



**BRAZILIAN SCIENCE FICTION: ECOFEMINISM AND POST-COLONIALISM
IN PLÍNIO CABRAL'S UMBRA**

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ABSTRACT

The present work aims to analyze the dystopian novel *Umbra* by Plínio Cabral in the light of ecofeminism and postcolonial theories. The analyses will be focused on the investment of the writer toward colonial and neocolonial experiences based on the arguments of critics such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Latin American Nestor Canclini and Enrique Dussel as well as on the arguments of ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva, Ivone Gebara and Caroline Merchant, among others. For methodological reasons, the first part of the analysis will focus on the ecofeminist criticism followed by the postcolonial discussion.

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INTRODUCTION

The academic study of Brazilian Science Fiction is relatively new. Although its first works can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century, few researchers have given attention to this complex and rich genre. However, in the last two decades, the number of academic studies of Science Fiction has considerably increased. Critics such as Elizabeth Ginway, Léo Godoy Otero and Roberto de Sousa Causo have tried to focus on Brazilian Science Fiction as a literary vehicle for examining the perception and cultural impact of the modernization process in Brazil.

According to Elizabeth Ginway:

Science Fiction, as a genre associated with the First World, becomes a curious mixture in Brazil. As both a resistance to and an acceptance of the process of modernization, it often projects Brazilian myths of identity from the past onto a society of the future, as a form of cultural opposition to the perceived threat of technology, especially before the end of the dictatorship in 1985 (2004, p.16).

In other words, Brazilian writers have frequently used this genre as a way of dealing with issues of identity and nationhood. Doing so, they contest the traditional paradigms of Anglo-American Science Fiction by emphasizing particular Brazilian themes and problems. The present work has as its main focus Brazilian Science Fiction produced in the 1970s, a

period in which Brazil was starting its process of modernization and was, apparently, achieving a rapid economic development and industrialization. During this epoch, a group of science fiction writers tried to demonstrate the implications of these changes to Brazilian society by using the genre in a very distinctive perspective.

As stated by Ginway “Brazilian Science fiction from this period reflects a kind of pseudo-modernity, because despite the modern façade of space travel, new technology, futuristic cities, robots and aliens, these works advocate values associated with humanism” (2004, p.36). This humanist outlook can be explained as an attempt to nationalize the genre and give it a Brazilian perspective which could satisfy the requirements suggested by the Brazilian modernist movement¹. Works from this period deserve special attention since it comprises mostly anti-technological science fiction as a way of affirming myths of Brazilian identity so that, according to Ginway (p.14), “it provides a unique look into Brazil’s modern metamorphosis”. Most of these works demonstrate a basic distrust of science and technology in the hands of humans due to a lack of confidence in the power of reason to control the excesses of human emotions, which recalls some tendencies of the Anglo-American New Wave². However, whilst in this respect Brazilian writers seem to use paradigms of Anglo-American science fiction, their science fiction is quite distinctive, representing as it does myths of

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¹ - One of the most important requirements of this movement was the absence of foreign influence - European and American – and the search for a pure Brazilian form of art.

² - Further explanation of New Wave will be given in the first chapter of this research.

Brazilian nationhood, for example, the myth of *grandeza*, or national greatness which highlights Brazil's national wealth and beauty, in terms of ecology and fertile land. In this perspective, this work aims to analyze Plínio Cabral's *Umbra* (1977) by the light of ecofeminism and post-colonial theories. Plínio Cabral's *Umbra* (1977) is a portrait of a devastated world. Its plot takes the reader to the future as a projection of present day reality. The flowers, the clean water, the rivers, the fresh air are all disappearing. Little by little pollution is poisoning the planet and its wildlife, making man an irrational being unable to stop the consequences of his own action.

