Literature and violence: the representation of religious-dogmatic violence against the gay character in Speak No Evil, by Uzodinma Iweala[1] /

Literatura e violência: a representação da violência dogmático-religiosa contra a personagem gay em *Speak No Evil* de Uzodinma Iweala

Orison Marden Bandeira de Melo Júnior [2]*
Orison holds a master's degree in Literature and Literary Criticism and a PhD in Applied Linguistics and Language Studies. He did his postdoctoral training in Languages, focusing on Aglophone queer African literatures. He teaches literature in English in the Teacher education program in English and is a permanent professor in the Graduate Program in Language Studies of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte. He is a CNPq Research Productivity Fellow – Level 2.
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7592-449X

ABSTRACT
Queer African and Afro-diasporic literature has received little attention in Brazilian academia. This text seeks to fill this gap by analyzing Uzodinma Iweala's novel *Speak No Evil*, focusing on the religious-dogmatic violence suffered by the protagonist Niru. Methodologically, the literary analysis is based on the Bakhtinian assumption that content, material, and form are indivisible elements of the literary text, which leads us to discuss this type of violence (content) through the form and material used by the author to represent how the character is subjected to a rejection of his homosexuality by his parents and religious leaders, who even subject him to an exorcism session. Therefore, I conclude that the author uses a vocabulary related to the values of Pentecostal demonology to represent the perniciousness of dogmatic-religious violence, allowing us to establish a dialogue between this fictional world and the world of life, in which, despite there being laws or not for this type of "conversion therapy", LGBT+ people are still victims of this authoritative discourse of religion and subjected to these inhumane rituals.
KEYWORDS: Queer African literature; Religious-dogmatic violence; Exorcism; *Speak no evil*; Uzodinma Iweala

RESUMO
As literaturas africanas e afro-diaspóricas queer têm recebido pouco espaço na academia brasileira. Este texto busca

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preencher essa lacuna a partir da análise do romance Speak no evil de Uzodinma Iweala, com foco na violência dogmático-religiosa sofrida pelo protagonista Niru. Metodologicamente, a análise literária parte do pressuposto bakhtiniano de que conteúdo, material e forma são elementos indivisíveis do texto literário, o que nos leva a discutir esse tipo de violência (conteúdo) por meio da forma e do material usados pelo autor para a representação de como a personagem é subjugada a uma rejeição da sua homossexualidade pelos pais e líderes religiosos, que o submetem, inclusive, a uma sessão de exorcismo. Concluo, portanto, que o autor utiliza um vocabulário relacionado aos valores da demonologia pentecostal para representar a perniciosidade da violência dogmático-religiosa, permitindo que estabeleçamos um diálogo entre esse mundo ficcional e o mundo da vida, em que, a despeito de haver leis ou não para esse tipo de "terapia de conversão", pessoas LGBT+ ainda são vítimas desse discurso autoritário da religião e submetidas a esses rituais desumanos.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Literaturas africanas queer; Violência dogmático-religiosa; Exorcismo; Speak no evil; Uzodinma Iweala*

1 Introduction

The representation of violence in its various forms is not a new subject for literature scholars. In particular, I emphasize the literatures that represent the conflicts and violence experienced by queer bodies within fictional worlds. In this broad field of queer literatures, I highlight the writings by contemporary African and Afro-diasporic authors, such as Uzodinma Iweala, author of the novel *Speak No Evil*, which is the object of analysis in this article.

Several scholars have already engaged with the theme of violence, whether physical, cultural, symbolic, among other types. I briefly discuss the work of authors such as Chauí (2019), Galtung (1990), Bourdieu (2000), and Han (2018), aiming to explore the multiple manifestations of violence and their relation to domination and power. In this context, I seek to develop the concept of dogmatic-religious violence to understand how this type of violence is represented in literary works, particularly within African and Afro-diasporic queer literatures written in English.

