

Languages of (De)colonization: Toward a Poetics of Relation in Psychoanalysis

Linguagens da (Des)colonização: Por uma Poética da Relação na Psicanálise

Lenguajes de la (Des)colonización: Hacia una Poética de la Relación en el Psicoanálisis

Langues de la (Dé)colonisation : Pour une Poétique de la Relation en Psychanalyse

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Abstract

Language consists of contingent and ever-evolving games that establish fields of possibility for agency, affect, and perception – semiotic ecosystems that give rise to existential territories. The domain of language is often a site of disputes over legitimacy, purity, correctness, origins, authenticity, truth, and related concerns. Within these tensions, the ethical, aesthetic, and political immanence of the processes through which coloniality is constituted becomes clearly visible, as do the processes of decolonizing resistance and their minoritarian becomings. Drawing on a critical decolonial perspective, this essay problematizes language in general and questions the need to destabilize and render errant the languages that sustain our theoretical systems in psychology and psychoanalysis. Revisiting the relationship among language, the unconscious, and alienation in the works of authors such as Eduard Glissant, Franz Fanon, Lélia Gonzalez, Lacan, and Deleuze, the essay seeks to develop a critique of our theoretical frameworks in order to highlight the imperative of experimentation and opacity that confronts us.

Keywords: language, psychoanalysis, decolonization, poetics of relation, coloniality.

Resumo

As linguagens são jogos contingentes e em devir que estabelecem campos de possibilidade de agências, afetações, percepções: ecossistemas semióticos que instauram territorialidades existenciais. O campo das linguagens é frequentemente território de disputas acerca de legitimidades, purezas, correções, origens, autenticidades, verdades, etc. Nesses tensionamentos visibilizamos com nitidez a imanência ético-estético-política dos processos de conformação da colonialidade, assim como, por outro lado, dos processos de

resistência descolonizadora e seus devires minoritários. Este ensaio parte de uma perspectiva crítica descolonizante para problematizar as linguagens em geral e colocar em questão a necessidade de fragilização e errância das línguas que sustentam nossos sistemas teóricos da psicologia e da psicanálise. Retomando a questão da língua, do inconsciente e da alienação em autores como Eduard Glissant, Franz Fanon, Lélia Gonzalez, Lacan e Deleuze, pretende-se efetuar uma crítica de nossas perspectivas teóricas de modo a evidenciar o imperativo de experimentação e opacidade que se coloca.

Palavras-chave: linguagem, psicanálise, descolonização, poética da relação, colonialidade.

Resumen

Los lenguajes son juegos contingentes y en devenir que establecen campos de posibilidad de agencias, afectaciones y percepciones: ecosistemas semióticos que instauran territorialidades existenciales. El campo de los lenguajes es frecuentemente un territorio de disputas en torno a legitimidades, purezas, correcciones, orígenes, autenticidades, verdades, entre otros aspectos. En estas tensiones se visibiliza con nitidez la immanencia ético-estético-política de los procesos de conformación de la colonialidad, así como, por otro lado, de los procesos de resistencia descolonizadora y de sus devenires minoritarios. Este ensayo parte de una perspectiva crítica descolonizante para problematizar los lenguajes en general y poner en cuestión la necesidad de fragilización y errancia de las lenguas que sustentan nuestros sistemas teóricos de la Psicología y del Psicoanálisis. Retomando la cuestión de la lengua, del inconsciente y de la alienación en autores como Édouard Glissant, Frantz Fanon, Lélia Gonzalez, Lacan y Deleuze, se propone efectuar una crítica de nuestras perspectivas teóricas con el fin de evidenciar el imperativo de experimentación y opacidad que se impone.

Palabras clave: lenguaje, psicoanálisis, descolonización, poética de la relación, colonialidad.

