

The historical fiction of Eliana Alves Cruz: necropower, violence, coloniality of the body, and infectious diseases

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Navigating through Alves Cruz' historical fiction

Historical fiction has the ability to articulate paradigmatic planes of existence. According to Fredric Jameson (2007), this type of narrative is capable of stressing the existing boundaries between the public/historical dimensions and the sphere of literary creation. It is, at the same time, subjective and internal in relation to the framework used as raw material for the fictionalization process. That is, the aforementioned literary genre represents the balance point between two magnitudes of potential meaning: individual existences and historical events, a fact that can be observed in the following fragment.

The historical fiction must show neither individual existences nor historical events, but the intersection of both: the event must pierce and transfix, at a single stroke, the existential time of individuals and their destinies. In this regard, I like to quote Brecht's great poem: 'Oh vicissitudes of time, you hope for the people!' etc. (JAMESON, 2007, p. 192, our translation).¹

In fact, the category "historical" supports the convergence between the continuous transformation of the real and the human experience with its temporal dimension. According to Brandão (2000, p. 47, our translation), "the writing of history" is relevant to civilizations over time, precisely because it allows a form of interpretation of past events, since they are placed under a supposed order and factual coherence, reducing the gap between human experience and its historical ac-

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¹ O romance histórico não deve mostrar nem existências individuais nem acontecimentos históricos, mas a interseção de ambos: o evento precisa trespassar e transfixar de um só golpe o tempo existencial dos indivíduos e seus destinos. A esse respeito, gosto de citar o grande poema de Brecht: 'Ó vicissitudes do tempo, vós, esperança do povo!' etc (JAMESON, 2007, p. 192).

count. However, Jacques Le Goff (1990) points to a change in the documentary perspective, especially from the 1960s onwards. He criticizes, based on the perspective of New History, the non-correspondence between the real human experience and the historical record. In our view, such discussions pointed out by Le Goff are the result of the critical revisionism proposals of some social and political movements, such as feminisms and black activism. These movements have added essential points to their agenda, such as marking social differences, intersectionality and, the destabilization of the concept of hegemonic identities. In light of this, the documentary and historical bases of society began to be critically revisited, in order to bring out neglected voices in the process of historicizing culture and peoples, making “the document no longer the happy instrument of History”, in the words of Foucault (1986, p. 8, our translation).

In this sense, when narrowing down to literature, Gärtner (2006) problematizes the absence of great female writers, such as George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) and Jane Austen in the tradition of the modern novel, especially in the Lukacsian wake. In Brazil, the tension can be even more afunilated, especially when one thinks of great black novelists still made invisible by the literary system, such as Maria Firmina dos Reis and Ruth Guimarães, who were, for a long time, absent from the cartographies of Brazilian literature. Fortunately, in the other hand, the picture has changed in recent decades, and even more black female writers are conquering their space, as can be seen in the following quote:

In the postmodern condition, especially after 1970, it was possible for women writers to present the facts of history from the perspective of the vanquished or otherness, and, in this way, to reverse traditional history by founding the history of women’s historical novels. The hallmark of these novels is the conquest of space through the expression of the female voice (GÄRTNER, 2006, p. 64, our translation).²

It seems that is within the scope of the history presented in the historical fiction of women that Eliana Alves Cruz resizes the bases of the genre through a fruitful research of ethnographic commitment. The author has published novels that reflect on the problem of slavery in Latin American and the transit between Angola, Mozambique and Brazil between the 17th and 19th centuries. In her first novel, *Água de barrrela* (2018), she fictionalizes the experiences of her ancestors, in a temporal dimension that comprises more than three centuries of oppression. She refers to the configurations of the space of origin (Mozambique) and of exploitation, in order to narrate the story of generations of women who used washing clothes (lye water) as a survival strategy.

² Na condição pós-moderna, principalmente depois de 1970, é que se possibilitou às mulheres escritoras apresentar os fatos da história sobre a perspectiva dos vencidos ou da alteridade, e, deste modo, reverter a história tradicional fundando a história do romance histórico de mulheres. A grande marca desses romances é a conquista do espaço pela expressão da voz feminina (GÄRTNER, 2006, p. 64).