It is worth noting that by emphasizing the verb 'represent' in these initial paragraphs, I start from two conceptions of Bakhtin's theory of the novel. The first concerns what the Russian author calls *naïve* realism. For him, *naïve* realism is based on the understanding that the world that represents (the world of life) and the represented world (the world of art) are conflated or even merged. Moving away from this type of conception, I share with the author the perspective that between the world of life and the world of art there is the "immutable [...] presence" (Bakhtin, 1981a, p 254) of a boundary between them, which does not allow this fusion. However, as the Russian author himself argues, what exists between these worlds is a "continual mutual interaction; uninterrupted exchange goes on between them, similar to the uninterrupted exchange of matter between living organisms and the environment that surrounds them" (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 254).

The second conception is more closely related to the meaning with which the term

'represent' is used in this article, namely, that of refraction. According to the Russian author, a work is never a pure reflection of society, like a mirror. As Holquist (1981) explains, the metaphor of refraction used by Bakhtin is directly connected to the author's intentions, which are refracted at various angles, considering that the words chosen by the author follow two different trajectories: toward the object and toward the audience. These trajectories are not neutral, as they are already ideologically filled, leading to the refraction of these words and, consequently, of the author's intentions. As stated by Bakhtin (1981b, p. 277; emphasis in original):

> If we imagine the intention of such a word, that is, its *directionality toward the object*, in the form of a ray of light, then the living and unrepeatable play of colors and light on the facets of the image that it constructs can be explained as the spectral dispersion of the ray-word, not within the object itself […] but rather as its spectral dispersion in an atmosphere filled with the alien words, value judgments and accents through which the ray passes on its way toward the object; the social atmosphere of the word, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle.

Therefore, a work should not be read and/or analyzed as a reflection or mirror of society, since the author's intentions – even if they aim to represent "reality" – go through the natural process of refraction, given that the object of representation is "entangled in someone else's discourse about it, it is already present with qualifications, an object of dispute that is conceptualized and evaluated variously, inseparable from the heteroglot social apperception of it" (Bakhtin, 1981b, p. 330).

In this sense, recognizing that the represented world is different from the world that represents it – despite their interaction – and that the author's intentions to represent "reality" are refracted within the object of representation itself, this work does not lean toward sociologism, in which the analytical emphasis falls on the social content of the work. However, without disregarding the social content refracted by the author – or, in Bakhtin's own terms, by the author-creator, I seek to understand the aesthetic construction of the novel. More specifically, this study aims to analyze how the construction of dogmatic-religious violence against the gay protagonist of the novel *Speak No Evil* (Iweala, 2018) takes place.

To achieve the proposed objective, in the next section I will provide a brief discussion on violence to bring the focus of the study – that is, dogmatic-religious violence. Subsequently, I will present a short introduction to the author and the work, including a summary of the plot to provide better insight into the construction of this type of violence against the gay main character. Finally, I

will conclude with reflections on the theme developed in this study and its academic relevance.

2 Dogmatic-religious violence

The content of violence in literary texts is not unprecedented, especially when considering the different forms of violence perpetrated by human beings as represented in literature. Chauí (2021) helps us think about violence on different levels. For her, "*Violence is the presence of ferocity in relationships with the other as other, or simply for being other*" (Chauí, 2021, p. 36; emphasis on original)[3]. In this sense, violence can be:

> 1. anything that acts through force against the nature of a being (i.e., denaturing); 2. any act of force against someone's spontaneity, will, or freedom (i.e., coercing, constraining, torturing, brutalizing); 3. any act that violates the nature of someone or something that is positively valued by a society (i.e., violating); 4. any act of transgression against things or actions that an individual or a society defines as just and as a right; 5. consequently, violence is an act of brutality, cruelty, and physical and/or psychological abuse against someone, and it characterizes intersubjective and social relations through oppression, intimidation, fear, and terror (Chauí, 2021, p. 35-36)[4].

This framework of violence presented by the author is also shared by other scholars whose discussions often move toward a classification or categorization of violence. In this regard, Galtung (1990) develops a typology of violence based on four classes of basic human needs: survival needs; well-being-needs; identity needs; and freedom needs. Based on these, he categorizes violence as direct, structural, and cultural, with the latter being the one that "normalizes" both direct and structural violence. For example, while extreme poverty is a form of direct violence against human beings, the exploitation that leads to a permanent state of poverty constitutes structural violence. While facing repression or being forced out of one's home is a form of direct violence against individuals (such as LGBT+[5] people who are kicked out by their parents simply for being

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[3] In the original text: A violência é a presença da ferocidade nas relações com o outro enquanto outro ou por ser um outro.

