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MATTERS OF ARCHIVES AND MEMORIES: POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITIES IN MASS CULTURAL PRODUCTS[1]

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Abstract

Starting from a proposal of Cultural Studies, this paper analyzes some products of cultural industry, more specifically: the novel *Gould's Book of Fish*, by Richard Flannagan (2003) and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, by Joan Lindsay, first published in 1967, both in its version as a novel and in the two subsequent adaptations, first as a movie (Weir, 1975) and lately as a TV series of the same name (2018), available on streaming on the Amazon platform. We also focus on the BBC recent short series named *Noughts + Crosses* (2020), in which we observe the impossibility of representing "reverse racism". These cultural products are observed through the prism of postcolonial theories. The paper identifies some issues related to the historical narrative produced through colonial archives and the silencing of other voices. It observes how the phenomenon of hybridization and cultural appropriation develops as a tool suitable for the construction of collective national identities in a postcolonial era of globalization.

Keywords

Colonial Archives, Collective Identities, Mass-Culture products, Cultural Studies, Postcoloniality: Racism.

Resumen

A partir de una propuesta de Estudios Culturales, este artículo analiza algunos productos de la industria cultural, más específicamente: la novela *El libro del pescado de Gould*, de Richard Flannagan (2003) y *Picnic en Hanging Rock*, de Joan Lindsay, publicado por la primera vez en 1967, ambos en su versión como novela y en las dos adaptaciones posteriores, primero como una película (Weir, 1975) y últimamente como una serie de televisión del mismo nombre (2018), disponible en *streaming* en la plataforma Amazon. También nos centramos en la reciente serie corta de la BBC denominada Noughts + Crosses (2020), en la que observamos la imposibilidad de representar el "racismo inverso". Estos productos culturales se observan a través del prisma de las teorías poscoloniales. El artículo identifica algunos temas relacionados con la narrativa histórica producida a través de los archivos coloniales y el silenciamiento de otras voces. Observa cómo el fenómeno de hibridación y apropiación cultural se desarrolla como una herramienta adecuada para la construcción de identidades nacionales colectivas en una era poscolonial de globalización.

Palabras clave

Archivos Coloniales, Identidades colectivas, Productos de cultura de masas, Estudios Culturales, Postcolonialidad: Racismo.

Introduction

The problem of narrating memories and of identity in a multicultural panorama, the recognition of their legitimacy or the lack of it are themes of postcolonial and decolonial discourse. The theoretical path we propose here, in order to analyze the chosen cultural products (literary and audiovisual) and their links with identity representations, is built on the basis of the reflections developed by thinkers such as Stuart Hall (2006, 2011), Homi K. Bahba (2007), Grada Kilomba (2019) and Nestor Canclini (1997), among others.

Analyzing cultural products such as TV series or books is particularly interesting when we observe the forms of impact of cultural and political reflections developed by the academic world when they come into contact with globalized audiences, contesting some principles of universality of Eurocentric origin. Novels and TV series can be observed by identifying, as the main nucleus, the production of discourses that become institutional and which originated in the formation of alternative identities to those, binary based, of the dialectic of center-periphery, in a scheme discussed, already in the 70s, by Fernando Novais (1986).

The issue we identify in these products is that of the possibility of legitimate narratives as alternatives to those produced by the tradition of European origin, in which any alterity to the order imposed by the formation of institutional archives created by colonization would not respond to the idea of truth, but would be relegated to the space of the invention. We want to discuss the principle of legitimate and illegitimate knowledge based on the status of discursive productions which, as fiction, are considered as "secondary" social memories, because principles still exist stating that historical constructions only recognize the validity of the speeches produced from the creation of documentaries sources, as they have long been articulated starting from the European and colonial archives, specially from the nineteenth century.

First, we will analyze two cultural products related to Australian space, *William Gould's book of fish* (Flannagan, 2003) and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Lindsay, 2017), from which, after the publication in 1967, both a movie, directed by Peter Weir (1975) and a TV series (2018) were taken. These are productions of Australian origin that clearly question the records of postcolonial identities, and we will approach them from the debates on the idea of "total archives" (Cook, 1998; Stoler, 2009). Later, we will focus on a short BBC series, *Noughts + Crosses* (2020), where we found some issues that forced us to discuss how images forges identities.

These products are related to the sphere of mass culture production and, at the same time in which they are not well seen by the academic world, they enter, in a very efficient way, in the symbolic market of late Capitalism, as analyzed by Beatriz Sarlo (2007).

The history proposed by these mass products imposes the irruption of the present, transforming them in operations that can be decoded only to the extent that they are structured as fiction narratives. Thus, they are able to move far beyond the disciplinary field of history, reaching the public sphere of political communication.

Our proposal wants to discuss these mass productions, suggesting a revision of the methodological rules of a still Eurocentric history, which claims to supervise the ways of reconstitution of the past, through an epistemological ideal that places itself as a "guarantor" of a historical production of quality, thus corresponding to the construction of authority. On the other hand, the story narrated by the products of wide circulation, sensitive to the strategies in which the present "captures" the past, reveals itself to be open to a "common sense" capable of orienting audiences in different ways, legitimating some postcolonial perspectives, still minor in the academic world.

New archives facing multiculturalism and decolonisation

In a similar way to museums and other traditional institutions of the European nation states, the archives have in the last decades undergone significant changes towards higher accessibility and transparency, facilitated mainly through the advances of the digital technologies. These changes have resulted in new challenges which offer unforeseen possibilities for democratization, both in terms of access and knowledge production by new, often marginalized, voices. The decolonisation of archives has a broader meaning beyond interrogating the colonial legacy and existing, or even emerging, neo-colonial power relations (Stoler, 2009). Therefore, what we should discuss is how to undo, or at least to avoid, the perpetuation of neo-colonial epistemologies, fighting for the recognition of certain materials as relevant, despite continuous dismissals by the authorities (Ernst, 2016). One of the levels we must consider when we address decolonised memory dwells in acknowledging that the seemingly neutral Western criteria and classifications are in fact tools for maintaining the role of an archive as an imperial project of domination and affirmation, while the wide spread of digitalized documents may offer the illusion of a new "democratization" of knowledge. However, the apparent abundance of available material online often results in

an overload that, instead of mining the established Western narratives, merely supplement and thus confirm their primacy.