The second novel written by the Afro-Brazilian writer, *Crime do cais do Valongo* (2018a), addresses the brutality of the slave trade based on a historical research resulting from her work as a journalist, whose initial motto is the murder of Bernardo Lourenço Viana, a wealthy merchant of Valongo, Rio de Janeiro. It is important to highlight that the Valongo pier was the main door of entry of Africans enslaved in the Americas. In *Nada digo de ti, que em ti não veja* (2020), her most recent book, Alves Cruz brings a narrative that historically resignifies the 18th century Rio de Janeiro, addressing topics such as racism, religious intolerance, enslavement of the black population and sexual violence. It also discusses about a love triangle between Felipe Gama, Sianinha, and Vitória (transgender character), stimulating the wake of the contemporary debate on the insurgency of deeply racist practices through letters that detail the actions of the plot to the reader.

In this article, we will analyze the effects of necropower and colonial violence on bodies in diaspora and the functioning of infectious diseases, such as cholera, yellow fever, smallpox, and maculo, as regulatory mechanisms of life. To achieve our goal, we will study three novels: *Água de barreira* (2018), *Crime do cais do Valongo* (2018a), and *Nada digo de ti, que em ti não veja* (2020), by Eliana Alves Cruz. To do so, we will ground our research on the discussions of Aimé Césaire (2020), Eurídice Figueiredo (2017), Giorgio Agamben (2002), María Lugones (2019), Michel Foucault (2008), among others. In the next section, we will investigate in these historical fictions how necropower and other forms of violence, allied to capitalism, led subordinate bodies to suffering and death, by denying them basic conditions of existence, such as food, hygiene, decent work, health care, and resting.

Necropower: violence and death as a form of controlling black bodies

Berenice Bento, in the article *Necrobiopoder: who can inhabit the nation-state?* (2018, our translation)³, works on the concept of “necrobiopoder”, which concerns the “abyssal differences in State’s action in relation to certain groups, and the differential distribution of the right to life” (2018, p. 2, our translation)⁴. Therefore, based on the texts of Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe and Judith Butler, the scholar presents how the theoretical fields which investigate transgender people, transvestites, the black population, and women are marked by the presence of the State as an agent that does not distribute equitably the recognition of humanity. In other words, the State decides who should be kept alive and those who should not.

Yet in the wake of the debate on violence, death, and power, Eurídice Figueiredo (2017, p. 14, our translation), when stating that “it was against the lack of freedom that many fought”⁵, presents the regime of exception as a context of curtailment

³ Necrobiopoder: quem pode habitar o Estado-nação?

⁴ Diferenças abissais da ação do Estado em relação a determinados grupos e a distribuição diferencial do direito à vida (BENTO, 2018, p. 2).

⁵ Foi contra a falta de liberdade que muitos lutaram (FIGUEIREDO, 2017, p. 14).

of democratic freedoms. Also, based on Figueiredo's (2017) idea of oppression due to lack of freedom, it is possible to affirm that there is a colonial power that directs the personae in the narratives selected here to violence, suffering, and death, as one can see in the fragment below present in *Água de Barrela*:

They were thrown into a shed crowded with people from all over, near the fortress. For all intents and purposes, trafficking was prohibited. It was a black Babel they didn't know existed, reeking of feces, urine, and other waste. The place had the worst food they had ever tasted, but it could be considered a luxury room compared to the boat that would make them sail the seas (CRUZ, 2018, p. 25, our translation).⁶

The above mentioned excerpt narrates the moment when Gowon and his family make a fifteen-day journey, walking towards the Port of São da Ajuda or Port of Ajuda, in a trajectory generally carried out in four days. This extension of the time was due to the fact that the blacks were lined up, chained by the neck and obliged to walk with slow steps, lulled by a violent rhythm of torture and oppression. Open wounds, putrid odors, fever, and other ailments accompanied those enslaved during their agonizing journey. All these descriptions above, portrayed in the narrative, point to the conditions of violence and death to which generations of African families were subjected in the Diaspora.