[4] In the original text: 1. tudo que age usando a força para ir contra a natureza de algum ser (é desnaturar); 2. todo ato de força contra a espontaneidade, a vontade e a liberdade de alguém (é coagir, constranger, torturar, brutalizar); 3. todo ato de violação da natureza de alguém ou de alguma coisa valorizada positivamente por uma sociedade (é violar); 4. todo ato de transgressão contra aquelas coisas e ações que alguém ou uma sociedade define como justas e como um direito; 5. consequentemente, violência é um ato de brutalidade, sevícia e abuso físico e/ou psíquico contra alguém e caracteriza relações intersubjetivas e sociais pela opressão, intimidação, pelo medo e pelo terror (Chauí, 2021, p. 35-36).

[5] In Brazil, the acronym currently used is LGBTQIAPN+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, *travesti*, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, non-binary), which seeks to encompass a greater number of gender and sexuality variations. The "+" sign is intended to indicate that other variations are possible. However, for the purposes of this work, I will use a simplified form, namely LGBT+, considering that this is the acronym often used by African intellectuals and Africanists

who they are), their marginalization represents structural violence. Cultural violence, in these examples, is the mechanism that normalizes both the poverty and the exploitation that sustains it, as well as the act of forcing someone out of their home and the broader marginalization that follows.

Similarly, Han (2018), in his discussion of the macrological structure of violence, explains that macrophysical violence emerges from the tension between the self and the other, between friend and enemy. It manifests, therefore, as an external force that "forces its way inside me without my consent" (Han, 2018, p. 64). According to the scholar, power and violence operate through techniques of subjugating the other in such a way that the other is bent or subdued. As he puts it, "[v]iolence and power are strategies to neutralize the disturbing otherness and unruly freedom of the other" (Han, 2018, p. 66).

Another category of violence discussed by the author is systemic violence, which is related to the structures of the social system that establish unequal power relations without these relations being revealed to their victims, who "may not be directly aware of it [ruling system's violence]" (Han, 2018, p. 77). It is for this reason that the philosopher classifies this type of violence as a technique of domination – one that exerts a discreet, yet far more effective, form of control than violence *per se*. In this regard, Han (2018) draws on the thought of Bourdieu, according to whom

> Symbolic violence is the coercion which is set up only through the consent that the dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator (and therefore to the domination) when their understanding of the situation and relation can only use instruments of knowledge that they have in common with the dominator, which, being merely the incorporated form of the structure of the relation of domination, make this relation appear as natural (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 170).

Han (2018) elucidates that, according to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is embedded within the social system, as it ensures that the *status quo* of domination remains unshaken. Thus, both in structural violence (Galtung, 1990) and in symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2000), there exists a relation of domination exercised by those who hold power over those who are subjected to it.

Considering these power relations between the ruling class and the dominated class, Vološinov (1986, p. 23) states that the ruling class "strives to impart a supraclass, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgments which occurs in it, to make the sign uniaccentual", or, as Han (2018) would argue, seeks to neutralize the disturbing otherness. Within this framework, the word or discourse (verbal ideological signs) is taken as an authoritative discourse which, according to Bakhtin (1981b, p. 343), demands

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referenced in this study.

from us unconditional recognition and assimilation, not permitting variations that are freely creative and penetrating "our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it." Among the various forms of authoritative discourse, Bakhtin cites the authoritarianism of religious dogma, the focus of this research, as an example.

