving waters
lady of childbirth
moon woman (1-5)

The prayer calls the goddess, promising that those who are told massacred by the colonizers still exist:

straining your eyes over the vast expanse
of the Carib Sea looking for your lost children
(...)
if you look intently you will see them walking swiftly
through the cassava patches
You should know *Atabeyra* that they are not dead
so please my Lady weep no more (12-3, 38-41)

In fact, the prayer is the one responsible for the existence of her myth in the present, since, with the extermination of *Arawaks* by Europeans, all that the original Caribbean nation created is gone. Cooper says: "I believe their mythologies went underground and later resurfaced in the dreams and artistic work of the present people inhabiting their islands." (*Memories Have Tongue* V). Once any single vestige of their existence sparks in one's memory they live again. The prayer addresses *Atabeyra*, asking her to strain her eyes. That is not a message for that Goddess, but for Jamaicans, especially women, to look harder at their own past and see the

position they have always occupied and how important for life they have always been.

Writers of the African Diaspora very commonly keep a strong connection with their roots. For the most part, what black people who are scattered to different countries throughout the centuries know about their culture is preserved in their own memories. Memories loaded with different cultures and languages, such as Fante, Ga, Kikongo, Kimbundu, Mandinka, Twi, Ewe, Ibo, Yoruba, and, according to Cooper's *My Name is Phillis Wheatley*, Arabic: "We learn the Arabic alphabet so we can read and recite from our holy book, the Qur'an" (16). What happens is that during slavery many have no available language to communicate because they are spread to places where they are in contact with users of other languages, and because black slaves are impeded of using the written form. Whether for tradition, or because they have been denied the right to have contact with the written world, or even as a strategy, memory is of paramount importance for African descents.

Memory savers here refer to women who save memories of the past, and pass them on to other generations. I return to the poem "Night Ease" to discuss the topic. The stillness allows an attentive observer and her reflections to capture images from the past:

> but in their mouths are dutty tuff stories
> making bread outta stone stories
> and stories of how they made it to the other side
> of how time pass
> an di children grow
> an di mem die
> an the hurt ease (10-6)

Shifting to Patois a couple of times, Cooper gives "Grandmothers," as she refers to them, voice to "teach" about history. The poem greatly dialogues with Brand's "Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater," also mentioned in the first chapter, based on a photograph of an old slave: "she waited until it suited her / to take this photograph and to put / those eyes in it" (12-20). If Cooper's Grandmothers become living representative of the memory of black people in Jamaica, Brand's Mammy Prater defines which image will remain to the future. In both, the narrator offers a black perspective of history.

In another poem, "Confessions of a Woman who Burnt Down a Town," memory concerns a return to the eighteenth-century Canada, when a slave, *Marie Joseph Angélique*, is accused of setting fire to her owner's house, which spreads to other buildings in Montréal, destroying half of the old town. Cooper says: "No one saw

her light the spark the blaze. All the evidence was circumstantial. But I believe she did it. She had motive enough" (*My Name is Phillis Wheatley* 9). The poem is a reconstruction of the final days of *Angélique* through "scenes" that capture her inner thoughts and sensations. They reveal some of the motives Cooper talks about:

> I buried the twins that evening
> they died of smallpox
> were only eight months old
> Madame came too to the funeral
> and said to me by way of consolation
> "C'est la vie,
> I too have lost my own."
> I went back to work
> went back to work in Madame's house
> that same evening and at supper she yelled at me
> and boxed me full in the face because
> I overturned they gravy bowl in her lap (1-12)

The suffering makes her to become a person with major purposes:

> After we buried them that evening
> My heart changed position in my chest
> And I was seized with one desire and one desire only
> And that was to leave the prison of this island (21-4 73)

Angélique goes from a sufferer to a woman with an ideia in mind, who articulates the way to make it happen:

> and I serve the food good and proper
> was on my best behavior
> (…)
> den I went back to mi room in the cellar
> and mek mi plan (40-1,44-5 74)

The plan goes wrong. Captive again, initially she rejects the values of that community:

> I don't utter a world as I sit here in the jailhouse
> Father Labadie come to confess me
> But I refuse
> Their god is not my god (62-5 75)

However, the cruelty of the "civilized" white justice is too strong:

> Guilty, the judge pronounce
> And the sentence: to be tortured, my hands cut off
> My body burned and the ashes scattered
> To the four corners of the earth (72-5)
> (…)

> The sentence is reduced
> Now I am to be hanged only and my body burned
> Father Labadie come back for di confession
> And I confess (80-3)

Even though, she claims her version of how she finally "accepts" God:

> is I Marie who burn this city
> so write that down Father Labadie
> write down my story so it can be known in history
> with my heart burning I take the sacrament
> and accept the final rites (90-4 76)

In this poem, Cooper "dresses up," or "personifies" *Angélique* in order to give her voice, a strategy she repeats in the book that takes the same title of the poem, as much as she does in the poem and the book about Phillis Wheatley. In these poems and books Cooper assumes the voice of the protagonists, creating a polyphonic text that encompasses the dominant voices, but focuses on giving voice to those who were silenced in history. It is possible that *Angélique* has set the fire, but it is also possible that she has not. "Elite white men, most of whom were slaveholders, wrote and mediated the records" (*Copper Woman And Other Poems* 12) as Cooper says. Well, *Angélique* was a commodity. Who expects a commodity to have voice?

In more than one way Cooper's poem gives voice to *Angélique*. One of them is through "personifying" the slave to express her thoughts and feelings. The author also inserts terms from English influenced by African language, and we see grammatical errors in English, as "Father Labadie come" (line 63) and "is I" (line 90). In addition to that, *Angélique* claims the right to have her own gods, rejecting the Western god, written in lower case letter. This is a very significant aspect of her speech if we have in mind the participation of Christianity in the colonization of the Americas. Cooper elects a Father to be the spokesperson of a community that tortures and slaughters people or burns them alive, putting state and Church together as only one power. It is exactly in face of a Father that *Angélique* claims her name to be part of history.

In the preface of her collection *Memories Have Tongue* Cooper declares: "These poems came out of my experiences of being a woman, a mother, a black person, an immigrant, a student, a daughter, a grand-daughter, a lover and a wife" (IV). The same diversity of women populates poems of her collection *Copper Woman And Other Poems*. Her words, introducing readers to the process that gives birth to her poems, confirm the voice

through which the narratives of these women come to be known. To make public the thoughts of these women represents a way of resistance against discourses that insist on keeping them in silence. Those discourses act in such a subtle and perverse way that take even women, as in the case of the aunts, to perpetuate patriarchalism, which comes to be considered “natural” part of a culture that regulates the life of women and, consequently, does not require any questioning. Assuming the persona, strategy which in some cases resurrects the voices of those who were not given the opportunity to talk when they were alive, observing, or inserting voices of other people, Cooper breaks with notions of single voice and opens space for plurality. Voice is power, and because of that, its appropriation is fundamental for a new discourse to take place. Thus, appropriation requires the right space in order to guarantee those voices to be heard. The poetry created by Cooper gives her authority to insert the black female subject from different origins in a zone of prestige where the dialogue with the literary world is possible.

Cooper’s process of voice appropriation includes identity in ways that converge to the notions of Stuart Hall (1989). Kingstonian who lives outside Jamaica since adolescence like Cooper, Hall proposes an instable notion of identity, or “identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (222). Hall’s idea about an instable identity is similar to that of Fred Wah, who sees identity as something “now you see it now you don’t” (73). Wah’s playing with words is a representation of his experience as a displaced person, half-Chinese-Scottish-Sweden in Canada. His Chinese name resurrects old Canadian prejudices, but when people look at his “white image,” the “problem” disappears. Such circumstance takes Wah to explore this ambivalence “place” developing a notion of writing that allows hyphenated writers to “invade” the dominant culture without being assimilated. Cooper, for instance, uses the English language to discuss the situation of black women, eventually placing in some of them terms that refer to an African language.

In relation to the linguistic devices available for writers, Hall affirms: “It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (226). Is it not what Cooper does depicting old women who worked their entire lives in the sugar cane plantations and quoting them, allowing the voice of Jamaican girls to be listened from the microcosm of their “initiation,” fracturing traditional roles, silencing men, electing women the

breadwinners of the family, or giving life to a mythical people, the *Arawak*, through narratives told by women? Indeed, the linguistic devices, among which there are some forms of rupture with formalities, such as (dis)arrangement of the words in the text, free meter, lines initiated with low case letters; cohesiveness above coherence; use of images, be it through frozen or motion pictures; memory; polyphony; "personification of a character," when the author writes in the first person; use of Patois or another language that mix English with an African language; and grammatical errors make part of an "ethnopoetics tools" that Cooper uses to make resistance to a "racist patriarchal structure," as she says. According to Hall: "It is this identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through [poetic] representation" (223). Or, in Fred Wah terms: "The cultural marginalized writer will engineer approaches to language and form that enable a particular residue (genetic, cultural, biographical) to become kinetic and valorized" (51). This way, the ethnic experience is united to the body of the writing, emerging even through the least detectable vestige as it is constituent of the writer's way of expression.

I return to "Finding My Voice" to talk about the shaping of a writer. Before being a narrator, Afua Cooper is a listener, following the stories told by family members and neighbours in a place where there is no TV. It is also through storytelling that she learns about political problems, like the 1938's riots. In the shop of the relatives she lives with, people, men and women, gatherings to play board games usually lead to feverishly political issues. This period not just introduces Cooper to the ideas about politics, but also the specific language and rhythm of that people. Her spiritual life conciliates Sunday School in the church and Rastafari tradition, culture, symbology, and imagery. In Canada, Cooper understands what means to be black in a "white, male-dominated, racist, and classist society," as she says. However, that is the circumstance that takes her to put into practice her poetic background. Because of restrictions of the print word and "the literary," as she calls an opposition to oral, she gets used to giving life in loud voice to ideas that already suggest her "riddims and chants" (303). In this way, the writing process is a search for her subconscious, collapsing barriers between poetry and song. In her words, spirituality, history and lyricism, and I suggest, memory, ethnicity and commitment guide Afua Cooper's writing.

ALZIRA RUFINO

Eu sou criola descente
não sou vil
estou nas cordas em equilíbrio
de um Brasil
a minha cor apavora
essa raça agride ouvi dizer
não é nos dentes do negro
não é no sexo do negro
é na arte do negro
de viver
melhor dizendo
sobreviver
com essa coisa que se arrasta
o tronco que tentam esconder
mas esses troncos existem
no conviver
os troncos estão nas favelas
vejo troncos nas vielas
nas moradias fedidas
nas peles sem esperança
nas enxurradas de não

no jogo de damas e reis
eu me perdi
nas rotas dos estiletes
nas celas e nos engodos
negro carretel de rolo
querem fazer um mundo
marginal crioulo[12]

(Alzira Rufino 1988)

3.1 *Candomblé* roots and *Eparrei* Magazine

"*Eparrei, minha mãe Iansã*!" ("Hail, my mother *Iansã*!"). In *Candomblé*, African religion brought by slaves to Brazil, each *orishá* has a particular salutation; *Eparrei*, or *Epa hei*[13], is the salutation of *Iansã*, or

[12] I am a decent *criola* / I'm not vile / I'm on the ropes / em equilíbrio / of Brazil / my color threatens / I've heard people say this race hurts / it is not in the teeth of Black / people / it is not in the sexo of Black people / it is in Black people's art / to live / or should I say / to survive / with this thing that stay on us / trying to hide the whipping post / but these whipping posts exist / on our routine / they are in the *favelas /* I can see them in the alleies / In the smelling houses / In the hopeless skins / In the flood of "No!" // In the card game / I got lost/ In the route of straight razors / In the jail and lies / black of the curly hair / a marginal creole world / your place is nowhere. Rufino, Alzira. *Eu, Mulher Negra, Resisto*. 1988. (My translation)

[13] Some sources affirm this is an expression of surprise; others translate it as requesting a blessing.

Yansã. According to *Umbanda*[14] priest, *Pai Caio de Omolu*, *Oyá* was the name of *Iansã* in Ira, Nigeria, where she was a princess in the fifteenth century, being King *Elempe*, one of the founders of Yoruba nation, her mother's uncle. *Iansã* fights fearlessly until she conquers the throne. Later on, made an *orishá*, she is recognized for her bravery, courage, and dedication. Considered the Lady of the storms, winds, lights, and death, she is depicted as a blindfolded woman wearing red who holds a sword.