In view of the events and circumstances that marked the death of Gowon and many other characters, we must "politicize death", to use the words of Giorgio Agamben (2002, p. 167). Consequently, one also must establish the attributions of the cause as beyond the individual instances, removing the cause of death from the hands of those who die and placing it as the responsibility of the State or the current political-ideological system. These systems are, in practice, the delimiters of life, once they decide who can live and who should die. Overall, under these assumptions, the concept of necropower has its foundation.

Additionally, the death of Gowon, in fact, is a *sine qua non* for the operationalization of the capitalist system, through which the plantation, the large landed estates, and (neo)colonialism survived over time, despite the non-survival of bodies made abject in the desolate scenario of exploitation. By these lenses, the words of Berenice Bento echo to reflect on the context of killable life, that is, "the power embodied in the modern State is of another order, the opposite. It is a power that is based on 'making' live and 'letting' die and that will act with techniques unique to those implemented by the disciplinary power" (BENTO, 2018, p.

⁶ Foram atirados em um galpão apinhado de gente de todas as partes, em um local próximo à fortaleza. Para todos os efeitos, o tráfico estava proibido. Era uma Babel negra que não sabiam que existia cheirando a fezes, urina e a outros dejetos. O lugar tinha a pior comida provada por eles em suas vidas, mas podia ser considerado um aposento de luxo se comparado à embarcação que os faria singrar os mares (CRUZ, 2018, p. 25).

6, our translation).⁷ Gowon, Ewà Oluwa, Firmino, and others were lives that the colonial power let die.

In addition to this coloniality of the body, that acted via inhuman sanitary conditions and deplorable work spaces, there were other ways in which the colonial system regulated the bodies of dissident subjects, such as the gay and the transgender characters in the narratives. Marianno, a homosexual character in *Crime do cais do Valongo*, as well as Anacleto in *Água de barrela*, are associated with sorcery and the curse. Because of that religious intolerance, they are constantly disapproved by the masters and subjected to exclusion and physical abuse as it is described below:

Marianno is a mestizo with a long face, little beard and thin eyebrows. His stature is much larger than the average person and is quite strong, but his feminine beauty of face and his delicate manners when he is not carrying or doing anything heavy make him a constant target of various mockery and violence (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 66, our translation).⁸

It is important to pay attention to the fragment: “they make it a constant target of various mockery and violence”. This shows the diversity of violence that Marianno suffers, from homophobia and bullying, to the “various violence”, which includes physical, religious, and sexual abuse. These forms of mistreat are perceived not only in Marianno, but also in Vitória, a transgender character in the novel *Nada digo de ti que em ti não veja*, who was injured countless times by the executioners of the Gama family, including Felipe Gama, her lover. Also, the transfobia, once Vitoria was treated as if she was a man and as filthy because she was a trans woman, as it is presented by the following quotes:

Vitoria was crying silently, feeling filthy as from time to time they used to shout at him in the streets. I saw that Vitoria twisted her face as if it had been whipped again, in the same way that she had experienced throughout her life. I noticed by his expression that he felt slapped inside (CRUZ, 2020, p. 11, our translation).⁹

It hurts her to remember the moment when they discovered she had a phallus and not a vagina. It was there on deck, mixed in with all of them.

⁷ O poder encarnado no Estado moderno é de outra ordem, inverso. Trata-se de um poder que se fundamenta no ‘fazer’ viver e no ‘deixar’ morrer e que irá atuar com técnicas singulares às implementadas pelo poder disciplinar (BENTO, 2018, p. 6).

⁸ Marianno é um mestiço de rosto comprido, pouca barba e sobrancelhas delgadas. Sua estatura é bem mais que a ordinária e é bastante forte, mas sua beleza feminina de rosto e seus modos delicados quando não está carregando ou fazendo nada pesado o fazem alvo constante de troças e violências diversas (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 66).

⁹ Vitória chorava silenciosa, sentindo-se imunda como vez por outra costumavam gritar-lhe nas ruas. Vi que Vitória contorceu o rosto como se tivesse sido outra vez açoitada, da mesma forma que tanto experimentara ao longo da vida. Notei por sua expressão que se sentia esbofeteadá por dentro.

