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"Unforgettable": The Poetics of Resistance and the Construction of Immigrant Identities in Slam Poetry

Florianópolis
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ATA DE DEFESA DE TCC

CURSO: LETRAS INGLÊS – Bacharelado

Ata de Defesa de Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso de **Maria Eduarda Dutra Mendonça**

Aos 29 dias do mês de setembro do ano de 2021, com início às 11h00min, realizou-se de modo virtual, a sessão de defesa de Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso de LETRAS INGLÊS, intitulada "Unforgettable: The Poetics of Resistance and the Construction of Immigrant Identities in Slam Poetry". Após a apresentação oral da monografia pela estudante, a Banca Examinadora, composta pelos professores Dr. Matias Corbett Garcez, (Orientador e Presidente - UFSC), Drª. Maria Rita Drumond Viana (UFOP) e Dr. George Alexandre Ayres de Menezes Mousinho (UFSC), deu-se início à arguição pelos membros da Banca que aprovaram a monografia com a seguintes notas:

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Maria Eduarda Dutra Mendonça

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"Your name is a dirt pit. It is a black hole, but what they don't know is that black holes be the brightest source of light."
Pages Matam, Elizabeth Acevedo & G. Yamazawa

RESUMO

O propósito do presente trabalho é analisar o poema "Unforgettable" de Pages Matam, George Yamazawa e Elizabeth Acevedo, e como o poema é usado como ferramenta para expressão das identidades dos autores. A Poesia Slam tomou a oportunidade oferecida por sua crescente popularização para abrir as portas para discussão de diversas questões sociopolíticas (Sommers-Willet, 2005). Identidade, como argumentado por Muhammad e Gonzalez (2016) é diversa e complexa, moldada por práticas socioculturais, expressões e práticas literárias desenvolvidas pelo indivíduo. Uma vez que a Poesia Slam demanda ser reconhecida não apenas como a prática de um movimento poético, mas também como um movimento social (Sommers-Willet, 2012), "Unforgettable" se apresenta como um exemplo da tensão entre dois movimentos de resistência: um no qual os autores resistem à estereotipização que a cultura ao seu redor impõe sobre suas origens étnicas e questiona seu pertencimento a um grupo culturalmente divergente, e outro no qual os autores resistem ao apagamento de suas raízes culturais em nome da assimilação pela cultura estadunidense. Desse modo, o propósito da presente análise é analisar como os processos de identificação culturais de imigração e resistência são performados no poema analisado.

Palavras-chave: Poesia Slam, nome, etnia, discriminação.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the poem "Unforgettable" by Pages Mattam, G. Yamazawa and Elizabeth Acevedo and how it is a tool of expression of the authors' identities. Slam poetry took advantage of its growing popularity to open the door of discussion to many socio-political issues (Sommers-Willett "Slam Poetry and the Cultural Politics of Performing Identity" 51). Identity, as argued by Muhammad and Gonzalez (2016) is diverse and complex, molded by sociocultural practices as much as self-expression and the literacy practices developed by the authors. Since slam poetry "[...] begs to be regarded not only as a performance poetry movement but also [...] as a social movement" (Sommers-Willet "The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry" 7), "Unforgettable" poses as an example of two different resistance movements: one in which the authors resist the stereotyped view that the culture around them imposes on their origins and questions their belonging to culturally diverse groups, and another in which the authors resist the assimilation of cultural roots by the United States' own culture and way of life. As such, the aim of the analysis is to identify how cultural identification processes of immigration and resistance are performed through slam poetry.

Keywords: Slam poetry, name, ethnicity, discrimination.

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INTRODUCTION

"I realized my first name didn't match my background before I knew how to spell assimilation". That line, the twelfth in the poem "Unforgettable", by Pages Mattam, Elizabeth Acevedo and G. Yamazawa, puts in evidence a part of the experience of being a second-generation immigrant from one of the minority groups in the United States. Slam poems are usually like that - claiming a place where the voices of minorities can be heard through the performance of poetry, more often than not dealing with what it is to belong - identify and being identified - to such groups (SOMMERS-WILLET 2005, p. 51-52; MUHAMMAD AND GONZALEZ, 2016, p. 443-444).

That is because Slam poems typically deal with themes of commentary on social injustices, which involves racism, sexism and politics. One of the goals of this kind of poetry is to make the listener feel like they can include themselves in the narrative, eliminating the barrier between the writer/performer and their audience (CARMACK, 2009, p. 19); and enhancing the ability to empathize with themes and issues that are not the listener's experience, or to solidify and validate the issues of those who do experience them.

Racism and xenophobia are indisputably two of the most important and frequent issues that Slam Poems try to bring awareness to; which is a direct reflection of the depth of the issue, since United States' institutional policies have included discrimination mainly against, but not limited to, African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos and Asians, while establishing advantages to white European groups (DUANY, 1998, p. 155). This discrimination takes the form of surveilling, profiling, policing and confining racially marked bodies, which can look like practices of exploiting immigrant workers, enforcement of boundaries in neighborhood segregation, or the presence of the police in school hallways of poor/colored neighborhoods, for example (OMI AND WINANT, 2015, p. 145); but also of microaggressions that are expertly portrayed by the poems that concern such themes, shedding light and making the connection between discourse, the "small things" and the bigger, criminal acts and policies involving race and immigration.

Southall and Gold (2020) explain that in New York, from 2002 to 2013, for example, police officers stopped and frisked people on the streets more than five million times - the vast majority of them young black and Latino men, people they had no reason to suspect in the first place. Miller and Jean-Jacques point out that, according to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, black students are more than twice more likely to receive disciplinary action through the hands of the law enforcement present in schools than by the hands of a School

Counselor, even though they make up a smaller proportion of students, and 51% of schools with high black and Latino enrollment have SRO's (school resource officer). More than that, people of color (both black and Latinos) were shown to be three times more likely than White Americans to have subprime and high-cost loans after The Great Recession of 2008 - those loans accounted for more than 55% of all mortgages at a point (OMI AND WINANT, 2015, p. 2). Those examples make up a small, but significant - and horrifying - picture of how racism becomes pervasive within institutions when it comes to structural racism.

While immigrant assimilation is, in fact, connected with cultural change (CARNEIRO ET AL., 2020, p. 1-2), in the United States there is a tendency towards a belief that immigrants should acculturate into their society to blend in as much as possible. Yet, tension remains as the full assimilation is deemed impossible because of racial components of an immigrant's identity that diverge from the mainstream culture, no matter how "American" that immigrant acts (JOHNSON, 1997, p. 191-192).

Adopting a native-sounding name or bestowing a native-sounding name to a second-generation immigrant supposedly helps with that, as people with native-sounding names are afforded better jobs, easier citizenship status, better income, among other benefits (CARNEIRO AT AL., 2020, p. 9; JOHNSON, 1997, p. 201). Still, names are not merely referential, but also reveal information about one's background, being that personal, cultural, social, ethnic, historical, national, and even spiritual (CLIFTON, 2013, p. 404), which means that changing one's name, even if just in ethnicity, can mean a fracture on their sense of self and the past that previously defined them (TOURNIER 1975, p. 19, as cited by XU, 2018, p. 6).

