

The woman as a subordinate subject in the short story

“Liberdade Adiada”, by Dina Salústio /

*A mulher como sujeito subalterno no conto ‘Liberdade Adiada’,
de Dina Salústio*


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ABSTRACT

In the light of the post-colonial feminist perspective, this article intends to analyze the short story *Liberdade Adiada* by the Cape Verdean author Dina Salústio, which integrates the work *Mornas eram as noites* (2002). Through this work, it is intended to rescue the history of the Cape Verdean woman and her condition as a muted and erased subject. There is still much to discuss on the issues involving the female subject in a peripheral country. Based on postmodern theories, we analyze aspects such as subalterity, the female subject and her condition. To speak of African literature

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as a whole, we will have the support of authors such as Mazrui (2010), Santos (2003) and Gandhi (1998). To deal with topics such as feminism and post-colonialism, we will be based on readings of Silva (2014), Bahri (2013), Spivak (2010). And on female authorship in Cape Verde, we will have Gomes (2015) as the main basis. The present study aims to treat the emergence of the construction of a female identity of the Cape Verdean woman.

KEYWORDS: Feminism post-colonial; Female authorship; Dina Salústio; Subalternity.

RESUMO

Sob a luz da perspectiva feminista pós-colonial, este artigo pretende analisar o conto Liberdade adiada, da autora cabo-verdiana Dina Salústio, que integra a obra Mornas eram as noites (2002). Por meio deste trabalho, pretende-se problematizar a história da mulher cabo-verdiana e sua condição enquanto sujeito emudecido e apagado. Ainda há muito o que se debater sobre as questões que envolvem o sujeito feminino em um país periférico. Com base em teorias pós-modernas, analisamos aspectos como subalternidade, o sujeito feminino e sua condição. Para falar da literatura africana como um todo, teremos o suporte de autores como Mazrui (2010), Santos (2003) e Gandhi (1998). Para tratar de tópicos como feminismo e pós-colonialismo, teremos como base leituras em Silva (2014), Bahri (2013), Spivak (2010). E sobre autoria feminina em Cabo Verde, teremos Gomes (2015) como cerne. O presente estudo almeja tratar sobre a emergência da construção de uma identidade feminina da mulher cabo-verdiana.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Feminismo pós-colonial; Autoria feminina; Dina Salústio; Subalternidade.

1 Initial considerations

Writing has always been a vehicle for explaining ideas and concepts, the ideal field for women to express opinions and construct speeches in their favor. Perhaps we can say that writers want to share writings of themselves so that their readers can come to identify with what is being said there. Our discussion will be based on relevant data that observe “the colonial heritage of cultural and racial miscegenation, the extent of the influence of the Luso-tropical ideology, the impact of the Africanization discourses emerging during the anti-colonial struggle” (SILVA, 2014, p. 69). The work aims to remember the evolution of the African individual, as well as to analyze the development of the role of the female subject in African Portuguese-speaking societies, in an anti-colonial and post-colonial feminist perspective, aiming to understand how female identity “came to be culturally constructed as a subordinate” (SILVA, 2014, p. 69).

We can say that themes like forced labor, “feudalization”, the class spectrum, are very recurrent topics in African literature. This has its genesis with militancy, both walking side by side and fighting European impositions on the African spirit, “the African speaker, reaching the mine represented by European literature, saw, won - and took over. Then he started his climb” (MAZRUI, 2010, p. 673). This “rise” was and is arduous until today, there is a need for a critical African look at its own literature.

So far we are talking about African literature in general, and we can infer how much this type of writing occupies a peripheral place. For a long time, we were faced with male and dominant literary writings and productions of Western descent (Cf. SAID, 2010). However, with the

increasingly presence of women in the spheres of society, outside the exclusively domestic space, individuals began to raise more questions about their fates, especially their identity. Based on post-colonial feminist theory, we can see that, in addition to being colonized, women were discriminated against among their equals (men who, also colonized, because of the patriarchal society, feel superior) and even after the deconstruction of the colonial narrative, the “colonizing pattern” still persists, especially if it is about women.