From the very beginning of the novel it is possible to identify issues related to colonialism, ecology and Military Regime in Brazil and Latin America. In the novel, people live in a factory and the factory gated ports remind us both of the way in which slaves were enclosed in the *senzalas* (slave quarters) after six in the evening and the original colonial settlements in which a city worked as a fort whose gates were closed at 9pm every night. Another important allusion to this time is the way people die: "some suffocate by pollution; others kill themselves or go mad". This is exactly what happened to the original natives: many died of illness caused by the colonizer and many chose to commit suicide rather than submit to the horrors of colonization. Another important fact that bears witness to the continuing impact of colonial history on Brazil during the seventies is the way Cabral represents most characters: nameless, homeless, submissive, dependent and hopeless, unable to take decisions by them own.

O Moço conversava com ossignos: aprendera com o anterior que aprendera com seu anterior que aprendera do anterior do anterior [The young boy talked to the signs: He had learnt this from his forerunner who had learnt from his forerunner who had learnt from his forerunner](p.14)

Given that a 'name' is central to the individual's sense of identity, Cabral denounces the lack of identity in *Umbra's* characters. Expressions like 'the young boy', 'the old man', 'forerunner' replace the name of the characters as if they do not have a real name.

Also important is the idea of homelessness present in the novel. This is clearly illustrated by a frequent movement of people looking for a better place to live. Paradoxically, there is no other place where they could settle and build a better future; in fact, Cabral reflects on the lack of perspective for Brazilian society during the seventies; the characters behave as if they already knew the future - "they meet to discuss about the history of the future" - which is not possible literally since the word 'history' is usually related to something that happened in the past. This attitude can support the idea that *Umbra* is strongly related to issues of colonization which is not just to do with Brazil's past but also with its current and potentially future political and economic status.

Thus, our analysis will underline the novel's investment in colonial and neo-colonial realities, as well as its projection toward ecological disaster. Based on the arguments of important critics such as Fanon, Said, Spivak, Bhabha and the Latin American Nestor Canclini and Enrique Dussel. For methodological reasons, the first part of the analysis will focus on the ecofeminist criticism followed by the postcolonial discussion. Given the fact that this novel was published in 1977 it is pertinent to highlight that its publication coincided with some important ecological

movements that arose in Brazil during the seventies. Another important issue to stress is the particular significance of the environment for Brazilian national identity which is associated to the myth of *grandeza*, or national greatness. This myth goes back to images of Brazil's wealth and beauty, its forest and fertile land.

In 1971 the agronomist José Lutzenberger founded the first ecological association in Brazil and Latin America - The Gaúcha Association of Protection to the Natural Environment (*Associação Gaúcha de Proteção Meio Ambiente Natural - AGAPAN*). It was located in Rio Grande do Sul state where Plínio Cabral was born. Among other important actions of AGAPAN one can mention: the fauna and flora defense, combating the industrial and vehicular pollution, combating the indiscriminate use of insecticides, fungicides and herbicides, fighting against water pollution caused by industries and against the destruction of natural landscapes. From 1971 to 1974 these actions were severely repressed by the military regime; any attempt to raise awareness of these ecological problems could be taken as an insult to the governmental authority since ecological activists pointed the government as the main responsible for the destruction of nature. Its countless enterprises did not take into account the preservation of the environment. During the sixties and seventies, with the growth of industrial production, toxic wastes used in agriculture were thrown into rivers, dangerously compromising the water resources. Uncontrolled gases expelled by industries and motor vehicles were the principal cause of the increase in respiratory illness. According to the sociologist Eduardo Viola in his work *Meio Ambiente, Desenvolvimento e Cidadania [Environment, Development and Citizenship]* (2005), the height of absurdity, when it comes to ecological issues, was when Brazilian president Médici put an advertisement in international newspapers and magazines inviting first world companies to move to Brazil where they would not face any expenses due to anti-pollution legislation.