Résumé

Les langues sont des jeux contingents et en devenir qui établissent des champs de possibilité pour les agentivités, les affects, les perceptions : des écosystèmes sémiotiques qui instaurent des territorialités existentielles. Le champ des langages constitue fréquemment un territoire de luttes autour des légitimités, des puretés, des corrections, des origines, des authenticités, des vérités, etc. Dans ces tensions, nous rendons visible avec clarté l'immanence éthique, esthétique et politique des processus de formation de la colonialité, tout comme, à l'inverse, celle des processus de résistance décoloniale et de leurs devenirs minoritaires. Cet essai part d'une perspective critique décoloniale afin de problématiser les langages en général et mettre en question la nécessité d'une fragilisation et d'une errance des langues qui soutiennent nos systèmes théoriques de la psychologie et de la psychanalyse. En reprenant la question de la langue, de l'inconscient et de l'aliénation chez des auteurs tels qu'Edouard Glissant, Frantz Fanon, Lélia Gonzalez, Lacan et Deleuze, il s'agit de proposer une critique de nos perspectives théoriques afin de mettre en évidence l'impératif d'expérimentation et d'opacité qui s'impose.

Mots-clés : langage, psychanalyse, décolonisation, poétique de la relation, colonialité.

Introduction: Escapes and Captures in the Languages of Coloniality

Coloniality is part of our lives. It permeates our processes of alienation, constituting collective assemblages of enunciation – agencies woven transversally through the performance of subjectivation processes marked by territories that are simultaneously collective and singular. Heterogeneous body-territories, engaged in continuous collective performances, dissolve the presumed polarities between the individual and the social (Barad, 2017; Escóssia & Kastrup, 2005; Simondon, 2020), allowing us to perceive an expressive and evental dimension of our ontologies (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000; Whitehead, 1929/1956), in which the ethical-aesthetic dimension of experience clearly emerges as a political issue.

Beyond the “linguistic turn,” the “affective turn” and the “speculative turn” – articulated with the necessary critical and intersectional exercise of decolonization – transform our expressive, speculative, affective, and narrative performances into a powerful field of political disputes and compositions. It is through these practices that we may be able to displace and eventalize the apparent concreteness of our intelligible and sensible regimes (Ahmed, 2015; Foucault, 2015; Hartman, 2022; Mombaça, 2021).

However, even while recognizing the multiplicity of human and nonhuman agencies and languages that perform our reality (Barad, 2017), we cannot forget that we speak the (verbal) language of the colonizers and that, as Lacan reminds us, it is the world of words that creates the world of things (Lacan, 1998a, p. 277). This is not to assert a linear causality

nor to attribute exclusivity or hegemony to words in the construction of reality. Rather, within our networks of relations among humans and nonhumans, living and nonliving beings, we engage in a multiplicity of language games – visual, economic, urban-architectural, institutional, labor-related, affective, sexual, dietary, consumerist, among others – that, in their material concreteness, participate in shaping the field of possibilities that defines our world and its agencies.

We may conceive of multiple performative languages that establish semiotic games and ecologies (Guattari, 1990) and that – alongside capital, labor, reinforced concrete, and digital bits – compose the materiality of lived experience. These languages constitute an important field of study and experimentation within social and institutional psychology, situated in its paradoxical singularity between psychologism and sociologization.

In this sense, we may draw upon and extend Barthes' (2013) understanding of language as a form of legislation and of langue as its code. Our cities, homes, habits, technical devices, and media images establish distinct, though intertwined, modes of legislating, sedimenting different games that we may call languages: open and evolving systems that, through their assemblages, compose planes of possibilities for meaning and action, which we both inhabit and transform.

By virtue of their systemic texture, languages imply a relationship of alienation: dwelling, acting, and speaking are not merely ways of inhabiting, cooperating, and communicating, but also ways of not dwelling, acting, and speaking otherwise. In other words, they entail a process of partially submitting oneself to a style of subjectivation within which one is immersed: affirming a territory from which a world is perspectivized and performed (Barad, 2017) – even in the most intimate depths of the subject. In this sense, the colonized speaking being is traversed by a language that cannot simply be abandoned, one that leaves its marks (Moreno, 2022) and consequences.

