

POPULAR-STYLE LITERATURES: IN SEARCH OF COSMOPOLITANISM

LITERATURAS DE EXPRESSÃO POPULAR: EM BUSCA DO COSMOPOLITISMO

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Abstract: Brazilian popular literature comprises a set of literary works, widely disseminated among the people, almost always of unknown authorship, produced by hand, without academic concern. It encompasses a variety of genres such as oral romances, cantiga (songs), short stories, viola songs, cordel (cordel), etc. Despite the strong Portuguese influence, in Brazil it expanded with the presence of the ethnic elements that constituted us: indigenous and African. This study is an application of François Rastier's (2015) theoretical proposal on the cultural cosmopolitanism that strongly marks popular literary texts, whether in the mixture of languages, language levels, languages, or genres within a single literary work. The corpus analyzed in this research included oral or written texts, prosaic or poetic, and also traditional texts, that is, texts that were present in different times or places, or contemporary texts that show the marks of the present, although with popular characteristics.

Keywords: Popular Literature; Semiotics of Cultures; Cosmopolitanism.

Resumo: A literatura popular brasileira compreende um conjunto de produções literárias, largamente difundidas entre o povo, quase sempre de autoria desconhecida, produzidas de forma artesanal, sem a preocupação acadêmica. Comporta uma variedade de gêneros como o romance oral, a cantiga, o conto, as cantorias de viola, o cordel, etc. Apesar da forte influência portuguesa, no Brasil, ampliou-se com a presença dos elementos étnicos que nos constituíram: o indígena e o africano. Este estudo é uma aplicação da proposta teórica de François Rastier

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(2015) sobre o cosmopolitismo cultural que marca, fortemente os textos literários populares, seja na mistura de línguas, níveis de língua, linguagens ou de gêneros dentro de uma mesma obra literária. Foram incluídos no *corpus* analisado nesta pesquisa textos orais ou escritos, prosaicos ou poéticos e, ainda, tradicionais, isto é, que se fizeram presentes em diferentes épocas ou lugares, ou contemporâneos que mostram as marcas da atualidade, embora com as características populares

Palavras-chave: Literatura popular; Semiótica das Culturas; Cosmopolitismo.

This study is an application of François Rastier's (2015) theoretical proposal on cultural cosmopolitanism to analyze different literary genres of popular expression, searching for a universal citizenship that can be linked to a democratic ideal of mutual understanding.

We know the right to diversity is a richness, especially in Brazil, due to its ethnic and intercontinental origins. Considering that social sciences have a vocation for diversity, is it necessary to discover which attempts are being made to welcome otherness in the popular texts analyzed?

It is important to remember that the popular culture studies we have been doing are not limited to its usage to exemplify theoretical passages but comes from a deeper research project that started with field surveys in some Brazilian regions, mainly the Northeast, in which I emphasize Pernambuco and my home state, Paraíba.

After the surveys, we analyzed and distributed the texts by generic and thematic-figurative categories, language levels and phases, detecting their similarities and differences and linking them to a possible historical origin and looking for an interpretation to the variations found in Brazilian territories. So, we did it by considering, as Rastier says, the semiotics of cultures as a “interpretative, historical and comparative” science. (2002:p).

The term *popular literature* means “a group of literary productions largely widespread amongst the people, outside of the educational environment, usually from an unknown author and said in a familiar and carefree language”. Some call the studies in popular literature *ethnoliterary* because they explain “the origin of the universe, the way nature works and the core values of people” (JAPIASSÚ & MARCONDES, 1996: p. 183).

Pais (2004: pp.176-178), in studies of differentiation between nonliterary, literary and ethnoliterary discourses, considers as characteristics of the last two: “anonymity, erasure of the enunciating individual that is commonly replaced by an

imaginary or virtual being, and the inexistence of time and space markings of the enunciation which causes an effect of atemporality and displacement”. This is a generalization since many texts have a known origin, like the *cordel* and the *cantoria de viola*, where we can effectively point out the source, which means they have delimited marks of time and space.

A known origin might imply that popular literature is restricted to the two genres mentioned. The research we have been doing showed the existence of countless literary genres of popular expression initially defined by modality of language used in communication – oral or written. In the first case, there is the already mentioned *cordel*, a type of literature that stems from the communication between writer and reader, while the second one is situated in the speaker-listener axis, defined by sociological rather than linguistic terms (Zumthor, 1983).