The issue, previously appointed, of legitimate memories and of their recognition (or their lack of legitimacy) is the main theme of *Gould's Fish Book* (2003), written by the Australian author Richard Flanagan. Within a journey through the paths of fiction and its connections with the representations of information and its universe of documents, the analysis of this novel is of particular interest, placing it on a literary axis strongly marked by discussions of Cultural Studies as contestants of the universality of Eurocentric origin. The novel does this by identifying, as its main nucleus, the production of institutional memory originated by archives as the only legitimate source of history. The theme that arises throughout the narrative is the impossibility of an alternative history to that allowed by the institutions or, better: a different history is possible, but it can only be considered as a fictional narrative. Any alterity to the order imposed by an institutional archive created by the colonizers has no value. What is discussed in this book is the core of legitimate and illegitimate knowledge based on the status of literature, which, as fiction, tends to be considered as a less socially useful memory, more like a *divertissement*.

What this means is already presented in the first pages of the novel. The first "self" in the narrative belongs to Sid Hammett, a forger who lives on expedients, deceiving tourists with fake objects that satisfy their expectations in relation to their ideas about Tasmania, seen by them as a distant and exotic place: "In the end, what tourists were buying was history, the only kind of story they were interested in buying - an American story, happy and exciting, whose theme was 'we found them alive and brought them back home'" (Flanagan, 2003, p. 14). "They wanted stories in which they were already imprisoned […]. They wanted us to say 'whalers', so that they could reply 'Moby Dick' and evoke images of the well-known miniseries" (p. 16). A memory forger, therefore.

One day, during an expedition in search of old objects to be transformed into "ancient ones", Sid sees some loose threads "from a somewhat worn bookbinding, with the spine partly detached" (Flanagan, 2003, p. 19). It is the encounter with an unusual book, which, says Sid himself, should not have fallen into the hands of the little rascal he was. The book presents itself to the eyes as "a terrible mess, with some reports written in ink, brought up over other texts in pencil, and sometimes the other way around" (p. 21). It is an account written by a prisoner from the penal colony of Sarah Island, named William Buelow Gould, in charge, since 1828, of making the drawings of all the fish that were caught for scientific purposes. But "if the charge of painting fish was an obligation,

writing the text […] was not. Prisoners were forbidden to write diaries, and therefore this activity was dangerous." (p. 22). The problem with this account is that, despite being recognized as "old" by the historians, bibliophiles and editors Sid shows it to, "it harmonized with the known facts to a certain extent, as soon afterwards it came into conflict with them" (p. 24).

In short, the book cannot be recognized as a historical document:

> When I managed to convince the museum experts to subject the parchment and the inks to certain tests, to apply carbon dating and even tomography to the entire book, page by page, they recognized that all materials and techniques looked authentic and compatible with the period. However, the text of the report was so far-fetched that, instead of providing me with a document attesting that the book was an authentic work of great historical interest, the museum experts praised the quality of my forgery and wished me much success in my activities focused on tourism. (Flanagan, 2003, p. 24)

Sid decides, then, to turn to an eminent specialist in the colonial period, trusting academic authority, but the professor "initiated a passionate reasoning accuse" (Flanagan, 2003, p. 25), during which he "demonstrates" how history is made based on archival records. At first glance, he says, the penal colony described in the book seemed to be the same that historically existed on the island of Sarah, where the worst criminals were taken. However,

> If on one hand it is a historical fact that between 1820 and 1832 Sarah Island was the most feared colony in the entire British Empire, on the other hand there is practically nothing in the Book of Fishes that is corroborated by what is known about that insular hell. There are few names contained in this curiosity that appear in the official documents of the time, and those few appear in documents with identities and life histories that have nothing to do with what is reported in this… this despicable *pastiche*. And, if we take the time to examine the historical […] documentation, we learn that Sarah Island never suffered under the heel of a tyrannical ruler, nor did it, for some time, become such an important and independent commercial port that it became an autonomous nation, nor was it destroyed by an apocalyptic fire such as reported by this catastrophic chronicle which is the Book of Fishes. (Flanagan, 2003, pp. 27-28)

The final suggestion Sid receives is to publish it as a novel, since literary fraud is, for the eminent university professor, "the only area of letters… in which Australia can be proud of a certain global eminence" (Flanagan, 2003, p. 28). Despite all the chemical, physical and biological (in a word: scientific) evidence pointing to the originality of the book, its inconsistency with the archival memory that becomes historical puts it at a lower level twice: the first, because it can only be considered a literary piece and the second because it originates from a part of the world that, beings a colony, can only be able to imitate an original, something that comes from the "center", from Europe, from the British colonizer, the only producer of the legitimate memories of that time.

Obviously dissatisfied, Sid searches for information in the public archive of Tasmania and finds a historic William Gould who was effectively arrested, as a swindler, in the penal colony and in charge of drawing the fish. He also finds a copy of the book at the Allport library but, in this book, there are no words: there are only the drawings of fishes. This is a legitimate copy, the one found in the library, and it is the mirror of the book Sid possess: "they seemed to mirror each other so precisely, they were simultaneously the same book and two very different books […]. One of the books spoke with the authority of words; the other, with the authority of silence […]" (Flanagan, 2003, p. 30-31).

