

Histórias do meu povo [Stories of My People]. Reflections on Decolonial Pedagogies in Esmeraldina dos Santos' Escrivência – AP [Amapá State]/ Histórias do meu povo. Reflexões sobre pedagogias decoloniais na escrivência de Esmeraldina dos Santos – AP

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we discuss the work of Esmeraldina dos Santos, a woman, Black, quilombola, from Amapá, residing in the Curiaú quilombo, Macapá-AP [Amapá State]. Despite having only studied up to the “6th year of grade school” at the time, Esmeraldina wrote the book *Histórias do meu povo* [Stories of My People], in which she gathers memories from her community that narrate elements of struggle and resistance of the Black population in Amapá. We characterize the work as an “escrivência” – a literary narrative constructed by Black women, based on their collectivities and ancestries. We discuss how certain elements present in the work, such as the denunciations of racism experienced by her and her community, the environmental devastation promoted by capitalist accumulation in the territory, and gender stereotypes against Black women, can help in the construction of decolonial pedagogies, pedagogical models that collaborate with overcoming coloniality in our time, showing the interface between literature and education.

KEYWORDS: Escrivência; Decolonial Pedagogies; Esmeraldina dos Santos

RESUMO

Neste artigo discutimos a obra de Esmeraldina dos Santos, mulher, negra, quilombola, amapaense, residente no quilombo do Curiaú, Macapá-Amapá. Apesar de ter estudado apenas até “6ª série do 1º grau”, à época, Esmeraldina escreveu o livro *Histórias do meu povo*, em que reúne memórias de sua comunidade que narram elementos de luta e resistência da população negra amapaense. Caracterizamos a obra como uma *escrivência* – narrativa literária construída por mulheres negras, a partir das suas coletividades e ancestralidades. Debates como determinados elementos presentes na obra, como as denúncias do racismo vivido por ela e sua comunidade, da devastação ambiental promovida pela acumulação capitalista no território, de estereótipos de gênero contra mulheres negras, podem ajudar na construção de pedagogias decoloniais,

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modelos pedagógicos que colaborem com a superação da colonialidade em nosso tempo, mostrando a interface entre literatura e educação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Escrivência; Pedagogias Decoloniais; Esmeraldina dos Santos

Introduction

Escrivência, a concept developed by the writer Conceição Evaristo, tells us that the subject of Black literature has their existence marked by their relationship and complicity with other subjects. It is a literary narrative built from the experiences of Black women, in particular. *Escriviver*, in this sense, as stated by Soares and Machado (2017), means telling deeply personal stories that also connect to other shared experiences.

That said, we affirm that this study will address the *Escrivência* of Esmeraldina dos Santos, a Black woman from Amapá, residing in the Curiaú quilombo, in the outskirts of Macapá-AP. In her work *Histórias de meu povo* [Stories of My People], Esmeraldina, drawing from the memories, feelings, desires, and emotions of Black women who endured the hardships of their time, describes, narrates, and reflects on countless aspects of the life and daily experiences of the Black population of Amapá. Her work unveils elements that are often subsumed and blurred within so-called official narratives.

Her work is our choice because we recognize in her writing various elements that reveal how the popular knowledge that shapes it is infused with feminist and anti-racist perspectives. It can be characterized as decolonial literature that contributes to the cultural, social, economic, and political changes necessary to overcome coloniality.

Esmeraldina dos Santos narrates the racial and religious prejudice experienced by her and her ancestors; however, she adopts a radical stance in denouncing these injustices. She is committed to overcoming them, and beyond the pain, her work reveals what is beautiful, joyful, and contemplative. By proclaiming the honor of experiencing and admiring the landscape, dances, and culture of her community, her work expresses the dialectic between the denunciation of oppressions and the proclamation of other possible worlds—essential elements for decoloniality.

Thus, our objective in this article is to discuss the coloniality/decoloniality dialectic present in the work of Esmeraldina dos Santos, reflecting on how her *escrivência* provides elements for the construction of decolonial pedagogies within schools. This is achieved through her anti-racist reflections, her critique of the rampant

predation inherent in the capitalist mode of production, the elements in her work that challenge the naturalization of gender roles, and more.

In addition to this introduction, the text includes: (1) – a brief discussion on the concepts surrounding coloniality/decoloniality; (2) – an introduction to the concept of *Escrevivência* by the author Conceição Evaristo and a discussion of how it relates to decolonial feminism in the work of Esmeraldina dos Santos; (3) – an analysis of the work *Histórias do meu povo*, demonstrating how the coloniality/decoloniality dialectic is present in the narrative; (4) – reflections on how Esmeraldina dos Santos' *escrevivência* offers insights into the decolonization of education, serving as a valuable resource for building decolonial pedagogies in the Amazon.

1 Coloniality and Decoloniality

Although we have not lived under the condition of being a colony in a political/administrative sense for two hundred years, forms of oppression established by colonial power persist in the individual and/or collective subjectivity and mindset of society. This is coloniality—a negative and objective reality that affects human relationships, often subtly perceived, establishing asymmetrical power dynamics and, consequently, relationships of oppression. It creates hierarchies in terms of race, class, gender, and culture.

According to Tito-Sanches (2019), this occurs due to a colonial matrix of thought, which persists even after these colonial frameworks have been removed from occupied territories:

[...] what remained, however, in the subjectivities and social relationships of the dominated were an entire set of epistemologies deeply shaped and oriented by modernity/coloniality. These frameworks tended—and continue to tend—to prioritize certain patterns of thought, culture, society, and power as hegemonic, establishing a historical relationship of subalternization of other subjects and epistemologies (Tito-Sanches, 2019, p. 34).¹

¹ In Portuguese: “restaram, ainda, nas subjetividades e nas relações sociais das/os dominadas/os, todo um conjunto de epistemologias profundamente marcadas e orientadas pela modernidade/colonialidade que tendeu e tende a priorizar certos padrões de pensamento, cultura, sociedade e de poder como sendo hegemônicos – em uma histórica relação de subalternização de outros sujeitos e epistemologias.”