While at least in Brazil the *cordel* shows itself in a poetic way, oral literature is shown in two ways: prose (tales, legends, myths, riddles, prayers, etc.) and verse (*cantoria de viola*; romance, sung or recited; challenges; ABCs; nursery rhymes). Every genre possesses its own enunciative and content characteristics that sets them apart from the rest. For example, romance is a narrative, poetic and, in most cases, dialogical, while the *cantiga* is poetical, lyrical, and subjective, and possesses an enunciator-actor in first person.

Oral genres come from the ancient times of language, above all the romance which crossed generations until reaching present day. Once the subjects assume and modify previous speeches manifested within a community, the popular text presents a deeply rich variational process, characterized by a cultural, generic, social, and even aging diversity of the involved actors. Besides, the enunciator responds by a collective subjectivity that returns once the play is resumed.

In their oral performance, the enunciator is confused with the singer, the reciter, the interpreter of a text that isn't always theirs, but deep down ends up being because they add new elements (of their culture or world vision) to the enounced text, reason by which there is talk of a collective author, or as some academics say, a legion author.

Pais, in the previously cited study (2004: p.179), says that ethnoliterary discourses are not documental like scientific history texts, but they recreate another kind of social memory that “incorporates, sustains, characterizes a cultural identity, representing a shared vision about the world”. As Batista (2014:160) says, “it

presupposes, communicates, determines a knowledge, previous to a school knowledge that is transferred from one subject to another continuously”.

The study of a culture is not done just by looking to its identity, highlighting only the things it supposedly produced, but in comparison with different cultures. The search for what is different leads to a discovery of its own identity and at the same time, to how diverse it is. Therefore, it could never be considered “pure in the full sense of the word, but a product of relationships and exchanges that collaborates with the others, that is, cosmopolitan” (RASTIER, 2015: p.19).

Cosmopolitanism, also known as interculturality, is a concept that has been referred to by many scholars. Zanella and Sousa (2008) describe it as a “philosophical thinking that despises geographical frontiers imposed by society (...) and considers men as builders of a single nation, not seeing any difference between them”. Culture as understood from the cosmopolitan or intercultural point of view, needs to be described, according to Rastier (2015:7), differently just like the “cultural objects that compose them, especially languages and texts”.

We now move on to text analysis. It is a characteristic of popular literature’s discourse, an enunciation made with different languages (gestural, musical, linguistic), allowing it to consider the existence of a semiotic spectacle, even in the simplest of texts, as in the song “*Hoje é um dia lindo*”³ which, besides the musicalization and language, is also composed of corporal movements. Take for example the first moment: raise your arms, make an arc-shaped gesture with them, stand up, then turn around and sit down.

Hoje é um dia lindo
Me sinto contente (Bis)
Levanto e salto
Dou meia volta e sento (Bis)

In the second stage, gestures are directed toward the person nearby, such as: holding their hand, walking alongside them, declaring friendship:

Nós iremos juntos
Iremos Juntos
Iremos juntos
Amigos seremos

³ The term semiotic spectacle is used for those situations of emancipation that gather many languages, beyond the linguistic text like: gestures, singing, dancing etc.

Amigos seremos

In the last stanza, each person points a finger, starting from their own heart and moving toward the other's heart, while singing:

Pois o meu amigo
 É o teu amigo
 E o teu amigo
 É amigo meu (Bis) (Batista:2025)

Opening yourself up to another person, listening to them and hearing things for them are present in oral performances of popular genres, which causes relational goods. These, according to Marx (*Il Capitale*, 1975 [1867]) – are *goods* because they satisfy human needs and have value but are not *merchandise* (have no value and cannot be bought at any markets) although they can play a significant role in establishing well-being.

So, “ever since the first lullabies we hear from our mothers, while playing with friends, at work, in moments of leisure, the goal is to keep a dialogical relationship between the participants and favor relational goods”.

In *La Condessa romance*, two different languages are used, but it does not prevent comprehension. The two languages are: Portuguese, for the most part, and Spanish in words such as the feminine definite article *La* e personal pronoun *Yo* (in its aspirated oral form: *Jo*).