Nobody noticed until they undressed the huge group for a bath in salt water and sun in the vessel. She was then forced to go down to the cellar with the men. Not without first receiving lashes that bled profusely and gained a bucket of salt water to stop [...]. She was named Manuel and was still such a young lady, was sold to one and to another and then to another (CRUZ, 2020, p. 40, our translation).¹⁰

Moreover, Tânia Pellegrini (2008, p. 41), when analyzing *Cidade de Deus*, by Paulo Lins (1997), and *Estação Carandiru*, by Drauzio Varella (1999), points to the tension generated by the approach to violence as the organizing axis of the plot and load semantics of these literary texts. According to the author, these works of contemporary Brazilian literature have been gaining visibility in the media, criticism and in the literary field, as they deal with the possibility of problematizing reality itself, and bringing into the fictional sphere the cultural expressions that populate the atmosphere of the Brazilian contemporary urban space. The researcher states:

It is undeniable that violence, from whatever angle you look at, emerges as constitutive of Brazilian culture, as a founding element from which the social order itself is organized and, as a consequence, also interferes in the creative experience and in the symbolic expressions, incidentally, as it happens, with particular characteristics, in most cultures of colonial extraction (PELLEGRINI, 2008, p. 42, our translation).¹¹

Further, according to Pellegrini (2008), violence appears as a constituent element in cultural expressions, including literature, which can transform themes related to physical and symbolic violence, among others, into literary focus. In view of this, Eliana Alves Cruz, through her narrative voice, organizes traumatic experiences of sexual abuse, violence against homosexuals, rape of enslaved women into diegetic nuclei. The episode in which the next scene is narrated is a clear example of this affirmative:

We were all around a huge cauldron of boiling water. I shuddered imagining what was about to occur. None of the blacks wanted to see it, and

¹⁰ Doía-lhe lembrar do momento em que descobriram que ela possuía um falo e não uma vagina. Estava lá no convés, misturada a todas. Ninguém percebera, até que despiram o enorme grupo para um banho de água salgada e sol na embarcação. Fora então obrigada a descer para o porão, com os homens. Não sem antes receber açoites que sangraram enormemente e ganharam um balde de água salgada para estancar. [...] Ganhou o nome de Manuel e era ainda tão juvenzinha... foi vendida para um e para outro e depois para outro (CRUZ, 2020, p.40).

¹¹ É inegável que a violência, por qualquer ângulo que se olhe, surge como constitutiva da cultura brasileira, como um elemento fundante a partir do qual se organiza a própria ordem social e, como consequência, interfere também na experiência criativa e nas expressões simbólicas, aliás, como acontece, com características particulares, na maior parte das culturas de extração colonial (PELLEGRINI, 2008, p. 42).

I noticed that some whites, especially women, didn't either, but Senhor Lima de Azevedo forced us with an energetic voice and a threat in his eyes. Senhor Bernardo and Dona Ignacia were among the most excited in the audience. The man was brought in by two huge foremen, each holding one arm. He was proud, but he only started to scream when he saw what would be done (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 21-22, our translation).¹²

In this excerpt, Mr. Bernardo and Dona Ignácia, full of anger and desolation, learned, through the managers of the Lima de Azevedo family, that Joaquim Mani Congo was sleeping with a white man, due to that, he boiled the enslaved alive. In response to the euphoria of Joaquim Mani Congo, Mr. Lima de Azevedo uttered the following words:

If these filth are allowed in their wild land, dressed as women and serving each other as patients, they will not do it in my lands! They won't do it in lands of true good Christians! [...] While being led to the cauldron, between the screams, the man cursed the entire generation of lords and played incantations (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 22, our translation).¹³

Mr. Lima de Azevedo's speech associates homosexual practices with immorality, treating the sexual relations that Joaquim Mani Congo had with other men as filth. In addition, from a unilateral and prejudiced view, he brings in his speech the imaginary of a wild Africa ("wild land"), far from the civilizing processes. On the whole, when observing such pronouncements through the prism of violence, we realize how Kilomba (2019, p. 37) is precise when stating that the colonial wound remains open, manifesting itself both in the new updates of colonialism and in the psychic traumas that persist.