Decolonial studies seek to understand and denounce the oppressive processes shaped by colonial hegemony, which have been asserted in opposition to the problematic and negative global standard of Power, Being, and Knowledge, here related and studied under the shadow of coloniality (Lugones, 2014).

Given that European colonial expansion was carried out by heterosexual men who, wherever they went, propagated their discourses, throughout the initial formation of the capitalist world system, racist, homophobic, and sexist ideologies of European patriarchy became intertwined with capital accumulation, introducing a series of power hierarchies to the international division of labor, based on ethnic-racial, spiritual, epistemic, sexual, and gender orders (Castro-Gomes; Grosfoguel, 2007).

In this system, the racialization of the world's population became one of the most effective tools of social domination and was incorporated into all areas of the global capitalist power structure. Quijano (2000) called this phenomenon the Coloniality of Power.

In this sense, Esmeraldina dos Santos' work denounces the historical process that centralized the white, heterosexual, European man and his culture, subordinating Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, their knowledge, cosmogonies, and culture in general. This mindset is also denounced when she speaks about racism: "Years go by and things change, but not racism, which continues in our days; Black people pass by and are still criticized" (Santos, 2002, p. 20).²

The author also narrates the desire for freedom that existed within her family and her historically dehumanized population, dispossessed of their lands and forced into labor on overseas plantations under the condition of slavery.

It was a story of great struggle; those who survived told the story. My great-grandparents were slaves. At the beginning of their lives, they were defeated, they fled to other villages where they believed they would live free. But how cruel! There was a master there too (Santos, 2002, p. 15).³

² In Portuguese: "os anos passando e as coisas se transformando, só não o racismo que continua em nossos dias, os negros passam e ainda são criticados."

³ In Portuguese: "Foi uma história de muita luta, aqueles que sobreviveram, contaram a história; meus bisavós foram escravos. No começo de suas vidas, foram vencidos, fugiram para outros lugares, onde acreditavam viver livres. Mas que maldade! Lá também tinha senhor."

According to Lugones (2014), the dichotomous hierarchy of the human divided the world. Validating the Eurocentric power structure, other peoples, such as Indigenous and African populations, were deemed illegitimate and therefore subservient to the active subject: the European man, bourgeois, capable of decision-making, suited for public life, and governing these peoples and bodies, thereby denying their humanity. The colonizer held a Eurocentric worldview, and the idea of Europe as the center rendered all other geographic spaces of the world inferior to it.

Europe thus became the great center. All cultures and peoples were introduced to modernization, which only it could provide. Europe determined what needed (colonization) and still needs to be changed (coloniality), presented and continues to present the actions and conditions for this, and, fundamentally, it remains continuous by sustaining the epistemic model it developed—Eurocentrism. This is a pattern of domination whose political, economic, social, and cultural influence is exerted over all other geopolitical areas, thereby reaffirming itself as the geopolitical space of true knowledge and the only one capable of offering the unique and superior culture to nations (Tito-Sanches, 2019, p. 37).⁴

However, due to the failure of the colonizer who sought to eradicate the culture of the peoples and believed they had stripped them of their knowledge and wisdom, there was resistance. According to Cordeiro (2021), ethnic minorities in colonized countries never submitted passively to domination; on the contrary, they have always resisted (and continue to resist) subalternization processes. Resistance generates movement, and these minorities, organized into movements (Black, Indigenous, feminist, labor...), drive transformation.

It is from this anticolonial struggle in Latin America that decolonial intellectuals affirm the emergence of a first moment of decolonization beginning in the mid-19th century, during which political independence was established on the continent. However,

⁴ In Portuguese: “A Europa tornou-se, portanto, o grande centro. Todas as culturas e povos foram introduzidos à modernização que somente ela poderia proporcionar. A Europa determinou o que precisava (colonização) e o que ainda precisa ser mudado (colonialidade), apresentou e apresenta as ações e condições para isso e, no fundo, é contínua por manter o modelo epistêmico por ela desenvolvido – o eurocentrismo, que é um padrão de dominação, cuja influência política, econômica, social, cultural é exercida sobre todas as demais áreas geopolíticas, desse modo reafirmando-a como espaço geopolítico de conhecimento verdadeiro e somente deste, possível de ofertar única e melhor cultura às nações.”

they emphasize the urgent need for a second movement: “a complete break with the power matrix established through colonialism, which remained in force even after the political independence of the Americas—coloniality” (Cordeiro, 2021, p. 186).⁵

This second “decolonization” became known as decoloniality, a systematic project of global transformation of the assumptions and implications of modernity. It is taken up by a variety of subjects in dialogue, promoting a shift in perspective and attitude, grounded in the practices and forms of knowledge of colonized subjects (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

As Bernardino-Costa and Grosfoguel (2016) state, decoloniality is not merely an academic project obligating us to adopt and cite its authors and key concepts, nor is it a kind of abstract universalism. If it were, we would face a new intellectual colonialism—not from Europe, but from Latin America.

According to Mignolo and Walsh (2018), decoloniality responds to coloniality and the ongoing colonial process and condition. It is a form of struggle and survival, an epistemic response and practice rooted in existence—especially by colonized and racialized subjects—against the colonial power matrix in all its dimensions.

In the *escrevivência* of Esmeraldina dos Santos, we identify various elements that allow us to affirm her work as a powerful decolonial theoretical perspective. Her work addresses both the confrontation of coloniality and the indicators of other possible worlds and decolonized societies.