It is not by chance that Alzira Rufino, herself a *Iyalorishá*, title better known in Brazil as *mãe-de-santo*, has chosen this *orishá*'s salutation to entitle a magazine directed and coordinated by women, which depicts blacks as subjects of their own actions. It means that, although *Eparrei* works to give Brazilian society visibility of the "black world," which encompasses women and men, the way black women experience life is what defines the magazine's editorial. In the first edition, in 2001, for instance, Rufino, the editor, mentions, among different issues concerning black people, women's rights; in the second edition, in 2002, she claims women to occupy seats in the following elections; the third edition, also in 2002, highlights black women who are part of Brazilian history, and discusses Benedita da Silva, a black woman who loses election for governor, but emerges as a national leader.

Eparrei is not the first medium focusing on blacks, but it is the first one created and directed by women. In order to better understand the reasoning about specific demands of black women, I trace a parallel with another cultural manifestation, but that created and directed by a man. In the 1940s, Abdias dos Nascimento founds TEN-*Teatro Experimental do Negro* (Negro Experimental Theater) because theater misses an "Afro-Brazilian voice." Nascimento observes that plays of this period written in Brazil are impregnated with a "Portugal-Portuguese accent" and blacks are portrayed as caricatures. The company, founded and directed by blacks, with a cast composed of black actors, intends, as Eparrei magazine later does, to depict blacks according to an understanding formulated by blacks of what is like to be a black. In the 1960s, Nascimento denounces the indifference of the left wing movements to the specific demands of black people. On the other hand, these movements accuse TEN of an inverted form of prejudice, this one of blacks against whites, which serves to isolate a theater made by blacks. Along the time it exists, TEN is the only company paying attention to demands

[14] African-Brazilian religion originated in Brazil.

which are specific to blacks, be it social, political or cultural.

However engaged on a project that proposes blacks to be the represented by blacks, that is a men's company and the specific circumstances experienced by black women are included as part of the specificity of black people. In spite of many women in the company, TEN is created and directed by a man, all the plays staged by the company are written by men, and its first actor is a man. To affirm this sort of activism as a work made by "blacks," in which women are taken for granted, correspond to a dangerous process of naturalization of man as the norm. It dialogues with Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble*) when she discusses her notion of "universality of female identity," which questions the constraints in the basis of definitions of categories that do not represent specific contexts (19). Subjectivities proper to the black woman do not allow whatever "umbrella" terms: "blacks," "women," "feminists." All of them fail to define the specific situation experienced by black women. For that reason, Eparrei magazine is fundamentally a medium for the expression of the experience of the black woman, according to the perspective of black women.

3.2 Places from where to observe women

In an interview to the web newspaper "*Jornal Vicentino*," in 2007, Alzira Rufino is asked about her view on what has been done in relation to the black women's health since the launch of the "*Violência Contra a Mulher uma Questão de Saúde Pública*" (Violence Against Woman, a Question of Public Health) campaign in 1995. Rufino answers with a shocking image: "Na área da saúde eu pude observar vários casos de violência e o descaso das pessoas com essas mulheres. Algumas chegavam no hospital por chute com aborto, enfim nada era feito" (In public health I witnessed many cases of domestic violence, and people didn't care about those women. Some arrived at hospital with abortion after being kicked. Nothing was done). A baby is assassinated because of aggression committed against a pregnant woman. The causes vary, but violence against women are usually based on the indifference that ordinary people and authorities have to the problem. Men, frequently companions, understand they have women "at their disposal" to practice different forms of physical and psychological violence. This is one of the places from where Rufino observes women who are depicted in her

poetry.

In the introduction of the interview, an illustration of her earliest days, "*Jornal Vicentino*" mentions when her contact with tough reality started: "*Aos nove anos, Alzira Rufino já trabalhava com seu irmão vendendo sacos vazios de cimento*" (At nine, Alzira Rufino was already working with her brother selling empty bags of cement). The hard work, echoing Miss Lou's "tough *dutty*," (chapter two) is another place from where Rufino observes women. As part of her life since early age, hard work means to react against a precarious circumstance as the only way a poor family of blacks in Brazil in the 1950s has to survive. However, Rufino goes beyond survival, she demands dignity. In other words, Rufino associates her life experience with a fundamental element of differentiation, which is her awareness that such reality is not "natural" or "given," but it is constructed and can be changed. That is what we see in "*ladainha*" ("cut this bla bla bla out"): "*Vamos lá / não pra ver o que é que dá / vamos lá para virar*" (1-3) ("let's go / not to see what will be / let's change the game").

The idea that individuals shall take action to define themselves as subjects is central in Rufino's poetry as part of a discourse that she coherently repeats. Proud, she declares to the "*Jornal Vicentino*": "*Nos primeiros anos da escola eu ganhava todos os prêmios relacionados à literatura. Quando me formei eu mesma preparei meu discurso*." ("In the first years of school I won all literary awards. When I graduated, I wrote my own speech") It means that, on the contrary of many predictions for a black woman from a poor family, Rufino becomes a respected leader and writer. That is also a place from where she observes women, which gives her the opportunity to translate into "other languages" the situation of black poor women in Brazil. "Languages" here means both idioms and ability to express ideas. Rufino's work as a feminist has been recognized by different institutions in the world: Ashoka fellow; coordinator of "Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Network against domestic and sexual violence" between 1995 and 1998; indicated, among a thousand women, for Nobel Peace Prize 2005. Her work has called the attention of Dawn Duke, Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at University of Tennessee, who has been writing about her as an activist and poet. Rufino has been the spokeswoman for many black women of Brazil, depicting and denouncing their experiences, "translating" the language of those who do not know how to do it.

3.3 Voicing the saga of black women

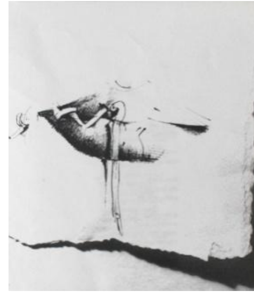 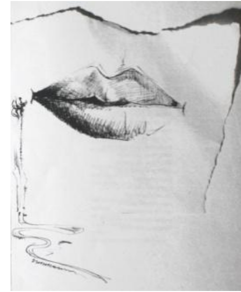

Fig. 3. Mouth sewn shut Fig. 4. Mouth sewn shut1 Fig. 5. Mouth sewn shut2 Fig. 6. Free Mouth. Source: Rossi, Beatriz Rota. *Eu, Mulher Negra, Resisto*. Alzira Rufino. 1988. 15-63.

Alzira Rufino is an independent writer because she understands that larger publishing houses are not interested in black writers and because she insists on developing a certain line of thought as she declares in "*Alzira Rufino e a Poesia Negra*" ("Alzira Rufino and the Black Poetry") an interview to Ana Paula Fanon. Her collection *Eu, Mulher Negra, Resisto* (*I, Black Woman, Resist*) is an example of the persistence of the poet to keep her freedom. Instead of subtitles, she marks the divisions of the book with images, figures "3" to "5." In the first drawing a woman has her lips sewn shut, and in the last one, the mouth is free, although the thread is still there as a trace of memory that guarantees the woman will not forget her past. These drawings, in which the lips of a black woman gradually set free, represents a process towards the right to speak and pretty much correspond to the sequence of poems. *Bolsa Poética* (2010) is another collection of poems that I analyse in this work. All poems analyzed here are in "APPENDIX B – ALZIRA RUFINO."

Identity is the central demand in "*resgate*" ("recovering") the last poem from the collection *Eu, Mulher Negra*, *Resisto*. At the end of the "poetic journey," the persona defines her position once and for all:

sou negra ponto final
devolvo-me a identidade
rasgo minha certidão
sou negra
sem reticências
sem vírgula sem ausências
sou negra balacobaco[15]
sou negra noite cansaço
sou negra

---

[15] Term of African origin used to refer to someone with a strong personality.

ponto final (1-10, 1988) [16]

The poet subverts the common use of graphic symbols, "period," "comma," and "ellipsis," transforming them into meaningful words. That is what Lima refers to with being "faithful to the popular culture, speeches and uses of Brazilian people" (234). In regular conversations, when people manifest these graphic symbol they mean their function in a sentence, and the objective is to emphasize what is said before the graphic symbol. Thus, through convention, these graphic symbols, now transformed into words, emphasize the author's ideas about her position as a black woman. Although writing in first person, the author does not isolate, but use it to represent thousands of black women, calling them to recover their dignity.

In addition to that, she reacts against institutions that insist on the appropriation of every single individual through systems of identification created by whites, in which she does not recognize herself. Such perspective is in agreement with Palmeira (8) who recognizes a poetic self emerging to create another social register in: "I tear my birth certificate" (3). This is the very first register anyone has, but for the author it does not represent her. Thus, Rufino repeats her color in almost all lines of the poem. We also see in the poem her positioning accompanied of attitude, two elements that mark her work.

Understand the poems are organized in sequence, the second poem, "*boletim de ocorrências*" ("Police Report") can be considered consequence of a process of transformation, which goes from awareness to activity. The persona tries to wake up her companions through reminding them of their strength:

mulher negra,
não pára
por essa coisa bruta
por essa discriminação morna (1-4) [17]

In addition to the encouragement, her words command black women to take position:

riscam teu nome com ausência
mulher negra, chega
mulher negra, seja
mulher negra, veja
depois do temporal (15-19 1988) [18]

[16] I'm black period / I give me back my identity / I tear my birth certificate / I'm black / without ellipsis / without comma without absenses / I'm a *balacobaco* black woman / I'm black night fatigue / I'm black // period (My translation).
[17] black woman, / don't stop / because of this brute thing / because of this light discrimination (My translation).

Duke ("Poetic Valuing of the Female Self: Selected Women's Writings from Brazil, Cuba and Guyana") sees in the persona's racial pride an opposition to "cultural adversaries" who fear for their "interests." I agree with such proposition, understanding "cultural" as oppositional to "natural." Notions about blacks are taught, learned, and passed on, among others, through "jokes" and "sayings" such as: "*preto, quando não caga na entrada, caga na saída*" (if a black doesn't shit in the beginning, he'll do it in the end) which could be include as an example of what Rufino "light discrimation." The "interests" Duke mentions, concern power. Cultural practices work to maintain notions that guarantee people to occupy certain positions. Blacks, and more specifically, black women, are taught to occupy the basic job positions, and stay there. The persona of the poem affirms with all terms the dignity of black women in order to move them to what I call the "crucial step," which is taking action. What they need then, as Duke suggests, is an "inner strength" in order to do so (106). Indeed, in this poem, Rufino proposes black women not only to reflect and have their own conclusions, but also to act.

A slightly similar strategy is found in the poem "*Feminismo*" ("Feminism"). Rufino offers just two lines for each move. In the first part we see what impels the poet: "*O preconceito diminui todas / as mulheres*" (1-2) (Prejudice diminishes all / the women). Then her call to what can be done against the problem: "*Cresço quando percebo / solidariedade aguda*" (3-4) (I rise when I feel / deep solidarity). Finally, a slight joke: "*Seria coisa de feminista / bem amada?"* (5-6) (Perhaps because / I'm a beloved feminist). Rufino refers to a known sexist thought, according to which feminists do not fight for dignity, but they miss men and, for extension, sex. Rufino selects few words as a response to discourses insistently reproduced against women, especially when they take position. Strategically, the poem works as an acid joke which is proportional to the malice of the discourse.

"*Mulher Negra*" ("Black Woman") mixes elements of nature with memory to propose a view on black women. Once again Rufino uses few images to construct a picture of the subject she observes:

> *Mulher negra, base forte,*
> *um pedacinho de céu nublado*
> *sempre sujeita a chuvas e trovoadas.*
> *História viva. O hoje.*

---

[18] your name is scratched out by absence / black women, enough / black women, be / black women, see after the storm (Translation: Duke, Dawn. Obsidian III. V 6, n 1. 2005. 106)

Páginas que o tempo não consegue amarelar. (1-5 2010) [19]

The poem is a reflection about the race and gender she belongs to. It reminds black women of their physical and psychological strength when compared to rain and lights, and reaffirms their history. When Lima discusses the presence of a black memory "forgotten by official history" (233) he refers to the distinguished ways white and black writers depict blacks. Saying that pages will never turn yellow Rufino refers to old books usually forgotten, rejecting such future for black history. Additionally, this sentence affirms black identity, which should never be rejected nor ideologically persuaded.