Moreover, by saying that "Europe is indefensible" (2020, p.9, our translation)¹⁴, the Martinican scholar Aimé Césaire, in the text *Discourse on colonialism*, shows the reader how much the European continent established hierarchical dichotomies, subordinated lives, marginalized identities, and committed the greatest memoricides¹⁵ of the history of modernity. It was done in the name of a supposed idea of progress, rational superiority and globalization. These conceptions

¹² Ficamos todos ao redor de um enorme caldeirão com água fervente. Eu estremecia imaginando o que estava para ocorrer. Nenhum dos pretos queria ver, e percebi que alguns brancos, principalmente senhoras, também não, mas o senhor Lima de Azevedo nos obrigava com voz enérgica e uma ameaça no olhar. O senhor Bernardo e dona Ignácia estavam entre os mais excitados da assistência. O homem foi trazido por dois capatazes enormes, cada um segurando em um braço. Estava altivo, mas só começou a gritar quando viu o que seria feito (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 21-22).

¹³ Se em sua terra selvagem permitem-se estas imundícies e sujidades, vestidos como mulheres e servindo de pacientes uns aos outros, não o farão em minhas terras! Não o farão em terras de verdadeiros cristãos de bem! [...] Enquanto era conduzido para o caldeirão, entre os gritos, o homem maldizia toda a geração dos senhores e jogava encantamentos (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 22).

¹⁴ A Europa é indefensável (CÉSAIRE, 2020, p.9).

¹⁵ Term used to designate the erasure of the cultural and collective memory of a certain people, due to the development of so-called superior imperialist epistemologies. This semantic category

by which Europe subjugated the colonized countries of the Southern Cone, are the ones to be blamed for the “colonial problem”, as the aforementioned author points out:

The main responsible in this field is Christian pedantry, for having elaborated the dishonest equations: Christianity = civilization; paganism = savagery, from which the abominable colonialist and racist consequences could only result, whose victims would be the Indians, yellows and blacks (CÉSAIRE, 2020, p. 11, our translation).¹⁶

In fact, the blacks and the indiginous were treated without any trace of humanity, placing such subjects, located in the equations described above, as a “dead weight in civilization” (CÉSAIRE, 2020, p. 17, our translation)¹⁷, in which Europe establishes itself as the starting point of colonizing barbarism. Thus, the abyss that separates the recurring justifications about the colonial enterprise is constantly increasing, as one can understand by the observation of Césaire when he posits that “from colonization to civilization, the distance is infinite; that, from all the accumulated colonial expeditions, from all the colonial statutes elaborated, from all the ministerial circulars dispatched, there would not be a single human value” (CÉSAIRE, 2020, p. 11, our translation).¹⁸

In this section, we aimed to present how necropower and violence, rooted in a totally inhospitable and unhealthy spatial structure, regulated black bodies, subjecting them to regimes of exclusion, multiple forms of violence, and death. For that, we analyzed excerpts retrieved from the historical narratives of Alves Cruz (2018, 2018a, 2020). Such factors prove that colonial power is not only responsible for conditioning social brutality through environments suitable for human work, but also causes a coloniality of bodies seen as dissidents. It is a regulation of the body and the space it occupies. Furthermore, in the next section, we will discuss how infectious diseases (cholera, yellow fever, smallpox and maculo) were used as weapons that acted as vectors of oppression and of death among countless subjects, and started a control mechanism amid enslavers.

is used to name the action of relegating social and historical practices of memory to invisibility, the word having the greatest repercussion in the studies of Fernando Báez (2010), especially in the book *History of the cultural destruction of Latin America: from the conquest to globalization*. In Brazil, the idea of memoricide has been more frequently disseminated by the studies of Professor Constância Lima Duarte, in her research on the historical erasure, for a long time, of Nísia Floresta in *Feminist Studies*.

¹⁶ O grande responsável nesse campo é o pedantismo cristão, por ter elaborado as equações desonestas: cristianismo = civilização; paganismo = selvageria, das quais só poderiam resultar as abomináveis consequências colonialistas e racistas, cujas vítimas seriam os índios, amarelos e negros (CÉSAIRE, 2020, p. 11).

¹⁷ Peso morto na civilização (CÉSAIRE, 2020, p. 17).