— Ô de casa, ô de fora onde mora **La** Condeza?
 — Qu’ê que ques com **La** Condeza que por ela perguntais?
 — Senhor rei mandou dizer que das três filhas que tivesse,
 Por favor, mandasse uma para **Jo** casar com ela
 (*La Condeza*⁴, Vila de Bodocongó, PB. In BATISTA, 2015: p. 291)

It is an oral romance of ancient Iberic tradition, dating back to medieval times, when there was no distinction between Portuguese and Spanish. Unaware of this, people still interpret *La* as if it belonged to the countess’ name, proven by the link between article and noun, in the texts we receive in written form, creating a single word with a new meaning.

⁴ We have omitted the names of the informants here for ethical reasons.

Lacodeça is the spelling pointed out by some informants, who affirmed this as being the name of the character and *Jo* is interpreted as being the name of the knight who would come for the girl and not the personal pronoun of the first person in Spanish (*Yo*), pronounced in an aspired way.

Linguistic aspiration can be found in a single word, as in *Text 3* –

Lá na ponte d'avinhança,
 todo mundo passa
 Lá na ponte d'avinhança,
 todo mundo passa
 A lavadeira faz assim
 A lavadeira faz assim
 Assim, Assim
 Todo mundo passa

Of an informant from a town near Recife), in which *Avinhança* seems to be a mix of the French word *Avignon* and the Portuguese word *Aliança*. Since it is quite common to hear this lullaby as “*A ponte d’Aliança*”, we asked the informant (1993) if she did not make a mistake, but she confirmed it, claiming her mother taught her the name *Avinhança*.

Then we concluded that the lullaby referenced the legend of Avignon Bridge’s origins, also called *Saint Bénéze Bridge*, an homage to the saint who begun its construction in the 12^o century, following a divine inspiration. Today this bridge is listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, known internationally through the song *Sur le pont d’Avignon* which is similar in form and musicalization to our lullaby *A ponta da Aliança*. In text 3, we compared these two versions: French to the left, Brazilian Portuguese to the right.

People who go through the bridge are appointed by profession, and in the Brazilian text, they are all female: seamstresses, embroiderers, nurses, washers, cooks – since in Brazil, boys were not “supposed to” play like this. In the French version, besides those employed people, others who went through the bridge were beautiful ladies (*belle dames*), fine gentlemen (*beaux monsieurs*) and shoemakers (*cordonniers*), which might imply there is broader universalism in the French text.

In Brazil, there was no translation of the French text, nor a proper creation of an original text, but an adaptation that included both the words and the gestures. During the game, while they sing and dance, the children are separated in two lines, one in front of the other, then they raise their arms and hold the hands of who is in front of them, forming a tunnel, where the girls in pairs go through, until the line ends.

Every time a profession is mentioned, they make gestures that symbolizes it: rubbing clothes like a washer, holding a pan like a cook, sewing like an embroiderer etc. The tunnel represents the bridge and the girls passing through the tunnel is an allusion to the people passing through the bridge, which are numerous and diverse – and they are happy to be playing.

Then, we believe the word *Aliança*, included in most versions, does not refer to the city in Pernambuco where the informant previously mentioned lives, but to the noun “alliance”, which means pact, deal, friendship – something that can happen whenever people are together.

In text 4 – Pai José, there is a linguistic cosmopolitanism where different language levels are used (popular and erudite) and different social classes also at play, since it involves the relationship between the boss (*sinhá moça*) and its subordinate (*the slave*) without preventing a good rapport between the participants:

Pai José em sua terra
 Ele era capitão
 Hoje em terra de terra branco
 O bravo chatim 69F⁵
 Pai José é ladrão (bis).

 Sinhá moça que tá na janela
 Que tá me oiando
 Que tá maginando
 É ou lá o batuque na cozinha
 Mãe Maria quer me dar

A single popular play can also be characterized by different literary genres. The example shown in text 5 is a variant of the traditional fairy tale *A Madrasta* (which can be found under different names in Brazil). Along this prosaic narrative genre, there is a sextile sung in oral performances and constitutes the most used poetic form in the written popular genre, the *cordel*.

Em cima da sepultura da órfã nasceu um capinzal bonito. O donoda casa mandou que o empregado fosse cortar o capim. O capineiro foi pela manhã e quando começou a cortar o capim, saiu uma voz do chão, cantando:

Carpineiro de meu pai!
 Não me cortes os cabelos.....
 Minha mãe me penteou,
 Minha madrasta me enterrou,
 Pelo figo da figueira
 Que o passarinho picou....