Rooted on the aforementioned debate, the purpose of this study is to identify how the Slam Poem "Unforgettable" deals with this tension between the impossibility of full assimilation of the poets to United States' society due to racial components of their identity, and the fact that, even not being fully assimilated, they and their families were still not allowed to preserve their own culture, which is represented by their choice of names for their children.

The importance of this study lies on the fact that Slam Poetry has been helping shape the discussion on themes like immigration and discrimination, for its power to incite empathy and bring forward an experience that would not have been so powerfully shared, or an angle that would be much harder to reach, summed with the growing popularity of the genre, make it an important discourse tool. Since it is also a theme that has not been much explored in Brazil, therein lies, too, the significance of this research.

The poem "Unforgettable" (see Appendix A) was performed at the 2014 National Poetry Slam for Beltway (D.C.), winning the tournament on September 4th, 2014. Next, it was

performed on the National Poetry Slam Semi-Finals, which had a video uploaded to the YouTube platform on October 13th, 2014, and, finally, on the NPS 2014 Finals, with the video uploaded on December 4th, 2014.

       G. Yamazawa is Cultural Diplomat for the Department of State, National Poetry Slam Champion, and works with performances that were featured on ABC, NBC, among other vehicles[1]. Elizabeth Acevedo was born of Dominican parents and raised in New York, and she is an educator and a best-selling author, having won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature, the Michael L. Printz Award, among other various awards[2]. Pages Matam is an artist and educator from Cameroon, Central Africa, director of Poetry Events for Busboy and Poets, along with being a published author, National Poetry Slam Champion and cultural ambassador for the National Fair Housing Alliance[3].

       The methodological framework of this analysis will rely on the themes brought to discussion by the poem itself. The basis of the analysis, then, comes from important concepts retrieved from the poem itself, which will be defined and discussed through research on the literature.

       The method will be mainly literature review. First, the texts with relevant concepts will be read and summarized. Those relevant concepts will, in the end, be used as the base for the poem analysis – which is how they will be selected, considering the themes the poem discusses.

       For this analysis, those concepts, such as immigration, identity and name, will be defined through literature review, in order to see how the poets use them to bring the narrative of an experience – as it is usual when it comes to Slam Poetry — to life, specifically, the experience of being an immigrant/second generation immigrant belonging to discriminated groups within the United States. They discuss this through the premise that their first names (Elizabeth, Patrick, George) were chosen to facilitate their assimilation by the host culture, and yet, perhaps because of racial reasons, they are never fully assimilated – just as their ethnicity is never fully accepted. This "in-between" place of ethnic identity is questioned by the poem as to not only raise awareness on the audience, but also an empathetic reaction - also a common feature of Slam Poetry, which claims its place as not only a literary genre, but also as a social movement that gives voice to the most diverse minority groups.

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[1] Source: https://gyamazawa.com/. Access on October 26, 2020.

[2] Sources: http://www.acevedowrites.com/about and http://www.latina.com/entertainment/book-club/elizabeth-acevedo-debuts-first-novel-poet-x. Access on October 26, 2020.

[3] Source: http://www.pagesmatam.com/. Access on October 26, 2020.

This is how the work will be organized in the following sections: review of the literature, where some of the literature concerning the themes presented by the poem will be presented and discussed, method, where the method to the work will be described, probable contents, where there will be an attempt to delineate which themes will be discussed in the paper itself, a timetable for the work and, finally, list of references used.

1 CHAPTER ONE – IDENTITY, PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL POWER

This chapter will be divided into three subsections. The first section will cover some of the most important theories on identity, the relationship between identity, performativity and performance, how Slam Poetry allows for a performance of identities, and the relationship between Slam Poetry, the performance of minorities' identities and social power. The second section will provide an overview for concepts of ethnicity, identity, immigration, and a little on their relationship, and how ethnicity is a starting point for discrimination inside the United States. The third and final section will delineate some of the historical reasons and importance of the concept of *name*, and then discuss the relation between name, ethnicity, and how it influences immigrant assimilation.

1.1 IDENTITY THEORIES

Identity is one of those ideas that has concepts across many fields. Amongst them are fields of study like psychoanalysis, political sciences, sociology, and history, just to cite a few. Every one of those fields have definitions for the term that vary greatly, depending on its axioms, perspectives and points of start of each, which ensues interesting dialogues between the theories.

Hegel, on his own accord, defines identity as "consciousness" or "I", which is completely empty and abstract until it relates to the world and the "Other". The self is self-conscious, but it also depends on its relation to an Other, to something given by the world (HEGEL, 2010, p. 27). If, as Hegel (2010, p. 108) states, "[S]elf-consciousness is *in* and *for itself* while and as a result of its being in and for itself for another; i.e., it is only as a recognizable being", then self-consciousness is created through the interaction of one with others, in a way that how we see ourselves, our self-concept, is therefore mediated by the way others see us.

William James theorized in 1890 that the self is constituted of four different elements: the *material* self, which includes the body and other material things, the *social* self, which is the recognition one gets from those around them, the *spiritual* self, which are the psychic dispositions and subjective faculties, and the *pure Ego*, the bare principle of distinction between men (183/199).

Identity theory was also marked by the works of George Mead (1972, p. 135/136), who argues that we identify with our experiences, especially the affective ones, into the experience of a self, just as we do with our memories and their connection to bodily experience. In his own words:

> "[W]e do inevitably tend at a certain level of sophistication to organize all experiences into that of a self. We do so intimately identify with our experiences, especially our affective experiences, with the self that it takes a moment's abstraction to realize that pain and pleasure can be there without being the experience of self. Similarly, we normally organize our memories upon the string of our self. [...] There are, of course, experiences which are somewhat vague and difficult of location, but the bodily experiences are for us organized about a self".

As explained by Stryker and Burke (2010, p. 286), Mead's theory implies that "the self is multifaceted, made up of interdependent and independent, mutually reinforcing and conflicting parts". A person, through this view, would have as many identities as there are social roles - roles that would have a hierarchy between them, as to assure a person would choose, when aligned to more than one set of role expectations, according to the higher commitment role (ibidem).

For Jung, the self would consist of the whole of what makes a person, to which ego, the unconscious and the conscious are part of, but not the totality of it. In his own words: "I have suggested calling the total personality which, though present, cannot be fully known, the *self* (JUNG, 2003, p. 19). A person's central characteristics are attached to the ego through the concept of individuality, composed by a myriad of complex factors that make for relative stability, meaning that it can change, develop and transform, and all of that is considered normal (ibidem). These adaptations of the ego evidence its importance in the so-called "psychic economy" and the power that *will* has, even when it comes to causing shifts in one's personality.

Freud argues that the self, or Ich, is "a particular form of organization [...] that mediates between the Es and the external world" (FREUD, 2003, p. 279 et. seq.), being the Es the bodily organization and the inherited characteristics already present at birth. Another great influence on the self would be the Über-Ich, which is a residue from authority during childhood. Therefore, it is possible to say that for Freud, the self is what mediates the inner/physical world and needs, the world and the social requirements that may be imposed over oneself, constructed, therefore, through a combination of the many variations of those elements.