2 Interfaces Between *Escrevivência* and Decolonial Feminism in the Work of Esmeraldina dos Santos

Conceição Evaristo states that *Escrevivência* is an act of writing that seeks to undo an image of the past in which “the body-voice of enslaved Black women had its power of expression also under the control of slave owners—men, women, and even children” (Evaristo, 2020, p. 31).⁶

⁵ In Portuguese: “a total ruptura com a matriz de poder fundada com o colonialismo e que permaneceu vigorando mesmo após a independência política da América – a colonialidade.”

⁶ In Portuguese: “o corpo-voz de mulheres negras escravizadas tinha sua potência de emissão também sob o controle dos escravocratas, homens, mulheres e até crianças.”

And if, in the past, even their voices did not belong to enslaved women, today the letters, the writing, belong to us as well. They belong to us because we have claimed these graphic signs, the value of writing, without forgetting the strength of the orality of our ancestors, both women and men (Evaristo, 2020, p. 31).⁷

Evaristo questions the audacious act of Black women who break imposed boundaries and venture into the path of writing:

What would lead certain women, born and raised in non-literate environments, and, at best, semi-literate, to break away from the passivity of reading and seek the movement of writing? I try to answer. Perhaps these women (like me) have realized that if the act of reading offers an understanding of the world, writing goes beyond the limits of a perception of life. Writing presupposes a dynamism inherent to the subject of writing, enabling their self-inscription within the world (Evaristo, 2020, p. 35).⁸

This is precisely the path of Esmeraldina dos Santos. Born in Amapá, daughter of “Tio Bolão” [Uncle Bolão] and “Tia Chica” [Aunt Chica], and a resident of the Curiaú quilombo, at the time she published her work “Histórias do Meu Povo,” she had studied only up to the 6th grade (now the 7th year of elementary school) in regular school. She embraced the challenge of gathering and writing the memories of her community in a text that impresses with its beauty and depth, revealing various aspects of the lives of the quilombola population in Amapá.

It is a memoir composed of her personal experiences and, fundamentally, the narratives she heard throughout her life. It is a written record of a collective memory made enduring through orality. It is a storytelling endeavor that Esmeraldina dos Santos made a point to transform into written text.

Conceição Evaristo (2020, p. 30) tells us that the foundational image of *Escrevivência* is the “Mãe Preta” [Black Mother], an enslaved Black woman who

⁷ In Portuguese: “E se ontem nem a voz pertencia às mulheres escravizadas, hoje a letra, a escrita, nos pertencem também. Pertencem, pois nos apropriamos desses signos gráficos, do valor da escrita, sem esquecer a pujança da oralidade de nossas e de nossos ancestrais.”

⁸ In Portuguese: “O que levaria determinadas mulheres, nascidas e criadas em ambientes não letrados, e, quando muito, semialfabetizados, a romperem com a passividade da leitura e buscarem o movimento da escrita? Tento responder. Talvez essas mulheres (como eu) tenham percebido que se o ato de ler oferece a apreensão do mundo, o de escrever ultrapassa os limites de uma percepção da vida. Escrever pressupõe um dinamismo próprio do sujeito da escrita, proporcionando-lhe a sua autoinscrição no interior do mundo.”

performed forced labor within the master's house. She cared for the children of the colonizing family as a wet nurse, prepared meals, and, among other tasks, told stories "to tuck the ones in the landowner's house."⁹

And *Mãe Preta* [Black Mother] would make her way to the children's quarters to tell stories, sing, and tuck in bed the future masters and mistresses, who would never relinquish their inheritance and their power to command over her and her descendants. It was in this enduring act of reclaiming that image, which lies deep in my memory and history, that I found the driving force to conceive, think, speak, and aspire to expand the semantics of the term (Evaristo, 2020, p. 30).

It is from this understanding of Conceição Evaristo that we grasp that *Histórias do meu povo* by Esmeraldina dos Santos is, in fact, the *escrivência* of a Black and quilombola woman who tells about her life and the lives of other Black women, their struggles and achievements, their resistances and powers. For there are many moments when the author refers to the words of other women in her narrative: "Aunt Chiquinha says that when she understood, the Black people pounded ginger in the mortar, back then there was no blender" (Santos, 2002).¹⁰

Many Curianuense women and their respective stories are brought forth by Esmeraldina dos Santos: Bendita Carlota, Tia Chiquinha, Dona Zefinha, among others:

When I was a child and helped my mother on the farm, I met women who fought to make a living; Dona Maria dos Santos, Dona Benedita, Tia Joaquina, Maria Ramos, and my aunts whom I will never forget: Venina, Joaquina do Garcia, and Joana "do Piu." These women carried cans of *tucupi* on their heads, often hot, so that the next day they would have their own money, from tobacco, from açai, even from the São João da Barra, a drink that was highly appreciated back then (Santos, 2002, p. 21).¹¹

⁹ In Portuguese: "para adormecer os da casa-grande"; "E a Mãe Preta se encaminhava para os aposentos das crianças para contar histórias, cantar, ninar os futuros senhores e senhoras, que nunca abririam mão de suas heranças e de seus poderes de mando, sobre ela e sua descendência. Foi nesse gesto perene de resgate dessa imagem, que subjaz no fundo de minha memória e história, que encontrei a força motriz para conceber, pensar, falar e desejar e ampliar a semântica do termo."

¹⁰ In Portuguese: "Tia Chiquinha conta que quando ela se entendeu, os negros socavam gengibre no pilão, naquela época não tinha liquidificador."

¹¹ In Portuguese: "Quando eu era criança e ajudava a minha mãe na roça, conheci mulheres que lutavam para ganhar a vida; Dona Maria dos Santos, Dona Benedita, Tia Joaquina, Maria Ramos e as minhas tias que jamais irei esquecer: Venina, Joaquina do Garcia e Joana "do Piu", estas carregavam latas de tucupi na cabeça, muitas vezes quentes, para que no outro dia tivessem o seu próprio dinheiro, do tabaco, do açai, até mesmo do São João da barra, uma bebida que naquela época era muito apreciada."