According to Erickson (1994, p. 45), dogma is "[a] doctrine, usually in the form of an official or authoritative ecclesiastical declaration". In this brief definition presented in his *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, we notice the mention of two axiologically important words: 'doctrine', and 'authoritative.' When thinking about doctrine, we understand it as a system of discourses that defines the beliefs to be adopted by a particular group of believers. Alongside this, the normative adjective reinforces the content of 'doctrine' by determining that such doctrines are norms to be followed. It is in this sense that we can relate dogma to an authoritative discourse, as outlined by Bakhtin. Bezerra, commenting on this type of discourse, explains that, for Bakhtin, authoritative discourse "seeks to determine even the foundations of our ideological relationship with the world and our behavior" (Bezerra, 2015, p. 244)[6].

In its various segments, Christian doctrine is defined as a patriarchal heterocisnormative religion. Dissident sexualities or genders are, in many segments of this broad umbrella called Christianity, rejected as sin, placing the person outside of divine grace. Several biblical verses that apparently condemn homosexuality are recited and violently used to violate someone's nature (Chauí, 2021), without the proper contextual exegesis of the passages taken from the Bible. For example, who has not heard the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and how it is used to refer to God's supposed condemnation of homosexuality? It is from this perspective that authors such as Sharpe, who wrote *The Gay Gospels* (2011), and Vines, who wrote *God and the Gay Christian* (2014), countered this supposed condemnation by providing a contextualized interpretation of the biblical passages that are normally used to condemn LGBT+ people to "hell," which is considered the place reserved for these "types of sinners."

This type of violence also arises from unequal power relations. The pastor or priest, who position themselves as ecclesiastical authorities, exert power over their congregants. As "ambassadors of the divinity," these leaders present themselves as those who know God's will – what God loves and what God abhors – and prescribe what must be done to attain "salvation." In

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[6] In the original: "procura determinar até os fundamentos de nossa relação ideológica com o mundo e do nosso comportamento".

this sense, the dominated (the congregant) submits to the leader's word, which is presented as the "truth." As a result, relationships of oppression and intimidation through fear are established (Chauí, 2021): fear of living in sin, fear of not attaining the long-promised salvation, fear of displeasing God, fear of falling out of favor with the religious leader and/or other members of the group. These religious leaders seek to "bend" the other through techniques of subjugation (Han, 2018), aiming to neutralize dissidence so that all conform to the heterocisnormative standard.

This dogmatic-religious violence is one that oppresses the other in a discreet manner (Han, 2018), especially when the power dynamic between the dominator (ecclesiastical leader) and the dominated (congregant) shapes the latter's ideological relationship with the world and seeks to dictate their behavior (Bezerra, 2015). In this type of violence, there is no creative dialogue, no divergence, no contestation on the part of the dominated; it does not "awakens new and independent words" (Bakhtin, 1981b, p. 345), for in this context of power and violence, it is precisely the dominated who must bow to the authoritative heterocisnormative discourse so commonly found in church pulpits. As a form of violence, it offers no alternative other than "conversion," exorcism (of the "demon of homosexuality"), so-called gay cures ("conversion therapies"), among other violent techniques of submission.

According to the dominators, the oppressed are not entitled to refute the authoritative heterocisnormative discourse. As religious leaders, by normalizing oppression, they claim to speak "in God's name," quoting biblical verses out of context to violently impose condemnation upon dissident sexualities and gender identities. Within this context of dogmatic-religious violence, the oppressed is cast not only as the "sinner" whose "sin" is deemed unforgivable by divine standards, but also as the "enemy" – the one who stands against "morality," "decency," and the so-called "traditional Christian family."

These manifestations of dogmatic-religious violence are responsible for turning the LGBT+ individual into the enemy – someone who is expelled from their home by their parents or sent to therapists, gay conversion retreats, or exorcism sessions. It is worth noting that, in Brazil, the Federal Psychology Council (in Portuguese, Conselho Federal de Psicologia, also known as CFP), through Resolution nº 001/99 of March 22, 1999, declared that "it is not within the scope of psychology professionals in Brazil to offer any type of sexual orientation reversal therapy, since homosexuality is not considered a pathology according to the World Health Organization (WHO)" (Farhat, 2018). Furthermore, according to Farhat (2018), a group of psychologists advocating for

the use of sexual orientation reversal therapies filed a popular lawsuit seeking the right for these professionals to perform such therapies. This lawsuit was suspended on April 24, 2019, by the Supreme Federal Court (in Portuguese, Supremo Tribunal Federal, also known as STF), which upheld the entirety of Resolution nº 001/99 (CFP, 2019).