In 1986, Rufino creates the "*Coletivo de Mulheres Negras da Baixada Santista*" (Baixada Santista Black Women's Collective); in 1990, she founds the "*Casa da Cultura da Mulher Negra*" ("Black Women's Cultural Center"); in 1991, she is chosen to be member of a group that goes to the US for a course about violence against women; in 1995, Rufino launches the campaign "*Violência contra a Mulher, uma questão de Saúde Pública*" (Violence Against Woman, a Question of Public Health). In other words, her life has been dedicated to the issue of violence against women. In poems that approach such theme the author usually "takes pictures" of shocking situations experienced by women. With a different purpose, the strategy is common in popular cheap Brazilian newspapers to attract people through explicit details of crimes. In "*direito de nascer*" ("right to be born") Rufino writes from the perspective of who sees that there is a human being suffering such violence:

defeito de fabricação
negra morta grávida
barriga cheia chora
dizeres na mão uma faca
fere os atores
do conteúdo (1-5 1988) [20]

In the poem, it is possible to see the grotesque image of a woman stabbed who has a child crying inside her belly. Rufino chooses three adjectives to define the woman, "black," "dead," and "pregnant." With "manufacturing defect" her human condition is taken away. Even "full belly," instead of identifying her as a person, portrays the woman just through part of her dead body. The noisy result of a savage act is all that

[19] Black woman, strong basis, / a small piece of a clouded sky / always susceptible to rain and lights. / Living history. Now. / Pages the time / cannot turn yellow. (My translation)
[20] manufacturing defects / pregnant woman dead / full belly cries / captions a knife in the hand / hurt the actors / of the content (My translation)

remains. The poem dialogues with Afua Cooper's "The Child is Alive" (*Copper Woman And Other Poems* 28): "oh Onyame, take the spirit of the mother / oh praise to the ancestors / the child is alive!" But the treatment each poet gives to the theme is different. In Cooper's poem people watch for the baby, ending with hope; in Rufino's, the baby is crying out, but no help is mentioned.

The issue of pregnancy is also present in the poem "*Pai evadido*" ("Evaded father"). Once again, in a few lines Rufino creates strong images:

> *Lavam-se os botecos,*
> *a mulher grávida*
> *amarela transita.*
> *Uma criança*
> *pede doce* (1-5 2010) [21]

That is the end of the night, but Rufino detects two characters that, in a normal situation, should not be there: a sick pregnant woman and a child. However odd, the fact that other people are regularly working represents how the problem is trivialized. Indeed, the presence of those two specific characters is incorporated as a "natural" part of the scenario. That is the bitter side of life no one wants to interfere. As a consequence of individualism, violence, in its most different forms, becomes "normal" and/or "natural" part of life. Thus, Rufino focuses her attention not just on the social problem, but the way society as a whole, and individuals, handle such problem.

In another poem we see again the crucial difference between awareness of a problem and taking action against it. The poem "*Metendo a colher*" ("Interfering") discusses violence against women as a result of cultural practices that take society to close its eyes as if the problem concerns only the neighbor next door. Rufino continues to "take pictures" of circumstances she witnesses, but here she intervenes in it:

> *Mulher gritou*
> *ninguém acudiu*
> *Desenho impreciso na face*
> *nos olhos, neblina.*
> *Pancada de amor dói e muito*!
>
> *Vou meter a colher na tua panela*
> *pra não azedar a sua comida.*
> *Raspe o fundo*
> *Resgate a sua dignidade antes*
> *que a morte te cozinhe* (1-10 2010) [22]

---

[21] People clean the bars, / the pregnant yellow / woman transits. / A child / asks for sweet (My translation)

This association between food preparation and eating as a process in which the subject is "socially prepared to be devoured," simultaneously denounces how society is taught to be individualist, as we see in line 2: "nobody pays attention," and warns women about their social condition. Rufino talks about an issue she knows very close: violence against women. Many times the companion is the aggressor. The author proposes the discontinuity of this "code of conduct" transmitted through generations in Brazilian society. The persona does not allow the problem to get hidden, discussing it openly, but she does not act for the oppressed women. In order to break such culture of violence women themselves must take position.

With the poem "*Mulheres*" ("Women") Rufino offers images that include the condition of the woman in circumstances that go beyond Brazilian reality:

> *Mundo*
> *propriedade*
> *proprietários*
> *Poder*
> *ferros marcados*
> *véus, burcas.* (1-6 2010) [23]

On the contrary of what she does in the prior poem, where she openly declares the focus of the problem and interferes in it, Rufino applies a more descriptive view to "*Mulheres*," which is also different from other poems, as we will see along this analysis. In this poem, power forms a thick oppressive block that holds its place above women, who are obliged to live behind veils and burqas.

Oppression is a theme also present in Rufino's poem "*sufoco*" ("breathless"). It gives voice to an ordinary worker to talk about her life. It starts with a feeble voice:

> *eu tenho de ir*
> *[prá] viela*
> *do trabalho, do sufoco*
> *do medo sem liberdade*
> *do salário que não dá*
> *nem mesmo pra ver Piaf*
> *amanhã vou pra gráfica*
> *às cinco de la matina*
> *minha saúde vem pó*
> *poluição,*
> *em calor, refrigerador,*

---

[22] Woman cries out / nobody pays attention / Imprecise figure in the face / and her eyes are blurred. / Violence in the name of love hurts a lot! // I'm interfering / so, you won't have your food spoiled. / Scrape the bottom / Recover your dignity before / death cooks you (My translation)

[23] World / property / owners / Power/ known chains / veils, burqas. (My translation)

sem lazer e sem perdão,
mas o patrão diz não, (1-12) [24]

These lines do not resemble other Rufino's poems for resistance, but a human being manifesting how difficult her life is. The persona needs relief, finding a way through the imagination:

queria chutar bola
e derrubar esse esteio
esteio de falsidade
montar casa de verdade
onde tivesse jardim
onde eu soubesse de mim (17-22 1988) [25]

In a way, the persona's wishes are quite simple. All she wants is a modest life that allows her to have time for herself. The same dream many people have. Why is it so difficult? The answer comes through the voice of the boss, representative of the power and oppression that "says no" and feeds the system in detriment of people's lives. Dignity becomes a dream in big cities where people live smashed inside cubicle rooms, many of them blacks, intersecting racial and social problems. Resistance here is made through the denouncement of a miserable life that takes the persona to seek for peace in her dreams, yet reality is too hard for the persona to keep on living in it.

The poem "*sufoco*" calls into question a social organization that becomes even more problematic when analyzed in comparison to "*Vou à luta*" ("I'm gonna fight back"). In this poem, as much as we have seen in "*sufoco*," the persona is a worker whose job is usually seen with disrespect by society. However, she has a positive discourse:

Arrumo o coque
calço a chinela.
xale nas costas,
saia rodada,
navalha no seio
e vou à luta! (1-6 2010) [26]

In the poem, Rufino depicts a woman dressing in an extremely simple way. She is going to work, as we read in line 6: "Im gonna fight back!" What we do not know exactly is why it is required a "straight razor near the

[24] I gotta go / to the village / where I work suffocating, / with fear and without freedom / my salary isn't enough to see Piaf / I work for a Printing Company / tomorrow I'm going at five / when I come back my health is gone / pollution / heat, refrigerator / no leisure and no forgiveness / and a boss who says no (My translation).
[25] I wanted to kick the ball / put this mainstay down / mainstay of lies / have a real house / where I had a garden / where I knew of myself (My translation)
[26] I make a hair bun / put on my sandals. / shawl in my back, / circle skirt, / straight razor near the breast / I'm gonna fight back! (My translation)

breast," only that she needs to be protected. In spite of her precarious situation, this woman strives for survival. Putting together personas from poems "*sufoco*" and "*Vou à luta*" help us to think of certain social patterns. It is said that people with regular occupations are "the" correct ones, and because of that they achieve dignity. Thus, we may understand the persona in "*Vou à luta*" does not have dignity because the elements in the poem indicate a sort of job that is not considered socially respectful. Of the persona in the first poem, we know she is mentally and physically exhausted, she leaves for work before sunrise, and she needs illusions, a sort of drug, to keep on living. Then, we may ask: would it be possible to affirm that one of these women have more dignity?

Discussing about the constitution of norms in *Undoing Gender* Judith Butler explains that the understanding of norms works accordingly to the theory one follows, finding support in Habermas's ideas of norms as a result of an imaginative dimension that makes a social group possible. Thus, members of a group are identified by projections of a common good which is regulated by orders. Because some social orders do not work, it is reasonable to occur ruptures between the members of such society. In this sense, a conservative attitude can rest in the very discursive origins of the norms since norms are supposed not to be flexible. Butler explains that in such circumstances norms are thought to integrate normalities. In this case, integration is the proper producer of segregation. The common becomes the result of avoiding the uncommon (220-1). Because of our knowledge of the world, common workers are usually well accepted in society, while those who do not correspond to certain patterns, including clothing, are usually marked as the representative of the social exclusion. When we look at the narratives in the two poems, could we sustain that the persona in "*sufoco*" is less excluded than the one in "*Eu vou à luta*"? Does it mean that the order that regulates poor women requires some rupture in order to include them, or that the order that leads the worker to delusions proves, for this same reason, restrictive? In other words, if we understand the worker in the first poem is someone to be considered included in society, it means that she deserves dignity. If we consider the poor woman as someone who cannot be included in society, it means that she does not deserve dignity. In this sense, dignity is part of the norm formed by those included in society. Rufino's poem calls into question the very social norms because they exclude black women in both situations.

In the previous poems Alzira Rufino depicts the tough reality that many black women experience, usually

exposing the innards of the society from which they are constantly excluded. A different tone is applied to some poems in which nature is present and assumes specific functions when it is depicted in association with women. In "*Na pedra*" ("On the stone") a stone is associated with a mother:

> *A pedra gera*
> *folha e flor*
> *e não precisa da terra*
> *pra procriar* (1-4 2010) [27]

The poem is a reflection about an observable phenomenon that approximates human nature and nature itself. According to the persona, the stone is a self-sufficient generator of life, because it dismisses the presence of the soil to be successful in such process. A parallel between the stone and women who raise their children by themselves, which also concerns the strength of women, is reasonable.

Nature is also present in "*telúrica*" ("telluric") but on the contrary of what happens in "*Na pedra*," in this poem the author proposes an association with death. The fusion with earth is a way of transportation:

> *talvez, quem sabe, talvez*
> *eu volte [prá] terra roxa*
> *coberta de matagais*
>
> *talvez, quem sabe, talvez*
> *eu volte pro barro em molde*
> *eu volte [prá] terra negra*
> *África tribo imortal* (1-7 1988) [28]

The persona narrates a wish of returning to the dust as a way of recovering her African roots, which is also a return to the womb, reprising the known association between the earth and a mother. But, this poem does not celebrate such association; the persona wants a way of protection or escape from reality. The persona is a captive who prefers to die instead of remaining in such condition. Her need of a dimension in which she will be better connects her with the persona of "*sufoco*." The comparison echoes Rufino words about blacks still experiencing conditions that in much resemble their ancestors in Brazil: "*o tronco que tentam esconder* / *mas esses troncos existem* / *no conviver* / *os troncos estão nas favelas* / *vejo troncos nas vielas*." (but these whipping posts exist / on our routine / they are in the *favelas* / I can see them in the alleys).

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[27] the tone generates / leaves and flowers / it doesn't need the earth / to procreate (My translation)

[28] maybe, who knows, maybe / I will return to the purple soil / covered with grass // maybe, who knows, maybe / I will return to the mud shaped in mold / I will return to the black land / Africa immortal tribe (My translation)

Thus, nature is equated with human beings in Rufino's poems in a way that the former assumes characteristics found in the latter. The process of "domesticating" nature largely found in literature usually provides a romantic view of the elements. In the short poem "*Natureza*" ("Nature") instead of such romantic view, Rufino offers a realistic notion of the action of nature:

Quem disse que a chuva é dócil?
Eu não acho a chuva dócil.
Ela carrega na enxurrada. (1-3) [29]

The image created by Rufino refers to natural disasters that leave poor people under water inside their own houses. Besides this denotative reading, it is possible to understand the sweet notion of the rain in line I that many have as a metaphor of the discourse about how women are seen in society. Rufino proposes a dialectical method of argumentation against this notion. First, she questions the discourse. In the second line, she rejects that discourse. Then, she provides evidence for her argument, affirming a new discourse about women. As a result, rain, which in Portuguese is a feminine noun, be it an element of nature or a metaphor of a woman, becomes an icon of power.