In the case of African female authorship in Portuguese-speaking countries, there is an increasing number of studies and scientific contributions on women's writings that tell the story of African women, black women, subordinate and discriminated within their own people. In our work we aim to study the people (not the elite), the subordinate, the woman, and it is based on this “deviation” that the study will take shape.

The issue of being a woman in a peripheral country seems to be the most problematic. Spivak (2010, p. 88) says that, “in seeking to learn to speak to (instead of hearing or speaking on behalf of) the historically muted subject of the subordinate woman, the post-colonial intellectual systematically 'unlearns' the female privilege”, in other words, it is necessary to make a critical reading of this discourse, “not only replacing the lost figure of the colonized” (SPIVAK, 2010, p. 88).

Between patriarchy and imperialism, the constitution of the subject and the formation of the object, the figure of the woman disappears, not in an immaculate void, but in a violent throw that is the displaced figuration, of the 'Third World woman', trapped between tradition and modernization. (SPIVAK, 2010, p. 119)

In this way, we will begin our study and analysis of the role of women as a subordinate subject from a post-colonial feminist perspective, analyzing the short story *Liberdade Adiada*, by Dina Salústio. Next, we will go a little further into this topic, specifically in the writing of African women from Cape Verde.

2 Women's literature in Cape Verde

Most female texts often describe women's daily lives. Thus,

Merging traces of the exterior and interior world, the feeling of creoleness is strengthened by the knowledge built between the cracks of power and goes, so to speak, sewing the desires fragmented by the colonizer. The patriarchal discourse, revised, releases criteria of value, opening up possibilities for the

emergence of female writing that, although timid, still deserves critical looks of approval and sometimes enchantment. (GOMES, 2015, p. 177)

The above-mentioned passage brings us to a term inherent to the theme, the question of creoleness. In general terms, creoleness would be a kind of recomposition of traces, memories of a culture, dispersion of the colonial sign. However, this creolization requires something from the heterogeneous elements inserted in the local culture “placed in relation, value themselves” (GLISSANT, 2005, p. 22). In other words, they have equivalent value, without one lowering or canceling the other. African female writing is strengthened on top of these heterogeneous elements inserted in their culture; there is a destabilization of meaning and this contributes to the insertion of local female discourses. According to Glissant (2005, p. 25), “creole languages come from shock, consumption, reciprocal consummation of linguistic elements”, and from a positive point of view, creolization helps to create its own identity, despite it being built from elements external to it.

Resuming the thought of African female writing, creolization opens the way for the reconstruction of female knowledge and longings, previously fragmented by the colonizer, although it still has to subvert the chauvinist, political and authoritarian limits imposed by the left colonization culture.

Unless African literature has this dependence rooted in politics and activism, writers began to stand out with themes parallel to these. Criteria still guided by a European criticism expand and give visibility to texts that show the reality experienced by women. Thus, writing, in addition to being an activity, is a way for the authors to rescue and reconstruct the role of women as an individual who will no longer be silent.

The literature of Cape Verdean female authorship is full of traces of life, of the activities performed by those women, their desires and frustrations. Fátima Bettencourt (apud GOMES, 2001, p. 177) notes that,

It sometimes happens that I have to look for a few things around and it was when I passed the pages of the large volume of “A Imprensa Cabo-Verdiana” by João Nobre de Oliveira that I suddenly realized that between 1820 and 1930 there were practically no women in Cape Verde, a conclusion that, too absurd, I am forced to refuse. They actually vegetated around, in the shadows of the house. Quiet and calm, they were bearing children, those whom God sent and their husbands determined, but neither love nor pain made them breathe a sigh that might have given them a sign of presence. Like vague ghosts they did the housework; if they thought - nobody knew; if they dreamed - no one had ever suspected. Practically immersed in limbo, very few references glimpse of their existences and that is why I am led to suppose that if any of them exceeded

this almost vertical state. It was silenced and concealed from the written press, which is, as it were, the history of these islands, islands that, however, were teeming with journalistic activity. Note that we are talking about a period of more than one hundred years, since I am far from combing the entire book, a Homeric task.