Authors such as Mensah and Williams (2014) remind us that identity is also an aspect of politics and is not only internal, attributed to oneself by oneself, but also something that can be ascribed by others, displaying individual, collective, cognitive, affective, socially constructed and unstable, processual facets. On that account, it also must be said that it can be seen through two different points of view: the point of view of content, that is, how a group identifies itself, the norms of acceptance and the purpose of such collective, and the point of view of contestation, which is the level of disagreement, internal or external, that this identification generates (ibidem). Those dynamics are, however, fluid and take place within

many distinct power dynamics, which is understandable, since, according to Steven Vertovec (2004, p. 984, *apud* Mensah and Williams, 2014, p. 43)

> [...] identities concern matters of membership, belonging, loyalty, and moral and political values; borders involve territoriality, admission, legal status and deportation; orders relate to sovereignty, implications of legal status, civil, social and political rights, obligations, and access to public resources.

Identities are, therefore, created within a set of material conditions, which include economic motivators such as employment opportunities, living conditions, and other access avenues that are either opened or closed depending on how one's identity is ascribed and perceived (MENSAH; WILLIAMS, 2014).

The most important thing to notice, however, is that the self is not conceptualized as an independent thing, but always in relation to the environment, which includes the idea of space or place attachment, the concept of a social self, family's social history, among other concepts, suggesting even the influence of the continuity of place and of identity (TWIGGER-ROSS ET AL., 2003, p. 212-214).

It is possible to affirm, therefore, that the whole of personality is not something one is born with, nor is it something that relates only to one's inner world, depending solely on their thoughts and beliefs. Identity seems to be, according to the authors studied in this chapter, akin to a process, influenced by material and social factors, and subject to transformation as the world around an individual transforms as well.

1.2 IDENTITY, PERFORMATIVITY AND PERFORMANCE

According to post-structuralist thought, the individual is not only something that exists in an essential sense, but more of a "truth-effect of systems of power/knowledge that are culturally and historically specific" (SULLIVAN, 2005, p. 81). Judith Butler (2002, p. 23) points out that external regulatory practices also constitute, to some degree, identity. That means it is important to realize that features of coherence, autonomy, continuity, etc., previously perceived as features of personhood, are concepts which are not merely a matter of description of a person, but also normative practices within society (ibidem).

Identities, as explained by Wenger (2007, p. 188), are formed within a context of tension between our own attachments (belonging), in relationships of association and differentiation, and the degree to which we possess the ability to negotiate the meaning of those attachments. Identity is both about identifying *with* something, meaning to associate an

experience as constitutive of who one is, and identifying, or being identified *as*, a category, description or role, for example (idem, p. 191).

Negotiability, however, is "the ability, facility and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter within a social configuration" (idem, p. 197), which means it takes the dimension of an "economy of meanings", emphasizing social systems of meanings and their ownerships. But, as practices are interactional, participation is key - and yet, it can also be a path to denying negotiability and creating non-participation. The members of a society who never have their contributions adopted end up marginalized as people of non-participants identities (idem, p. 202-203). Identity is, therefore, a performative practice, so it is constituted through performative processes - actions - instead of being the origin and cause of the action (SULLIVAN, 2005, p. 89).

Performativity is not, however, boundless, but a "reiteration of norms that precede, constrain and exceed the performer" (BUTLER, 1993, p. 24). Identity is a product of the continuous performance of acts that are mostly predetermined, and that predetermination is also supported, in a cyclical motion, by the performance of those acts, in a way that the adoption of certain forms of identity becomes not-optional and rigidly regulated (PENNYCOOK, 2004, p. 8).

That is to say that interacting with different people every day, in the various roles one performs (mother, son, friend, employee, etc.), generates those very roles/identities (SOMMERS-WILLET, 2016, p. 74). Simply "acting it", however, is not enough - credibility plays a role in selfhood, where how a performance is received and judged by others helps constitute or disintegrate the sense of self attached to that role within a certain context (ibidem). The author, (2005, p. 54) therefore defines identity as a "fluid product of both conscious and unconscious performances", since, for her (ibidem), "performance is [...] an instance of identity's performativity, a live embodiment and enactment of an identity in a particular space and time."

Identity is, therefore, connected to a multitude of variables such as culture and time, regulatory practices of role performance, experiences, negotiability of social meanings, interaction and participation of the self within society, and the roles and their social credibility. That makes the concept of identity a complex and multi-faceted idea.

1.3 SLAM POETRY AND THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITIES

Slam poetry is sometimes defined as free-form poetry, that is, poetry that does not follow any specific sort of rhyming structure. In the case of Slam, particularly, it is meant to be performed and listened to - orally, and not read from a page - usually focused on evoking emotional reactions (POSEI, 2020). On other definitions, it is intrinsically connected to *who* and *what* it involves, such as in the concept brought by Davis (2018, p. 118), citing Gregory, who states that slam poetry is "spoken word poetry, the oral performance of poetry written by marginalized youth to challenge the political and social forces that oppress them through policies, practices, and silencing". The author also connects the practice of the spoken word poetry with the use of contemporary vernacular vocabulary, popular symbols in the form of icons, and the experiences of the authors themselves as to "provide a counter-narrative to Eurocentric portrayals of these communities in mainstream media and pop culture", a definition that is deepened by the idea that the practice of slam poetry is a form of collective resistance shared by the poets and their audiences (ibidem). Sommers-Willet (2016, p. 16) defines it as "the transmission of an original poetic text through speaking". What all those definitions have in common is the conclusion that slam poetry is not limited to the words of the text being spoken, but also *how* the text is spoken, *where* it is spoken, and, sometimes, even the themes that it approaches.

Poetry, as a performance, includes sound - gasps, hiccups, stutters, slurs, micro repetitions, oscillations in volume, variations in pronunciation, and other semantic features that disrupt the common patterns of sound as to create meaning, a meaning that cannot be translated by monological analysis (BERNSTEIN, 1998, p. 13/14, as cited by COOK, p. 2003, p. 191/192). That form is important to poetry we already know - but the delivery of a performance of Spoken-word poetry becomes just as important as the content itself, conveying tones and meanings through voice, posture, volume, etc., that may amplify, subdue, contrast or confirm the words said or the content implied, providing the whole performance with another shape which differs greatly from something that is merely read from a page.

Zumthor (1997, p. 11) affirms that the physical qualities of voice, such as tone, timber, reach, volume, register, are connected to meaning. It is easier to imagine this when one thinks, for example, of the various meanings of screams, all of which humans, as a species, can tell apart - the scream of birth, of children having fun, of pain, of joy. The author defines performance as a complex action through which a poetic message is simultaneously here and now transmitted and received (idem, p. 33).

Spoken-word poetry is, therefore, literary in the sense that it carries a marked, socially recognizable discourse. According to Zumthor, something is poetry (or literature) when people believe it belongs to such genres, usually perceiving a non-pragmatic intention on the text which makes it belong, in a specific time and space, to be poetic or literary social discourses (idem, p. 40). Spoken-word poetry engages the body through the voice and gestures and, as such, rejects simple textual analysis as it is conditioned by the linguistic traces that constitute oral communication (idem, p. 41).