When speaking of the struggles faced by her mother, Esmeraldina narrates proudly: “My mother, there’s no question, always fought with her children by her side, dedicated herself to the swidden, first helping others until she managed to get her own piece of land” (Santos, 2002, p. 25).¹²

As one can see, Esmeraldina dos Santos’ work is also a narrative that, as Ribeiro (cited in Lima, 2019) affirms, frees us from the tendency of telling women’s stories always from their impossibilities, losses, lacks, and failures. It is from this aspect that her *escrivência* reveals feminist elements from a decolonial perspective, as it unveils the struggles and resistances of Black women in Latin America.

As Raul (2016) states, the differences established by coloniality, as tools for the hierarchization of human beings, kept the Black population at the bottom of the social pyramid, with greater harm to Black women, subjected to the intersectionality of racial, gender, and class oppressions. Thus, the author says, the historical process of subordinating Black women laid the foundations for Brazilian society, both as enslaved workers and as objects of male domination.

However, as Suely Carneiro (2003) warns, the consciousness of gender identity did not naturally unfold into racial solidarity within the same gender, which led Black women to confront, within the feminist movement itself, the contradictions and inequalities that racism and racial discrimination produce among women.

Ferrara and Carrizo (2021) caution that a Eurocentric-liberal feminism cannot address the consequences left by the colonial/modern global power structure, given that the demands of women who find epistemic privileges within this structure are fundamentally different from those of women who are directly affected by the racialization imposed by coloniality.

Thus, as Lima (2019, p. 202) affirms, decolonial thinking considers the feminist epistemologies of women from the Global South as a way to resist, simultaneously, both coloniality and patriarchy, overcoming the incapacity of Euro-American feminism to “see the pain of women who suffered from the colonial conquest, but who, despite all the

¹² In Portuguese: “Minha mãe, nem se fala, batalhou sempre com seus filhos do lado, se dedicou à roça, primeiro ajudando os outros e até que conseguiu seu próprio pedaço de chão.”

violence endured, resist and propose another feminism, one that considers and includes the different living conditions of women.”¹³

We know so little about the women who possess such significant popular knowledge for the history and recognition of Amapá’s culture. To know them through Esmeraldina dos Santos’ *escrevivência* is to recognize the grandeur of our own history—not the one that denies the past, but the one that seeks to denounce the invisibility, the absence, the tragedy of colonial power, and teaches us to legitimize knowledge born from the real-life experiences of everyday life.

Esmeraldina dos Santos’ work, which narrates the history of her people and the experiences of her ancestors, especially the Black women of the Curiaú quilombo, is a reference for decolonial feminist studies. Esmeraldina goes beyond the harshness of her time, that is, the oppressions, prejudices, and discriminations that surround her and her people. She teaches and demonstrates, through her popular knowledge, decoloniality, and does not distance herself from it.

3 Coloniality and Decoloniality in Esmeraldina dos Santos’ *Escrevivência*

From the very first lines of her *escrevivência*, Esmeraldina dos Santos makes a point of expressing how she came to know all the information she narrates in her text. They are the result of the memories shared by her ancestors, knowledge that orality and community life did not allow to dissipate. The author, in fact, highlights this collective and community dimension of *escrevivência* right from the title of the work: *Histórias do meu povo*.

Slavery is a recurring theme in her text. There are countless passages where she discusses the horrors her ancestors endured as slaves.

While some searched for a place to stay, others lived in chains, forced to work, carrying stones on foot from the Pedreira River to Macapá to build the Fortress. The Black people also made history, but were

¹³ In Portuguese: “enxergar a dor das mulheres que sofreram com a conquista colonizadora, mas que diante de toda violência sofrida resiste e propõe um feminismo outro, que considere e inclua as diferentes condições de vida das mulheres.”

weakened by time; they continue to live within us (Santos, 2002, p. 15).¹⁴

As seen in the quote above, Esmeraldina dos Santos' work consistently emphasizes the legacy of the enslaved Black population during the colonial period for the current state of Amapá. The Fortaleza de São José, mentioned by the author, was built during the 18th and 19th centuries to protect the region from foreign invasions and relied heavily on enslaved Indigenous and African laborers who, according to Barreto (1958), had to travel about 32 km, carrying stones from the Cachoeira das Pedrinhas in the Pedreiras River to Macapá.

Esmeraldina sadly recalls the Fortaleza: "Each stone has a drop of tear from those Black people who fought so hard for their freedom" (Santos, 2002, p. 39).¹⁵

Today, the fortress is one of the main landmarks of Amapá, and the author seems determined to remind new generations of the contributions of the Black population of Amapá to the state's material and cultural heritage. She is categorical in saying: "The Black people also made history, but they were weakened by time, they continue to live within us" (Santos, 2002, p. 15).¹⁶

Esmeraldina dos Santos identifies a silencing of the history of the diasporic Black population, aligning with what Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel (2008) calls the covering up of the other. According to the author, colonizing actions presuppose the ontological negation of the conquered peoples. To achieve this, they sought to strip them of their histories, languages, beliefs, and knowledge.

Another striking aspect of Esmeraldina dos Santos' work is her ability to perceive how the slave system still echoes in the struggles faced by her community today. In many passages, she recalls memories of her relatives in which the colonial legacy still weighs heavily:

¹⁴ In Portuguese: "Enquanto alguns procuravam lugar para ficar, outros viviam acorrentados, obrigados a trabalhar, carregando pedras a pé do rio Pedreira até Macapá para construir a Fortaleza. Os negros também fizeram história, porém foram enfraquecidos pelo tempo, continuam vivos dentro de nós."