Nature is a constitutive part of African Brazilian religions, being recurrent in Rufino's poems which have those divinities as theme. In the first chapter I explain that *Iansã* is the goddess of the fire, storms and lights, an *orixá* identified with bravery. According to *Candomblé*, she first marries *Ogum*, and then *Xangô* steals her, initiating an ardent love relationship. Rufino's poem "*Iansã*" ("*Yansã*") is a sort of description of the characteristics of that goddess, honoring an entity which legend depicts a powerful woman:

Iansã – Oyá mulher
dona de vento e relâmpago
tua beleza é fogo
o teu raio decisão (1-4) [30]

At each line Rufino describes an attribute of the entity, repeating over and over positive features, with the inclusion of passion, forming a powerful identity:

animas o que é vida
lá onde o amor é sentido
zarpando do teu olhar

[29] Who said rain is docile? / I don't think rain is docile / Floodwater can carry away (My translation)
[30] *Iansã – Oyá* woman / matriarch of wind and lightning / your beauty is fire / and your ray of lightning decision (Translation: Duke, Dawn. "The Unfolding of an Afro-Brazilian Literature of Commitment. Connection Black Movement, Black Literary Movement." Ethnos Brasil. 6: 1. 2008.)

rota de estrelas de paixão (5-8 1988) [31]

Writing a poem which has as its main theme an African-Brazilian entity, Rufino contributes, as Lima puts it, to the literary "affirmation of African religions" (233) and brings into the universe of poetry its symbolic elements. Thus, in addition to a theme that involves gender and race, Rufino elaborates on a poem about the strength of a sacred female African-Brazilian divinity endowed with sexual desire. This, no doubt, destabilizes traditional pureness of most part of sacred narratives found in Brazil. If we understand that narratives of the lives of the entities are created by a community to guide people's lives, we can affirm that Rufino's "*Iansã*" reminds women that a different role in society is possible and that they can love, have pleasure and be free.

Relationship, this time involving ordinary people, is also present in "*Se liga simpatia*" ("Wake up, dude") a sinuous, smooth, dancing poem. There is flirting, and sex is insinuated:

Eu estou brincando de mirar contigo
Estou brincando de encontrar amigo
Eu estou brincando
De girar comigo (1-4) [32]

But, at the end of the poem, there is a "turning point":

Você é gente fina, mas vacila
pra caramba! (5-6 2010) [33]

Discursive practices support the idea that women shall always forgive men's mistakes, but the persona rejects such position, as we can read in line V. In the first sentence the persona recognizes the man is cool, but in the second she shows conscious of his attitudes, which she disapproves. The poem keeps its mood to the end. There is no rupture, fight, aggression, just a woman taking position.

Another persona assuming the command in a relationship is found in "*não sei se queres*" ("I don't know if you want"). It is like a piece of dialogue, or a moment in a relationship, and readers have access only to what she says. Again, Rufino gives a woman voice to express how she feels:

queres que eu fale
queres que eu cante
não sei se queres
que eu bote manto

[31] thou animates life / there, where love is felt / departing from your eyes / route of stars and passion (My translation).
[32] I'm playing of looking at you / I'm playing of finding friend / I'm playing / of spinning with myself (My translation).
[33] you're cool, but you always / mess things up! (My translation).

que eu não sinta
vulcão e lavas
a pele em brasa
que eu não abra
os meus portões (1-9 1988) [34]

With metaphors associating the body of a woman with substances of the interior of the earth, the persona unveils her sexual explosion. Then we understand that what motivates the poem is a restriction against the nature of this persona. Each line of the poem repeats this sexual vibration lived by the persona, which gives the poem a highly aggressive intonation and accentuates how impossible it is for someone to contain the flames that burn inside. The persona's demands suggest that she and her companion do not have an agreement on how to deal with the situation she is experiencing. The poem does not offer any solution to the problem she lives, but opens space for discussions about the sexual condition of the black woman.

In Alzira Rufino's poems we recurrently see a black woman affirming her subjectivity. That is the discursive consolidation of a space that has not been conquered yet. It is a process of reconstruction of the identity of the black woman through inviting these women to reflect on representations elaborated by a peer, a black woman who knows how it feels to be doubly discriminated. It occurs because Rufino transports to her words situations she experiences, which makes possible for women to identify with. In "From Past to Present. Poetic Homage to Distant and Recent Memory. Grace Nichols, Alzira Rufino and Nancy Morejón," Duke affirms that the Brazilian poet "makes it clear that she will inevitably express her own subjectivity, a subjectivity which could lead to her exclusion, a subjectivity that she must use to resist such exclusion." (34). Indeed, because Rufino's poetry reflects her own experience, her own subjectivity appears in the personas of her poems, and that is exactly what gives her authority to speak in the name of the women she represents. Her work does not allow any scission between race and gender because the condition resulting from the intersection of both is exactly what motivates her work.

In a brief comment, Duke indicates that subjectivity is also among the many aspects of Rufino's writings that concerns Spivak's postcolonial theory, more specifically her idea of the Other. It is worth to explore a bit

[34] do you want me to talk / do you want me to sing / I don't know if you want me / to put on a mantle / if you want me not to feel / volcano and lava / the skin burning / if you don't want me to open / my gates (My translation)

more such comment. In Spivak's theory, the Other is related with the idea of the "subaltern" developed by postcolonial studies. Spivak (1988) criticizes colonial studies carried out by the West because it is not possible to see them as a realistic voice to discuss issues related with the Third Word. Her notion is not only geographical, but also ideological, viewing as unrealistic studies that interpret the Third World from a Western perspective. The problem posed by such perspective is the cultural component, a European construction of the Self, which places the West in a position distant from the Third World, the Other, associated with an understanding of superiority of the West over the Third World. The application of such theory to Alzira Rufino's writing reveals a process of "deconstruction," which is another concept developed by Spivak: "It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have the truth. (...) It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced" ("Bonding in Difference: Interview with ALfred Arteaga" 28). Rufino's method for the transformation of black people's reality is very similar to this notion Spivak proposes. Rufino is constantly questioning the position blacks were taught to occupy and how they were/are depicted by non-blacks. Alzira Rufino is an "insider," a black woman from a poor family who addresses women of the same origin.

This questioning is directly connected with Duke's assertion that "Rufino's central theme is the notion of resistance." (34). I accept such an idea, exploring the way such "notion of resistance" is constructed. Black people, especially women, populate Rufino's lines, usually reflecting about some hard experience. This is a structure perceivable in many poems, a sort of "method" that I call "steps for the transformation," which is composed of two important features: "reflection' and "action." Personas in her poems are usually reflecting about their condition, that is the first step. Reflections tend to lead towards some conclusion, and then a position is inevitable. The best example in Rufino's poetry that marks a crucial division in the reality of black poor women in Brazil who suffer from violence is the poem "*RESISTO*". On the other hand, in the poem "*Metendo a colher*" the woman is conscious of the pain she feels, but there is a chasm between understanding her own situation and acting against the cause. Acting, when it occurs, is the second step.

Rufino's converge onto aspects observed by Proença Filho in the literature produced by blacks in Brazil, when he talks about their committed attitude. For him, in general, such literature is characterized by the

presence of black cultural identity and unbreakable connections with elements of African origin. Among the aspects Proença Filho mentions are: "questioning associated with demands"; "rebellion"; "ethnic pride"; "consciousness about necessity of affirmation"; "a tentative recover of black myths and rituals" (61-2).

Alzira Rufino's militancy, in the different textual genres she expresses her view, reiterates a coherent way of her thinking. In "*VOCÊS NÃO PODEM MAIS ADIAR OS NOSSOS SONHOS...*" (2002) ("YOU CAN NO LONGER POSTPONE OUR DREAMS") published after the World Conference against Racism 2001, in Durban, Rufino mentions a delegation composed of six hundred people, legitimate representative of discriminated people from Brazil. She also calls people for unity and organization, pinpointing where black organizations are not doing well. Based on documents of global importance, among them one prepared by Amnesty International declaring Brazil, Guatemala, and Honduras as countries with highest level of discrimination and racial injustice in the world, Rufino restates the situation of racial difference in the country. She calls for a stronger positioning: "*Precisamos de ousadia. Nossas ações ainda são muito tímidas*" (We need to dare. Our actions are still too shy). She also indicates the way: "*Pé que não dá topada não cria calo*" ("you can't learn to walk without falling over") and proposes a slogan: "*Você não é racista, certo*?" (You're not racist, are you?). Finally, she claims black women to run in the next elections and advocates for quotas for black candidates. As she does in "*eu vou à luta*," the title of the text is also the final sentence. I retrieve three main terms from her speech: "awareness," "unity," and "insistence." For me, this text epitomizes the work developed by Alzira Rufino.

Comparative analysis of Afua Cooper's and Alzira Rufino's poetry

Recent history of Canada and Brazil has shown that even in circumstances that apparently more liberal regimes take place, blacks are still oppressed, and, among blacks, women suffer even more. This situation is part of a white supremacist system of thought that creates social categories and formulates ways to make people identify with these categories as fixed places. According to this notion, not just "blacks [are supposed to] do this, blacks [are supposed to] do that, all blacks sing, all blacks play basketball," as Doreen Johnson says in Tara Burke's documentary (Chapter II) but embedded in such discourse is the very indication of the social status blacks are thought to maintain. In hooks words in "The Oppositional Gaze": "A culture of domination demands of all its citizens self-negation. The more marginalized, the more intense the demand" (19). It means that social systems are the practical result of what a certain social group projects to be, which is based on the beliefs and values cherished by that society. A white patriarchal dominant society is built upon the ethics that support such society. In such society non-white groups are supposed to accept the dominant values. Afua Cooper and Alzira Rufino, as we have seen in the previous chapters, use their voice against this system.

For the comparative analysis, I return to Fred Wah and Luciano Rodrigues Lima, who discuss the condition of the marginal writer subsequently in Canada and Brazil. Wah reacts against the essentialism of what means to be ethnic, as if ethnicity could be considered static and/or homogenous, predictable, defined. For him, an alternative for ethnic writers to tackle the "problem" is the exploration of the space that results from the contact of ethnicities. Wah explores his hyphenated identity and its context to challenge notions of identity, nationality, and race, in Canada. From such investigation, he develops his poetics of ethnicity, in which he discusses the context of the hyphenated writers, including devices they elaborate to make resistance. Lima discusses the depiction black writers make of their ethnic group and the "tools" they use for that. According to him, black writers use an aggressive style that combines traditional narratives with descriptive forms that draw on a perspective that emerges with technology, such as photography, to their writing.

Because drawings are considered in the analysis of some of Rufino's poems, it seems productive to

draw on Barthes's "A Photographic Message" on the analysis of image. He proposes that in all images produced there are two types of message: one is "denoted," and the other is "connoted." The denoted message is the result that is captured, and the connoted one, its interpretation. It means that every since one produces an image, the more faithful this person tries to be to the object in focus, in the very act of trying to reproduce such "reality" is possible to notice that the individual apply his understanding of the object to that image, which somehow modifies the "reality" observed. The drawings in Rufino's *I*, *Black Woman*, *Resist*, complete notions about the condition of the black woman found in the poems.

I analyze Cooper's and Rufino's poems observing in which way they apply their "tools" to make resistance in the representation of women. The first two poems that I analyze are Cooper's "How to Hold Your Man" and Rufino's "*RESITO*" ("I RESIST"). In the former, women rebel against pre-established rules and free themselves:

> Some of us were told when we were young girls
> (directly and through osmosis), that if we did everything
> right when we became women, that is
> smile coyly
> keep our legs sealed
> never let men feel that we were smarter than they
> learn how to cook
> smile when we feel like crying
> then maybe (if we were lucky) we could get a man
> and be able to keep him.
> But some of us were thinking beings and we thought
> […]
> Because the advice given insulted us to our very core. It was meant to stultify the spirit, kill the heart, shrivel the body and destroy the soul. We rejected it. And became women who did not know our place. Became women with ringing laughter. Became women who knew that our ultimate aim was to seek our truth and live it. (1-11,20-41 1992)

In the latter, a woman reflects about her existence as a black woman:

> where does this fear come from?
> I am
> without mistakes, I exist
> I search for gestures
> to be seen
> gathering memories
> that people tell me about
> I scream
> where does this

shame over me
come from?

I, black, woman,

RESIST.