However, this practice of sexual orientation "reversal" is defended by certain religious leaders. For example, Barros & Cerqueira (2024) highlight the work of the Lagoinha Baptist Church, led by André Valadão, which promotes spiritual retreats lasting from three to eight days under the responsibility of a female pastor of the church. Although the term "gay cure" is not explicitly used, the authors clarify that

> Among the congregants who experienced these retreats is Claudia Baccile, a 33-year-old advertising professional. She reports that, during the sessions, participants are bombarded with ideas such as "homosexuality is the ultimate sin" and that those who engage in such sexual acts "will be condemned to eternal death." "At the time, I already saw myself as a lesbian and was taken to an exorcism session," Claudia says (Barros; Cerqueira, 2024)[7].

In Nigeria, the fictional setting of the novel analyzed in this study, "freedom, equality and dignity in human rights are subject to a myriad of violations" (Ogbeche, 2022), especially against members of the LGBT+ community. According to the author, this oppression in the country is not only ongoing but also widespread and rooted in religious dogmas and societal norms, thus constituting the "ideal" background for "conversion therapies," which range from prayers, intercessions, and fasting to exorcisms (based on the belief that homosexuals or bisexuals are possessed by demons), among other practices.

Although exorcism is not a practice exclusive to Pentecostal or Neopentecostal traditions, I will highlight this segment of Christianity through the lens of African and Africanist scholars, as it aligns with the focus of this study. In his discussion of Pentecostalism in Africa, van Klinken (2016) explains that, for this religious segment, demons occupy a central place in both theology and even cosmogony. Many aspects of social, economic, psychological, and medical life – as well as interpersonal relationships – are interpreted through the lens of spiritual warfare (angels vs. demons; God vs. the devil/Satan). Grounded in this notion of spiritual warfare, one of the core

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[7] In the original: Entre os fiéis que passaram pela experiência está a publicitária Cláudia Baccile, 33 anos. Ela conta que nas dinâmicas os participantes são bombardeados com ideias como as de que "a homossexualidade é o pecado extremo" e que quem se envolver em ato sexual dessa natureza "será condenado à morte eterna". "Na época, já me via como lésbica e fui levada a uma sessão de exorcismo", diz Cláudia.

pillars of African Pentecostalism is prosperity theology, which suggests that if a believer remains in poverty, it is due to their spiritual condition and that "[…] misfortune is passed from generation to generation via demonic ancestral spirits" (van Klinken, 2016, p. 74). It is worth emphasizing that, according to this strand of Pentecostal gospel, homosexuality is considered the most abominable of all sins against God – the Pentecostal God, of course.

Within this same field of Pentecostal demonology, two other aspects are presented by Lyonga (2016): the end-time gospel, and the healing gospel. According to Lyonga (2016), the end-time gospel frames homosexuality as demonic and as sign of Christ's second coming, which would mark the final days of the world. In this view, the growing visibility of homosexuality is interpreted as the expansion of the devil's power, and those who advocate for the rights of this minority group are perceived as the very embodiment of the devil and as agents of the Antichrist.

Regarding the healing gospel, the author explains that this type of preaching constructs homosexuality as the manifestation of demonic spirits, against which believers must engage in spiritual warfare through prayer. In this context, gay men and lesbians, for instance, are viewed as victims of demonic control and therefore must be delivered from the "demon of homosexuality" Homosexuality, then, is understood as a "[…] a spiritual sickness from which victims can be cured through repentance, prayer and exorcism" (Lyonga, 2016, p. 62).

This is, therefore, where dogmatic-religious violence takes shape: beyond "othering" LGBT+ individuals by casting them as sinners deprived of God's grace, it also vilifies queer subjectivities by portraying them as spiritually ill and under the control of demonic forces. As a form of violence, it seeks to break the other, leaving no alternative but submission to its discourse of power and domination. Much like symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2000) and systemic violence (Han, 2018), the victims of dogmatic-religious violence are not always aware of their subjugation, as these unequal power relations become naturalized.