¹⁸ E digo que, da colonização à civilização, a distância é infinita; que, de todas as expedições coloniais acumuladas, de todos os estatutos coloniais elaborados, de todas as circulares ministeriais despachadas, não sobraria um único valor humano (CÉSAIRE, 2020, p. 11).

Coloniality of the body: infectious diseases as a form of regulation of life

In an articulation plan analogous to the coloniality of being, power, knowledge and gender, the coloniality of the body, in our view, refers to the regulation of subalternized bodies through violence, capitalist exploitation, racism, gender inequality, and social differences. Showing European undertakings in colonized countries, excesses, and colonial violence as a disguised form of a supposed civilizing challenge, María Lugones says that

The colonial “civilizing mission” was the euphemistic mask of brutal access to people’s bodies by unimaginable exploitation, violent sexual rape, control of reproduction, and systematic horror (by feeding live people to dogs and by making bags and hats from the vaginas of brutally murdered indigenous women, for example) (LUGONES, 2019, p. 360, our translation).¹⁹

In fact, this mark of violence confirms, in many ways, the hypothesis of Berenice Bento (2018), that, in the recognition of humanity carried out by the State, there are bodies that receive the privilege of living and others that, inserted in the regulated space by the same State, receive the inevitability of death. Furthermore, it is worth noting that black women, like the indigenous women portrayed in the quote previously mentioned, go through situations of re-updating forms of violence and oppression, such as femicide, domestic violence, and rape, guidelines that have been gradually receiving the look and visibility of the media, sociological studies, political movements, and literature. In this way, María Lugones (2019), when talking about the animalization and the invisibilization of the colonized, states that:

Turning the colonized into human beings was not the colonists’ goal. The difficulty of imagining this objective can be easily perceived when we see that such a transformation, from the colonized into men and women, would not be an identity transformation, but a change of sadness. But turning the colonized against each other was part of the repertoire of justifications for the abuses that took place. The Christian confession, sin and the Manichean division between good and evil served to mark female sexuality as evil – colonized females were related to the devil (LUGONES, 2019, p. 360, our translation).²⁰

¹⁹ A “missão civilizatória” colonial foi a máscara eufemística do acesso brutal aos corpos das pessoas pela exploração inimaginável, violenta violação sexual, controle da reprodução e um horror sistemático (ao dar pessoas vivas para cachorros comerem e ao fazer bolsas e chapéus com as vaginas de mulheres indígenas brutalmente assassinadas, por exemplo) (LUGONES, 2019, p. 360).

²⁰ Transformar os colonizados em seres humanos não era o objetivo dos colonizadores. A dificuldade de imaginar esse objetivo pode ser facilmente percebida, quando vemos que tal transformação, dos colonizados em homens e mulheres, não seria uma transformação identitária, mas uma mudança de tristeza. Mas virar os colonizados uns contra os outros fazia parte do repertório de justificativas para os abusos que aconteciam. A confissão cristã, o pecado e a di-

In this way, the regulation of female bodies is evident. This process of controlling women's bodies, by the patriarchal structure, by the State, and by capitalism, was called by Silvia Federici (2017, p. 262) of primitive accumulation. By these lenses, the body was understood as a machine for reproduction and for work, making it a potential instrument for maintaining coloniality. Truly, the sexuality of women and blacks was marked by prejudiced, oppressive, and stereotyped religious conceptions, for they were demonized and conditioned to be a heretical and rebellious body. The coloniality of the body was also associated with a strategy of controlling freedom, will, and reproduction, so that women were seen through the prism of what is abhorred, inferiorized and delegitimized. In this sense, modernity, as a propelling substrate of capitalism, continues to prevail a power structure that dehumanizes and places bodies in a subordinate position, so that women, blacks and those who belong to non-hegemonic identity groups are strategically excluded from a hierarchical dichotomy, which classify them as uncivilized. This coloniality of the body involves the disregard for marginalized lives in the face of infectious diseases presented in the novels. In the quote below, Eliana Alves Cruz fictionalizes the historical epidemics of macula and smallpox, in *Crime do cais do Valongo*:

Well, the maculo is well known in those cellars and ports. A lot of people didn't even get on board. Considering that the ships that bring us to these parts of the world are the same as death, the maculo was death before death. It all started with a strong evacuation (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 124, our translation).²¹

This passage is about the moment in which Muana Lomué begins to tell some atrocities to Mr. João Toole, an Englishman who was doing a listening job to substantiate his abolitionist arguments. According to medical reports, the patient had strong bowel movements and small wounds in the anus region; over time, a huge swelling would open up and create bugs, hence the reason for calling it "animal disease". In a final stage of the disease, the infected patient no longer had control over the feces, which continually came out through the large hole that became the excretory organ. Hearing such descriptions, the Englishman wandered into a vast silence in the face of the cruelty of slavery.