Cooper's poem creates a movement of transformation playing with two compositional forms, verse and prose, as well as through the content of the text. The way it is composed, a cycle is broken through the transgression of poetic conventions. Doing so, Cooper gives space in the poem to a sense of free expression. The author departs from a "set of advice" for "good girls" not to be alone, then moves to the rejection of such prescription. This rejection marks a "turning point," which goes from the suggestion of good behaviour to a feminist manifesto. In order to expose the absurd of those "guidelines" Cooper applies some irony to the first part of the narrative. It is inside this ironic view that we find the consciousness that creates the basis for the transformation. Thus, the courage of those women to express their thoughts on the rules that shape their existence and the decision for a different position are the key elements for their subjectivity. The plural form the persona uses indicates an entire generation making resistance against absurd rules for absurd purposes. With that assertiveness the persona ends the poem defining her new trajectory.

Reflection is also the basis for transformation in Rufino's poem. As much as Cooper, Rufino composes a text that disobeys poetic conventions, following the author's own conventions. She scatters the words, provoking disconnections between the lines. It is like a metaphor of the text, which describes a black woman gathering pieces of thoughts, who, at the end of such reflexive process, is conscious of her race and gender and has decided to resist to the oppression she suffers. In this poem we see the central proposal of Alzira Rufino's work. Resistance must be associated with consciousness, suggesting black women a self reflexive process. In addition to the correlation between form and content, the poem, part of the collection *Eu, Mulher Negra, Resisto*, also dialogues with the aggressive drawing of a black mouth sewn shut on the opposite page, a visual illustration of the way many black women live. Although speaking in the first person, the persona does not do it as an individual, but as representative of women in their search for dignity as blacks.

Fig. 3. "Mouth sewn shut." Rossi, Beatriz Rota. *Eu, Mulher Negra, Resisto*. Alzira Rufino. 1988. 15.

In both poems there are marks or resistance. These marks are present in the structure and in the content of the poems. In regard to form, while Cooper provokes a rupture mixing prose with verses, Rufino's rupture is made using large spaces between the words. Both are manifestos of women's resistance as the result of a reflexive process that lead them to challenge social patterns and find their position as female subjects. Thus, in both poems we find women with attitude. The poems, each of them focusing on a specific circumstance, depict the effect of historical practices against blacks in the micro universe of private life, how it affects the life of the individual. Through this comparison we see that the outcome is the same in two different continents where blacks receive similar treatment. The main aspect of differentiation refers to the voice that repeats the discourse about the "the woman's position." Cooper portrays a black community in Jamaica, which indicates black women themselves reproducing the discourse. In Rufino, besides gender, the skin color is marked, but the discourse about the depreciation of the black woman already inside of her mind belongs to a larger collectivity. Her "turning point" starts exactly when she starts questioning such discourse.

Another element present in the work of both poets is the significance of ancient entities. The poem "Copper Woman," that entitles the collection *Copper Woman and Other Poems*, subtitled under its Spanish translation "*La mujer de Cobre*," is a three-page long narrative about two lovers hidden in *Sierra Maestra*, legendary mountains of Cuba that, over the centuries, has sheltered rebellions, among which, runaway slaves. The woman is the narrator, and through one of the pieces we know that she is pregnant:

> I shelter our love in my womb (9)

And that memories of the life they had before still dominates her:

> the threat of capture
> of being hounded by dogs

of being beaten, killed
of being sold, or strangled
of being castrated (11-5)

Fearing for their future, alone, because the man is working to bring food for them, she rests and waits for him, looking for comfort in her own memories:

I sit and wait for you
in this long black night
(...)
I cover myself with the red silk shawl
you gave me when we first wedded each other
(...)
I shiver in the dark cold air
when will you come? (1-2, 7-8, 15-17)

Then the persona indicates that copper refers to objects used to adorn and make war:

the moon glides from beneath a forgiving cloud
and the light illuminates the bracelets
on my wrists
copper and brass (22-5)

When the man comes back, he brings her a whole feast as an offering:

and lay this bounty at my feet
roasted breadfruit, dried fish
parched corn, yams,
cassava bread, and an assortment of fruits
You also present me a jug of ginger beer
and a whole side of goat, roasted (38-43)

They talk and have sex:

I hold you close to my belly
and find comfort in the regular rhythm of your breath
I rib my nipples against your chest
and you run your fingers along my spine
(...)
our love will go from everlasting to everlasting (55-8, 62)

Patricia Monaghan (“Volume I: African Diaspora” 42) explains that in Cuba there is a divinity, the patron of the island, represented by a beautiful and sensual mulatto woman known as Our Lady of *Caridade del Cobre*. A similar image, wearing copper bracelets, symbol of a warrior, and a fan is present in Brazilian and other Latin-American religions with the name *Oshun*. Cooper approximates this entity of a life on earth mixing her

with the suffering of slavery and pleasure of who fights for freedom. This is an African entity, which, per se, represents a movement of insurrection. Additionally, this entity has a regular pleasures openly expressed sexual life.

The same entity is also in Rufino, but the approach is much different from that of Cooper. In Rufino's poem "*Oxum*", love is mentioned, but as the result of a reflection on discourses about being a woman. In *Candomblé*, Afro-Brazilian religion, *Oxum* is a female entity associated with riches, fecundity, water and air, represented as a beautiful black woman wearing copper bracelets, sitting close to a river or waterfall holding a mirror. In the first part of the poem the persona mentions "voices" teaching her how to be a woman:

> *me disseram que ser mulher*
> *é ter os dengos de Oxum*
> *ouro de mel e espelhos*
> *fitas e flores nos cabelos* (1-4) [35]

The voices also teach her how to behave:

> *ser a calma de um rio*
> *deixar a pedra afundar*
> *não lutar pelo direito*
> *pois isso é um defeito*
> *de mulher mona de aló* (5-9) [36]

According to those "voices," a woman is defined as someone who only cares for beauty, and consequently does not strive for any rights. But, in the second part, the persona turns her attention to other voices, reflects on it, and comes up with her own conclusion:

> *escutei muitas estórias*
> *de como Oxum guerreou*
> *água apagando fogo*
> *onde espada não ouso*
> *aí pensei repensei*
> *e a vi dona do amor* (10-15 1988) [37]

Oxum is not good or bad, but has a complex personality, in which positive and negative coexist as it occurs with every human being, erasing any traces of pureness. She is not either delicate or strong, she is both. This

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[35] I was told that to be a woman / is to have the effects of Oxum / the gold of honey and mirrors / ribbons and flowers in my hair (Translation: Duke, Dawn. "Literary Passion, Ideological Commitment." Cranbury NJ: Lewisburg Bucknell UP. 2008. 209-10).

[36] to be as serene as a river / let the stone down in the water / don't strive for your rights / because it is a problem / of silly women (My translation).

[37] I heard many stories / of how *Oxum* waged war / water putting out fire / where the sword did not dare/ and I thought, and thought again / and I saw her, the Madam of Love (Translation: Duke, Dawn. "Literary Passion, Ideological Commitment." Cranbury NJ: Lewisburg Bucknell UP. 2008. 209-10).

conjunction of different natures in a personality, especially considering its spiritual dimension, becomes an example for women to reflect on their own condition.

The poems, drawing on the same inspirational theme, converge in some aspects and differ in others. Besides the presence of an African entity with a complex personality represented by its beauty as much as the strength to fight, in both poems we see a narrator immersed in reflections; in Rufino's, the persona is again alone. There are also some differences. Love, present in both poems, in Cooper is the feeling able to demolish all barriers and project the future of the couple. In Rufino, love is the realm in which the persona recognizes the reign of *Oshun*. While Cooper offers many details of the persona and the existence of a partner, Rufino depicts a woman reflecting alone. In addition, in Cooper the woman personifies the entity, while in Rufino's poem the persona sees in the entity a reference.

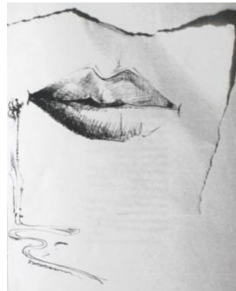
Sexuality is also a theme in the work of both poets, which they approach in different ways. With "Hibiscus" Cooper dares to openly explore a theme that has become a taboo for black women: the female black body. Carla L. Peterson ("Eccentric Bodies") discusses the construction of the "eccentric body" of the black woman as a result of centuries of sexual fantasies of slaveholders. That leads to distortions in the way the black woman is seen, and takes them to be more careful with the matter in their writings (xv-xvi). Cooper offers another perspective of the theme, depicting the corporal intimacy of two people:

> You know all my secrets
> all the secrets of my body
> have knowledge of my love triangle
> as hot and sweet as freshly baked cinnamon buns
> red as a hibiscus flower (1-5)

"Secrets" stands for the ways this woman have pleasure with her genitalia, the "love triangle," which is "hot", "sweet", "fresh", "red." The author describes a woman whose body shows no defense against her lover. For Mel Cooke the author "shows herself to be very comfortable with matters of the physically intimate kind" (1). George Elliott Clarke comments on this: "Given her social concerns, it is almost surprising to see Cooper's amorous poems. They are openly sexual, celebratory of love" (2). Why is it surprising to see amorous poems by an author who has social concerns? For Cooper, sex has a very specific meaning: "Sexuality, for me, is not only material but also spiritual--a site where we can combine mind, body, soul, and spirit to humanize ourselves to

our highest capacities" (Email)[38]. Cooper's poetry ritualizes the body, and inscribes it in intimate relations as part of her beliefs. Anyway, considering Peterson's discussion, the presence of the black female body and intimacy in a literary work by a black woman challenges the stigmatization that has been created.

In Rufino, the introduction of the theme in the collection *Eu, Mulher Negra, Resisto* combines text and image. Fig. "6," which marks the last quarter of the book, shows a woman free from the threads that sewed her lips shut:



Figs. 6. "Mouth sewn shut." Rossi, Beatriz Rota. *Eu, Mulher Negra, Resisto*. Alzira Rufino. 1988. 63.

Free, the woman can express all the words available, including those of seduction. On the next page there is an untitled poem. Regarding form, Rufino applies her own pattern for the placement of each paragraph. These sentences show a dialogue in which the first person forms a track to indicate a way to "solve the mysteries" of who she is, which enables the second person in the dialogue to "find" her. Readers accompany the persona and her partner, this mute participant, through this word game:

me acompanhe no tempo
use a tecnologia pros meus ventos
eu raio na avenida são joão
me acompanhe nas fedras
se enrole na minha serpente
consulte os búzios
estranhe a minha beleza
duvide que eu sou deusa
desconfie até que sou mulher (1-9 1988)[39]

São João Avenue, in the heart of São Paulo city, now is known as a decadent place of prostitution. That is the place where the persona rises. In command, the persona wants the other to set free and enjoy all seduction and

[38] Cooper, Afua. Answers from Afua Cooper. Oct 26 2013.
[39] follow me throughout the time / use technology for my winds / I rise at São João avenue / follow me in the *fedras /* wind up my serpent / ask the *búzios /* reject my beauty / doubt that I'm a goddess / suspect that I'm a woman (My translation).

pleasure of her body. But, this is a game, and the first person gives abstract "tips" on how to find her because the unusual is the only dimension in which she exists. In the poem, there is not any term concerning feelings, no future, no romance, but seduction. The serpent does not lunge, but moves around using a sequence of verbs that, notwithstanding the imperative mood, sounds more like an invitation than an order. As a seducer, she is in command.

Sex, explicitly mentioned in Cooper, in Rufino's poem is more implicit, exploring ways to express seduction. The intimacy in Cooper's poem produces the image of a whisperer; Rufino's persona is talking to a "prey." While Cooper's persona shares her body with her companion, the persona in Rufino's commands the situation. Above all, these poems promote a female voice arguing for its right to be sexual.

The last pair of poems to be analyzed refers to women as workers. In "My Mother" Cooper depicts a daughter exalting the deeds of her mother as she does in "Bird of Paradise" (Chapter II). In this excerpt they are going to work:

> My mother planted fields
> married a man
> bore then children
> and still found time
> to run her own business (1-5)

Later, this daughter indicates that she is a co-worker with her mother:

> She and I
> were going to work
> the plot of land
> she rented from someone (7-10 1992)

In the first lines the daughter introduces readers to her mother "chanting her deeds." Although co-workers, the girl knows that she and her mother are not of the same rank. Her mother's accomplishments inventory impacts her in such a way that she can only feel proud of being by her side.

Rufino's "*Vou à luta*" ("I'm gonna fight back") already discussed on Chapter III, depicts a women going to work:

> *Arrumo o coque*
> *calço a chinela.*
> *xale nas costas,*
> *saia rodada,*

navalha no seio
e vou à luta! (1-6 2010) [40]

In this poem, Rufino offers few elements, which basically describe the humble way this woman dresses. In addition to that, the last line of the poem informs readers that this is a woman who lives on her own.