¹⁵ In Portuguese: "cada pedra tem uma gota de lágrima daqueles negros que tanto lutaram por sua libertação."

¹⁶ In Portuguese: "Os negros também fizeram história, porém foram enfraquecidos pelo tempo, continuam vivos dentro de nós."

My children, it was a very sad struggle what my parents and grandparents went through, everything they owned they had to bury: gold, money, jewelry, everything of value. A Black person had to be poor, a Black person was only suffering and pain (Santos, 2002, p. 15).¹⁷

What precisely characterizes coloniality is wisely observed by the author: political regime changes, such as the independence of colonies or the abolition of slavery, did not come with significant changes in social structures to benefit the populations oppressed by colonial power. What is evident in the history of the Americas is the maintenance of a power structure that perpetuated inequality and violence against these populations. The author affirms:

Since 1888, much has happened. Slavery in Brazil remains the same. Benedita Carlota do Rosário was born on May 13th, but nothing changed; she was also the daughter of slaves. Black, she had to work since she was young to survive; life was very harsh. Today, writing this book, I see that slavery continues with men, women, and children in the sugarcane fields, inside cassava mills, day and night, nonstop, earning three pennies (Santos, 2002, p. 15).¹⁸

It is in view of these regulations (that oppress and subjugate human beings) that we understand how throughout history the modern concept of “race” has been used, and under which interests the subjects were naturalized by an unequal relationship that began with the processes of capital accumulation (Lugones, 2014).

And it is precisely the maintenance of this hierarchical system that Esmeraldina dos Santos denounces. By unveiling the colonial legacies involving the Black population of Amapá, the author presents the decolonial dimension of her work, indicating the need for a second decolonization, one that will break the colonial power structure that underpins contemporary capitalism. By celebrating the history and achievements of the

¹⁷ In Portuguese: “Meus filhos, foi uma luta muito triste o que meus pais e meus avós passaram, tudo o que possuíam tinham que enterrar: ouro, dinheiro, joias, tudo que era de valor. Negro tinha que ser pobre, negro era só sofrimento e dor.”

¹⁸ In Portuguese: “De 1888 para cá muita coisa aconteceu. A escravidão no Brasil continua a mesma. Benedita Carlota do Rosário nasceu em 13 de maio, mas nada mudou, também era filha de escravos. Negra, tinha que trabalhar desde pequena para sobreviver; a vida era dura demais. Hoje escrevendo este livro, vejo que a escravidão continua com homens, mulheres e crianças em canavial, dentro de casa de farinha, noite e dia, sem parar pra ganhar três vinténs.”

Black population of Amapá, she reveals to us an entire trajectory and legacy of resistance to colonial oppression in both the past and the present.

According to the Argentine intellectual Walter Dignolo (2007), decoloniality comes from the resistance of Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean peoples to the foundation of modernity/coloniality. The thinker argues that we must recover the knowledge produced in opposition to the colonial power matrix, thus constructing the genealogy of decolonial thought. The *escrevivência* of Esmeraldina dos Santos reveals part of this genealogy in the Amapá Amazon, based on the struggles of the Black population in the Curiaú quilombo.

The right to land and territory is also frequently addressed in her writing, narrating how her ancestors organized themselves for the construction of the quilombo and how the current generations continue to fight for its preservation. It is a narrative that synthesizes the territoriality of the Black population of Amapá in the Curiaú community.¹⁹

When speaking of Curiaú, her writings move toward memories of struggle and the ongoing search for freedom. The community, according to her account, began from the journey of slaves who “started to flee down the river” in search of a place “where everything would be perfect, where everything began to shine, gold or silver or even serenity” (Santos, 2002, p. 15).²⁰

Two slaves sought a place to raise cattle, a place that was good for raising the “ú,” which was the name of the ox they carried. Hence the name *Criaú* [Raise Cattle]. [...] And thus, the Quilombo of Criaú was born, now known as Curiaú (Santos, 2002, p. 15).²¹

Videira (2010) states that the transition from the name *Cria-ú* to Curiaú occurred in 1945, with the arrival of the first teachers to the quilombo. They considered the original spelling and pronunciation incorrect and began to encourage the change with the local

¹⁹“The quilombola community of Cria-ú is made up of the villages of Cria-ú de Fora [Out] and Cria-ú de Cima [Up], and Cria-ú de Dentro [In] and Cria-ú de Baixo [Under]. These are located within the environmental protection area of the Cria-ú River (APA of the Cria-ú River), situated 10 km north of the city of Macapá” (Fagundes; Gibson, 2000, apud Videira, 2010, p. 26).

²⁰ In Portuguese: “começaram a fugir ao longo do rio abaixo”; “onde tudo seria perfeito, onde tudo começava a brilhar, ouro ou prata ou até mesmo o serenar.”

²¹ In Portuguese: “Dois escravos procuravam lugar para criar gado, este lugar que era bom para criar o ‘ú,’ que era o nome do boi que eles carregavam. Daí o nome Criaú. [...] E, assim surgiu o Quilombo do Criaú, hoje denominado de Curiaú.”

population. However, the researcher notes, the elderly members of the community still refer to the quilombo by its original name.

Thus begins the story of this people who sing, cry, but are happy. At the beginning of their existence, they survived by raising cattle, horses, goats, pigs, but also cultivated sugarcane, oranges, and bananas. They also had a cassava mill, where their immense plantation “disappeared in time.” They also lived from fishing (Santos, 2002, p. 16).²²

Curiaú, “Where it all began!”²³, is an important highlight in the author’s work. The location, landscape, flora, and fauna awaken memories of experiences and people with multiple forms of knowledge who were born on that land. It is their dialects, festivals, knowledge, and a deep sense of belonging to the community that help in understanding the history and valuing the culture of Amapá.