Spoken-word poetry or Slam Poetry, therefore, mixes properties of poetry, performance, and the oral tradition that characterizes it as a subversive practice, in order to deliver a powerful and effective message to the listener by combining themes, rhymes, tone, volume, among other elements - but, most of all, *presence.*

1.4 SLAM POETRY, MINORITIES' IDENTITIES AND SOCIAL POWER

In Slam Poetry, the author embodies the identity of the "I" of the poem, regardless of the point of view it was written on. The author's body is part of certain aspects of the identity performed, such as race, gender, class, sexuality and regionality (SOMMERS-WILLET, 2016, p. 69-70).

Most slam poems engage in first-person narrative; therefore slam-poetry is characterized by a performance of identity and identity politics (SOMMERS-WILLET, 2005, p. 51-52). As Muhammad and Gonzalez (2016, p. 443) affirm, agency is "the defining and redefining of identities, relationships, and histories and is gained by (re)defining and dismantling structures of power", which involves the author of a poem being able to participate in the political discourse, read the social context critically, and develop both self-expression and social action, one within the other. Activism involves, among other things, actions that attempt to trigger changes in society. Therefore, it is coherent to say that Slam Poetry can be a form of activism in which authors may, in their verses, advocate for more social equality and raise awareness to social issues through reclaiming the power of language, fighting, through verse, for marginalized groups (idem, p. 444). As Zumthor (1997, p. 66/68) affirms, it is through words - discourse, meanings and the interactions created through the use of language - that power (and power relations) is born.

Butler discusses Bourdieu's classic view of the relationship between language and power. In her book "Excitable Speech" (1997), she defends that, for Bourdieu, the difference between an effective and an ineffective use of language to create a certain repercussion would

be the social power invested on the speaker, therefore, those without any social power could utter whatever they wished and it would never have the same effects (BORDIEU, 109, as cited by BUTLER, 1997, p. 146). This means that the positions of power and the authority of the utterances are somewhat fixed and do not accept transformations from the outside. Butler argues, however, that this does not take into account the possibility that the utterance itself creates the legitimacy necessary for it to have an effect (idem, p. 146/147).

That means that language and discourse not only display the power relations of society, nor is it limited to changing the social world merely through the utterances performed by people with legitimate power invested in them to do so, but it also has the potential to change power structures from the margins to the center (idem, 156). As she defends, "social positions are themselves constructed through a more tacit operation of performativity" (ibidem). In her own words (idem, 157/159):

> Indeed, I would argue that it is precisely the *expropriability* of the dominant, "authorized" discourse that constitutes one potential site of its subversive resignification. What happens, for instance, when those who have been denied the social power to claim "freedom" or "democracy" appropriate those terms from the dominant discourse and rework or resignify those highly cathected terms to rally a political movement? If the performative must compel collective recognition in order to work, must it compel only those kinds of recognition that are *already* institutionalized, or can it also compel critical perspective on existing institutions? [...] Performatives do not merely reflect prior social conditions, but produce a set of social effects, and though they are not always the effects of "official" discourse, they nevertheless work their social power not only to regulate bodies, but to form them as well. [...] The appropriation of such norms to oppose their historically sedimented effect constitutes the insurrectionary moment of that history, the moment that founds a future through a break with the past.

When the discourse comes from another culture it is felt as marginal and exotic, and conflicts with the cultural ecosystem that is, in most cases, dominated by an Eurocentric civilization, generating an imposition of stereotypes (ZUMTHOR, 1997). That is why the oral tradition is part of what was deteriorated by the effects of colonialism within diverse cultures, erasing and stopping the organic growth of many cultural expressions - and its manifestation could, in that sense, be considered counterculture (idem, p. 66/68). On this account, orality can be regarded as subversive and transformative utterances that can change power structures even outside the given or "authorized" forms of effective political speech, gaining legitimacy on itself. This may suggest why spoken-word poetry became the medium for deep and powerful criticism, and a true fertile soil for the development and growth of social transformation.

Slam poetry, as previously mentioned, uses vernaculars, cultural icons, and marginalized experiences to offer a counter-narrative to the Eurocentric stereotypes bestowed upon marginalized communities by the majoritarian discourse, mainly displayed through pop

culture and media. In these events, poets and audience form collective resistances to the mainstream narratives, denouncing social injustice and reimagining ways to bring equality to life. This movement may recall, even if distantly, both the traditions of Civil Rights movements activism and the resistance in truth-speaking hip-hop activism (DAVIS, 2018, p. 118).

2 CHAPTER TWO – ETHNICITY, IMMIGRATION AND DISCRIMINATION

In this section, themes of ethnicity, immigration and identity will be explored, with special focus to how those issues relate to discrimination against non-White Americans in the United States.

2.1 ETHNICITY, IMMIGRATION AND IDENTITY

Max Weber (1978, 389) defines as ethnic groups

> [...] those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership (Gemeinsamkeit) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere.

He follows up arguing that "[...] almost any association, even the most rational one, creates an overarching communal consciousness; this takes the form of a brotherhood on the basis of the belief in common ethnicity" (ibidem). A few motivators of those beliefs can be shared language, consanguinity, religious beliefs, way of life, social circles, among other factors that are linked to culture.

Therefore, immigration is a process that can have significant impacts on an individual's sense of identity, and that is because in said process one leaves behind familiar cuisine, music, social custom, language, significant dates, icons, among so many other things that, little by little, compose a culture (AKHTAR, 1995, p. 1052). This culture shock challenges the inner organization of the immigrant's mind and, with that, causes shifts in their identity (ibidem).

Phinney et al. (2001, p. 495) define acculturation as "a broader construct, however, encompassing a wide range of behaviors, attitudes, and values that change with contact between cultures". Within that definition, there are four acculturation strategies identified by the authors when it comes to preserving an individual's culture and adapting to the host society, being them: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Those concepts are tied to the value of preserving someone's cultural heritage and its relationship to the value of connecting to society at large. Integration values both, assimilation values only the second, separation values only the first, and marginalization values neither (ibidem). That means that it is considered

possible to keep a strong ethnic identity while also belonging to the host society one means to be integrated with, even when immigration is involved.

Immigration tends to result in a split between self and object world which generates a new, hybrid identity for the immigrants, which continues changing throughout their whole lives (AKHTAR, 1995, p. 1076). This split also includes a linguistic split that creates two distinct linguistic personalities, resulting in immigrants who have to exist in two different linguistic structures, switching even the pronunciation of their own name when in contact with the host culture and language (idem, p. 1069).

Usually, there is a higher degree of emotional reactions to one's mother tongue (CALDWELL-HARRIS, 2014, p. 1/2). Having dual input (L1+L2) at home influences a second-generation immigrant child's fluency in either language, which is determinant to the child's level of connection with the language. This input at home appears to be more important than the exposition to monolingual L2 speakers, which happens at schools, for example (SCHWARTS, 2012, p. 121). Considering this, it is possible to connect elements like language, name (and name pronunciation) and this aforementioned split, in-between identity which attempts to, but is not allowed, integration - that is, keeping one's ethnic identity while also belonging to the host culture. Even when an immigrant or an ethnic diverse community attempt to assimilate (that is, deny their own cultural heritage in order to be accepted by the host culture), racial differences - and the component of cultural difference - keep those groups fated to marginalization.