Through the circulation of the languages of coloniality, we witness the weaving of the Fanonian collective unconscious (Fanon, 1952/2020) in its sociogenesis of libidinal production and circulation, insofar as the unconscious is understood as a collectively inherited network. Eurocentric semiotic systems and their colonizing narratives circulating within colonized societies thus constitute a difficult “home,” a complicated and violent territory. It is an ecosystem in which the colonized subject exists as an unwelcome foreigner in their own home, sometimes identifying more intensely with the colonizer and their history, perspective, and values than with those subalternized through colonization.

Within this subjectivity are inscribed the fixations of the hegemonic norms of the bourgeoisie, patriarchy, cisheteronormativity, and whiteness, which come to operate as ego ideals organizing the political-libidinal field – even though, of course, there are always resistances and escapes from such fixations. The image evoked by both Chinua Achebe (2013) and Franz Fanon (1952/2020) – that of a Black child reading European stories and identifying with white invaders in narratives that cast the colonial aggressor as the hero – denounces the tragic “silent” violence permeating the very air of coloniality that we breathe: I did not see myself as African in those books. I took the side of the whites against the ‘savages’ (Achebe, 2013, p. 121).

The Social Grammars of Verbal Language in Processes of Colonization

This essay, derived from a study that adopts fiction as an ethical-aesthetic method (Costa, 2014) – a kind of “speculative anthropology” that extends beyond the mere illustration of the world, constituting a way of shaping and simultaneously experimenting with reality through narratives (Saer, 2014) – focuses its analysis on the verbal dimension of language. We reflect on its political and subjectivizing modulations, both because of its profound relevance in the constitution of human collectives and because of its hegemonic centrality within Eurocentric perspectives. This dimension is frequently invested with a superior hierarchical status, in contrast to other forms of language.

To be sure, even for Lacan (1985), language is not restricted to the world of words but rather to a know-how with *lalangue*: what one knows how to do with *lalangue* [emphasis added] far exceeds what can be accounted for under the title of language (p. 19). The neologism *lalangue*, arising from a slip in Lacan's own discourse, refers precisely to error – to that which escapes language and its signifying logic. According to Moreno (2022), it is precisely here that something inaccessible and impossible to know about *lalangue* is situated, which paradoxically establishes conditions of possibility for other inscriptions. In this sense, language and speech may become subversive, exceeding their restricted rules through certain dynamics of displacement and invention.

Through a discussion of spoken languages, verbal forms of expression, and the movements of colonization and decolonization, we examine this question of coloniality, which significantly traverses our lives and modes of enunciation, seeking within it possibilities for separation and displacement. For this reason, we begin by reflecting on the so-called *petit-nègre* French mentioned by Fanon (1952/2020) in *Black Skin, White Masks*. It is important to emphasize that *petit-nègre* does not refer to Creole or to the local languages of colonized territories but rather to a linguistic mode established by the colonizer as a confining stereotype of the colonized.

The language imposed by colonizers constitutes a double prison: imposition and stigmatization. On the one hand, French itself – as well as other European languages – appears as an imposed linguistic horizon: The Caribbean Black person is considered part of the human species only when able to speak a purer form of Spanish, English, or French (Geismar, 1972,

p. 18, as cited in Faustino, 2015, p. 27). On the other hand, we encounter the stereotype projected through the *petit-nègre* variation of French, used by the colonizer to stigmatize and infantilize the colonized population.

In this sense, this linguistic variation is understood by Europeans as a kind of “sub-French”: when an ordinary European addressed any of these natives, including their most distinguished representatives, they did so using *petit-nègre*, a stereotyped and demeaning language (Faustino, 2018, p. 23). This dual affiliative bond seeks to annihilate the opacity of extensive alterities (Glissant, 2021): the assimilative violence that institutes a heroic notion of origin and purity to be imperatively followed, and the exclusionary violence that separates legitimate French from another French deemed illegitimate in its lineage.