Unfortunately, Sid says that (as we already know, he is also a con man) he ended up losing the book. The fascination, however, had been so great and its reading so attentive that he decided to rewrite it and deliver it for publication as a novel. This long initial part, more than a traditional prologue within literature, that of a found manuscript, already places several stimuli for reflection on the documentary validity of history and literature, especially in a post-colonial context such as Australia. From that moment on, we are thrown into a surreal world, that of the penal colony, made up of all the elements summarized by the remarkable historian, in an atmosphere of cruelty, ambition and unbridled desire of the colonizers. The self of the narrative changes, now the first person to speak is William Gould, the crook, transposed into a fictional narrative by Sid Hammett, also a crook.

Let us now discover another "key" character in the story, Mr. Jorgen Jorgensen, a clerk at the penal colony, who is described by William Gould / Sid Hammett as follows:

> Even by the horrendous patterns of that horrendous island Jorgen Jorgensen —despite all his affectation— was a veritable ugly pelican, a long man, full of sharp angles, a body that looked like a hanger trying to remember the coat he had slipped many years before. (Flanagan, 2003, p. 150)

Jorgensen takes care of writing reports and rendering accounts of the administration of the penal colony. In short, he is nothing more than the archivist of the island, obedient to the commander to the point of creating the fantastic documentation on the administrative and prison conditions that the latter asks him to report. But this evidence, William Gould will reveal to us almost at the end of the book. For insubordination, our con "author" is confined in a cell where, during high tide, he can only stand and head upwards so as not to drown. It is in that cell that he writes his Book of Fishes while he arms his escape, digging a path through the low ceiling. Through this exit, he reaches a place where there are only books:

> There were books everywhere, and everywhere I looked, my eyes were met with more books, and they were all neatly stacked and arranged on rough, heavy shelves of dark hardwood, on large shelves that rose from the floor to ceiling, all radiating, like the spokes of a wheel, from the center, where there was a large, circular table, from which I had emerged […]. (Flanagan, 2003, p. 275)

An interesting form, which refers to the *Panoptikon* model, applied to prison spaces, rather than to an archive, which is exactly the place where the protagonist entered. Yes, because that is the kingdom of Jorgensen, as we will soon discover. And if an archive is, unfortunately, frequently still defined as the mirror of the institution that produces it, an archive of this nature reproduces the model of control and surveillance that allows, from a center, to observe all rays, in effect, the model studied by Foucalt (2005). Here, the archivist is watching, and his documents are under his eye without being able to hide from him. It is not a cozy archive, but "a labyrinth of gray and blue mobile shadows, ugly and sinister" (Flanagan, 2003, p. 276). On the table there is a document, which William takes out to read. Even the letters "extended in monstrous connections […], as if all the words were chained together, subdued" (p. 276), a description that reinforces our idea that this is a place that, through its documents, "mirrors" the penal institution. But what William reads baffles him: "it was supposed to be a list of the activities of the forced in the past six months, but almost every detail was wrong" (p. 276).

Gould understands that he is in the archive, where all the records of the island can be found, that this is the table where Jorgensen sits "to indulge in the work of the only account of our strange world that would last more than the memory of each one of us" (Flanagan, 2003, p. 276). These are, then, those documents on the basis of which history is built, that history that made the Book of Fish, at the beginning of the novel,

a fraud, a literary piece, something that contrasts with the institutional account. We thus have a new swindler, who can never be considered such, as a legitimate producer of memory, but who, in the eyes of the swindler Gould and in the words of swindler Sid, only writes "things so unexplainable, of shocking boldness, and, yet at the same time so convincing in the lucidity of their madness" (p. 277). Everything Gould reported in his Book of Fish has no trace in the archive, despite his searches that go on for seven nights:

> What I discovered between the covers was not a chronicle of the penal colony I knew, the new nation that the commander called New Venice. I flipped through the memos, the copiers, the forced labor contracts, looking for the records, the drawings, the floor plans of the wonderful Great Hall of Majong. Anything. For seven nights, I combed through the Intendency records, trying to find bills, invoices, receipts that would prove that the commander had bought the South American locomotives; documents attesting the sale of Transylvanian forests, or the even bolder operation by which the commander had sold the Australian continent and acquired the Moluccas Jewels, medicines from China, sea cucumbers, Javanese furniture and shipments of Siamese girls. Anything. For seven nights, I examined diaries and personal letters, looking for the smallest details that would indicate, albeit in a more indirect way, the commander's nightmares about a past that never passed, of naked Arab merchants and Japanese immortal pirates and French rationalists. (p. 278)

In Gould's eyes, everything in the archive reveals the need to lie to the central government, painting the penal colony as it was expected to be and not as it really was, and clearly the archivist had been chosen to alter all documents to reflect not the institution as it was, but expectations about it. And isn't this, one of the evils of the archive, that positive view of the document that tells the truth, so criticized throughout the 20th century? Is not history as offered by the colonizers, who have long denied genocide and the destruction of original cultures, in the name of civilization, progress and order? The protagonist says:

> I tried to imagine the old Dane at first feeling compelled to reinvent all the barbarism and horror of our colony as order and progress, material, moral and spiritual, recording everything, in the uncertain light of the whale oil lamp, with its elegant

> italics in the colony's official documents. […] If, under the commander's yoke, vigil, dream and nightmare formed a single whole, in the records of the old Dane they were completely separate and opposite things. Nightmares were forbidden, and no collusion between life and dream was allowed. It was a tremendous cheat […]. (Flanagan, 2003, p. 281)

It is clear, then, that the penal colony is a metaphor for telling the world subjected by the colonizers and the archive, as a precious source of "facts" and "data", is the place of the lies of memory, which becomes a false history not yet rejected. After all, "If freedom […] exists only in the space of memory, then […] everyone was condemned to an eternity of incarceration" (Flanagan, 2003, p. 285). And then, William Gould's conclusion is that the world no longer existed to become a book. Now a book existed whose obscene ambition is to become the world. The outcome is inevitable: the destruction of the archive. Surprised by the archivist who, as the document room is "monochromatic and cold", the two begin to fight and Jorgensen dies, buried by the shelves and the records that fall on him. But, as we already know from the beginning of the book, it is the official data, it is the archive that, in the dimension of memory, silence the other voices, those of the dominated, who, like prisoners of the penal colony, forbidden to write diaries, had his own silenced memories, reduced to literature as an improbable tale.