Another sanitary and epidemic war is fought during the plot: the fight against the smallpox outbreak, commonly called bladder. The African enslaved were brought in the holds of ships in inhumane conditions of accommodation and hygiene. As a result, many contagious diseases proliferated, as they made all their

visão maniqueísta entre o bem e o mal serviram para marcar a sexualidade feminina como má – fêmeas colonizadas eram relacionadas ao diabo (LUGONES, 2019, p. 360).

²¹ Pois bem, o maculo é bastante conhecido naqueles porões e portos. Muita gente nem chegava a embarcar. Considerando que os navios que nos trazem para estas partes do mundo são o mesmo que a morte, o maculo era a morte antes da morte. Tudo começava com uma forte evacuação (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 124).

physiological needs together in that environment, making the situation even more degrading. Thus, smallpox spread, imposing intense fever and festering sores on the skin. The contaminated died and, soon, were thrown into the sea, so that “the sea became the largest cemetery in the world” (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 138, our translation).²² From that moment on, a motto was created to describe the catastrophe: “whoever had no other way but to die, died. Who could only live, lived” (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 150, our translation).²³

In this sense, it is worth emphasizing the ideas postulated by Foucault (2008), which refer to a power over life (biopower), which is exercised through a disciplinary technology. In other words, such power is a possible establishment of a conception of social order. It promotes measures of control over the individual and collective body. Because of that, colonial violence feeds on the regulation of these oppressed bodies and makes them totally dependent on this unequal power relationship that is capitalism. Thus, the countless lives thrown into the sea, the world’s largest cemetery, represent the great barbarism of the decimation of colonized bodies.

In *Água de barrêla*, cholera is metaphorically presented as “the implacable reaper”. In 1855, cholera morbus, a deadly disease that caused intense days of vomiting and diarrhea, turned the bearer pale daily. After many days in that state, the patient died. According to estimates described in the narrative, more than eight thousand people died in the region of Cachoeira, in Bahia. This is how the outbreak is described:

By 1850, “*a bixa*” as Yellow Fever was known, had wreaked havoc, as had earlier outbreaks of Smallpox and various diseases that took many at once underground. Cholera was yet another lethal disease that came to haunt the impoverished lives of that population, which was already suffering from the sugarcane economic crisis (CRUZ, 2018, p. 50, our translation).²⁴

Some points deserve to be highlighted in this quote. First, cholera appears as another lethal disease in the context of outbreaks that have already occurred in the region; second, there is the advent of a new aspect of social marking: inequality. The diseases were spread, especially, on “impoverished lives”, since the condition of poverty is coupled with other variants of inequality, such as lack of access to better hygiene, sanitation structures, and decent clinical care to reestablish the cholera, the yellow fever or the smallpox. In short, in this section, the reasons why infectious diseases fit in as a mechanism of the coloniality of the body

²² O mar se tornava o maior cemitério do mundo (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 138).

²³ Quem não tinha outro jeito a não ser morrer, morreu. Quem só podia viver, viveu (CRUZ, 2018a, p. 150).

²⁴ Em 1850, “*a bicha*”, como era conhecida a febre amarela, fizera um estrago, assim como surtos anteriores de varíola e doenças várias que levavam muitos de uma vez só para debaixo da terra. A cólera era mais um mal letal que vinha assombrar as vidas empobrecidas daquela população, que já vinha sofrendo com a crise econômica da cana-de-açúcar (CRUZ, 2018, p. 50).

were made explicit. In addition to the normalization of violence of bodies considered dissidents, there is a regulation of bodies marginalized by the disciplinary technology of a colonial power. This power, which acts through segregating and oppressive structures, is a tool of colonialism to annihilate subordinated groups through diseases, especially with the poor and with the enslaved.