It is based on this brief discussion on violence – especially the dogmatic-religious violence and its schemes within African Pentecostalism – that I present, in the following section, the author and the novel analyzed in this study, as well as an examination of excerpts in which such dogmatic-religious violence is represented.

3 The representation of dogmatic-religious violence in *Speak No Evil* (Iweala, 2018)

Uzodinma Iweala is a Nigerian-American physician and writer. In 2004, he earned his bachelor's degree from Harvard, where he received the Hoopes Prize for his senior thesis, which he later developed into his first novel, *Beasts of No Nation*, adapted into a film in 2015 with the same title. In 2011, he graduated in medicine from the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and is currently the CEO of a museum located in Harlem, New York, called *The Africa Center* (https://theafricacenter.org/).

Speak No Evil is the author's second novel, published in 2018. In this novel, the intersections among the social constructs of race, class, gender, and sexuality are magnified throughout its pages, through the story of Niru, a Nigerian-American teenager in his final year of high school, living in a middle-class neighborhood in Washington, D.C. Niru reveals that he is gay to Meredith, his white heterosexual friend, after rejecting her attempts to have sexual relations with him. To help her friend, Meredith downloads a dating app on Niru's phone so that he might gain the courage to arrange meetings with other men. Following that, he schedules a date with a boy named Ryan, but after losing his phone at home, his father finds it and discovers the messages exchanged between them. The father's reaction to the discovery is to savagely beat Niru and take him to Nigeria for a "spiritual revival." Upon returning to the United States, his family attempts to resume normal life, although Niru is required to visit, on a weekly basis, the pastor of the church his family attends for spiritual counseling.

After his first track competition, Niru attends a party where he becomes intoxicated, has an argument with Meredith, and is helped by a young man named Damien, with whom he begins a romantic relationship. However, he must navigate the spaces in which he exists: as someone who conceals his sexuality at home and at school, and as someone who "exists" while being with Damien. Nevertheless, his relationship with Damien is itself marked by conflict, as Niru is unable to fully reject the authoritative anti-homosexuality Christian discourse with which he was raised and through which he was taken to Nigeria to be "cured."

After the final track meet of his senior year, Niru runs away from his father and goes to a bar with Meredith. As they leave, an argument ensues, during which Niru pushes her against a wall. Police officers then shoot Niru, claiming he was attempting to rape the young woman. Niru is killed, and both his father and Meredith are left to confront and process the aftermath of his death.

In this plot created by the author, the narrative reveals the emphasis given to the Christian anti-homosexuality discourse, which is represented both in Niru's upbringing by his Protestant

parents and in the character's own assimilation of this authoritative discourse, leading him to experience inner conflict. In this sense, the author constructs the character Niru as someone who was subjected to the authority of his father and the pastor, always experiencing inner turmoil, as the dogmatic-religious violence to which he is subjected leaves permanent marks.

Given the scope and length of this text, I would like to focus on the passage of the novel in which Niru is taken to Nigeria by his father to be "cured." The author constructs a character who is in constant struggle between the discourse of his father and the pastor (the authoritative anti-homosexuality discourse) and his own desires. In this regard, even before the trip, he contemplates:

> I wonder if my father and Reverend Olumide are right, maybe there is something truly abominable about me that only the purifying fire of constant prayer can purge. Maybe I have spent too much time in the United States soaking up ungodly values and satanic sentiments, as my father has said, and that has created a confusion only the motherland can cure (Iweala, 2018, p. 57).

It is noteworthy to reflect on the lexical choices made by the author to represent the character's internal conflict, as he finds himself in a state of "confusion," beginning to question whether there is something "abominable" in him. The adjective used by the author aligns with the very preaching of Reverend Olumide, for whom the United States is "under the shadow of that abomination, homosexuality" (Iweala, 2018, p. 16). The dogmatic-religious violence seeks to subjugate the character by making him doubt whether what is preached to him is indeed right or wrong. Another element brought forth by the author is the binary opposition constructed within the character's subjective consciousness: the United States as a place of "ungodly values" and "satanic sentiments", versus the "motherland," Africa, seen as a source of "cure." The authoritative discourse is, therefore, this compact mass that is assimilated through dogmatic-religious violence, leading the character to reverberate words (ideological signs) that belong to the lexical repertoire of the Christian anti-homosexuality discourse.