Revisiting fiction in Cultural Industry: Picnic at Hanging Rock

Collective identity refers to the sense of oneself as a member of a social group or collectivity. It is a sense of belonging, a sense of being part, that makes sense of the world and one's place within it. What is the relevance of communication media to the construction of this identity? The media provide some of the important symbolic materials for the construction of identity, both at the individual and the collective level: beliefs, assumptions, and patterns of behavior. The construction of identity can never start anew; it always builds on a pre-existing set of symbolic materials which form the foundation of identity.

Evidence for the influential role that the medias play in societies is overwhelming. Perhaps most significant of all is the fact that people attach central importance to the media as critical contributors to the way in which they think and live their lives. In this way, it is very important to remember that collective identity is collective consensus, a

symbolic project, and shared interests, and that the media in general and the Internet in particular are powerful tools to actively build it.

The path we'd like to follow concerns the way of using a fictional product, originally a novel, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, by Joan Lindsay, first published in 1967. In 1975 the Australian director Peter Weir adapted the novel for the homonymous movie and, in 2018, the streaming platform by Amazon produces a series also named after the novel.

Picnic at Hanging Rock has become one of the most known Australian fictional products since the global success of the book, and the recent series allows to observe how it designs postcolonial reflections.

The original story is known. On Valentine's day in 1900, the young students of the Appleyard college, directed by the widow Appleyard, go, accompanied by two teachers, to Mount Diogenes, also known as Hanging Rock, for a festive picnic. During the afternoon, four of the young women, Miranda, Irma, Marion and Edith, leave the group to explore the surroundings. In the meantime, the rest of the group, exhausted by the heat and food, falls asleep.

At noon, all the clocks stopped. After some time, the group is awakened by the cries of Edith who returns in desperation. Not only did the other three girls disappeared, but also one of the teachers, Miss McCraw, joined them. Only after more than a week Irma will be found, while there will be no more news of the other two missing girls and the teacher. Originally, the book was published with a suspended ending, but a few years later the author published a closure in which the widow Appleyard reaches Hanging Rock and commits suicide by jumping off a cliff. Peter Weir's film substantially follows the plot of the book. In the original story there are no elements that allow to characterize the ethnicity or race of the characters, which we tend to suppose white, with the exception of a single reference to an "abo tracker" during searches for missing girls. We suppose them white because they are part of a college established for the "traditional" education of young people according to an English model. Peter Weir's film reinforces this image: the widow Appleyard is a middle-aged lady, the young women of the college are all white, from good families, with the exception of Sarah Waybourne, an orphan who studies at the college thanks to a rich tutor. The college servants are also represented as belonging to the world of English colonization. The only, quick exception is the fleeting appearance of the "abo tracker", during the searches, to which both Lindsay and Weir don't give much importance, but whose presence shows the fidelity of the movie script to the book.

Peter Weir's movie begins with the adaptation of Poe's poem *A dream in a dream*, published in 1849: "What we see and what we seem are but a dream. A dream within a dream"[2], a young voice recites. This quote remembers us that the author of the book, the Australian artist and writer Joan Lindsay, claimed to have written the book directly inspired by dreams she dreamt.

But, as we shall see, this idea of the dream will acquire a lot more of importance, when the story is re-adapted for the tv series, in 2018.

As the movie unravels, we can see that the adaptation is strongly based on the original characters: Ms. Appleyard is a middle-aged English widow; all the students are white young ladies; the servants are white, and the story is quite faithful to the novel. Apparently, there are no big changes in the expectation created by the novel but, of course, the visual effect must be considered as an element that help to build sense.

Nevertheless, the movie is interesting to consider because it allows to observe the changes that occurred in the audiovisual representation of history in its production as a TV series, which took place in 2018. Of course, the story clearly follows the original novel, so we are now going to observe what happens between the movie production in the seventies and the much more recent tv series.

First of all, let's take a look to the characters that play a central role in our analysis:

1. Ms, Appleyard. In Weir's movie, she is an English widow, owning a school in which "good manners" are taught. In the series, Ms. Appleyard is a swindler. Not even the name belongs to her, she took it from a soap box. She fled away from her evildoer fellows from England to Australia and she doesn't really know "good manners". She appears, during the first scenes, pretending to be a wealthy widow, and one of her first assertion is that "People always believe their own eyes. Dress like a tart you're a tart. Dress like a widow…". She also thinks that it is a new beginning, there in what she sees as "the end of the world". So, in her mind, it's a "goodbye, Hester, hallo, Ms. Appleyard". During the six episodes, flashbacks will reveal her past at the orphanage, how she met her fellows and how she escaped. We will also know that she is far from refined (one of the girls comment that she doesn't even know the right place to put the cutlery on the table). At the end, she will kill herself, as the original novel character does.

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2. "All that we see or seem/Is but a dream within a dream", recites the original poem by Poe.

2. Miranda Reid. Both in the book and the movie, she appears to be the leading girl of the lost group, but we actually don't know who she is or where she comes from. In the TV series, she's the eldest daughter (and the only female of five) of a family who owns a factory in North Queensland. She is portrayed as quite a rebel, used to ride horses and climb trees. Her family wants her to get manners in order to find her a husband. She faces up Ms. Appleyard several times.

3. Irma Leopold. As for the other characters, Lindsay and Weir don't tell us about her background, we only know she's from a very rich family. In the series, we learn her mother is from the Rotschild family and left her father. After ten days lost, she is found in a cave at Hanging Rock. After recovering, she will leave the boarding school, and the other girls violently attack her. In the series, it looks like she established strong boundaries with Miranda, but we will discover that she actually hated her.