As a journalist, lawyer and member of the government, Plínio Cabral occupied important posts in cultural and political fields, among them it is worth mentioning his performance as Chief Secretary of the State of Rio Grande do Sul. From this post it was possible for him to see and discuss the problems of environmental devastation during the military regime. Although his position as a member of the government did not allow him to join the AGAPAN, his writings reveal his deep consciousness about ecological issues. For Ginway (2004), Cabral is among the first to popularize environmental themes and contest the cultural myths of Brazilian sensuality and of the lush and fertile land (p.33). As a writer, he has been critical of modern society and its relationship to the natural environment. His use of metaphor and allegories can be understood as a necessary response to censorship. Thus, he used dystopian fiction as a way of denouncing and satirizing modern society. By utilizing an imaginary futuristic world, his dystopia effectively focuses on political themes and satirizes tendencies present in contemporary society.

According to Ginway (2004), Plínio Cabral's *Umbra* is the first Brazilian dystopia to focus exclusively on ecological disaster. Given the fact that the novel was published during the military regime when the government wanted technological advancement at any cost, and censorship did not allow any opposing views, it is no surprise that the author

used allegoric discourse as his most important instrument in order to protest against the depletion of Brazil's natural resources. The idea that everything could be replaced by technology is strongly stressed by Cabral from the first chapter:

Nada era importante: cada um fazia o que era necessário fazer, desde tempos imemoriais. E ninguém se importava com o resto. A fábrica fornecia tudo: roupa sintética, alimento concentrado, figuras visuais e reuniões onde se debatia a história do futuro [Nothing was important: each man did what he had to do since time immemorial. Nobody worried about the rest. The factory provided everything: clothes, food, visual pictures and meetings to discuss about the history of the future] (p.10).

Little by little the natural environment is replaced by an artificial one and not only the environment, but also people's values. With the expression "*nothing is important*" the reader can see how nature is put aside; there is no need to cultivate or preserve the natural environment since technology provides whatever is necessary. However, at the same time that man is shown as intellectual, scientific and superior to nature, he seems to be an irrational being, enslaving himself. This attitude can be associated to the invading colonizers who despised the indigenous people's harmonious relationship with the natural world.

According to the ecofeminist Caroline Merchant (2003) Western science is based on an epistemology of male domination over women and nature. This epistemology abstracts the male knower in a transcendent space outside of nature and reduces nature itself to dead matter pushed and pulled by mechanical forces. Thus, the *homo scientificus* given supremacy over nature, denying the symbiosis between humanity and the natural world. From this perspective, the modern scientist is a man who creates nature as well as himself, through his own intellectual power. Echoing Merchant's argument, Cabral seems to advocate the idea that man and nature are in constant symbiosis. Reflecting this argument at the end of most legends, the hero joins with a natural element: sand or water, as can be seen by the second legend:

Um dia, por fim, chegou à beira de um rio. Era calmo e silencioso. Aric, então, deixou-se ficar ali. Já não podia mais caminhar. Não tinha forças. Abraçou-se ao rio e chorou misturando-se com a água e nela tornou-se. E assim, correndo com o Rio, continuou a nadar. Até o fim do mundo [One day he got to the river's edge. It was calm and silence. Aric, then, stopped and stayed there. He could not walk anymore. He was weak. He hugged the river and cried, his tears mixed with the water and Aric and the river became only one. Aric ran with the river and swam to the end of the world] (p.33).

Here, the dynamic interaction of man (hero) and nature emphasizes the fact that the non human world, animals, plants, celestial bodies are not simply under human control. They also have their own purpose, their own relation to God, as expressed by the ecofeminist Rosemary Ruether (2005). Unlike non human world, modern man has lost contact with nature; instead of being a part of it he has alienated himself from it and therefore abuses it. Allusions to important biblical ideas are also an important strategy used by Cabral in order to reinforce the idea that nature has its own vitality and it is strongly related to God. In the ninth legend, the hero Daric

dies to save nature in the same way that Jesus Christ dies to save humanity:

Depois ergueram o lenho e o corpo a ele preso, e olharam: Daric de braços abertos, a cabeça sobre o peito... Os homens, então, sentiram medo. A terra parecia tremer. Chegara a noite, embora fosse dia. O céu estava ficando violeta e roxa. Em breve estaria negro... Correram todos, desesperados, gritando. A noite, porém, descia sobre eles, furiosa, escura, mais negra ainda, medonha... [After that they lifted his body fixed on a wood cross and looked: his arms were opened, his head was bent over the chest... The men, then, felt fear. The earth seemed to shake. It got dark though it was day. The sky became purple. Soon it would be black... Everybody ran desperate and shouting. The night, though, was coming furious, dark, terrifying] (p.67).

In this passage it is possible to find important aspects of the patriarchal paradigm with its hierarchical structure and methodology of thought which is closely linked to the Judeo-Christian ideas of man's innate superiority over nature. These ideas are discussed by the historian of science Lynn Townsend White in her article *The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis* published in 1967. White suggests that an alternative worldview was necessary, and this alternative must be religious. She also believes that science and technology were so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution to our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone³.

According to Ivone Gebara (2005), patriarchal epistemology bases itself on eternal unchangeable 'truths' that are the presuppositions for knowing what truly is. In the Platonic-Aristotelian epistemology that shaped Catholic Christianity, this means eternal ideas that exist *a priori*. Catholicism added to this the hierarchy of revelation over reason. Revealed ideas come directly from God and thus are unchangeable and unquestionable, compared to ideas derived from reason. This religious way of seeing reality shows, somehow, Cabral's ambivalent discourse; as is a practicing catholic, he transfers, unconsciously or not, his beliefs to his texts. Gebara criticizes this kind of discourse, because according to her, experiences are the most important subject for any discourse, they cannot be translated into thought finally and definitively. They are always in context, in a particular network of relationships. This interdependence and contextuality includes not only other humans but the nonhuman world, ultimately the whole body of the cosmos in which we are embedded in our particular location. Theological ideas are not exempt from this embodied, contextual questioning. Gebara goes on to state that changing the patriarchal paradigm for an ecofeminist one starts with epistemology, with transforming the way one thinks. Such an effort to dismantle patriarchal epistemology for ecofeminist thinking includes the nature of the human person.

In *Umbra*, patriarchal epistemology is also reproduced in the hero who seems to be a disembodied self that is presumed to exist prior to all relationships. From this perspective the ideal self is autonomous, has extricated itself from all dependencies on others and stands outside and independent of relationships as a 'free subject'. Interestingly *Umbra's* hero always

³Science, vol.155(March 10, 1967), 1203-7. Reprinted in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature and Environment*, Roger S. Gottlieb, ed (New York: Routledge, 1996), 184-93.

reincarnates with other names and without any family ties or 'network of relationships', as if he existed by himself. In an ecofeminist understanding of the human person, such autonomy is a delusion based on denial of the others on whom one depends. This attitude is also expressed in the end of the novel when the nameless boy decides to leave alone searching for a better place to live. Ironically, he is supposed to be a hero but he fails to understand the necessary reconceptualization that is needed. Whilst the novel is strongly critical of environmentally destructive policies, it reproduces individualistic and transcendent ideas that are, according to ecofeminism, incompatible with environmental awareness.

Whilst Cabral's hero can successfully reincarnate in other bodies, the opposite happens with nature. The promise of planting more and better plants has never been kept (p.43). The idea that technology is able to renew nature is dismissed. Here, one can make a link to Merchant's criticism of human attempts to civilize nature. From this perspective, science and technology are restoring human dominion and thus transforming primitive, disorderly nature into civilization. Influenced by Merchants' ideas, Ruether (2005, p.121) states that, this task of civilizing nature is the white man's burden⁴. This reference seems to be ironic. The white Western male is subduing the whole world, first Europe and then the colonized areas of the Americas, Asia, and Africa and elevating them to a higher order. And by "areas" one can include all individuals living within them: indigenous people, women, black people and slaves, among others. Merchant goes on to state that this system of patriarchy or elite male domination is further developed in Western colonialism and modern scientific technology and economics. These patterns of domination lead to the impoverishment of most humans and the natural world and rapidly produce a crisis that threatens survival on earth. Cabral illustrates this same feeling of devastation by male domination in modern society; because of the effects of pollution, men lose their natural habitat and have to survive in inhuman conditions:

Naquele tempo quase não falavam. Não havia o que dizer. Deixavam-se ficar ali, protegendo-se do frio ou do calor, olhando o horizonte, cavando a terra, sem esperança. De quando em quando alguém aparecia com raízes velhas, sem água, esfarelado-se como a própria terra. Mastigavam os pedaços, depois cuspiam sangue, a boca seca, lábios cortados. Assim era a vida. E de tanto sofrimento, um dia perguntaram: por quê viver?[That time, men hardly ever spoke. There was nothing to say. They used to stay there, protected from the cold or the heat, looking at the horizon, digging the earth without hope. Sometimes some people found old roots, without water, dissolving in the earth. They chewed pieces of roots and then, spit blood, with dry mouths and chopped lips. That way was life. The suffering was so much that one day they asked: Why do we live?] (p.82)

Cabral's writing reflects the concerns of ecofeminism, but in some respects it is also subject to criticism from the perspective of colonialism. His work can also be usefully read in the light of postcolonial theory. The degeneration of men, for example, is strongly emphasized in *Umbra*, suggesting the destructive impact of colonization on human identity; Like

technological development, the process of colonization generates people without memories, dreams or hope. The novel depicts the idea that people have lost their memories, history and imagination, and because of this, they have lost the desire to procreate; this can be taken as an allusion to Edward Said's stereotypes of the Orient: timeless, feminine, weak, cowardly and lazy. Cabral seems to denounce the effects of foreign policies that have put Brazil in a neocolonial position, that is, dependent and unable to develop by itself. Cabral's criticisms reflect Edward Said's observations about the attitude of the United States to underdeveloped nations:

Because the governments are relatively powerless to affect US policy toward them, they turn their energies to repressing and keeping down their own population, which results in resentment, anger and helpless imprecations that do nothing to open up societies where secular ideas about human history and development have been overtaken by failure and frustration... (*Orientalism's* Preface, 2003).

In Brazil's case, the authoritarian government with its repressive acts generated a feeling that progress and economical development are never used in favor of the majority of the population. According to the historian Helena Alves (1990, p.259), after 1974, the state resumed its previous effort to find a balance between selective repression and a more flexible mechanism of representation that would allow it to extend its base of support among middle and upper class groups, now disaffected because of the violence of the repression and the end of the economic miracle. This economic model imposed extremely heavy burdens on the majority of the population; the trend toward ever-greater concentration was most pronounced in rural areas, where the poorest 50 percent of the population suffered a 33 percent reduction in its share of national incomes. Cabral also registers this specific period of history when the government imposed a high level of tax on the poorest population:

Os homens, porém, sentiam-se tristes. Envelhecidos, cansados. A pele secava, tanto era o trabalho. Da divisão por quarto, uma parcela dividia-se por três. Era a maior. Gigantesca. Foram então aos reis do mundo e reclamaram... O povo queixava-se, comia menos, vivia mal. Era difícil entregar a parcela dos Reis. [Men, though, felt extremely sad, old and tired. Their skin had dried, so hard was their work. From the division of four, an installment was divided into three. It was too big. The men complained to the kings... People complained. They ate less and lived in bad conditions. It was difficult to give the king's installment] (p71).