The passage is enlightening and self-explanatory about the lives of women on the island of Cape Verde, women who vegetated around the house, without the right to any expression, which does not differ much from the lives of women of other nationalities, such as Brazilians. It was from the post-independence period (1975), and with the feminist ideas of the 1970s, that middle-class women in Cape Verde began to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the colonialist and patriarchal oppressive system. Cape Verdean women wanted more than to live alone in their own homes, hostages to their husbands. The literature then problematizes this history of women in Cape Verde, it differs from the feminine and the masculine, as well as its cultural aspects, constituting the identity of a collective.

In some moments, feminist and post-colonial theories are both completed and questioned, paradoxically, as the example set by Bahri,

Feminist studies and post-colonial studies sometimes find themselves in a mutually investigative and interactive relationship with each other, especially when they become very specific, for example, when feminist perspectives turn a blind eye to issues pertaining to colonialism and the international division of labor work and when post-colonial studies ignore the gender issue in their analysis. On the one hand, then, feminists sometimes complain that analyzes of colonial and post-colonial texts do not consider gender issues, omitting them to pay attention to supposedly more important issues, such as empire building, decolonization and struggle for liberation (in the colonial context), and nation building (in the post-colonial context). (BAHRI, 2013, p. 662)

Despite having many mismatches in their ideals, feminist and post-colonial theories can converge and add even more knowledge to the theme of post-colonial feminism, which involves women, mostly black, from underdeveloped countries and without access to opportunities for a better life in society. The point is that post-colonial feminist studies clearly indicate a relationship with a “discursive configuration in dialogue with predominant academic constructions from the First World, even when in tension with these” (BAHRI, 2013, p. 663), so, some questions may come up as, who speaks for the post-colonial feminine? For whom? What we do know is such studies have

arisen due to the gap that there was in relation to these topics. And these debates within the theory only enrich and bring visibility to what was not central before.

Feminism and post-colonialism can complement each other, and in contemporary times, they are necessary fields for deconstructing the impositions of years of colonization and patriarchy. The culture of resistance is intrinsically related to feminist theories, such as that of Simone Beauvoir (1980), who questions the reasons why women submit to oppression; and post-colonial, such as Indepal Grewal (1994) and Caren Kaplan (1989) who work with the perspective of “transnational feminist practices”, the relationship between post-colonial studies and transnational studies being intrinsic to the feminist trajectory, as this has always focused on contrasts promoted by capitalist and social patriarchy.

Such theories that mostly include the figure of women from peripheral countries, the female figure who did not have access to education, who lives in countries where the human development index is low and, generally, has many children, becoming prisoner of the home.

Post-colonial feminist theories can be used in the study of Dina Salústio's writing, since they were born with the idea of subverting patterns of race, color and gender. In her collection *Mornas eram as noites*, she brings tense and brief stories, about women of all types, life stories, stories hybrid between prose and poetry. The short stories are read in a “single sitting”, but their brevity does not extinguish their intensity, as stated by Antônio Manuel Ferreira,

Note, however, that narrative brevity does not mean absence of thickness; narrative brevity requires a thorough work of writing, in order to produce an effect of tense conciseness, not wasteful, but generating mechanisms that provide the full functioning of language. That is why the short narratives tend to be close to the semantic density of the poem or the photograph [...]. Like the poem, the brief narrative presupposes the existence of a reader available for the work of concertation and expansion of meanings indicated by the text. It will be said that every reading of a literary text requires the same assumption. It is true. It is, however, an investment issue: revealing the depth underlying brevity, that is, articulating the density of the content with the smallness of the form, is a task that captures the reader's attention. Perhaps this reason for true creative cooperation lies in the reason that readers take the short narratives for granted. (FERREIRA, 2006, p. 150)

It can be said that Dina Salústio is concerned with transcribing the reality, mainly of women and for women, and that they may come to rewrite their lives out of the subordination in which they live. It is possible that one of Salústio's central concerns in her writing is that of transcending hegemonic discourses, including our own beliefs and culture, producing new knowledge, so that a new history can be built without necessarily erasing the past. It is necessary, therefore, to

understand Salústio's literature and its representation of the female subject in peripheral countries, which is discussed below.