In these two poems we find pieces of evidence of resistance in the depiction of women. Different from what we read in the previous comparison, which involves two of Rufino's poems, there are some commonalities between Cooper's and Rufino's poems. In both, women are independent. Cooper's persona is an entrepreneur who raises ten children going to work to raise her family. We do not know what the persona in Rufino's poem does, but we can affirm she too lives out of her work. In addition to their clothes, certainly simple in the case of Cooper's persona, and declared modest in Rufino's, these personas are equalized in their positive approach towards the need of survival in face of hardness life offers for black women.

In addition to poetry, there are other similarities between the two authors, as Afua Cooper declares in "Finding My Voice" and Alzira Rufino does in an interview on the blog "*Literatura Subversiva*" ("Subversive Literature"). With respect to their initiation into the writing, Cooper declares: "I started writing poetry in primary school" (302) the same period of Rufino: "*Aos sete anos minha professora me incentivou a escrever minhas composições em formato de Diário*."[41] (when I was seven my teacher stimulated me to write diaries). Concerning the role of writing in their lives, Cooper's: "I write primarily because of a spiritual compulsion which demands that I put pen to paper and open my mouth and chant" is very similar to Rufino's: "*É minha válvula de escape. Não sei se sobreviveria se não houvesse a poesia na minha vida*" ("[Writing] is my resort. I don't know if I could survive without poetry in my life").

In relation to their view on feminism, Cooper (Email)[42] finds support in bell hook and Patricia Hill Collins, who "have challenged mainstream white women feminism and feminist theory by arguing that white women's understanding of feminism rarely includes Black women." According to Katrina Payne, Rufino has the same position concerning her country: "the feminist movement in Brazil didn't understand that, although black

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[40] I arrange the top knot / put on my sandals. / shawl in my back, / circle skirt, / straight razor near the breast / I'm gonna fight back! (My translation).
[41] Blog Literatura Subversiva. 3 Mar 2010.
[42] Cooper, Afua. Answers from Afua Cooper. Oct 26 2013.

women have common issues as women, they have specific concerns as black women" (57). Both writers have included child literature as part of their militancy. *The Red Caterpillar on College Street* is a collection in which a little boy describes one aspect of his city in Canada at each poem. Rufino's *Muriquinho Piquininho* (*Little African-Brazilian boy*) tells the story of a family, from the perspective of a boy, since they are captured in Africa to their arrival in Brazil. Rufino mixes prose and poetry in a very comprehensible language.

FINAL REMARKS

In this work I raise the issue of oppression as it occurs against black women, discussing the intersectionality of race and gender as a system that isolates women “of color.” As this work deals with the poetic production of a Jamaican-Canadian and a Brazilian women, I discuss these contexts in regard to Cooper’s and Rufino’s poetry. If Canada has its multiculturalism policy, Brazil has been passing laws in the last few years that deal with social problems blacks face in the country. However, it is possible to affirm that Canada is still a segregationist country in which the black woman is treated as the Other, and Brazil, after centuries formulating negative notions about blacks, has not been able yet with recent laws to impact the lives of black population the way it is necessary.

As an opposition to this situation, in both countries writers have been formulating political forms of resistance, being resistance a meticulous way to read the reality in which one is placed to insistently question the factors that take such reality to exist. In Canada, ethnic writers have been producing a robust corpus of thought to face mainstream notions on multiculturalism. In Brazil, where all ethnicities are represented but the vast majority is of blacks, this is the group commonly associated with ethnic issues. For hundreds of years, blacks and mulattos have been contributing for the creation of what now comes to be known as Brazilian literature. A little more than a hundred years after slavery abolition, black writers in Brazil have produced considerable amount of literature, be it prose, poetry or song, and Machado de Assis, founder of *Academia Brasileira de Letras* (Brazilian Academy of Letters) a mulatto, is acclaimed Brazil’s greatest writer.

In this work I draw on references from both Brazil and Canada that demonstrate blacks integrating the formation of each country. Although there is plenty of evidence on that, slavery is the image that repeatedly illustrates black history in West, which demands black people to bring to light other aspects of the life of their ancestors. An example of such is Afua Cooper’s reconstitution of the environment in which lived the black abolitionist Henry Bibb. As part of her PhD research (2000) Cooper demonstrates that Bibb was a “writer and lecturer [with] participation in political abolition” (i) and provides evidence on blacks founding organizations in

the nineteenth century in Canada and the US.

In Brazil, the exhibit "*Emancipação, inclusão e exclusão. Desafios do Passado e do Presente*" [43] ("Emancipation, inclusion and exclusion. Challenges of the Past and of the Present") as part of a seminar with the same title at São Paulo University, presents photos from the nineteenth century in which blacks are depicted. For the most part, in these images they are doing some hard job. It is undeniable that, being the most recent of these pictures from 1882, six years before slavery abolition in Brazil, slaves would certainly be present in those photos. Thus, on one hand the exhibit depicts an aspect of black people's reality in the past, working as evidence of an economic system that reduces black people to trading material. On the other hand, they conceal other aspects of the black participation in society, repeating once again notions of blacks as non-people, which contribute for that image to remain to these days.

In the exhibit, women are also present as they were captured through the lenses of European photographers. Thus, foreign eyes captured the images that inform us who were black women in Brazil in the nineteenth century. In the introduction of her *Black Looks: race and representation*, bell hooks quotes filmmaker Pratibha Parmar:

> Images play a crucial role in defining and controlling the political and social power to which both individuals and marginalized groups have access. The deeply ideological nature of imagery determines not only how other people think about us but how we think about ourselves. (6)

The constant reiteration of the image that represents the black woman comes to be perceived as the black woman's "image." The use of those images during an event hosted by an important Brazilian university gives them a major significance. It contributes to form discourses about the black woman that even black women happen to reproduce. They are internalized as "proper" of the cultural identity to which the black woman belongs or a "natural" part of their existence.

Discourses do not occur "naturally," even if they are part of the cultural identity of a certain social group, but they are built up and always indicate a position. The same way, the emergence of a counter-position can work to deconstruct discourses and/or formulate new ones. This notion sees identities open to the possibility of

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43 "SP: Exposição Emancipação, Inclusão e Exclusão revela passado de escravidão no Brasil." "Brasileiros." 28 Oct 2013. http://www.revistabrasileiros.com.br/2013/10/sao-paulo-exposicao-emancipacao-inclusao-e-exclusao-revela-passado-de-escravidao-no-brasil/#.VDcomfldXp8.

a transitory “becoming” instead of a fixed “being.” If we believe in unchangeable cultural identities, it is not possible to believe that who we “are” is what we “became” and that we can “become” other. Stuart Hall (1989) returns to his Kingstonian origins to explain that the Jamaican population is simultaneously connected with its African roots and a cultural identity that shakes the guarantee of such cultural background. According to the author, who grew up in the Jamaican capital, being black was not even an issue up to the 1950s. Those discussions started to be part of the life of Jamaicans around the 1960s because of the violence and the movements against it. The new thoughts changed the way they understood themselves; they “became blacks.” When Cooper and Rufino reject cultural practices that define the place of people in the intersection of race and gender as given, they open the way to explore the possibilities of what comes to be a black woman. In other words, black women can be breadwinners, lovers, have spirituality and give life to their memories.

This notion of “becoming,” present in Cooper’s and Rufino’s poetry, makes possible their strategy of resistance, which consists of a call for an introspective analysis through which women can see themselves. Those poets do not free women, but they question the captivity they live in, whatever form it takes. As a consequence of those reflections, a “distance” from the women they were taught to believe they were, makes possible a different self-representation to emerge. This change is the “turning point” that restores their subjectivity. Rufino, an activist used to discussions in which argumentation is of paramount importance, transports such tone to her poetry. She addresses women directly, speaking closely in a “face to face” conversation that repeats a very strong enunciating self. This “I” is defined in Cooper through the narrator, always a black woman.

There are points of contact and divergence between the two poets in their representation of the black woman. Afua Cooper, a Dub poet, activates her memories and the memory of her ancestors as much as the memory of other groups that suffered with colonialism to inscribe female representatives as legitimate members of the Canadian history. Spirituality, associated with lyric strategies, is conceived as the opportunity to discover the “inner space,” as Cooper calls it. Cooper also makes use of her expertise in History to construct a historical perspective of black women in Canada. Rufino draws on her personal experiences as a woman from humble origins and her activism in the issue of violence against women to provide images of very practical

circumstances that black poor women face. Spirituality is also present in Rufino through female entities of *Candomblé.*

In regard to gender, one of the central issues in this work and in the poetic production of both poets, the texts of each poet are elaborated according to different perspectives. In some of Afua Cooper's poems we do not find a specific female voice, which, inversely, supports the existence of a space for the female voice. The long tradition in literature has created a "norm," according to which, if there is no definition of voice, a male voice is presumed. Any argument in favor of other possibility needs to be accompanied by evidence. The lack of an engendered voice works as a form of "counter-normatization" that subverts a male position that is taken for granted. For the same reason, Rufino uses an opposite strategy. For Rufino, the presence of a voice declaring explicitly its gender is fundamental. Her poetry demands the occupation of a space from where to manifest the unique experience of a woman.

The same parallelism is possible concerning the treatment each poet gives to the issue of race. In Cooper's poems analyzed in this work, the woman is represented through aspects connected with the experience of black women, such as hard workers or the use of Patois. Her Jamaican memories are constantly present, giving voice to those who did not have the opportunity to tell their side of History, which constructs such History anew according to a black perspective, as we see in the poem "Confessions of a Woman who Burnt Down a Town" (2006 73). In none of these poems Cooper mentions the skin color of the personas. In Rufino's texts, on the contrary, the image/presence of the term "black" is many times repeated. If in the poem "Police Report" she denounces: "your name is scratched out by absence" (15) the repetition works as a reaction. The superlative presence of her color, directly or through allusions, contributes to mark the presence of race in poetry.

It is possible to state that beliefs represent notions that an individual forms about certain issues. Individuals acquire those beliefs through social relations. Certainly, all references that make life in society possible are just the effect of the beliefs that were incorporated through some manifestation of power. If these propositions are correct, beliefs are a social product that can be replaced if there is enough power. The representation of the black woman in poems by Afua Cooper and Alzira Rufino is already a demonstration of

power. The poetic observation of the woman able to bear and raise people with no assistance counts as part of this power. That included, Cooper's and Rufino's power is located on their experience as black women, and that is the source from where they formulate a new belief of the black woman. In other words, Cooper and Rufino contribute to inscribe a new meaning for the intersection of race and gender, subverting the double burden and affirming the double power of the black woman.

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APPENDIX A – AFUA COOPER

Memories Have Tongue (1992)

"Aunts" (52)

Aunts sometimes are life-savers
they make sure they tell you things like the facts of life
bloody things like your period
and what to do when it comes
and what that means for your whole life
they tell you, that if you go with a boy
you can get pregnant
one aunt have told me
that she married such a man
she fell in love with his looks but he was in fact a beast
he abused her for many years
until one day she packed her bags

"How to Hold Your Man" (68)

Some of us were told when we were young girls
(directly and through osmosis), that if we did everything
right when we became women; that is
smile coyly
keep our legs sealed
never let men feel that we were smarter than they
learn how to cook
smile when we feel like crying
then maybe (if we were lucky) we could get a man
and be able to keep him.
But some of us were thinking beings and we thought "surely we know women who did all these things and they never got or kept their men and we saw within even our own families, women who never adhered to the above bad advice and they got men, were able to keep them and sometimes threw them out." And we kept on thinking and believing that the pulse of our souls and the beat of our hearts would guide us through the land of danger and hypocrisy. Because the advice given insulted us to our very core. It was meant to stultify the spirit, kill the heart, shrived the body and destroy the soul. We rejected it. And became women who did not know our place. Became women with ringing laughter. Became women who knew that our ultimate aim was to seek our truth and live it.

"More Bad Advice" (69)

We were also told that a sore foot man is better

than having no man at all
that a one-foot-man is better than no man at all
that the worse kind of man is better than no man at all
so young girls and women put up
with dangerous men
abusive men who beat the hell out of them
stupid men
because we were told that every woman needs a man
and that we are nothing without one
so some of us sold our pride, our self-worth
in order to get this dubious treasure
we were not taught to see the shining beauty of
our soulds.

"My Mother" (26)

My mother planted fields
married a man
bore ten children
and still found time
to run her own business
I remember once
She and I
Were going to work
the plot of land
she rented from someone
we heard the missionary's car
coming down the road
she jumped over a culvert to hide
because she had on a pair
of my father's pants
the church disapproved of women
wearing men's clothing
when the sun was steadily going westward
she had to rush home
to cook the family's meal
she seemed able to do anything
and I think that in one
of her past lives
she was a leader of some sort

my mother planted fields
married a man
bore ten children

and still found time
to run her own business.