This is a remarkable intermediate moment in the novel. Prior to this passage, people searched for a king who can govern them; they felt the necessity of some kind of leader. According to Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, this attitude is created by the culture of submission experienced by exploited people in colonized countries (200, p.29). Fanon's ideas gave significant contribution to the development of cultural and postcolonial studies in Brazil and Latin America. Inspired in his works, Latin American writers such as Enrique Dussel and Nestor Garcia Canclini have improved studies in this field. Dussel (2005) rethinks the process of colonization and domination through a new epistemology: "*A Teologia da Libertação e a Pedagogia dos Oprimidos* [The Theology of Liberation and the Pedagogy of Oppressed People] in Latin

⁴ This expression was probably taken from a poem by Rudyard Kipling which is addressing the entrance of the United States into the club of colonizing countries.

America. According to him, in order to overcome the formation of the oppressive and discriminatory discourse present in modern society, it is necessary to discover the 'other face' of modernity: the world colonial periphery which means the sacrificed Indigenous, the enslaved man, the oppressed woman and the alienated culture. By understanding the effects of colonization suffered by Latin American oppressed people it is possible to begin the process of 'decolonizing the minds' suggested by Fanon.

In this regard, Cabral seems to be critically reflecting on the way in which the government replicates neo-colonial power structures. The repetition of the colonial experience might also be seen in the reference to 'Kings' in the passage above which, one way or another, recalls colonial times. After being governed by the Kings of the world, people run away looking for a better place to live and then, they decide to build the Factory in which they live. Initially, the Factory works as a hope for people who have lost everything. It promises to provide a new way of living: more comfortable, healthier, safer, more intelligent and modernized. But they still need someone who can govern them: "*Agora precisamos de um chefe. Quem dirá o que devemos produzir? Quem repartirá o que produzirmos?...[Now, we need a chief. Who will tell us what to produce? Who will share our production?]*" (p.85). Re-reading *Umbra* in a post colonial context, it is possible to say that the Factory brings the characters a neo-colonial reality; if on the one hand, men feel free to do whatever they want, on the other hand they are unable to administrate their freedom. This attitude can be explained because, according to McLeod (2000), overturning colonialism is not just about handing land back to its dispossessed peoples, returning powers to those who were once ruled by Empire. It is also a process of overturning the dominant ways of seeing the world, and representing reality in ways which do not replicate colonialist values.

Here it is worth mentioning that in terms of post-colonialism, the Latin American context is different from the situation that pertains in Africa and Asia, where the colonized peoples won back their independence and rights to govern themselves; in Brazil, for example, the indigenous were killed or displaced, so these colonized people were marginalized by their colonizers. The anti-colonial independence movements then were primarily Creole which can explain the feeling that colonization is not over in Brazil. McLeod goes on to state that if colonialism involves colonizing the minds, then resistance to it requires 'decolonizing the mind'. Thus, it would be no exaggeration to say that, in several parts of the novel, Cabral seems to represent the way in which Brazilian people are still 'orientalized'. In other words, Cabral denounces the way in which colonization is still present in Brazilian people's mind and culture. In this perspective, his writing can be pointed as an attempt to 'decolonize mind'.

Attempting to analyze the cultural effects of colonization in Latin America, Canclini (1995) starts his studies by emphasizing the hybrid identities in Latin America culture. In his book *Culturas Híbridas: Estratégias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (1995), he postulates the necessity of a multicultural approach in order to understand the contemporary Latin American culture. Like Bhabha, Canclini believes that hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves because they are marked by multitemporal heterogeneity. His concerns about modernity and the new

configuration of Latin -American metropolis allowed him to elaborate an ample reflection regarding post-modernity and globalization. According to him,

As grandes cidades, dilaceradas pelo crescimento errático e por um multiculturalismo conflitante, são o cenário em que melhor se manifesta o declínio das metanarrativas históricas das utopias que imaginaram um desenvolvimento ascendente e coeso através do tempo [Large cities, tormented by uncontrolled growth and by a conflicting multiculturalism, are the perfect scenario to represent the demise of utopian historical met a narratives that suggested an ascendant and consistent development through the time (1995, p.130)].