2.2 ETHNICITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Johnson (1997, p. 191) points out that in the United States there is a tendency towards a belief that immigrants should assimilate the country's mainstream culture - and, as such, also acculturate into the dominant society. This process, however, is not a voluntary process, and it includes not only learning the English language but also shedding the traces of one's original culture - and still, racial diversity does not allow for full acceptance, regardless of how "American" they become (idem, p. 192). However, this issue is not restricted to immigrants - the Latino community, which is no longer restricted to immigrants, for example, continues to exist separately and unequally, keeping its members outside of the political and economic mainstream (idem, p. 194).

Discrimination is partially based also on physical appearance, which hinders attempts of adopting another social identity by those groups. Anyone with physical features linked to

other nationalities - other than White people, who tend to blend in - has a socially imposed 'race' thrust upon them (idem, p. 201).

United States' race relations have featured institutional discrimination mainly against, but not limited to, African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos and Asians, because of phenotype and geographic origins. The official discourse states supremacy to white European groups, leaving racial minorities to be stereotyped and marginalized with the most intensity (DUANY, 1998, p. 155).

The Drug War made the situation worse, as it was characterized by race-based policing, which impacted those minorities fiercely (WEINSTEIN; QUINN, 1998). African-American and Hispanics were the main target of the anti-drug police efforts, which resulted in intimidation and abuse and, consequently, in a suspicious attitude towards law enforcement and the government itself even by those who did nothing but abide by the law, taking into account that authorities both in political and judiciary fields did nothing but cover it up (ibidem).

As Mensah and Williams (2014) recall, immigrants often suffer with constant questioning of their allegiance to the host country, and racism is still a method that people use to categorize who belongs or not to a certain nation. Nativists, according to the authors, desire for the distinctiveness between ethnic minorities to disappear, something that they argue reflects quotes like US president Woodrow Wilson's, who said that "[a]ny man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic", the hyphen being a reference to hyphenated national identities, such as African-American or Asian-American.

Studies indicate that immigrants tend to form a stronger allegiance to countries that accept and respect diversity, but European immigrants of the first half of the twentieth century avoided a stigma that groups such as African immigrants could not, such as being able to reach basic conditions that could mean an escape from marginalization (MENSAH; WILLIAMS, 2014). Those experiences tend to generate in the immigrant a reaction of diasporic consciousness, that is, a stronger connection to their own homeland - which implies that the process of constructing a national identity is not a linear one but rather an uncertain path without a finish line, where each line of the road seems to depend on sociopolitical and economical access granted to the groups walking it (ibidem).

Another face of discrimination is the exclusion of ethnic minorities from the American identity, which is often equated with "White". This leads to identity questioning - which is a sign of exclusion - of those who adopt a dual national and ethnic identity (ALBUJA; SANCHEZ; GAITHER, 2019). Ethnic minorities are seen as "less American" than White

Americans, which is the seed of a feeling of foreignness of such groups in the United States, regardless of their status and identification as American (ibidem).

Shedding the traces of one's cultural heritage implies, however, discarding bits and pieces, or even entire chunks of one's history and personality - which includes, as we will see in the next chapter, one's own name.

3 CHAPTER THREE – NAMES, ETHNICITY AND MARGINALIZATION

This chapter discusses the purpose and origins of the category "name" in order to evidence its importance, especially in the social and symbolic realm. Furthermore, the relation between names and ethnicity is evidenced. At last, there is a brief discussion on how names affect the issue of immigrant assimilation.

3.1 PURPOSE AND ORIGINS OF NAMES

There is a consensus between linguists and anthropologists on the universality of the linguistic category "name" (VAN LANGENDONCK, 2007, p. 2). A name - as opposed to the conventional *nouns*, which are shared by those who speak the same language - is the element that designates the individual within society, serving the multiple function of integrating the personality, individualizing the person and indicating, roughly speaking, what family they belong to (PEREIRA, 2011, p. 204). A name has the purpose of registering the social attitudes and postures of a group of people, their beliefs, professions, origins, among other aspects - faith or television can also be an influence to name a child a certain way, for example (CARVALHINHOS, 2007, p. 2).

History recounts that in remote times, the name fulfilled its own signifying purpose, that is, a name did not just designate a person, but also offered the connotative weight of the word - but as language evolves and changes, the name was emptied of its meaning and resulted in just a shell, or, as we know it, simply *a name.* (Idem, p. 2/3)

Surnames, in their own right, came to be due to a necessity to identify a person within a family situated in society (idem, p. 8/9). They are a "donation", a symbolic first inscription of a child into a familiar lineage, making it possible to conclude, therefore, that a child is not born in a clean slate: they appear within a pretext and intertext that is their family - highlighting here that this is not a biological happening, but a symbolic one that places the child in a determinate position into the family structure (TESONE, 2009, p. 138/139).

Names represent a mix of right and obligation, tying a person to the external world, social life and legal matters, establishing personhood to the State (MORAES, 2000, p. 54/55). As they are part of personality, personhood and identity itself, names acquire prominence in the most varied societies, and this fact makes the value of names, both first names and surnames, evident.

3.2 NAME AND ETHNICITY

Names are not merely referential in function, but also reveal information about the subject - from personal, cultural, social, ethnic, historical, and even spiritual connotations (CLIFTON, 2013, p. 404). Among those connotations lies the cultural and national identity.

As argues Clifton (ibidem), a choice of name also showcases the wish to assimilate into a host country, as the name translates into perceived assimilation. This idea that names can be a sociological indicator of assimilation, however, disregards the social difference between 'nationals' and 'foreigners' (idem, p. 414). Names, therefore, have been recognized as linked to one's ethnic identity. (XU, 2020, p. 4/5).

3.3 NAME AND IMMIGRANT ASSIMILATION

Carneiro et al. (2020, p. 1/2) explain that immigrant assimilation is linked with cultural change, as the adoption of the native culture assists them in being accepted. In this regard, adopting a native sounding name is a head start, along with adopting the language, for holding, for example, better work occupations, citizenship status and annual earnings. In the second-generation immigrant's case, the rates of native names are much higher, a choice based on the assumption that having a native-sounding name will allow them to reach closer to the common-culture and common-language level in the eyes of the natives, as to facilitate trade by enhancing trust (CARNEIRO ET AL., 2020, p. 9; JOHNSON, 1997, p. 201).

The pressure, however, to change one's name, comes with a price - for example, the lack of what Johnson (1997, p. 210) calls distinguishable public figures, that is, public, powerful figures with recognizable Latino names and/or surnames, for example. Mirroring the forces pushing those groups underground, the pressure to switch to Anglo-Saxon names makes evident that other names - particularly those denoting one of the 'minority' ethnicities - would not be considered appropriate for polite society and contributes to their invisibility (ibidem). As Tournier (19, cited by XU, 1975, p. 6) asserts, changing one's name is to fracture their sense of self, cutting them from their past, which defined them until that point. Name change/choice is, therefore, a necessary step for acceptance.