Niru's father considers taking him either to the Holy Spirit Chapel or to the Mountain of Fire, two Pentecostal churches that exist in the world of life, the first located in the city of Ado Ekiti and the second in Lagos, both in southwestern Nigeria. Reverend Okereke, the pastor's responsible for Niru's "deliverance," confirms the binary opposition between the USA and Africa, stating that "the demon of homosexuality has become […] entrenched in America" (Iweala, 2018, p. 72) and that there, in Nigeria, due to strong faith, it has not yet been "infiltrated by the devil" (Iweala, 2018, p. 16). Pentecostal demonology ("demon", "devil") is once again perceived through the author's lexical

choices, who employs a heteroglossic language (Bakhtin, 1981b), through which the Pentecostal social group is represented not only by its values but also by its own language.

Two nights after the initial conversation with Reverend Okereke, Niru is taken again to the church for a night of vigil. According to the Pastor's words, that night was meant for "prayer and devotion, for renewal" (Iweala, 2018, p. 75). Niru's father then places a hand on his son's shoulder and says: "it's time that we..." (Iweala, 2018, p. 77). The author uses ellipsis to imply the father's own difficulty in revealing what would happen to his son from that moment on. Upon hearing his father and realizing what was about to happen, Niru manifests the following reaction: "My mouth dries out and my legs grow weak" (Iweala, 2018, p. 77). The author uses the verb "dry" combined with the particle "out" so that, as a phrasal verb, it conveys the idea of the mouth drying completely; moreover, his legs were gradually becoming weak in anticipation of what was to come. Each element of this scene constructs the image of someone who will be subjected to a type of violence, who will be oppressed and violated.

Father and son head to a back room, where four people are present: Reverend Okereke, two women, and a man holding a Bible. The room has no windows – only a small fan in the corner. Upon entering, the father closes the door, and Niru is placed in the center of the circle formed by the four. After the recitation of the "Our Father," the Pastor asks Niru to kneel so they can pray over him: "Kneel down young man so we can pray over you as God has called us here to do" (Iweala, 2018, p. 78). It is striking how the scene is constructed, as, for the Pastor, the dogmatic-religious violence they are about to perpetrate is ascribed to God, who compelled them to do what they are about to do ("God has called us here to do").

Then, the author portrays a tense scene in which the victim feels "bent": "I struggle for breath. My head hurts [...]" (Iweala, 2018, p. 78). The shortness of breath and the headache evoke the victim's sensation in his place of torture. Niru wants to flee – "I want to run" (Iweala, 2018, p. 78) –, but the Pastor blocks the door with his "imposing form and his fleshy outstretched palm" (Iweala, 2018, p. 78). The adjective used by the author to represent the Pastor's stance is linked to imposition ("imposing"), allowing no opportunity for Niru to escape that scene of violence. The "outstretched palm" already indicates that those people had their hands extended toward Niru to perform the deliverance prayer. The Pastor forcefully pushes Niru's head down, and in this state, the two women and the man place their hands on his head, preventing him from seeing anything but the concrete floor. They begin to pray softly, but the volume increases. Niru tries to stand up,

but someone puts a hand on his shoulder and holds him down – an action that, through the author's use of the phrasal verb "hold down," conveys the idea of forcibly keeping him pressed to the ground ("down"). The voices grow louder as they recite the following prayer:

> We pray that the evil demonic spirit that seeks to harm this boy's life should leave him and return to the pit of hellfire where it came, Bishop Okereke shouts. Clear out from that place in Jesus's name, another voice says. We ask you to banish the spirit of homosexuality and perversity from this young man, bind it and cast it out in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, Amen. Father almighty destroy each and every unclean thought, untoward desire and abominable notion in the corners of this young mind and heart, refill him with the love of your Word and reverence for your teachings. Fill him Lord Father in the name of Jesus. Father God, reorient this your child to the pure teachings of our Savior Jesus. Unlock in his mind and heart that place where you will reside to protect him from every unclean thing, Bishop Okereke shouts. Protect him Lord, protect him, the prayer warriors echo. Return your child to the spirit of obedience to his parents so that he may hear their direction and heed their advice, the Bishop shouts (Iweala, 2018, p. 78).