⁵Dishonest trader; trafficker, crook

Chô! passarinho!

(CASCUDO, Contos tradicionais do Brasil: p.207/208)

Moving on to text 6, seen for the first time by José Veríssimo (1888) amongst the indigenous ethnic group Maué, located in the then-called Province of Amazonas. The author visited the province's president, who received a *poracê* (a type of ball) in his honor. In this dance, the knight tap dances around the lady, and the musicians play and sing a chorus accompanied by the romance *A Nau Catarineta*:

Capitão barateiro Zonda do má
 Prometeu mas não deu, Zonda do má
 Sete saia de chita Zonda do má
 Para dia de ano, Zonda do má (1889)
 _Arriba, arriba, gajeiro e aquele tope reá (a)
 avista terra de Espanha areia de Portugal (b)
 Marinheiro vieram de longe, no grande navio de guerra.
 Pra 'starem hoje encalhado no caná da Igraterra.
 Avistaram terra de Espanha areia em Portugal
 _Não avistei terra de Espanha, nem areia em Portugal, (c)
 avistei três menina em baixo do Laranjá, (d)
 mostrava ser filha do capitão-generá.
 A mais pequena dela, para contigo casá (e)
 Não quero a vossa filha que lhe custou a criá (f)
 quero o meu anau Catarinete para nomar navegá. (g)
 nem isso te posso dá
 te darei em dinheiro
 Não quero vosso dinheiro, que vos custou a ganhá

How does an Iberic oral romance shows up in an indigenous group in the middle of the Amazon? Popular literature history can explain this. The oral romance has palatial origins, between the 11^o and 12^o centuries. They were recited in the Portuguese court, along the flute and the lyre. Oral romances were largely spread amongst the people and brought orally to the newfound lands. Therefore, they arrived in Brazil with the first Portuguese colonizers and infiltrated peripheric areas thanks to trailblazers, gypsies, circus performers and above all, the church, who used it in school festivities.

Many texts were adapted, almost completely restructured and others suffered mild modifications that preserved the original theme, verse structure and in many cases,

even the musicalization. Beyond these lexical differences, we see in the text modifications in the discursive genre that goes from being not a narrative told to a simple group of listeners but a ceremonial reception to an important visitor. It assumes the nature of tale much less than the *Fandango* (PIMENTAL, 2005: p.14), popular folk dance used by sailors.

In this text, like the ones analyzed before them (*Menina enterrada viva, Pai José*), the anthropic zone of distancing (RASTIER, 2010) begins early, linked to an enunciator, in a “enunciative clutch” (GREIMAS), which gives the voice to discursive speakers in an identity zone only (like in the three texts shown), or in identity and proximity, those surrounding the *You* and the *I* – as seen in *Capitão Borateiro* and *La Condessa*.

The proof is the use of pronouns of the first and second person (*meu gajeiro; te darei; vos custou; vossa filha, contigo etc.*) and verbs in the present tense in first and second person (*arriba, avistei, quero etc.*), with the ones in first person being the majority.

These elements point to an enunciator/enunciatee not distant from the text, but present as discursive actors, with ideologically marked values in the narrative, like for example, for the *gajeiro* (the *tu* marked in the enunciation of the six first verses), it’s taking the titular ship, the “*nau Catarineta*” from the captain. Meanwhile, for the captain (the *eu* marked in the same verses) it’s negotiating with the *gajeiro* to continue owning the ship, even if that means losing his daughters.

Although there were more texts where cosmopolitanism could be seen, there was not enough space in here to discuss it, and we decided to show the most significant case analysis. These were evidenced by the mixture of different languages like Portuguese and Spanish and types (verbal, gestural, musical), levels of language and social classes also diverse, and value systems linked to different races and specially amongst the blend of different genres within the same literary text.

We consider the cases where the difference was thoroughly accepted, it was seen as a unity in diversity. So, the identity attributed to popular culture is not a singular concept, an equality of thought or ideological uniformization, but a pluralism where senses are built from differences.

And according to Rastier (2015), this is the healthiest way to “understand the practices of adaptation, loaning and mutual enrichment that favors the exchanges, in

educational fields and amidst social groups” in which there must be programs to favor unity in diversity. To him, “cosmopolitanism is necessary and urgent for ethical (humankind rights), political (democracy) and ecological reasons”.