The consequent marginalization of some immigrant/racial/ethnic groups, their culture and language, and their representation and connection to both names and surnames, is what is questioned and criticized by the poem analyzed by this work.

The aim here is, therefore, to analyze how the process of cultural identification of immigration and resistance are performed in the poem "Unforgettable" by Pages Mattam, G. Yamazawa and Elizabeth Acevedo.

4 CHAPTER FOUR – "UNFORGETTABLE" ANALYSIS

In the poem, then, the authors explore the idea of how they are perceived as "different" (unforgettable) because of their names and ethnic/cultural/racial origins. This contrast of a self-perceived identity and an other-perceived identity, especially due to stereotyping, and how one influences the other, is the main focus of the performance. The push-and-pull effect of being an immigrant or second-generation immigrant, rejected by the host country and unable or punished for connecting to their roots is the struggle that will be analyzed in this chapter.

4.1 THE "US" AND "THEM"

The poem already starts with a very impactful phrase: "Teachers used to say, / your behavior is just like your last name… Unforgettable". A few things can be derived from that sentence. Firstly, it's coming from an authority figure, one of the first a child must face: a teacher, an educator, the gatekeepers standing between children and education; and, later on, a diploma.

If the self, as pointed out in Chapter 1, is constituted of many elements, which includes the social aspect, experiences and the environment that the person is surrounded with, then the school, the place where children spend a great portion of their time, is of great influence in their lives, especially during the crucial time of the molding of personality.

Teachers, as stated by Glock et al. (2013), are the ones who most directly evaluate a child's performance in school, and the ones who establish the rules that are to be followed in the classroom. Furthermore, their expectations about the student's development and capabilities influences the students' performances (ibidem). This means that their biases may shape not only the academic performance of a child, but may also shape their view of the world and of authority figures.

This authority figure is not only a judge of the child's capacity to learn and effort in their studies, but also a judge of character and behavior. Schools function with a set of rules that are enforced by many actors, but more so by teachers, who are in constant contact with the students. The bias of character is revealed in the poem through the association of a certain "behavior" and the speakers' "last name", emphasizing the connection that the teacher makes between a different "group" or "ethnicity" with the undesirable behavior.

This molding of a worldview is observed, for example, in teachers who expect poorer performances from students with a different race of their own (ibidem), and in children who

display beliefs that White Americans are "more American" than Black Americans, who are "more American" than Asian Americans, who are "more American" than Latino Americans, a judgement majorly based on appearance alone and that influences their attitudes, acceptance and what they perceive about members of those groups (BROWN, 2011).

This duality between a "them" and an "us" is clear throughout the whole poem. The "them" image - represented often by figures of authority, who shape the world and its perception, such as "teachers", "colonizers" and "America" -, is contrasted with the marginalized "us", marginalization here conceptualized as an environment where both preserving an individual's culture and adapting to the host society are devalued (PHINNEY ET AL., 2001). "Other people", "those", "they", "their" are all terms of exclusion, pointing at the ones perpetrating the discriminating behavior towards the authors and their communities.

Their names, as seen before, are mentioned as an association to a certain ethnicity, since they do guard information on many connotations of the subject's life, including ethnic and historical (CLIFTON, 2013). The acceptance of an individual within their host society may even depend on adopting a name that sounds native, as previously mentioned (CARNEIRO ET AL., 2020). In the case of the poem, the parents of the authors did give them American-sounding first names - "Elizabeth", "George" and "Patrick", but their surnames, which can identify a person within a family, within a society (CARVALHINHOS, 2007), remain foreign-sounding - "Acevedo", "Yamazawa", "Mattam", which, combined with the racial diversity (JOHNSON, 1997) generates the friction.

The poem emphasizes the more favorable attitude towards immigrants of European descent over African Americans, Native Americans, Latino Americans and Asian Americans, bias displayed in the previously mentioned study by Brown (2011). This is illustrated by the comparison of how hard it is to pronounce surnames of marginalized immigrant minorities, in contrast to those of the prestigious European names, which is expressed by the lines "In school, I learned a lot more about other people's names rather than the one closer to my own, as if Mattam / Yamazawa / Acevedo / Were so much harder to say than /Tchaikovsky, Michelangelo, Eisenhower".

4.2 REPRESENTATIONS OF CONTRASTS

Symbols are often brought to this poem as a way to create contrast. This contrast comes to illustrate the idea of how the identities of the authors are created in opposition to the identities of the prototypical American. If, as Hegel (2010, p. 108) explained, self-concept arises also

through a conscience of how others see us, then this contrast between 'self' and 'other' is one of the aspects that constitute identity.

In the poem, the contrast is used to bring up how those identities are portrayed in the eyes of the prototypical White Americans. As Butler pointed out (1997, p. 79), language often maintains social oppositions, and, in the poem, this is illustrated by the images evoked to speak about the host culture, like "milk" to represent the prototypical White Americans, which comes in opposition to the diversity of origins that the authors represent (Dominican Republic, Cameroon and Japan).

Other terms linked with the prototypical American and its mainstream culture are "placid", "princess", "pampered", "perfume", "accessibility", "class", "power" and "intellect". Those words emphasize the presence of a belief in superiority and greater development in terms of sophistication and civilization evolution by this American mainstream culture when in comparison to other nations. One good example of this discourse is the highly culturally influential practice of minstrel, "in which white men caricatured blacks for sport and profit" (LOTT, 2013, p. 3). Many minstrel troupes presented to presidents like Lincoln, and important authors such as Mark Twain and Walt Whitman, made way to iconic works such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), to cite a few (ibidem). Still, minstrelsy capitalized on superiority comedy, in which the laughter is *at* an object considered inferior to the point of ridicule; in the case of minstrelsy, this type of humor created separation, delineating the line between whites (superior) and blacks (inferior) under the guise of a "joke" through stereotypes that homogenized and dehumanized African Americans (PÉREZ, 2016).

This is perfectly represented by the images of "barbed wire", "black hole", "dirt pit" to speak about how prototypical Americans would perceive non-native sounding names - but not *any* name, seeing that European-sounding names such as Tchaikovsky, Michelangelo and Eisenhower are easily accepted and praised within the US's culture.

Butler defends, however, that the expropriability of discourse is a place where resignification of meanings - and, as such, modification of discourse itself - may happen, a moment with the potential of generating a rupture of the status quo (1997, p. 158/159).

In the poem, this is done by the appropriation of terms such as "thick-thigh", "short blades", "dressed in chainmail", "heavy", representing how the authors view ethnic-sounding first names as representative of their culture - and as something good, connecting a person to their roots, which they should be proud of.

4.3 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Cultural comparisons are also frequently mentioned within the poem, also evidencing the existence of a denied or exotified history and culture from the marginalized groups within the US.

When Acevedo cites the "Dominican hills rising and campesinos uprising", she may mean to remind her unaware audience of the resistance movements against the U.S. military forces occupation in the Dominican Republic, which happened from 1916 to 1924. The movement organized the rural population - that is, peasants - against U.S. troops, fact that highlights the imperialistic history of the U.S. and its long list of military occupations throughout the whole world, and that those occupations were not often accepted passively by the peasantry (MIGUEL and BERRYMAN, 1995), despite what seems to be believed - or ignored - when one is taught about the U.S.'s history.