Final remarks

In the present research, we sought to discuss the various manifestations of violence against black and subalternized bodies in the novels *Água de barreira* (2018), *Crime dos cais do Valongo* (2018a), and *Nada digo de ti, que em ti não veja* (2020), written by the Brazilian author Eliana Alves Cruz. During the investigation, we realized that there were two dimensions of violence manifestation: the normalization plan, guided by necropower, in which characters like Marianno, Joaquim Mani Congo, Vitória and others are inflicted to violence and, often, to death for not being fit into certain social standards, such as gender performances; and the level of regulation, where the tentacles of the body's coloniality show themselves through infectious diseases, which function as a kind of control technology to marginalized and poor populations.

Therefore, it became evident, after the readings carried out, that the historical novel allows relevant discussions situated around human experiences and historical events. In the three narratives analyzed in this paper, we found out that epidemic diseases affect those who suffer from the effects of social inequality the most: the enslaved. To these people, the epidemics were even more harmful, because they were intensified by the effects of the colonial wound, which decided that black bodies are killable bodies. Also, they are added to other oppressions, such as gender violence, racism, and poverty, since these marginalized social groups are constantly under imminent risk situations, both in the public sphere of power (the various forms of violence perpetrated by the State and its agents) and in the private one (domestic violence).

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Abstract/Resumo

The historical fiction of Eliana Alves Cruz: necropower, violence, coloniality of the body, and infectious diseases

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In this article, we aim to analyze the representations of necropower, violence, coloniality of the body, and infectious diseases (such as cholera, yellow fever, smallpox and maculo), recurrent in the process of enslavement of black people. We will investigate such themes by studying the historical fiction novels *Água de barrela* (2018), *Crime do cais do Valongo* (2018a), and *Nada digo de ti, que em ti não Veja* (2020), written by Eliana Alves Cruz. Therefore, starting from the discussions on the various forms of coloniality, violence, and barbarism evidenced in theorists such as Agamben (2002), Bento (2018), Césaire (2020), Dalcastagnè (2008), Lugones (2019), among others, we will observe the ways in which capitalism, European colonization and modern slavery, using necropolitics, led subalternized bodies to death through normalization and regulation, by denying to these bodies basic conditions of existence, such as food, hygiene, decent work, healthcare and rest. By the end of the research, we discovered that the novels problematize and denounce the colonial wound that slavery inflicted on black people, placing them in inhumane situations both of displacement, and in the environments of exploitation.

Keywords: historical fiction, necropower, violence, coloniality of the body, infectious diseases.

O romance histórico de Eliane Alves Cruz: necropoder, violência, colonialidade do corpo e doenças infecciosas

Francis Willams Brito da Conceição

Neste artigo, pretendemos analisar as representações do necropoder, da violência, da colonialidade do corpo e das doenças infecciosas (como a cólera, a febre amarela, a varíola e o maculo), recorrentes no processo da escravização dos negros. Investigaremos tais pontos temáticos a partir dos romances históricos: *Água de barrela* (2018), *Crime do cais do Valongo* (2018a) e *Nada digo de ti, que em ti não Veja* (2020) da escritora Eliana Alves Cruz. Sendo assim, partindo das discussões sobre as variadas formas de colonialidade, violência e barbárie evidenciadas em teóricos como Agamben (2002), Bento (2018), Césaire (2020), Dalcastagnè (2008), Lugones (2019), entre outros, observaremos os modos pelos quais o capitalismo, a colonização europeia e a escravidão moderna, utilizando-se da necropolítica, encaminham os corpos subalternizados à morte através da normatização e da regulação, ao negar-lhes condições básicas de existência, como alimentação, higiene, trabalho digno, atenção à saúde e descanso. Ao fim da pesquisa, constatamos que os três romances problematizam e denunciam a ferida colonial que a escravidão

imprimiu aos negros, colocando-os em situações desumanas tanto de deslocamento, quanto nos ambientes de exploração.

Palavras-chave: romance histórico, necropoder, violência, colonialidade do corpo, doenças infecciosas.