The lexical choices adopted by the author represent not only Pentecostal demonology – by associating homosexuality with "evil demonic spirit[s]," with "perversity," and with expressions such as "unclean though, untoward desire and abominable notion" – but are also axiologically filled with the values of that group, which, making use of their position of authority, employ verbs in the imperative mood: "Clear out from that place"; "bind it [the spirit of homosexuality and perversity] and cast it out"; "destroy each and every unclean thought"; "refill him with the love of your Word and reverence for your teachings"; "reorient this your child to the pure teachings of our Savior Jesus"; "unlock in his mind and heart that place where you will reside"; "protect him"; "return your child to the spirit of obedience to his parents."

With this prayer as a reference, it is possible to highlight the Pentecostal view on homosexuality: something demonic, impure, perverse, and also an act of disobedience to God and to one's parents. During the exorcism, the author reveals that Niru felt anger, then shame, and then anger again. Concurrently, however, he felt he wanted to be "clean," "normal" in such a manner that his father would once again feel proud of him and that he could meet his gaze without fear. As Bezerra (2015) explains, the authoritative discourse seeks to determine how we relate axiologically to the world and how our behavior should be.

This authoritative discourse, through dogmatic-religious violence, penetrates Niru's mind and heart, placing him in a position of conflict and imbalance, since he, as a victim of this Pentecostal artifice, cannot maintain healthy relationships, as doubt and guilt always arise in his

mind. It is the perniciousness of dogmatic-religious violence that leaves the individual with no choice but submission and subjugation.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze how dogmatic-religious violence was constructed against the gay protagonist of the novel *Speak No Evil* (Iweala, 2018). In order to achieve this objective, I presented a brief discussion on violence, as conceptualized by Chauí (2019), Galtung (1990), Bourdieu (2000), and Han (2018), to provide a foundation for understanding dogmatic-religious violence.

As such, dogmatic religious-violence seeks to break the other, to dominate them, to exert power over them so that they may see the world through the lens of imposed religious dogmas and doctrines, and so that their behavior may conform to the group in which they are embedded. Queer individuals, in particular, are targeted by Pentecostal demonology, which seeks to neutralize their unsettling otherness (Han, 2017), categorizing dissident sexualities as impure, sinful, and controlled by demonic entities.

In line with this, the novel represents the experience of exorcism to which the protagonist is subjected. The author employs not only the values of Pentecostal demonology but also the very vocabulary used by leaders of this Protestant segment. As an authoritative discourse, the religious dogmas regarding homosexuality are represented in a way that generates deep internal conflict in the character, who survives the exorcism itself but is ultimately unable to survive the devastating effects of this form of violence. To lend credibility to this scenario within the world of art, the author creates a gay character who is marked by the authoritative Christian anti-homosexuality discourse, one that renders impossible a life in which he can simply "exist" as a gay man. The author ensures that even the protagonist's relationships remain unfulfilling, shaped by his fear of sin, guilt, and rejection – rejection both by God and his family.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the world of art and the world of life, although distinct, interact with each other in a dynamic relationship. The world created by Iweala in the novel *Speak No Evil* directly engages with the world of life, in which members of the LGBT+ community are often subjected to dogmatic-religious violence, leaving them with no option but submission to the authority of religious leader who present themselves as spokespersons for God. However, even

though these leaders may offer no apparent alternative, one does exist: the recognition of the dogmatic-religious violence imposed by such figures and its "denormalization" so that victims of this form of violence can come to understand that any act against their right to exist – whether it is doctrinal coercion, gay conversion therapy ("gay cure"), exorcism, or any other form – can be named for what it truly is: **violence**.

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