The Curiaú is portrayed in the work as a paradisiacal place of comfort, peace, and freedom, because, according to Esmeraldina dos Santos: “In Curiaú, there is no master, only a working man. Black is life, black is love, it is a symbol of a nature that man has despised” (Santos, 2002, p. 16).²⁴

It is interesting to note that in the fragment above, Esmeraldina dos Santos includes the Black person as a symbol of nature. This statement is contrary to what was preached by the logic of Western modernity, which, according to Quijano (1992), is inherent to coloniality.

What we perceive in Esmeraldina dos Santos’s *escrevivência* is a relationship opposite to that promoted by the dominant paradigm of Western modernity. Throughout her narrative, the author emphasizes that the use of land through human labor aims at the community’s subsistence, not accumulation through reckless exploitation. There are also numerous passages where she highlights the privilege of living surrounded by so many natural riches.

²² In Portuguese: “Começa assim a história deste povo que canta, chora, mas é feliz. No começo de sua existência sobreviviam da criação de gado, cavalo, cabra, porco, mas também tinham plantação de cana, laranja e banana, tinham também a casa de farinha, onde sua plantação (imensa) ‘sumia no tempo’. Viviam também da pesca.”

²³ In Portuguese: “Onde tudo começou!”

²⁴ In Portuguese: “No Curiaú não existe senhor, somente homem trabalhador. Negro é vida, negro é amor, é símbolo de uma natureza que o homem desprezou,”

I am here in Curiaú, seeing this wonderful landscape in front of me. I see birds, trees, and rivers in abundance [...]. Seeing all of this, my admiration grows more and more. We must learn to love nature and everything it has. Curiaú, the people of this place must preserve it, this beautiful place that God blesses and never lets anything be lacking (Santos, 2002, pp. 30-31).²⁵

According to Svampa (2016), peasant and indigenous populations, due to the close relationship they see between land and territory, in terms of community life, represent civilizational possibilities and can promote the consolidation of an alternative language of territorial valuation. In this sense, in Curiaú, in Esmeraldina dos Santos's *escrevivência*, the people, the culture, and the popular knowledge stemming from them, existing since the colonial era of Amapá and still resisting today, reflect a model of society that rethinks the organization of the world, based on overcoming the colonial matrix of power.

Thus, the life of the people of Curiaú is about resisting the standards of injustice and segregation that subordinate and inferiorize, given the political, economic, and social order perpetrated by an exclusionary and contradictory society, marked by the capitalist and Eurocentric social practices of modernity/coloniality.

4 Considerations on Decolonial Pedagogies in Esmeraldina dos Santos' *Escrevivência*

Our previous works, focused on the analysis of everyday life and school knowledge, revealed that schools are shaped by the phenomenon of coloniality and, consequently, governed by a monocultural epistemology that favors the perpetuation of the values of neoliberal societies, values of the modern/colonial capitalist world-system, in addition to marginalizing the cultures produced by the populations that were victims of European colonialism in Latin America (Cordeiro, 2021).

Moreover, there is already a substantial body of work indicating the effects of colonialism on contemporary official education systems, after all:

²⁵ In Portuguese: “Estou aqui no Curiaú vendo esta paisagem maravilhosa em minha frente. Vejo pássaros, árvores e rios à vontade [...]. Vendo tudo isso minha admiração aumenta cada vez mais. Devemos aprender amar a natureza e tudo o que ela tem. Curiaú, os moradores deste lugar têm que preservá-lo, este lugar tão bonito que Deus abençoa e nada deixa faltar.”

The process of colonial domination of the Global South had as one of its facets epistemological domination. This occurred through the gradual repression of the knowledge of the peoples of the conquered lands. Their religiosity, cosmogony, customs, and ways of life were suppressed (though never entirely extinguished) through the physical violence of the invaders, but also by a violence of a pedagogical nature (Cordeiro, 2021, p. 73).²⁶

Walsh (2013) thus calls for the construction of pedagogical practices that radically open up “other” paths and conditions of thought, re-emergence, revolt, and construction. These are the decolonial pedagogies, as they question and challenge the singular reason of Western and colonial modernity.

Decolonial pedagogies stimulate thinking from and with genealogies, rationalities, knowledge, practices, and civilizational systems, as well as different experiences, inciting possibilities of being, feeling, existing, doing, thinking, looking, hearing, and knowing in different ways, pedagogies that are directed and anchored in processes and projects with decolonial character, horizon, and intention (Walsh, 2013).

Decolonial Pedagogies are intercultural, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic political acts, and oppose all forms of exploitation and oppression established by Colonial Modernity (CM). Decolonial Pedagogies are knowledge productions that work to transform the (neo)colonial reality. They enable the recognition of the colonial marks in our formation and teach us to relearn new worldviews from the “colonial difference.” It is learning to unlearn in order to relearn new stances, new actions of struggle, new ideas, and possibilities for existence (Oliveira; Ribeiro, 2022, p. 5).²⁷

In this sense, we will now highlight some contributions of Esmeraldina dos Santos’ *escrevivência* to the construction of decolonial pedagogies within schools,

²⁶ In Portuguese: “O processo de dominação colonial do Sul-global teve como uma de suas facetas a dominação epistemológica. Essa se deu a partir da paulatina repressão aos conhecimentos dos povos das terras conquistadas. Sua religiosidade, sua cosmogonia, seus costumes, seus modos de vida foram sendo suprimidos (mas nunca extintos em sua totalidade) pela violência física dos invasores, mas, também, por uma violência de caráter pedagógico.”