2.1 Dina Salústio

Bernardina Oliveira Salústio, born in Cape Verde, poet and prose writer, was a social worker, teacher and journalist. She is dedicated, for the most part, to writings focusing on poverty and misery, social marginality, violence against women. One of her main work *Mornas eram as noites* that deal with the themes mentioned above, she won the Cape Verde Children's Literature Award. Dina has been contributing to the construction of a female space in the archipelago that is mostly dominated by men.

Dina Salústio, when doing social analyzes in her works, unites “condensation and intensity to an intention that moves the author: telling ‘women's stories’” (GOMES, 2012, p. 53), as we can see in the author's testimony:

I did not make a selection of these texts, only the first was intentional, to show my appreciation to these Cape Verdean women who work hard, who do stone work, who carry water, who work the land, who have the obligation to taking care of the children, lighting the fire. I wanted to pay tribute to these women. [...] The stories happen, at the taste of the flight. I speak of intellectual women, of those who are not intellectuals, of those who have no written means of living, I speak about the prostitute, I speak about all women who give me something, and that I have something of them. [...] In Cape Verde, when a girl is born, she is already a woman. (SALÚSTIO, 1994)

The last sentence of the quote became a famous saying by the author, a representation of the female subject on the island of Cape Verde, girls who are already born with obligations of adult women, girls who need to mature before their time to survive in a hostile environment and oppressor. The short story we chose for analysis, “Liberdade Adiada”, can be seen as a picture of the female life and condition of women in Cape Verde.

3 Liberdade Adiada

In her condition of insularity, Cape Verdean writer Dina Salústio affirms that writing is not a way to earn a living, but to live a life in Cape Verde, “with extreme commitment, not dedicating herself exclusively to it, usually due to impossibility of choice” (SALÚSTIO, 1998, p. 33). There is a

lack of possibilities for writers, especially when it comes to female authorship, the feeling of abandonment and isolation in the islet can be observed in women's literary productions, the lack of perspective, the absence of an open space, where the Cape Verdean individual can move and provide other lives.

Written in 1994, “Liberdade Adiada” is one of the short stories that make up the work *Mornas eram as noites* (2002), a production with traces of poetry and social analysis. The short story describes the day-to-day life of a woman in her household chores, exhausted from the life she has. Gradually, the death wish comes to mind. The main character does not have a specific name, perhaps due to the fact that it represents a collective reality. During the short story, she talks about children, but there is no mention of a father. With no perspective on life and children she calls unwanted, the character sees no solution for herself but suicide.

The short story itself begins with the representation of the burden that a woman in Cape Verde is born to carry. A female character, without a name, perhaps not only to represent an individual, but a collective, is described in the passage: “She felt tired. The belly, the legs, the head, the whole body was an enormous weight, which fell irrevocably on top” (SALÚSTIO, 2002, p. 5). We can observe the misfortune of being born a woman, in a region where colonizing traits are still very strong and the subordination and marginalization falls, even more intensely, on the female subject.

Women in Cape Verde, as well as in many peripheral regions, start to have children from an early age, and this is something that is implied in the title of this story (points to the deprivation of liberty due to early pregnancy) and one of the social problems' aspects highlighted by the author. “Liberdade Adiada” depicts the early imprisonment of young women to their homes, children and husbands. The story tells, in third person, the trajectory of a woman who went to fetch water in a distant and suffering place. The first references are about a remote place, where women need to fetch cans of water for domestic use, and this is one of the few activities they do outside the home, as we can see in the following section of the work.

She thought of throwing the water can to the ground, spreading herself in the liquid, soaking herself, making herself mud, mixing with those paths that for years and years ate the soles of her feet, burned her veins, burned her, that stole her forces. (SALÚSTIO, 2002, p. 5).