In this respect, Canclini and Cabral appear to share the same opinion. Cabral denounces the way cities are developed without preserving historical and cultural aspects of people's lives. For him, the city is a key element in this contradictory processes of modernization in which men become slaves of their own creation, as can be seen in this passage:

...Trabalhava-se para a Cidade. Exclusivamente. Eram escravos do monstro. Não podiam se libertar. Ela cobria a terra, ia quase até o fim do mundo. Inchava, putrefata. Contribuições, dígitos, taxas, impostos, parcelas – devorava tudo. E pedia mais. Tanto, tanto que ninguém agüentava [Everybody worked exclusively for the City. They were slaves of the monster. They could not set them free. She covered the earth, it could go till the end of the world. It swelled up, rotten. Contributions, taxes, installments – She wanted everything. And asked for more and more. Nobody could stand that (p. 25)].

For both authors the process of modernization is a mechanism that transforms the subject into object. The passages above suggest the impossibility of idealizing a system without dehumanizing people. For this reason, these authors denounce the mechanism for which neocolonialism is able to reduce the individual to a state of inauthenticity. Here, one can build a parallel with Bhabha's hybridity:

Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value from symbol to sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative. Hybridity represents that ambivalent turn of discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification - a disturbing questioning of the images and presence of authority (1994, p.113).

Bhabha and Canclini show that the process of hybridization discloses the impurity inherent in postcolonial society. Their critiques are centered on the effect of different imperial policies imposed by the modernity's mechanism of control to the society. The motifs of reproduction and representation are key elements to their critiques. Both writers articulate a project of dismantling modernity and any kind of neocolonialism. Bhabha remarks that the "subaltern and ex-slaves" who now seize the spectacular event of modernity do so in a catachrestic gesture of reinscribing modernity's "caesura" and using it to transform the locus of thought and writing in their postcolonial critique (1994: 246). Like Bhabha, Canclini questions the representations of modernity which assumes the properties of simulacrum.

Modernity, then, is seen as a mark. A simulacrum conjures up by the elites and the state apparatuses, above all concerned

with art and culture, but which for that very reason makes them unrepresentative and unrealistic (1997, p.7).

Canclini goes on to state that modernity is not only a space one enters into or from which one emigrates, it is a condition that involves us, in the cities or in the countryside, in the metropolises and in the underdeveloped countries. Because of its contradictions, modernity is a situation of unending transit in which the uncertainty of the modern world will always be present. In *Umbra*, Cabral represents this 'uncertainty' of the modern world by showing people's refusal to look for another place to live. They are afraid of leaving the factory because they do not know what is outside it.

Interesting enough is the way Cabral reacts to this colonial discourse; in the end of the novel he describes the boy as someone prepared to face any obstacles he might find on his journey; like a hero, the bizarre black boy intends to find what nobody has found so far – a better place to live.

O menino aproximou-se. Era alto, a pele escura, quase preta. As pernas compridas, muito finas, sustentava um corpo atarracado, curto. O tórax era largo, abrigando pulmões desmesuradamente grandes. Do nariz saíam tufo de cabelos e estes cabelos é que filtravam o ar [The boy approached. He was tall with dark (almost black) skin. His long thin legs support his short thin body. His thorax was broad, giving space to large lungs. The tufts of hair in his nose could filter the air (94)].

At the same time that Cabral uses the discourse of colonialism to describe the boy, - a radically strange creature whose bizarre and eccentric nature is the cause for both curiosity and concern (MCLEOD 2000, p. 52) - this description seems to be an attempt of presenting a new type of hero whose characteristics could represent a colonized subject essentially outside Western culture and civilization. The refusal of the boy to be the old man's student can be seen as a rupture of the discourse of colonialism which attempts to domesticate colonized people.

In spite of the negative depictions of the long-lasting disastrous effect of modernization on people's lives, the novel presents new perspectives for a better world. Cabral resists the continuing agency of colonial discourses by exploring their contradictions and shortcomings and showing the possibility of revealing different experiences, histories and representations.

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