4. Marion Quade. She's one of the lost girls. In Weir's movie she is portrayed, as the others, as a white girl, but the series innovates, presenting her as the result of her father's affair with an aboriginal woman. So, she is race-mixed, and she has been sent to the college because she is not only an illegitimate child, but also socially unacceptable because of her dark skin. She falls in love with Ms. McCraw, the math teacher who also disappears.

5. Greta McCraw. She's the math teacher, portrayed in the novel and the movie as a middle-aged woman interested only in her books, stiff in her posture and mind. In the TV series, she's very friendly with the girls and she will accept an intimate relation with Marion. She went to Australia from Scotland, to run away from the rigid rules of a society where lesbians can't be accepted.

6. Mademoiselle Diane de Poitiers, the French teacher. In the book and in the movie, she plays an important role, while Ms. Appleyard is somehow less relevant during the whole action. In the TV series, though still occupying a relevant place, she presents less strength, letting Ms. Appleyard to stand out more.

7. Michael Fitzhubert. The young nephew of a retired colonel, he plays an important role. In the book and the movie, he is the last one who sees the girl while they are climbing Hanging Rock. He is the one who decides to go back, after ten days from their disappearance, eventually finding Irma Leopold. In the TV series we discover he was sent to Australia after some kind of scandal

involving him and another boy at Oxford. He establishes a strong homo-affective relation with Albert, Fitzhubert groom, who is an Australian orphan: no past, for him, who consider himself completely "Australian".

Some of the original lines are played by different characters in the TV series, but, basically, they are maintained. There are also some small repeated details from the book that surface in the movie and the series such as: when the girls leave the school for the picnic, Ms. Appleyard states that they will keep their gloves on until they pass through the small city on the way to Mount Diogenes. Then, they are allowed to take them off; after the picnic, when everybody is dozing, all the watches stop at midday. But many other can be found.

Let's now focus on what, essentially, changes, not in the script, but in the way it becomes an image of the collective identity for insiders and for outsiders, and in doing so, it contributes to the construction of some sort of Australian depiction of identity.

Benedict Anderson (1983) writes about the nation as a formalized, relatively stable, homogenizing social space that citizens encounter every moment of their everyday lives, but also as an imagined community, a cultural space that they share in common. Cultural identity gives people a shared sense of difference that is reinforced through the routines and rituals of everyday life,

Collective identity is much more than a collection of individuals who share history and space and speak the same language. Collective identities are complex and distinctive cultural narratives, mythical stories that people tell themselves. So, now, we will try to observe how the series builds some aspects of the "new" postcolonial Australian collective identity.

As we previously said, Lindsay stated she wrote her novel based on a series of dreams, while the movie begins with Poe's poems on dreams.

We have to remind, here, that in Aboriginal culture the *Dreaming* plays a basic role as metaphysical expression of primordial truths that trace the birth of the world and man's place in it. What to the early European settlers in Australia was little more than a landscape, was for the Aborigines a complex spiritual edifice. They were not living in a lonely and desolate place, but in an environment conductive to well-being. We have to look at how the landscape transcends its "pristine" state to become an example of what may be termed as cultural or sacred topography. The aboriginal belief is that, before the *Dreaming,* the landscape was represented by an unending, featureless plain, conforming to an idea of formless void. It was only with the *Dreaming,* that the landscape takes on

a truly significance and, when the *Dreaming* ended, the so-called Sky Heroes left their personalized signature in the way of topographic landmarks, contour variations, trees, animals… as a matter of facts, all manifestations of life on earth. The *Dreaming* was a primordial event that shaped what we can recognize as a cultural landscape. Aborigines regarded their land as a symbolic landscape that became an important correspondent in the dialogue between man and earth.

In order to find their own Dream, aborigines undertake the so called "Dream Journey", a practice that gave birth to the world *walkabout*. In Australian English, for the Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of *walkabout* is "a long journey by an Australian Aboriginal, especially on foot, for cultural reasons"[3], in order to live in the traditional manner. These preliminary observations are essential to understand the cultural shift from the western dream, related to the book and the movie, to a "national" one, operated by the TV series.

We want to alert that we are not saying the series allows subaltern voices to speak out (Spivak, 2010), nor that there is a true recognition of the aboriginal genocide, or that their culture is now considered as "mainstream". It is more a matter of cultural appropriation, through the hybridization of the western dream, stated by Lindsay and by Poe, and the search for a national discourse that is distinctive from the colonial one.

After the young girls cross the small town, they take off their gloves. They are dressed up in Victorian outfits, certainly not very comfortable in the Australian heath. They clearly show this discomfort, fanning themselves. After the picnic, the heath forces them to doze, and their watches stop. Time stops.

In the Aboriginal culture, the *Dreaming* is timeless, because the primordial events took place both in the far distant past and are continuing to occur even when someone is making his/her Dream Journey in the present. The encounter with the country, with the metaphysical landscape, which in this case is Mount Diogenes, the Hanging Rock, as the dream travelers roam across it, is an encounter with spiritual genesis, both personal and collective.

In the second episode of the series, during the searches for the girls, Albert, the groom, says that Hanging Rock was "used […] for initiation of boys to men, that sort of thing". And when sunset approaches, the policeman leading the searches says that "black men won't stay after dark", because they believe the Rock has a powerful spiritual presence: it's hunted. These clues, along with the ancient origin of the mountain, lead to

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3. Taken from Cambridge Dictionary: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/walkabout9

the idea that the Rock is a spiritual "hot place", therefore a place where a Dream Journey can take place. It is, as the watches stops, a timeless spot.