Notice the dissatisfaction of the character of the story in relation to the life that was imposed on her: she is a woman who, like many others, has no discernment of the reasons that led her to that condition. The difficulty in accessing education, the lack of perspective and the imposition of patriarchal and colonizing models, such as the imperialism of the white colonizer, are factors that are directly linked to the model of life that these women have, and it is necessary a “destabilization of patriarchal structures” (SCHMIDT, 2010), as well as colonialist standards, for Schmidt,

[...] it is essential to believe that feminist energies in the field of literary studies have the potential to interfere in critical discourse, revitalize teaching and fertilize an educational-pedagogical-political agenda capable of interrupting the historical continuities of exclusions, violence and prejudice. This interruption implies the destabilization of patriarchal structures, the transgression of binary paradigms, current in the social and scientific fields, the decolonization of thinking in a wide and unrestricted sense and the reinvention of subjectivities. (SCHMIDT, 2010, p. 270)

In the excerpt below, the frustration of the predestined life of being a woman in the archipelago is clear and acid,

She imagined the children who were waiting and who should already be awake. The children she hated! At twenty-three, she was told that her uterus had fallen out. It would be good to fall for good! She was fed up with that little bit of herself that, year after year, filled, swelled, unscrewed and tossed in her arms and for care another little bit of people. (SALÚSTIO, 2002, p. 5)

The woman was tired of being just a receptacle that “filled, swelled and spilled” year after year, as if that were the only function she could ever perform. As Dina Salústio comments, in Cape Verde, when a girl is born, she is already a woman, since she is a young woman who, at the age of twenty-three, already has the “fallen uterus”. What we can observe is that, even in post-colonial times, the participation of the female subject in the ideological construction, in work, in politics and/or in social life, is obliterated (SPIVAK, 2010, p. 66), and this gender obliteration ends up thus maintaining male dominance. “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the female subaltern subject is even more deeply in obscurity” (SPIVAK, 2010, p. 67).

The fate of motherhood in a woman's life is one of the great longings of many of them. The lack of perspective on life leads them to cloistering to the role of mother and wife. About this, Badinter (1985, p. 237) understands that,

Cloistered in her role as a mother, the woman will no longer be able to avoid it under penalty of moral condemnation. This was, for a long time, an important cause of the difficulties of women's work. The reason also for the contempt or pity for women who did not have children, the reproach of those who did not want them.

During the short story, we can observe this abjection about motherhood. In a moment, the woman hates her children, plans not to return home and even thinks about putting an end to her life, jumping from a ravine. In another moment, the feeling of guilt falls on her, as can be seen in the following quote:

No. She wouldn't go home. The ravine looked at her, mouth open, in an irresistible smile, inviting her to the final meeting. [...] What did the children have to do with the heart? The children... How she loved them, Oh Lord! She hurried to meet them. The youngest must have been calling out to her. (SALÚSTIO, 2002, p. 5-6)

In the passage, the woman reflects on what her children would have to do with her unhappiness and frustration, in other words, it is a paradoxical feeling that puts her in doubt and anguish.

There is a gap in the life of Cape Verdean women. In the short story "Liberdade Adiada", we can see that they are always below any civil, political, social and, if we can also say, human activity. Dedicated exclusively to the home, outside life is practically non-existent, a water can becomes a reason for your attention and appreciation, as we can see, "She liked her water can. She treated her well. Sometimes, in moments of anger or simply indefinite, she would sands it once, ten, a thousand times, until it was glowing and anger, or the uncertainty was lost in the silver glow" (SALÚSTIO, 2002, p. 6). This collective of female subjects live in "an inter-place, a space of becoming" (GAMA-KHALIL, 2008, p. 90), perhaps, we can say that they live in a diaspora, but without leaving their own island, they are forced to move away from themselves. We understand the diaspora, which, according to Hall (2003, p. 33), "is founded on the construction of a border based on the exclusion of the other", the exclusion of women, whose belonging is, in most cases, temporary. Crowded with loneliness, fear of loss and facing new frustrations.

As we continue to read, we notice a young but aged woman. Because she is forced to live in such a way, she even thinks of a possible suicide, jumping from the ravine that she goes through when fetching water. The passage of the work thus describes the situation: "She would throw herself down the ravine. She missed nothing. In fact, she never lost anything. She never had

anything to lose. They told her that she had lost her virginity, but she never got to know what it was” (SALÚSTIO, 2002, p. 6). The character barely knew what it was like to have “lost her virginity”, as they are so standardized lives, that she only followed models and traditions.