Another noteworthy comparison is brought forward by the line "in Japan, your last name comes first. / There is an emphasis on family. /But in America, / Your nickname comes first, because there's an emphasis on accessibility". Whilst not all Japanese people had surnames before 1875, when that was changed by a decree that made surnames obligatory (LAKSKER, 1985), names in Japan mean to situate a person in many different societal areas of their lives, following the order: 1. family name, 2. middle name, which is a title that helps situate the person within the economy, 3. clan name, 4. kabane, or a hereditary title that denotes duty and social rank, and then finally 5. a personal name (PLUTSCHOW, 1995). This line puts in evidence the fact that in Japan, people refer to others by their last name as they are seen as representatives of their families (ibidem).

All that culture and tradition was symbolically erased when the authors' parents attempted to enhance their children's chances of succeeding in the new country by bestowing upon them a native-sounding name (CARNEIRO et. al, 2020), a name "easily washed down with milk", or related to an "old, dead, white guy", that makes a throat swell into a sigh instead of a song, which is clearly exemplified by the line "[B]ecause when they hear names like George, Patrick, Elizabeth, what they hear is power, class, intellect. But names like Pedamante, Quvenzhané, and Tatsunokuchi sound like foreign. Impoverished. Illegal. What they hear is 'go back where you came from'", exemplifying one of the most common racial insults targeting immigrants and ethnic groups considered immigrants. The underlying message of that phrase is that if you do not blend in, which, as seen before in Johnson (1997) is not possible due to the fact that the prototypical American is the White American, serving as the normative pattern

against which all of the other groups are judged and awarded access to resources and good social status for that (DANBOLD and HUO, 2014), then you do not belong and are not welcome.

It is impossible to mention such a topic and fail to remember that this discourse is not new. Language is a social practice and, as such, it is both constitutive and constituted by social identities and relations (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003; 1995), acquiring social power by the use that powerful people make of it (BLACKLEDGE, 2005), thus representing and preserving, as mentioned before, social relations of power (BUTLER, 1997).

An example of such anti-immigrant sentiment is clear in the racist remark of the president of the US when he tells a non-White congresswoman to "go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came"[4]. This type of discourse, affirms Cornfield (ROGERS, 2019), asks people "[...] to forget about context and forget about policy choices [...] and just get angry at people who don't look or sound like you do". This means requesting that people push aside the facts and numbers of the social and historical reality in order to, as it often happens not only in the US, assign the blame for the increase in criminal and unemployment rates to vulnerable minorities.

This native-sounding name, however, is a name that ruptures the tradition and severs the authors' roots to their own culture in order to give colonizers "less to hold onto". As the authors' themselves recognize, "[O]ur parents had to dumb down their identity so our family could fit into a straight-jacket society", and lessen the possibility of that anti-immigrant sentiment jeopardizing their chances of thriving in this society.

4.4 IMPORTANCE OF A NAME

Names, as seen before, may have their cultural differences, but are considered a universal linguistic category (VAN LANGENDONCK, 2007), integrating one's personality and indicating a person's family, their roots, ethnicity, among other aspects (PEREIRA, 2011; CARVALHINHOS, 2007).

G. Yamazawa, in the lines "See, my parents named me George, but honestly, I always hated the name George. It reminds me of some / (unison) Old, dead, white guy. / Being a young, alive, Asian boy, it was hard for me to make the connection", followed by "I realized my first name didn't match my background before I knew how to spell assimilation" connects with the

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[4]Source: https://www.npr.org/2019/07/15/741827580/go-back-where-you-came-from-the-long-rhetorical-roots-of-trump-s-racist-tweets

personality-constitutive function of names. The lack of connection between the authors' first names and their ethnicities makes it so they are placed in a space of dis-identification with their names - which is reinforced by the fact that G. Yamazawa and Pages Mattam do not sign their works with their first names, and also by the verse "[N]ow, I call myself Pages so I can write my own history. It is the only name that I have ever owned".

Johnson (1997) also reminds us of the importance of names in representativity, that is, for recognizable "ethnic" names and surnames to be spread among important public figures in society. Beyond that rupture with culture mentioned in the previous subsection, in the poem this is also explored when the authors mention that the names they learn in school are far from their own, calling attention to the fact that classes - and the mainstream discourse - tend to exclude certain groups from history, a fact long-known to any minority in society. This sweeping of entire groups of people into an important historical invisibility and symbolic irrelevance, reinforces the widespread belief on their inferiority for the inadequacy to the prototypical American model.

4.5 ROOTS AND DOUBTS

"That's because my name wasn't given to me. It was given to the rest of the country" is a verse spoken in unison by the three authors and applies to all of them. It acknowledges the place of immigrants and slaves, and their children, in the making of America's history, despite their erasure from history books. It also acknowledges the fact that many of those marginalized groups did try to fit in, and many were not successful, remaining invisible, despite composing the country and contributing to it just as any prototypical White American.

While the authors hear phrases that state their status of unwelcome in the country due to ethnic and racial differences, there is also another current of identity conferring tendencies because of this native-sounding first name. This is illustrated by the passage "On countless occasions, I've introduced myself, and people would say shit like:/ 'But what's your real name though? That don't sound very ethnic.'/ You don't look like a 'George'. /Or a 'Patrick'/An Elizabeth".

As previously mentioned, it is not unusual for an immigrant to have an identity ascribed to them, their allegiances questioned, their cultural differences repressed by nativists, or to be talked about and viewed as transgressive (MENSAH; WILLIAMS, 2014). Respect for a cultural diversity and the offer of satisfying material conditions seem to be the best way of planting the seed of a national, dual identity in immigrants and their children, but race-based

discrimination is what they face, which enhances the diasporic consciousness that strengthens their connection to their own homeland (ibidem).

Because of the mismatch between the perceived ethnicity between first name and surname, their roots and history are put to question by people who know next to nothing about those cultures in an attempt to disqualify the connection.

4.6 EMPOWERING CONCLUSION

The reclaiming of words and their meanings, in Butler's (1997) terms, comes in a few noteworthy lines of the poem. First, when the authors say "[L]ike our last names were made of barbed wire, stripping the flesh of those trying to conquer the meanings in their mouths", it illustrates an "unconquerable" quality to those marginalized ethnicities, their history and their fight for equal treatment in the United States.

The connection between names that "[...] set the bar high. That tumbled out of mouths. Somersaulted into a room and split the air. A name like Xochi, or Anacaona, but although I must have punched inside the placenta/ my parents decided on something placid. [...]" evidences the strength the authors recognize in connecting to their ethnic roots and history. Despite the disconnection of their first names and this background, and the importance of representation, this valorization of their cultural and ethnic roots will ripple to the future, as addressed in the passage

> I've always wished my name was dressed in chain mail, that it was a heavy name, a thick-thigh syllable, shot down with short blades, so when I have my own children, I'm going to name them something special. /Something to make people stumble on, and guilt-trip over.
> Something to make their skin a little thicker than mine.
> Something to remind their classmates of the last samurai instead of the first president.
> Unison: Something powerful. Something real, real ethnic. Something unforgettable.