After lunch, almost everyone falls asleep. The four girls start their journey. After a while, climbing through the rocks and cliffs, they rest and sleep. Then, they go on, while they free themselves from their shoes, stocks and, finally, dresses. One of them, Edith, wakes up when the others three have already left, and goes back to join the group, screaming. She will give her version, a version that we will see as it changes, every time the scene of the journey up the Rock is repeated: it's like it's almost the same and never the same. When Irma is rescued, after ten days, she will have almost no memories of what happened, like when we wake up and the dream we were dreaming fades away. Many scenes are taken as if they were somehow unreal, with strong theatrical effects. For instance, when Edith tells the other girls what happened, the light completely changes, reaching a real dramatic effect and, as in a dream, we see the nails of the girls scratching a blackboard. Or when young Michael Fitzhubert sees the four girls walking: first he sees them approaching, but in the next scene, they simply disappear. Many other scenes put the viewers as if they were witnessing a timeless dream, where everything starts to happens at the same time. One good example of this is, in the final episode, when Ms. Appleyard starts climbing the Hanging Rock. We can simultaneously see Miranda, Irma and Marion walking and undressing, and we get the impression that Ms. Appleyard will reach them, because she is following the right path. The girls can actually hear her footsteps. But, when she arrives at the right place, nobody's there. They have vanished in another time, but they are still there. The past and the present of the *Dreaming* are staged. But while the fate of the girls may be of a real new beginning, the fate of Ms. Appleyard is a real end. As we said, in the first episode she says: "A new beginning". But this new life is impossible, to the extent that she "imitates", she "fakes" the old English life, teaching the girls how to behave as if they were English. So, she can't really start again, because she wants to reproduce something that doesn't belong to Australia.

Does representing a black racist society teach us something or is racism an asymmetrical representation? The *Noughts + Crosses* example

Until now, we discussed two post-colonialist cultural production markedly designed by white people.

However, the reflections of diasporic intellectuals become the privileged tool to understand how mass cultural products, which circulate globally (such as novels and television series proposed in this paper), made in societies with a wide colonial history, become bearers of new visions to deconstruct or, at least, to allow even countries like Italy to shed light on their structural racism.

According to Kilomba (2019), the way racism manifests itself in daily life is always through the particular. And the compilation of several episodes reveals not only the complexity of how racism is experienced, but also its uninterrupted presence in the lives of black people. We understand that if it is possible to analyze manifestations of racism through episodes, it is also possible to analyze actions of resistance. This form of analysis, according to Kilomba, also allows writing in a format similar to that of short stories, in line with his interest in transgressing the traditional academic format. Without using the term *episode*, African-American writer Jane Sharpe, when dealing with the lost stories about black slavery and the need to tell them, says that it can only be done through fragments. In this action, she teams up with Toni Morrison, who describes her historical novels as a type of literary archeology, to compose a world that exists only as a set of fragments (Sharpe, 2003, p. XI).

The term *fragment*, proposed by Kilomba, is also used by Ecléa Bosi, who states that memory is not a repository of "memories" from which to draw, but it is the constant work of organizing its fragments: "Full perception of the past is impossible. But memory allows the relation of the present body to the past in fragments, at the same time that it interferes with what is present" (Bosi, 1994, p. 46). Considering that collective memory, as studied by Holbwacs (2013), concerns shared individual memories, as well as the mosaic composed of the fragments that are the memories of each individual, it seems to us methodologically adequate to operate the analysis of literary and audiovisual texts as fragments / episodes. We propose to interpret these fragments in the light of the theories of memory and diasporic Cultural Studies, to the extent that these texts become tools for the production and circulation of information and knowledge, research techniques and individual and collective technology to resist racism.

We do not believe that our analysis of an English product like *Noughts + Crosses* (BBC, 2020) can be "objective", and the subjectivity that crosses it does not try to deny itself to the exposure of its theoretical frontiers and, as for all frontiers, of its limits and lacks. In a research that aims to discuss postcolonial themes starting from the multicultural textuality of the chosen fragments, we chose to use the voices of women and men who define "places of speech" that do not belong to us, and this forces us to discuss what

is the place of our speeches, inevitably rooted in the gender / race / class to which we belong (Ribeiro, 2017).

We cannot culturally appropriate the voices of men and women who belong to an "otherness" in which, as we will see, color and/or origin are what establishes, *a priori*, the otherness itself, the one who is other than me and which, as Mbembe (2001) clearly explains, is transformed into subordination:

> We should first remind ourselves that, as a general rule, the experience of the Other, or the *problem of the "I" of others and of human beings we perceive as foreign to us,* has almost always posed virtually insurmountable difficulties to the Western philosophical and political tradition. Whether dealing with Africa or with other non-European worlds, this tradition long denied the existence of any "self" but its own. (p. 2)

With these premises, we would like to try to think on a contemporary issue involving the complaint of structural racism, and on the concept of *reverse racism* as linked to the idea that there is, on the part of the black world, a phenomenon of racism against white people. Basically, a counterattack of structural racism is "formed" in the same way that a counterattack is elaborated in an attempt to dismantle the patriarchal model: in this case, the defenses of a family ideal —the heterosexual one— are put on stage, so that special days are set up for "family" and the requests for rights of other family configurations are hindered. All in the name of defending something based on the false premise that someone wants to "destroy" the heterosexual family, taken as "traditional". It is in the same direction that we discuss "reverse racism", that is, the claim that racial struggles for rights are a form of segregation towards whites.

To try to understand how the British series *Noughts + Crosses* stages racism, let's consider, schematically, the concept of race.

The concept of *race*, with its proposal to classify human beings permanently, is an eminently modern construction. The term has a semantic range that unfolds to this day. One of the characteristics of race is being a relational and historical concept. To understand what is meant by relational, Frantz Fanon, in *Black skin, White masks* (1967), criticizes the process of subjugation of black people, showing how strong the impact of the regime of images of racial representation is. According to him, the set of images makes existence understandable to human beings from childhood, through the construction of universal notions of humanity, with its identity dimensions. Fanon identifies the clash

that Black people suffer with the interpretative limits of the pedagogy of images, which are used as tools for the maintenance of racial representation practices. The images give us gender and race structure through literature, movies, games, cartoons, school books, disciplining black people in the place of anti-humanity. In this perspective, Fanon recalls when, at school in Martinique, in ultramarine France, he learned that the Gauls were the ancestors of the Martinicans, who are mostly descendants of enslaved people. Fanon identifies the process of acquiring images with the construction of a racialized identity, which prevents access to the right to a genealogy of one's own, on which to base identity(s), since identity is configured in the reproduction of the original colonial myth imposed, in his case, by the French.