“Oh Canada” - IV (45)

cooking
cleaning
washing
ironing
her weekend began saturday night and ended
sunday evening
at five, and this was every other weekend. spring.
time for spring cleaning
her missis told her to climb on the ladder
so she could reach the top windows. she said she was
not used to climbing, saw herself falling off
missis ask if back home she never use to climb trees

“To Jamaican Women” (49)

To those women who rise
At five in the morning to prepare
food for their children and send them off to school
while their men lie
in bed

To those women who have no food to give
Their children, cannot afford to send them to school
And whose men have disappeared

To those women who, in order to raise their children,
sweat inside oppressive factories
lie on cold sidewalks
hack an existence from rocky hillsides
take abuse from men who are their only source
of survival
this poem is for you

To those whores at Half-Way-Tree
with their mobile hotel rooms

To the young office girls who think
they hold they key of life in their hands

to those schoolgirls with their bright faces
whose dreams are sometimes betrayed by men
twice their age
to the unnamed
who by their unceasing work and action
cause life to flow unbroken
To those daughters of Nanny
who are beginning to realise the power
they hold in their hands
This poem is for you

"Womanhood" (61)

We who were thrust out of dark caverns
into a maddening light
We who know no truth
            no honour
we who go through this madness called life
into the estate of adulthood
crossing no dividing line
experiencing no period of transition
having no celebration for our puberty
                        our blood
No rites of passage
no lovesong
only a shameful quietude
an impatient sadness
Now here we hang - suspended
between madness, agony and absolute truth
becoming women
suddenly thrust into a sphere we do not understand
becoming women

Copper Woman and Other Poems (2006)

"*Atabeyra*" (37)

Atabeyra
Great Mother of the *Arawaks*
mistress of all moving waters
lady of childbirth
moon woman

Night and day you drift on the foam of the Caribbean Sea
drifting from Florida to the Guianas
tearing your long hair
in grief for your lost children

Atabeyra
you stand on the tallest peak of Seville mountains
straining your eyes over the vast expanse
of the Carib Sea looking for your lost children
Isis searching the world over for Osiris
Demeter weeping for Tammuz
Mary grieving for Jesus
and Yemanja lamenting for Shango

Atabeyra
in your mind's eye you can see your children
making canoes
pounding dried cassava
playing ballgames
swimming
and shamans making sacred ceremonies
and calling on your name
and the names of Yocahu and Opiyel Guaobiran
and
and we know that when women want children
a safe pregnancy and delivery
they invoke only your aid

Atabeyra
draw near
come, let me plait your hair
listen, though your children may be gone
gone, gone to the overworld, to Coyaba
if you sit still and listen carefully
you will hear their voices
in the wind and waves of the ocean
if you look intently you will see them walking swiftly
through the cassava patches

You should know *Atabeyra* that they are not dead
so please my Lady weep no more

You should know Atabeyra that they are not dead
so please my Lady weep no more

Atabeyra
Great Mother of the Tainos
Mistress of all moving waters
Lady of Childbirth
Moon woman

"Bird of Paradise" (15)

At dawn my mother stands on the hill
behind our house
and invokes the sun to rise
then she goes to the outdoor kitchen
and prepares cassava bread and cocotea for our breakfast

My mother has never travelled abroad
but she knows tales of everyland
she says the flowers in her gardens
especially the ginger lily, orchids,

My mother sells fruits and flowers in the market
stuff she grows with her own hands
she does not solicit customers
they come to her of their own volition
and at the end of each day
her items are all sold out

Now at age 42 my mother decides to stop having children
but not because her blood has ceased
"I have peopled the world with the numerous men
and women that my body has birthed," she says
"Now it's time for me to birth other things"

When my mother's back and feet grow tired
so I anoint them with coconut oil
her feet a detailed map
her back the star apple tree outside our front door

My mother has never travelled abroad
but she knows tales of everyland
she says the flowers in her gardens
especially the ginger lily, orchids,
and the bird of paradise, bring her such tidings

My mother is short in stature
her children tower above her
some do not recognize her
or acknowledge her
as they pass by in the market
they are ashamed of this fruit and flower woman
this woman who fed them fish soup and roast breadfruit
that made them so strong
sometimes they mock her
“She looks like something out of a Rivera mural,” they jest
but my mother does not hear
her ears are beyond their words

In the evening when she grows weary
my mother sings lullabies to the sun to entice it to sleep
so the dark can come and we can be rejuvenated
“It’s in the darkness that we grow strong,” she tells us

How wise she is
this woman with a life that no one can capture
how essential she is
this woman who makes gardens flower
and who feeds us milk and corn bread
I watch her as she descends the hill to the marketplace
her skirt at her knee
her black hair flecked with grey

“Confessions of a Woman who Burnt Down a Town” (73)

I buried the twins that evening
they died of smallpox
were only eight months old
Madame came too to the funeral
and said to me by way of consolation
“C’est la vie,
I too have lost my own.”
I went back to work
went back to work in Madame’s house
that same evening and at supper she yelled at me
and boxed me full in the face because
I overturned they gravy bowl in her lap

I remember my journey from my island to this island
Rhode Island to Montreal

Lived in Rhode Island all my life till
monsieur came from Montreal on one of his business trips
he bought me because he said I looked like a healthy wench.
Monsieur died soon after and madame never forgave me
but I had nothing to do with it, he died of consumption

The twins died too.
After we buried them that evening
my heart changed position in my chest
and I was seized with one desire and one desire only
and that was to leave the prison of this island
But whre could I go
because throughout the whole world
in all the continents people who look like me
were bound
But still, all I could see was
My feet running, no chains, no rope, no shackles
free

Madame talking to her best friend
and confessor Father Labadie
“I’m going to sell that nefress, she’s getting too much
for me, she’s getting too uppity
And furthermore since François died I just can’t seem to manage
    too well
Look a buyer for me father, perhaps the church is interested.”
I bring in the food and pretend like ah neva hear
and I serve the food good and proper
was on my best behaviour
 roll back mi lip and skin mi teeth
roll back my yai and show the white
den I went back to mi room in the cellar
and mek mi plan
Smoke, smoke, too much smoke
only intendi fi one house fi burn
fire, fire, too much fire
but it done go so already
and I running
my feet unshackled, unbound,
free
running pass di city limits
while behind me the fire rage
and my raging heart change back into its rightful position

He was running too
an apprentice, from France
i gave him all my food to take me or show me
the way to New England but he tek the food
and leave me while I was sleeping
and the constable caught me

I don't utter a word as I sit here in the jailhouse
Father Labadie come to confess me
but I refuse
their god is not my god
"Arson is one of the worst crime in New France, Marie,"
he say to me, "Confess now and save your soul."
I spit on the ground
outside, the mob want to rip me from limb to limb
but I not afraid, a strange calm fill my body
and I at peace, peach, perfect peace

Guilty, the judge pronounce
and the sentence: to be tortured, my hands cut off
my body burned and the ashes scattered
to the four corners of the earth
I break down, my body crumple in a heap
and before my eyes I see the twins
and they look so alive as if they waiting
to come nurse them
The sentence is reduced
Now I am to be hanged only and my body burned
Father Labadie come back for di confession
And I confess
is I Marie who set the fire
I say yes
I start it in madame's house by the river
50 building destroy
the hospital, the cathedral
I confess
is I Marie who burn this city
so write that down Father Labadie
write down my story so it can be known in history
with my heart burning I take the sacrament
and accept the final rites
outside the guard is waiting
to take me to my hanging
outside the guard is waiting

to take me to my dying
outside the guard is waiting
to take me to my burning

Soon I will be free from the prison of this island
and I will fly and fly and fly

“Copper Woman” (31)

I sit and wait for you
in this long black night
on a slope of this Sierra Maestra
I hear the sound of the sea
I tell it to guide you to me
the night is cold
I cover myself with the red silk shawl
you gave me when we first wedded each other
I shelter our love in my womb
protecting it from
the threat of capture
of being hounded by dogs
of being beaten, killed
of being sold, or strangled
of being castrated
I shiver in the dark cold air
when will you come

I sense your presence, I smell you
your sweat
your breath
your sex
the moon glides from beneath a forgiving cloud
and the light illuminates the bracelets
on my wrists
copper and brass
I remember when you courted me
You laughingly promised to build for me
a palace of brass
but instead gave me a dozen bangles to adorn my arms
Our women wear copper for love
or to draw the poison from the blood
to heal the joints and make them supple

You turn a corner, I stay in the shadow, still unsure

You softly call me by the nickname you gave me
“my copper woma,”
We agreed on this rendezvous
you take the branca from your head
and lay this bounty at my feet
roasted breadfruit, dried fish
parched corn, yams,
cassava bread, and an assortment of fruits
You also present me a jug of ginger beer
and a whole side of goat, roasted

I am thankful for the food
but even more grateful to see you
you had gone for days
gone from our mountain hideout
to trade on the plantation below

Feeling safe now, you play with the bracelet on my wrists
telling me what kind of copper each one is made of
the moonlight also illuminates our complexion
we have the same kind of ebony
we rub our wrists together
and I feel the sweetness in my lower abdomen

I hold you close to my belly
and find comfort in the regular rhythm of your breath
I rib my nipples against your chest
and you run your fingers along my spine
unknotting the fear
your kiss is warm honey
This moment is perfect and complete
our love will go from everlasting to everlasting

“Hibiscus’ (103)

You know all my secrets
all the secrets of my body
have knowledge of my love triangle
as hot and sweet as freshly baked cinnamon buns
red as a hibiscus flower

“Night Ease” (20)

Grandmothers carried loads on their heads

babies in their arms
men in their hearts
cut sugarcane until their palms became calloused and bruised
their backs sent, necks stiff, spines misshapen and a permanent hurt
lodged itself in their shoulders
grandmas want to lay their burden down
by the riverside

Grandmothers now lose all dem teeth
but in their mouths are dutty tuff stories
making bread outta stone stories
and stories of how they made it to the other side
of how time pass
an di children grow
an di mem die
an the hurt ease
as evening brings with it a purple peace

Now
grandmas sit by their doorstep gazing out onto the street
smoking their pipes
seated in themselves
oracling the scene

"Woman a Wail" (89)

Woman a wail
di eart is in labour
woman a wail
creation in danger and what shall she bring forth from her travail?

Her mountains shall roar and spit fire
her bowels shall move and cause the eart to split
from one end to another
our minds too shall be rent asunder
this woman shall avenge herself

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,
fair as the moon, clear as the sun,
but terrible as an army with banners
She wail and bawl
as she destroy but
she create again and again
she wail an shriek

as she bring forth
a new way of thinking
a new way of living
a new understanding
and a new new new creation

From the mouth of the Ganges
from the throat of the Yangtze
from the heart of the Niger
from the belly of the Amazon
she dance
she dance down lightning and thunder
she dance down brimstone and fire
she is a mighty earthquake
she is a non-stop hurricane
she dance
    and
dance
and dance and dance
she dance down lightning and thunder
she dance down brimstone and fire, fire
she is a mighty whirlwin
she is a non-stop volcano, ooh

She dance her dance of terror
She dance her dance of fear
look she dancing on the four winds
dancing the world's end, ooh

Ah seh
woman a wail
the eart is in labour
woman a wail
creation in danger
woman a wa-eh-eh-eh-eh-ail
the eart is in labour

And what shall she bring forth from her travail
what shall she bring forth from her travail?
A new way of thinking
a new way of living
a new understanding
a new way fi si tings
a new way fi do tings

and a new new new Creation

APPENDIX B – ALZIRA RUFINO

Eu, Mulher Negra, Resisto (1988)

"Boletim de ocorrências" (19)

mulher negra,
não pára
por essa coisa bruta
por essa discriminação morna,
tua força ainda é segredo,
mostra tua fala nos poros
o grito ecoará na cidade,
capinam como mato venenoso
a tua dignidade,
ferem-te com flexas encomendadas
te fazem alvo de experiências,
tua negritude incomoda
teu redemoinho de forças afoga
não querem a tua presença
riscam teu nome com ausência

mulher negra, chega
mulher negra, seja
mulher negra, veja
depois do temporal.