This is an excerpt where the authors enhance the cultural, ethnic and racial differences, the reason why they suffered from racism, anti-immigrant discrimination, discouragement, among other types of mistreatments, as something positive, something to be proud and joyful of.

They also address the public, emphasizing the importance of names and of everything they represent in the line "Your name is a dirt pit. It is a black hole, but what they don't know is that black holes be the brightest source of light", which, following Slam Poetry tradition (DAVIS, 2018), offers a positive, hopeful counter-narrative to the stereotypes attributed to

marginalized minorities, encouraging the refusal to deny one's identity as a form of resistance against social injustice and the mainstream narrative.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

"Unforgettable" is a poem that expresses great complexity concerning themes of identity, national identity, ethnic/cultural/racial identity, names and surnames, stereotyping and acceptance of immigrants and their descendants by the host country's society.

First, it is important to remember that identities are not fixed, innate characteristics of a person, but rather processes that suffer alterations due to life's unfolding and environment, just to cite two. A person may have as many "identities" as they have social roles, and those social roles can be changed depending on the society the person is situated in.

This brings us to the awareness that identity is, therefore, also a performance, and that's just what Slam Poetry does - performing identities and realities in order to catalyze, convey, express and perhaps change this reality, building bridges of empathy between performer and audience. This is because language and the discourses built upon it can and will change social relations of power in certain circumstances, and Slam Poetry aids in the reappropriation and legitimization of utterances made by social minorities.

The question in the poem seems to be "Where do I belong?" concerning national identity, since the prototypical American is, for a lack of a better word, White - which means any appearance other than White is considered "less American". Considering that the authors are second generation immigrants who have trouble connecting to their parents' homeland because they do not know it, but are also not accepted as American because they are not White, a split-identity forms regarding identity and allegiance.

The theme of 'name' is brought up as a way to illustrate this friction of assimilation and marginalization. The authors' parents gave them first names that are native-sounding to their host country in order to help with assimilation, since having a native-sounding first name does help with being perceived as a native by natives, diminishing the cases of exclusion; but their last names - and appearances - still belong to ethnicities/cultures/languages that are marginalized within the United States' society, setting them up for failure regardless of which names they adopt.

The authors, however, wish they could have first names that proudly connect them to those roots proudly regardless of discrimination, defending their right to value their parents' homeland and culture. The poem expresses a wish to be accepted within the US's society, without being marginalized or discriminated against, while still holding up and honoring the ethnic/cultural/racial roots, both in name and consuetude, and evidences the forms of discrimination that non-White immigrants suffer.

Language has its part in evidencing relations of power, and the poem does denounce the xenophobic and racist discourses that swerve around the issue of immigration. The problem runs deep in United States' culture and history, and it shows by the main discourses showcased by everyday conversations, the media, and even speeches from political leaders.

What the poem does, then, is urge for a space for immigrants to be culturally, ethnically and racially diverse without suffering from the rejection by the host country; a space to embody their full identities with no discrimination, stereotypization or discrediting of their dual identities. This is symbolically represented by the claim for the right to identify by an ethnic - that is, *unforgettable* - name.

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APPENDIX A – A few references to the poem's performance and text

PAGES Matam, Elizabeth Acevedo & G. Yamazawa - Unforgettable. Interpreter: Pages Matam, Elizabeth Acevedo, G. Yamazawa. Washington: Button Poetry, 2014. Son., color. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xvah3E1fP20&t=4s&ab_channel=ButtonPoetry. Access at: 01 Sep. 2020.

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Transcript of the Poem, retrieved from the website "Foluke's African Skies":

Unison: Teachers used to say,
Speaker 1: "Your behavior is just like your last name… "
Unison: "Unforgettable."
Speaker 1: In school, I learned a lot more about other people's names rather than the one closer to my own, as if Matam
Speaker 2: Yamazawa
Speaker 3: Acevedo
Speaker 1: Were so much harder to say than
Unison: Tchaikovsky, Michelangelo, Eisenhower. Like our last names were made of barbed wire, stripping the flesh of those trying to conquer the meanings in their mouths.
Speaker 2: See, my parents names be George, but honestly, I always hated the name George. It reminds me of some
Unison: Old, dead, white guy.
Speaker 2: Being a young, alive, Asian boy, it was hard for me to make the connection.
Unison: *I realized my first name didn't match my background before I knew how to spell assimilation.*
Speaker 3: I always wanted a name that set the bar high. That tumbled out of mouths. Somersaulted into a room and split the air. A name like Xochi, or Anacaona, but although I must have punched inside the placenta, my parents decided on something placid.
Unison: Elizabeth.
Speaker 3: A name for princesses, pampered women, and perfume. A name full of grace.
Unison: A name easily washed down with milk.
Speaker 1: Patrick, meaning "leader." Etymology: Irish, and although I speak French, I am from Cameroon. *(Parmis lesquelles est toi là, un lion indomptable*)* I would rather a name that would make a throat swell into a song, rather than a sigh.
Unison: *Your name is a song!*

Speaker 1: Now, I call myself Pages so I can write my own story. It is the only name that I have ever owned.

Speaker 3: I wanted a name of Dominican hills rising, and campesinos uprising, instead of "Long-live the Queen," but shortened my name to Liz *so colonizers had less to hold onto.*

Speaker 2: In Japan, your last name comes first. There's an emphasis on family.

Unison: But in America,

Speaker 2: Your nickname comes first, because there's an emphasis on accessibility.

Unison: Our parents had to dumb down their identity so our family could fit into a straight-jacket society.

Speaker 2: On countless occasions, I've introduced myself, and people would say shit like:

Unison: "But what's your real name though? That don't sound very ethnic."

Speaker 2: You don't look like a "George."

Speaker 1: Or a "Patrick."

Speaker 3: An "Elizabeth."

Unison: *That's because my name wasn't given to me. It was given to the rest of the country.*

Speaker 1: Because when they hear names like George, Patrick, Elizabeth, what they hear is power, class, intellect. But names like Pedamante, Quvenzhané, Tatsunokochi sound like

Unison: Foreign. Impoverished. Illegal. What they hear is, "*GO BACK WHERE YOU CAME FROM*!"

Speaker 3: Your name is a dirt pit. It is a black hole, but what they don't know is that black holes be the brightest source of light.

Unison: *I've always wished my name was dressed in chain mail, that it was a heavy name, a thick-thigh syllable, shot down with short blades, so when I have my own children, I'm going to name them something special*.

Speaker 3: Something to make people stumble on, and guilt-trip over.

Speaker 1: Something to make their skin a little thicker than mine.

Speaker 2: Something to remind their classmates of the last samurai instead of the first president.

Unison: Something powerful. Something real, real ethnic. ***Something unforgettable***.

* A lion that can't be tamed

FOLUKEIFEJOLA. **Unforgettable by Pages Matam, Elizabeth Acevedo and G. Yamazawa**. 2020. Available at: folukeafrica.com/unforgettable-by-pages-matam-elizabeth-acevedo-and-g-yamazawa. Access at: 01 Sep. 2020.