Foucault (1997) explains how racism is directly linked to the formation of states. In the nineteenth century, the discourses of biology have a direct impact on the concept of race denoting, among the functions of the state, that of protector of racial purity, which represents, for Foucault, the conservative face assumed by political discourse after the revolutions of the eighteenth century. According to him, therefore, from the nineteenth century states have operated under a "racist state regime". For Foucault, this is not an ideological discourse, but a true "technology of power" on life and death, which he defines as "biopower". The biopower, through biopolitics, acts in the areas of structures that concern health, transport, safety and hygiene, and how and where these structures are present or absent, the action of biopower on life and death can be identified. In all of this, racism performs two functions:

1) Fragmentation and biological division of the human species, through the hierarchization and classification of races. Thus, divisions are established between good and bad, between superiors and inferiors, between those who can live and those who can die.

2) Allowing the establishment of a "positive" relationship with the death of the "other", a relationship in which the discourse of biology makes the death of the "other" acceptable because this is not an peer, as an adversary, but belongs to a "bad", "inferior" race. Death is seen both as a guarantee of safety and as a "positive" development for the dominant group.

Mbembe (2018) states that it is in the colonial world, before the Nazi-Fascist state, that Western rationality started practicing "the selection of races, the prohibition of mixed marriages, the forced sterilization and the extermination of the defeated peoples" (p. 19). Colonialism and slave states shape racial hierarchies based on the fear that arises from the invention of an absolute otherness. It is in such spaces as colonies are, where

there are no juridical norms, for which the law is unable to dominate the right to kill, that the "necropower" is found. According to Mbembe, the specificity of colonial fear is that it exists without the existence of a serious/tangible threat. Fear is provoked by the possibility of an enemy's existence, by his (supposed) will to dominate, not from his real presence. In this climate, which is generated in colonial modernity, slave disciplinary regimes develop first and, after the abolition of slavery, preventive measures are refined up to now (ranging from curfews to control measures as preventive arrest, denunciations of resistance…).

What the racist structure builds is an unreal place which is wild, irrational, therefore unable to organize itself in the form of a modern state made by/for citizens. For Mbembe (2018), "[…] the colonies are the place *par excellence* where the controls and guarantees of the legal order can be suspended - the area where the violence of the state of exception is supposed to operate in the service of 'civilization'" (p. 35).

Colonial occupation must not be understood as a fact restricted to the nineteenth century, but as a new form of political domination in which disciplinary, biopolitical and necropolitical powers come together. Colony discipline, as a form of domination, can now be established within the borders of states as part of political appeals on public security.

Despite the anthropology and biology of the twentieth century playing their part in demonstrating the non-existence of "qualitative" differences that justify discriminatory treatment between human beings, it remains a fact that the notion of race plays a prominent political role in naturalize inequalities and legitimize segregation and genocide of sociologically considered minority groups. It is important to distinguish racism from other categories associated with the concept of race, namely "prejudice" and "discrimination". While racism is a systematic form of discrimination based on the idea of race, manifested through practices that culminate in privileges or disadvantages for members of different racial groups, racial bias is a stereotypical judgment that can result in discriminatory practices. Racism is, therefore, defined as having a systemic character, in the sense that it is not simply marked by one or more discriminatory acts, but as a process in which subordinate or privileged conditions, distributed among racial groups, are reproduced in the areas of politics, economics and everyday social relations. Racism is articulated in racial segregation as a division of spaces in urban topography, defining places of living, consumption and access to services. Basically, racism is a development of the social structure itself, that is, of the naturalized way in which political, economic and social relations are constituted: racism is structural. As a consequence, individual

and institutional behaviors derive from the fact that racism is the rule and not the exception. The systemic reproduction of racist practices constitutes the organization of society, concretely manifesting itself in inequalities.

That said, putting racism as part of the framework does not exempt the individual from responsibility for racist conduct, to the extent that actual changes are also brought about by individual anti-racist stances and practices, as well as collective complaints and moral repudiation. In short: race is a concept that can only be elaborated from a relational perspective, and it manifests itself in concrete acts that take place within social structures marked by conflicts and antagonisms.

If we look at racism as a political process, it will be clearer that it is a systemic process of discrimination that shapes social organization and that depends on political power itself. If this were not the case, systematic discrimination of entire social groups would not be possible. This way, the idea of "reverse racism" makes no sense, as something directed by minorities to majorities. The misunderstanding is obvious: minority racial groups can show prejudice and practice discrimination, but they cannot impose social disadvantages. In current conditions, in Western countries, whites do not lose their jobs, they are not suspected *a priori* of being dangerous, their intelligence or professional ability is not questioned for race reasons. By the way, the term *reverse* implies something out of place, in relation to a somehow "correct", "natural" racism, namely that against Blacks, Latinos, Arabs, Gypsy, Jewish minorities…

What is evident is that the idea of reverse racism serves to de-legitimize demands for racial equality.

With these observation in mind, let's now focus the six episodes series, produced by BBC in 2020, *Noughts+Crosses*.

The story develops in a "parallel" reality, in which a political "entity" called Aprica conquered, dominated and "colonized" Albion seven hundreds years ago. Albion is now ruled by a black racist elite, while white people are segregated and suffer heavy discriminations. The main plot is the love story between Persephone "Sephy" Hadley, daughter of a minister, and Callum McGregor, a young white boy whose mother performs domestic tasks at Sephy's family house. Of course, the love story is strictly forbidden by racial laws, and Sephy is not completely aware of her own racism. Meanwhile, a resistance army for white people liberation (the Liberation Militia) acts with terroristic attacks, inflaming a very unstable and violent social distress. Letting apart the love story between the two young characters (molded by a strong shakespearian influence) that allows us to understand the audience addressed by the show —young adults—, we tried to

understand what kind of racism BBC sketches and what issues this representation creates.