²⁷ In Portuguese: “Pedagogias Decoloniais são atos políticos interculturais, antirracistas, antissexistas, anti-homofóbicos e contra todas as formas de exploração e opressão constituídas pela MC. Pedagogias Decoloniais são as produções de conhecimento que atuam para transformar a realidade (neo)colonial. As Pedagogias Decoloniais propiciam o reconhecimento das marcas coloniais de nossa formação e ensinam a reaprender novas perspectivas de mundo a partir da ‘diferença colonial’. É aprender a desaprender para reaprender novas posturas, novas ações de luta, novas ideias e possibilidades de existência.”

through elements of her work that support educational practices questioning capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression instilled by colonial modernity.

Among the various contributions, we first highlight the elements of the history of the Black population in Amapá as pointed out by the author. By revealing the horrors lived by her ancestors during slavery, the author revives the memory of this tragic period in national formation, which problematizes the euphemistic approaches still prevalent in schools, deeply rooted in the myth of racial democracy.

The radicality of Esmeraldina dos Santos' anti-racist narrative, if brought into the school context, can contribute to showing students how the social, political, and economic structures of Brazil were founded on slavery, and how this system, which lasted more than three hundred years, continues to undermine the Black population through racism in the present. The author is categorical when she states: "Yes, I am a descendant of slaves, my people I will never forget" (Santos, 2002, p. 33).²⁸

Furthermore, by enthusiastically emphasizing the contributions of the Black population to the material and immaterial heritage of the State of Amapá, *Histórias do Meu Povo* becomes an invaluable resource that can be used to comply with Law 10.639/2003, which established the mandatory teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in schools.

Throughout her work, Esmeraldina dos Santos discusses several manifestations of popular culture led by the people of Curiaú, revealing customs, habits, and ways of life brought by the diasporic population during slavery, which, despite the transformations inherent in the historical process, still connect us to our ancestral bond with "*Mãe-África*" [Mother Africa].

One example of this is when the author dedicates herself to narrating the Batuque and Marabaixo festivals – events that include singing, dancing, and percussion instrument playing – that take place in the quilombo:

It is a time of great joy; the dawn begins at five in the morning with fireworks, announcing that another day has been born to be celebrated with much happiness. The night of the Batuque is enlivened by the charm of the women with their flowing skirts. When they spin, they become full of grace. The towels on their shoulders to wipe the sweat

²⁸ In Portuguese: "Sou descendente de escravo sim, meu povo jamais poderei esquecer."

also serve to protect them from the dew so that they do not lose the brightness of their voices (Santos, 2002, p. 29).²⁹

Cordeiro (2022, p. 310) warns that historically, the schooling established by Western modernity had the task of helping the popular classes overcome the “pile of superstitions” that constituted their culture. School knowledge was rooted in a colonialist perspective and had “the duty to take individuals out of their ignorance, revealing the truth, exercising their mind and body for civilization, removing them from savagery.”³⁰ This educational ideology built the conception that only some societies produced valid knowledge that could lead people and nations to civilization.

Esmeraldina dos Santos’ *escrivivência* can be used as an educational tool that breaks this paradigm within the school. Her narrative, by revealing that the cultural manifestations of the Curiaú people are elements of their ways of life that differ from the patterns established by Westernized societies, provides us with elements to discuss in schools about cultural and epistemological diversity in the world. It also opens the space to discuss the importance of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian cultural legacies for the formation of national culture, helping to build intercultural educational models.

Esmeraldina dos Santos understands the role of the school as a promoter of this dialogue between cultures. She says: “Today, it is beautiful to see the children when they go to school, this people has changed, even in the way they speak; we have our culture, work, and occupation” (Santos, 2002, p. 21).³¹

Wisely, the author understands that cultures transform over time, but she also recognizes the need to safeguard the cultural manifestations typical of her territory that may disappear. This is the dialectic of interculturality. While advocating for the need for dialogue between cultures, she understands that in a capitalist society, asymmetries and cultural impositions tied to market interests promote erasure and acculturation, a

²⁹ In Portuguese: “É um tempo de muita alegria; a alvorada começa às cinco da manhã com a folia queima de fogos, anunciando que nasceu mais um dia pra comemorar com muita alegria. A noite do batuque é animada pelo charme das mulheres com sua saia rodada. Quando elas rodam ficam cheias de graça. As toalhas nos ombros para enxugar o suor, servem também para a proteção do sereno pra que não percam o brilho da voz.”

³⁰ In Portuguese: “amontoado de crendices”; “o dever de retirar os indivíduos da sua ignorância, revelando a verdade, exercitando sua mente e corpo para a civilização, retirando-os da selvageria.”

³¹ In Portuguese: “Hoje é bonito ver as crianças quando vão à escola, este povo mudou, até mesmo no seu jeito de falar; temos nossa cultura, trabalho e ocupação.”

phenomenon that severely affects popular cultures. In response, Esmeraldina dos Santos says:

My nephews, my brothers, and I formed a Batuque group: Raízes do Bolão, so that the tradition does not die, because all we want is to show our culture so that everyone can see that we have to live to learn (Santos, 2002, p. 26).³²

Histórias do meu povo offers the school lessons in resistance. By presenting the struggles of the Curiaú people for the right to land, territory, and culture, the writing helps in the political role of education, providing elements for critical analysis in schools based on the reality of the Amapá and Amazonian people as a whole, positioning the subjects as protagonists of historical processes. Esmeraldina dos Santos, in fact, does not lose sight of this protagonism in her work: “I am looking for all the characters of this story. There are many, but I am not in a hurry, I am dedicating myself with all my strength to this work that not even time will erase” (Santos, 2002, p. 21).³³

Another contribution we highlight is the elements for building educational practices for gender equality and combating machismo/patriarchy in schools, present in the work. By emphasizing the struggle and the prominent role of women in her community, Esmeraldina dos Santos provides us with tools to question the stereotypes and socially constructed gender roles entrenched in the colonial structure.