To complete this picture of the attempt to affirm an affiliative (Glissant, 2021) grammatical contract of domination (Mills, 2013), we observe the harsh repression of the Poetics of Relation (Glissant, 2021), which elaborate new possibilities for language through encounters among continents and their forms of speech – as when teachers closely monitor children to prevent the use of Creole (Fanon, 1952/2020). The same zeal for conversion that once recognized souls only in Christians comes to recognize language only in “pure” European languages, expressing a horror of extension – of that which undoes affiliative grammars of belonging and their heroic fantasies. This drive for grammatical purity is mobilized by an epistemicidal politics of enmity (Mbembe, 2017), sustaining policies aimed at annihilating linguistic extensivities that emerge as forms of resistance to European-nationalist arrow-like nomadism (Glissant, 2021) and its delusions of adventure and progress.

Yet Relation (Glissant, 2021) and resistance always continue to flourish amid the ruins and fissures of colonial idealizations. In doing so, they undo exclusionary games through anarchizing violences (Glissant, 2021) that collapse judgments and claims to establish origins and purities of lineage – familial, national, linguistic, racial, and otherwise. In the defense of “official languages,” one can perceive the reiteration of linguistic hierarchies grounded in Eurocentric ego ideals and stigmatizing forms of subalternization. These are accompanied by severe repression of whatever emerges beyond colonial frameworks: a colonizing function of domination that extends through certain languages and their processes of transmission and acquisition, traversing some of the clearest and harshest boundaries of constitutive alienation.

This allows us to examine our most evident limits – as when Fanon (1952/2020) refers to alienated (mystified) Black people and, conversely, to white people who are no less alienated (both mystified and mystifying). Evidently, this game of domination is never total: one must recognize the not-all dimension of this network, as well as the traumas, screams, and silences that mark its history.

Lélia Gonzalez (2020), for example, highlights the racism of disavowal and the disavowal of racism as constitutive elements of our history. The former corresponds to attempts to erase the profound African and Indigenous contributions to Brazilian processes of subjectivation; the latter seeks to erase that very erasure and its violences, articulating a double operation: the racist denial that defines alterity as the reverse side of the norm and the disavowal of racism that naturalizes violence and sustains racial privilege. Attempts to render invisible the constitutive power of *pretuguês*, spoken by Brazilians as a linguistic modulation of our condition as *Amefricanos* (Gonzalez, 2020), express precisely this operation of erasure and the hierarchization of a bourgeois, white linguistic norm erected as the heroic bastion of grammar.

Gonzalez’s critique of this operation is woven through her exposure of the divisions between “high culture” and “popular culture” as a means of fetishizing and stigmatizing *Amefrican* cultural productions, including *pretuguês*. These two neologisms designate concepts that mark an important movement toward recognizing creative power as a form of resistance among Afro-Brazilian populations in the face of the racist violence constitutive of our culture. By affirming *pretuguês*, Gonzalez recovers this *Amefrican* existential and political dimension that has been repeatedly erased from our history. Such an operation displaces the normativity of colonial whiteness and makes visible its effort to homogenize and simplify language through a mere “glance” (Sodré, 2019), denying the complex presence of African and Indigenous roots within it.

This is a movement of displacement and complexification that opens onto becoming, interpellating the “individual” to occupy the singular position of the subject of enunciation – of the collective assemblage of enunciation – which concerns the movements of separation we are able to enact in relation to what is assigned to us by normative territorialities. We thus maintain that neither alienation nor liberation is ever total; rather, they constitute a dialectic that forms us as subjects and a paradox that weaves us into singular collectives. Consequently, thinking about decolonization involves much more than consciousness-raising or the pursuit of absolute truths and liberations; it requires understanding modes of existence as dynamic and heterogeneous sites engaged in a multiple and continuous movement through the curves of history.