Badinter (1985) questions the teaching that has been passed on to us for centuries, “‘complement’ of man, the woman is an essentially relative creature. She is what a man is not, to form with and under, and under his orders, the whole of humanity”, this thought is timeless, we can understand a little more how the conscience of the subordinate woman in a peripheral country works, humiliation and the misfortune of being colonized, not only by color, but by gender. The woman is not born for herself, but to please the other. Continuing the story, the narrator says, “at the edge of the ravine, with the can of water on her head and her skirt blown by the wind, she thought about her children and raised her hands to her chest (SALÚSTIO, 2002, p. 6), the children, another issue inherent to being female, especially those in underdeveloped countries.

At the end of the story, there is a whirlwind of emotions running through the woman, the main character. It seems to us that, for her, dying is better than living that life, that jumping from the ravine would be the final step towards her much-desired freedom, but suddenly her children come to mind, and, despite being very young, the weight of motherhood makes her ponder this freedom that she longs for, as seen in the passage.

She ran, leaving the bank and the dream of freedom behind. When I found her on the beach, she was waiting for fishing, I was looking for other wishes, she told me that piece of her life, in response to my comment on how good it would be to ride a wave and set off towards other destinations, other deserts, other Christmas. (SALÚSTIO, 2002, p. 6)

She would no longer jump off the bank. She would no longer leave the family behind. The ideological pressure of being a mother may have made her rethink everything, “from responsibility to guilt there was only one step, which led directly to condemnation” (BADINTER, 1985, p. 271).

In the last part of the story, we have the narrator's supposed encounter with the character. The two exchange a few words about what it would be like to have a new destiny, a new life, another perspective. The woman, despite dreaming, does not feel able to continue her wishes, often because of the guilt that is imposed on her. The frustrations and anxieties expressed by the narrator about the character in the story weave an idea about the subjectivity of women's daily lives in the Cape Verde archipelago.

Final considerations

The short story “Liberdade Adiada” is a narrative crossed by female exile in the Cape Verdean community. The barriers that keep us safe within the family are not always positive, these “can also become prisons and are often defended beyond reason or need” (SAID, 2003, p. 58). Ethnic and gender subordination is based on the entire length of the text, with a view to promoting a better understanding of Cape Verdean female identity, as well as the cultural construction of the subordinate subject.

Conditioned by historical and socioeconomic factors, in particular, the Cape Verdean woman was responsible for the social and physical constitution of women on the island. The postcolonial feminist theory comes to accentuate this part of history that does not appear in books, in literature, much less in everyday life. The struggle for equality and social inclusion must be constant, since, in the condition of subordinates, there will always be someone waiting to pull the rug.

Post-colonialism, as a libertarian activity, should reconsider the women's movement, mainly black, as this is a great support in interrupting the colonizer rhetoric. As Almeida (2013, p. 692) points out,

If we can say, on the one hand, that post-colonialism is strengthened by the interruption caused by feminist studies; on the other hand, we can highlight how feminist criticism, questioned some time ago for its whitening and its westernism, has been insistently led to reflect, by feminist criticisms themselves and by the debate expanded by the discussions brought about by post-colonialism, about the universalist category of women, opening the way to theorize several other and new ways of thinking about the place of women in contemporary times, the fallacy of universality, the difference between women, the various subjects of feminism, the transversality of gender, among others.

It is hoped that post-colonial feminist studies can not only give visibility to the history of women while colonized and subordinate, but that they take care of their place of speech. It is not useful to theorize a reality without showing the paths for its transformation. As Spivak (2010) said, “the post-colonial intellectual seeks to learn to speak to (instead of hearing or speaking on behalf of) the historically silent subject of the subordinate woman”, there is a fine line between empathy and the lack of consideration in relation to the other's position.

"The post-colonial intellectual cannot speak for the subordinate, but he/she can fight 'against' the subordination, he/she must create means by which the subordinate subject can speak, so that when, he or she does, he or she can be heard" (SPIVAK, 2010, p. 14), and this is one of the ideas that should be highlighted when studying and discussing post-coloniality, how to open the way for the subordinate/colonized to come to be heard and, consequently, to have power of speech. It is necessary to collect all the information and stories silenced in the past, in order to build a new history of women in peripheral countries, however, it is important not only to recover these memories, but to give these women the opportunity to rise from that life of subordination.

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