According to anthropologist Rita Laura Segato (2012), deconstructing the completely rigid gender and sexuality representations that were instilled and imposed by colonial modernity is an essential task to overcome the gender genocide we are experiencing, of which feminicide is the main expression of barbarism. The role of schooling in this deconstruction is well known, and the author’s own life trajectory inspires intersectional debates that reinforce the empowerment of students. The author says:

³² In Portuguese: “Meus sobrinhos, meus irmãos e eu montamos um grupo de batuque: Raízes do Bolão para que não morra a tradição, pois tudo o que nós queremos é mostrar a nossa cultura para que todos possam ver que temos que viver para aprender.”

³³ In Portuguese: “Estou procurando todos os personagens desta história. São muitos, mas não tenho pressa, estou me dedicando com toda a minha força neste trabalho que nem o tempo poderá apagar.”

People still don't believe what is happening to me; it is the power of life, I believed in the eclipse of the sun, I said it was a change in my life from that day on, and here is the proof, power is to overcome, I want, I can do (Santos, 2002, p. 39).³⁴

A final aspect we highlight concerns the contributions *Histórias do meu povo* offers to environmental education actions, which can transcend traditional approaches that do not problematize the unsustainability of the capitalist mode of production or highlight the urgent need to build social and economic arrangements based on a more balanced and much less predatory relationship with nature.

According to Vieira (2018), for Environmental Education to definitively break with the dictates of coloniality and thus operate from a decolonial perspective, its epistemic foundation must be developed from the territorialities of indigenous communities. As we have already indicated, by narrating the ways of life of the Curiaú people and their love for the territory where they live, Esmeraldina dos Santos provides us with many elements for building this decolonial Environmental Education: “Curiaú has a very beautiful landscape, just the green inside it makes you live its beauty, you have to love it to not deforest, it's wonderful to feel all that with the pure smell of the air” (Santos, 2002, p. 21).³⁵

Final Considerations

The *escrevivência*, being a work by Black women who experience the impact of coloniality in their lives more than anyone else, is built from memories of struggle and resistance. In this way, it is essential to the construction of the genealogy of decoloniality in Latin America.

Its application as an educational tool tends to be foundational in pedagogical practices that denounce coloniality in our time and announce other possible worlds,

³⁴ In Portuguese: “As pessoas ainda não acreditam no que está acontecendo comigo, é o poder da vida, acreditei no eclipse do sol, eu falei que era uma mudança na minha vida a partir daquele dia em diante e aqui está a prova, poder é vencer, eu quero, eu posso fazer.”

³⁵ In Portuguese: “O Curiaú tem uma paisagem muito bonita, só aquele verde dentro dele faz viver a sua beleza, é preciso amar pra não desmatar, é gostoso sentir aquilo tudo com cheiro puro do ar.”

aligned with the knowledge and ways of life of populations who are victims of Western colonialism.

The author provides us, through her presence and poetic contribution to the collective memory of her community, with elements for a feminist, antiracist, and therefore decolonial popular education in Amapá-Amazonia, making her a potential intellectual/writer in decolonial studies.

Esmeraldina dos Santos deeply expresses all of this in *Histórias do meu povo*. Her teachings, her knowledge, as we have discussed in this study, go against the colonial domination mindset and the suppression of the knowledge of peoples and nations. Establishing an intercultural dialogue between her work and school knowledge will assist in the construction of decolonial pedagogies that will help us build other possible worlds.

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Statement of Author’s Contribution

We hereby declare that the article is our own work. We acknowledge that all information presented in the work is solely the responsibility of the authors. 1. The conception and development, substantially – selection of the work *Histórias de meu povo* [Stories of My People], structuring of the sections, analysis, and interpretation with a theoretical gender bias and feminist perspective supported by coloniality/decoloniality, are contributions by Miquelly Pastana Tito Sanches. 2. The writing or critical review, particularly of the educational and epistemological processes present within the scope of popular cultures, with the deepening and supplementation of the debate regarding the role of *escrevivência* by Esmeraldina dos Santos with a decolonial analysis, are contributions by Albert Alan

de Sousa Cordeiro. 3. Regarding the final approval of the version to be published, our collaboration was based on the review and adjustments requested by the reviewers, adhering to the standards and references of this journal and ensuring compliance with the procedures for submitting the final version, including translation into English. 4. As for the responsibility for all aspects of the work to ensure the accuracy and integrity of any part of the work, in partnership, we maintained a commitment to ethical, theoretical, and methodological considerations, ensuring the article was produced with the rigor and quality that upholds the prestige of this journal.

Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

The article presents a relevant theme and bibliography within the field of Contemporary Literary Studies—particularly in Brazil. It is a contribution to Gender Studies, Race Studies, and Decolonial Studies in Latin America, with specific attention to the literary production of the Amazon region. At a time when, following numerous calls to recognize the importance of texts by indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in that region, this literature is gradually being acknowledged and explored, particularly after ABRALIC [Brazilian Association of Comparative Literature] convened in Manaus in 2024 and 2025, with its base at UFAM [Federal University of Amazonas]. Grounded in the principles and concepts of Literary Studies, the work addresses aspects of a literature that is little known—or entirely unknown—in the southern parts of Brazil. With a secure theoretical foundation rooted in Decolonial Studies and the concept of *escrivência* (a term coined by Conceição Evaristo and regarded by researchers as a significant contribution of Brazilian Literature to Literary Theory (Salgueiro, 2020), the author skillfully focuses on the work of Esmeraldina dos Santos. Recommendation for the article: APPROVED.

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Review II

The text discusses the work of Esmeraldina dos Santos, aiming to highlight her contributions from the perspective of promoting decolonial education. It is well-organized, addresses a relevant theme, and is grounded in an appropriate theoretical

framework. The proposed focus is maintained throughout its development. The connections between Esmeraldina's work and decoloniality issues are consistent. The writing is fluid and accurate. The text offers an original contribution to discussions on decolonial education within the school context. APPROVED

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