"Police Report"

black woman,
don't stop
because of this brute thing
because of this light discrimination
your strength is still a secret
show your speech through the pores
the scream will echo throughout the city,
your dignity is hoed
like poisonous grass
you're hurt with known arrows
you're made aim of experiments
our negritude disturbs
your whirlwind of forces suffocates
you're not welcome
your name is scratched out by absence

black women, enough

black women, be
black women, see after the storm.[44]

"direito de nascer" (35)

defeito de fabricação
negra morta grávida
barriga cheia chora
dizeres na mão uma faca
fere os atores
do conteúdo

"right to be born"

manufacturing defects
pregnant woman dead
full belly cries
sayings in the hand a knife
hurt the actors
of the content

"IANSÃ (OYÁ)" (40)

Iansã – Oyá mulher
dona de vento e relâmpago
tua beleza é o fogo
o teu raio decisão
animas o que é a vida
lá onde o amor é sentido
zarpando do teu olhar
rota de estrela e paixão

"YANSÃ"

Iansã – Oyá woman
matriarch of wind and lightning
your beauty is fire
and your ray of lightning decision
thou animates life
there, where love is felt
illuminating with your eyes
route of stars and passion.[45]

[44] My translation et Duke, Dawn. Obsidian III. V 6, n 1. 2005. 106.
[45] Translation: Lines: I-IV, Duke, Dawn. 2008; Lines: V-VIII, Luz e Souza, Sérgio.

"ladainha" (85)

vamos lá
não pra ver o que é que dá
vamos lá para virar
não são milhas pra partir
são encruzilhadas
barricadas
pra proteger e curar
essas feridas que sangram
cicatrizes que ficam
marcas que reivindicam
um grito de verdade

"cut this bla bla bla out"

let's go
not to see what will be
let's go to turn it down
we don't have miles before going
those are crossways
barricades
to protect and cure
these wounds that bleed
scars that stay
marks that claim
a scream of truth

"não sei se queres" (65)

queres que eu fale
queres que eu cante
não sei se queres
que eu bote manto
que eu não sinta
vulcão e lavas
a pele em brasa
que eu não abra
os meus portões
que eu não corra
pela estrada
que não assuma
a revoada
que dê vôo
à liberdade

"I don't know if you want"

do you want me to talk
do you want me to sing
I don't know if you want
me to cover up with a mantle
that I don't feel
this volcano and lava
this skin burning
I don't know if you want me
to open my gates
that I don't run down
the road
that I don't assume
that inside I'm flying
that I give way
to freedom

"OXUM" (41)

me disseram que ser mulher
é ter os dengos de Oxum
ouro de mel e espelhos
fitas e flores nos cabelos
ser a calma de um rio
deixar a pedra afundar
não lutar pelo direito
pois isso é um defeito
de mulher mona de aló
escutei muitas estórias
de como Oxum guerreou
água apagando fogo
onde espada não ousou
aí pensei repensei
e a vi dona do amor

"OSHUN"

they told me to be a woman
is to have the effects of Oxum
the gold of honey and mirrors
ribbons and flowers in my hair
to be as serene as a river
let the stone down in the water
don't strive for your rights

because it is a problem
of silly women
I heard many stories
of how *Oxum* waged war
water putting out fire
where the sword did not dare
and I thought, and thought again
and I saw her, the Madam of Love[46]

"Recado de Carmem, a prostituta" (60)

lutar não é sonho impossível
não parar quando é fácil ceder
o sonho também é coletivo
a vida é a forma de ser
canta e exige o melhor
hoje amanhã não é melhor nem talvez
é riso é liberdade é vida
fala o negro marginal
fala na violência policial
violência sem folga

cadê a atenção social
preocupam-se com o lado verbal
que é a semântica total e dizem
negra prostituta marginal
falam as entidades
falam mulheres de conceito
prostituta fala
eu sou mulher politizada
tenho dente de ouro
conheço o peso e a falta de decoro
não sou do mundo dos mouros
eu tenho muita saudade
do tempo em que eu era criança
e acreditava na verdade
o ser humano era real
inventaram empalharam
bichos e pessoas normais
puseram-nos em exposição
às filas de curiosos do nada
cadê os imorais cadê os anormais
cadê os débeis mentais cadê os ideias

[46] Translation: Lines: 1-4, Duke, Dawn. 2008. Lines: 5-8, my translation.

cadê a mulher negra altiva
cadê a mulher branca guerreira
cadê a política verdadeira
cadê a vida real espanta?
cadê os homens meninos
cadê as mulheres presentes
cadê a veia vertente
cadê a luta e o jogo
cadê a perda e o ganho
cadê o sono e o sonho
cadê os girassóis no peito
cadê o arco-íris do verbo
cadê a poesia

“What Carmem, the prostitute has to say”

fighting is not a impossible dream
not stop when is easier to give up
the dream too is colective
life is the way to be
sing and demand the best
today tomorrow is not better neither perhaps it will be
it is a smile freedom and life
speak the marginal black
speak the entities
speak fine women
speak the prostitute
I’m a politized woman
I have a golden tooth
I know weight and lack of respect
I’m not from the world of the moores
I miss
the time I was a child
and believed in truth
human beings were real
we were put in exposition
in a line of people with curiosity for nothing
where are the imorals the abnormals
where are the stupid and the ideals
where is active black woman
where is white warrior woman
where is the social attention
they are concerned with the verbal side of things
it’s total semantics and they say

Black marginal prostitute
the entities speak
women of consciousness speak
the prostitute speaks
where are the morons where are the ideals
where is the noble black woman
where is the white warrior woman
where is the true politics
where is the real life?
where ares the boy men
where is the present women
where is the strong vein
where is the fight and the game
where is the lost and the gain
where is the sleep and the dream
where is the sunflowers in the chest
where is the rainbow of verb
where is poetry

"resgate" (88)

sou negra   ponto final
devolvo-me a identidade
rasgo minha certidão
sou negra
                    sem reticências
sem vírgula sem ausências
sou negra balacobaco
sou negra noite cansaço
sou negra

                              ponto final

"recovering"

I'm black   period
I give me back my identity
I tear my birth certificate
I'm black
                       no ellipsis
no comma no absenses
I'm a black of the *balacobaco*
I'm black night tireness
I'm black

Period

“RESISTO” (14)

de onde vem este medo?
sou
sem mistério existo
busco gestos
de aparecer
atando os feitos
que me contam
grito
de onde vem
esta vergonha
sobre mim?

Eu, mulher, negra,

RESISTO.

“I RESIST”

where does this fear come from?
I am
I exist without misteries
I search for gestures
to be seen
tying deeds
that people talk about
where does this
shame on me
come from?

I, black, woman,

RESIST.

“sufoco” (50)

eu tenho de ir
prá viela do trabalho, do sufoco
do medo sem liberdade
do salário que não dá
nem mesmo pra ver Piaf
amanhã vou para a gráfica
às cinco de la matina
minha saúde vem pó
poluição,
em calor, refrigerador,

sem lazer e sem perdão,
mas o patrão diz não,
eu não queria estar só
eu queria só mudança
como criança que brinca
carrega sua casinha
mas meu mundo é mais amplo
queria chutar bola
e derrubar esse esteio
esteio de falsidade
montar casa de verdade
onde tivesse jardim
onde eu soubesse de mim

"breathless"

I gotta go
to the village
where I work suffocating,
with fear and without freedom
my salary isn't enough to see Piaf
I work for a Printing Company
tomorrow I'm going at five
when I comes back my health is gone
pollution
heat, refrigerator
no leisure and no forgiveness
and a boss who says no
I wanted to kick the Ball
put this mainstay down
mainstay of lies
have a real house
where I had a garden
where I knew of me

Sem título (16)

Eu sou criola descente
não sou vil
estou nas cordas em equilíbrio
de um Brasil
a minha cor apavora
essa raça agride ouvi dizer
não é nos dentes do negro
não é no sexo do negro
é na arte do negro

de viver
melhor dizendo
sobreviver
com essa coisa que se arrasta
o tronco que tentam esconder
mas esses troncos existem
no conviver
os troncos estão nas favelas
vejo troncos nas vielas
nas moradias fedidas
nas peles sem esperança
nas enxurradas de não

no jogo de damas e reis
eu me perdi
nas rotas dos estiletes
nas celas e nos engodos
negro carretel de rolo
querem fazer um mundo
marginal crioulo

Untitled

I am a decent *criola*
I'm not vile
I'm on the ropes
em equilíbrio
of Brazil
my color threatens
I've heard people say this race hurts
it is not in the teeth of Black people
it is not in the sexo of Black people
it is in Black people's art
to live
or should I say
to survive
with this thing that stay on us
trying to hide the whipping post
but these whipping posts exist
on our routine
they are in the *favelas*
I can see them in the alleies
In the smelling houses
In the hopeless skins
In the flood of "No!"

In the card game

I got lost
In the route of straight razors
In the jail and lies
black of the curly hair
a marginal creole world
your place is nowhere

Sem título (62)

me acompanhe no tempo
use a tecnologia pros meus ventos
eu raio na avenida são joão
me acompanhe nas fedras
se enrole na minha serpente
consulte os búzios
estranhe a minha beleza
duvide que eu sou deusa
desconfie até que sou mulher

untitled

follow me in the time
use technology for my winds
I rise in são joão avenue
follow me in the *fedras*
wind up in my serpent
ask the búzios
reject my beauty
doubt that I'm a goddess
suspect that I'm even a woman

"telúrica" (28)

talvez, quem sabe, talvez
eu volte prá terra roxa
coberta de matagais

talvez, quem sabe, talvez
eu volte pro barro em molde
eu volte prá terra negra
África tribo imortal

"teluric"

maybe, who knows, maybe

I return to the purple soil
covered with grass

maybe, who knows, maybe
I return to the mud in mold
I return to the black dirty
Africa immortal tribe

Bolsa Poética (2010)

"Feminismo" (18)

O preconceito diminui todas
as mulheres
Cresço quando percebo
solidariedade aguda
seria coisa de feminista
bem amada?

"Feminism"

Prejudice diminishes all
the women
I rise when I feel
deep solidarity
is it because
I'm a beloved feminist?

"Metendo a colher" (14)

Mulher gritou
ninguém acudiu
Desenho impreciso na face
nos olhos, neblina.
Pancada de amor dói e muito!

Vou meter a colher na tua panela
pra não azedar a sua comida.
Raspe o fundo
Resgate a sua dignidade antes
que a morte te cozinhe

"Interfering"

Woman cries out
nobody pays attention
Imprecise figure in the face
and her eyes are blurred.
Violence in the name of love hurts a lot!

I'm interfering
so, you won't have your food spoiled.
Scrape the bottom
Recover your dignity before
death cooks you.

"Mulheres" (13)

Mundo
propriedade
proprietários
Poder
ferros marcados
véus, burcas.

"Women"

World
Property
Owners
Power
known chains
veils, burqas.

"Mulher Negra" (36)

Mulher negra, base forte,
um pedacinho do céu nublado
sempre sujeita a chuvas e trovoadas.
História viva. O hoje.
Páginas que o tempo não
consegue amarelar.

"Black Woman"

Black woman, powerful basis,
small piece of a clouded Sky
always susceptible to rain and lights.

Living history. Now.
Pages the time
cannot turn yellow.

"Na pedra" (6)

A pedra gera
folha e flor
e não precisa da terra
pra procriar

"In the stone"

The stone generates
leaves and flowers
and it doesn't need the earth
to procreate

"Natureza" (23)

Quem disse que a chuva é dócil?
Eu não acho a chuva dócil.
Ela carrega na enxurrada.

"Nature"

Do you think the rain is lovely?
I don't think so.
Floodwater can carry away.

"Pai evadido" (10)

Lavam-se os botecos,
a mulher grávida
amarela transita.
Uma criança
pede doce
Uma frase escrita na sua barriga
Faça do amor o seu maior presente.

"Evaded Father"

Bars are washed,
a pregnant yellow
woman wanders.
A child
asks for treaties

A sentence written in her belly
Turn love into your best present

"Se liga simpatia" (14)

Eu estou brincando de mirar contigo
Estou brincando de encontrar amigo
Eu estou brincando
De girar comigo
Você é gente fina, mas vacila
pra caramba!

"Wake up, dude"

I'm playing of looking at you
I'm playing of finding friend
I'm playing
of spinning with myself
you're cool, but you always
mess things up!

"Vou à luta." (56)

Arrumo o coque
calço a chinela.
xale nas costas,
saia rodada,
navalha no seio
e vou à luta!

"I'm gonna fight back"

I make a hair bun
put on my sandals.
shawl in my back,
circle skirt,
straight razor near the breast
I'm gonna fight back!