Let's see some of the issues that appeared in our analysis. Apparently, the world represented in the series follows all the systemic "rules" that build our modern society on racism. Thus, we have black people ruling Albion, while white people do not enjoy the same rights: they don't vote, they can't enter good schools or university, the military career has just opened on quotas bases to white people, they live in poor districts, they can only work in low fares jobs. The elements of structural racism are all depicted, with white people represented as a constant danger, as (potential) enemies forcing the government to establish preventive measures in the name of "security". They are classified as inferiors, as bad, as savages. They are stereotyped as violent and drunk people. All the main points that belong to our systemic racism against black people are enacted in the series with a "simple" change of color. But: is it enough to allow both black and white audiences to identify with the characters and the action? Is it enough to characterize an effective representation of racism? From a very white point of view, we believe it is not.

The first issue is the target of the product, a young audience, without distinction of race. Black and white young adults, indeed, do not have the same expectations or the same basis in their appropriation of the series. While the white public belongs to the group that, out of fiction, benefits from structural racism and has a clearly defined identity, which comes from the pedagogy of images we referred to earlier, the black public is confronted with a quite lame representation of themselves. Black people are just white people with a different color. But it's not just a matter of skin: the real issue is that they are stripped of any cultural trace other than that of the well-known established white tradition. Shortly: Aprica replies the imperialist European world, it's by no means different, black people history is wiped out and substituted by the only role model of a structural racism, that is the white one. Apart from very few elements in costumes, this black racist society is structured exactly the same way as we know the white one. Aprica is just a name, the history of this black world appears to be a simple repetition of the legacy of domination left by European. So, we wonder what kind of impact this representation has on the black audience: does it find itself trapped, once more, in a white narrative of the past, one in which it may be difficult to mirror? To better clear what we mean with different interpretations due to racial cultural structures, we can observe how literature presents a perspective on perception of time and space when it comes to white and black identities and references. A good example refers to the relationship established with the act of "crossing the sea". Authors such as Gonçalves (2017), Collins (2019), Scego (2020)

have in common a very different historicized experience on what it means to cross the Ocean: while for white people the transoceanic travel during Modern Age is generally associated to adventure and discovery, black authors clearly identify the same route with death and suffering. This example can throw a light on differences in appropriating cultural production such as the BBC series.

With these divergent backgrounds backing interpretation, the bases needed for the suspension of disbelief may appear a bit more complicated when facing racialized audiences: does this representation, to someone whose past must identify with that of the real, present holders of biopolitical and necropolitical mechanism, cover the hiatus that sustain this kind of *mimesis*? Mind this, we are not saying that it is "wrong" to build this upside-down world, allowing white young people to decode some of the racist elements they carry by identity formation. The issue is that this product, in the end, seems to be much more directed to a white audience then a black one. Identification with the characters and the situations seems quite easier for white people, not only because, in the show, they are oppressed and discriminated, but because they recognize the rules of domination as their own. But to what extent do black people find representativeness, when they are "the villains" they could never have been?

We think we can't answer, due to our "place of speech". In terms of mechanism of identification and self-recognition in this fictional representation, we can only highlight issues we recognize as clearly belonging as a background of our race and gender. Although we may attempt to define racism, we have never been part of the history as racially dominated, so we can't put our white voice to point out how this product collides with the (still) unofficial history of black people.

Our last issue concerns the fact that, in this young adult novel, this unfair regime is doomed to change, and if this happens, it is mainly due to white people demands. If the regime doesn't change, black people will last as villains. Once more, we stand with a question on the expectations of a black audience in terms of self-representativeness. While white people have an asymmetrical dominant power in history, must black people "adjust" to the needs of someone who is frankly used to dominate? Once more, being white, we can't answer.

Noughts + Crosses try to offer an impossible symmetry, just changing the "skin" of power. What we question is what kind of representation of empowerment the series offers, considering that the audience background is not equal when the representation meets white or black people expectations. Expectations are built in a racist system, where race is still politically hierarchical, and where producing empowering images for

Black people doesn't seem so linear and simple as the series suggests. What we can assume, here, is that we understand that black people, once more, might find white people, despite the appearance, dominating the speech.

Summing up but not really concluding

The symbolic character of cultural identity, increasingly built, represented, and promoted by the media, stimulates levels of emotional involvement that contribute to the viability of any individual country. Indeed, the mass media have long played an important role in the process of identity building, creating, ritualizing, and broadcasting who we are, and who the other is.

New theories, especially those coming from South America, offer a broad conception of communication and identity, proposing that mediation should be a central category for analysis. Martín-Barbero (1993) suggests that, for South America, the syncretic nature of popular practices contributes both to the preservation of cultural identities and to their adaptation to new demands. One implication of this analysis for the processes of construction of cultural identity is that "the culture industry, by producing new hybrids resulting from the erasing of boundaries between high and popular culture, traditional and modern, and domestic and foreign is reorganizing collective identities and forms of symbolic differentiation" (Canclini, 1997, p. 208).

If we consider cultural identity a symbolic construction rather than a thing already there to be described, we shall understand that identity formation in a global communication environment is highly influenced by the media, which construct our everyday perceptions of the other and ourselves. People live in a symbolic environment, a world of meaning, and it is clear that the mass media play a critical role in people's perceptions and attitudes. The experience of Picnic at Hanging Rock shows us that the media can be used not only to challenge traditional values and beliefs, but also to extend and consolidate a sense of belonging and to incorporate new patterns of behavior, called by Thompson (1998) "cultural migrations" due partly to the globalization of media products.

To sum up, cultural and collective identities are constructed in new ways and, particularly for the global middle class, construction of cultural identity increasingly reflects exposure to abundant symbolic resources and discourses broadcasted through mass product of Cultural Industry.

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