Although reactionary, coloniality is itself a movement – it is not an inert reality but a force that shifts and renews itself over time. It appears as invasions and genocide, plantations and slavery, oligarchies and agribusiness, cities and death squads, dictatorships and police states, private militias and financial operators of the neoliberal economy – traveling in armored vehicles toward gated communities – multiple versions of privileges and inequalities accumulated in many manifestations of the same necropolitical theme (Mbembe, 2017). The supposed adventurer-hero, who seeks simultaneously to generate “wealth” and to (re)establish “civilizing” order, is the figure that synthesizes this constantly mutating narrative of domination.

In this sense, decolonization must not be left behind, lest we fall into the illusion that we will eventually arrive at an irreversible historical moment in the creation of new horizons of possibility. As Pavón-Cuéllar (2021) argues, the movement

of decolonization must be continually politicized. To do so requires a turn that implicates us within this process while simultaneously enabling us to direct a critique toward our own devices and frameworks.

French *Petit-nègre* and Language as Prison

Before we desire, we exist in the desire of the Other¹. Before we speak, we are spoken. Yet there is no way to articulate, even in other forms, all the affects that traverse the sands of our flesh. This is why Moreno (2022) states that the unconscious would concern the testimony of a knowledge that escapes the speaking being. In this sense, he mentions an important premise by Alomo et al. (2013): language would not be mediated solely by meanings and by the relations of a signifying chain, but also by an experience of the Real, in which the acoustic effect produced by the signifier leaves a subjective mark that manifests itself in the part of the signifier that is sound. Moreno (2022) asks whether this would indicate something about ancestry, even when each subject treats this Real at stake in a highly singular way.

To better understand this plot, we may think of the language imposed on us as a kind of board, composed of a series of pieces, with which we will play for the rest of our lives. Language, in this case, consists of the moves we make with these pieces, within the possibilities of that board. Although it is in constant movement, this language has certain common meanings, a kind of grammar that designates the order of some movements, until further notice. Consequently, language would be nothing other than a servant of power and, precisely for this reason, fascist – for fascism does not mean preventing speech, but compelling speech (Barthes, 2013). However, by uttering an “error” in his discourse, Lacan (1985) introduces the term *lalangue*, a neologism that points to the possibility of a “failure” within language itself and, therefore, to a condition of errancy that refers to our incompleteness, as we shall see below.

This is why speaking is much more than merely transmitting words, employing a syntax, or taking possession of the morphology of one language or another; it means assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization (Fanon, 1952/2020). It is in this sense that Fanon discusses the condition of colonized peoples, i.e., every people in whose midst an inferiority complex has arisen as a result of the burial of local cultural originality (p. 32), and who find themselves confronted by the “civilizing” language. Like the Antillean people described by Fanon, we Brazilians are products of this genocidal colonial tradition. The marks of our history, whether inscribed or not, carry the traces of these colonial processes, which are renewed throughout the meanders of history. Our proclaimed “democracy,” unfolded in the “myth of racial democracy,” is controlled by the white world, which formulates the country’s concepts, weapons, and values, transmitting them also through language (Nascimento, 2016).

We must not lose sight of the fact that, in the colonial experience, there are no social practices detached from discourses, languages, or representations, insofar as these are not only symbolic and imaginary components in the structuring of the colonial bond and in the constitution of colonized subjects, but also, in themselves, resources for actions and practices (Mbembe, 2019). Alongside the spilled blood that seeped into the earth as part of local populations were decimated and, later, African peoples were massacred through enslavement, a significant portion of languages – and therefore of the worlds at stake – was dragged away.

It is in this sense that Glissant (2021) emphasizes that spoken languages are world-echoes, which allow us to sense and illustrate the turbulent encounters of the cultures of peoples whose globality organizes our chaos-world (p. 122). This is why these world-echoes are important parts of what he calls the Poetics of Relation: a process of errancy and paradoxical hybridisms that occurs at the intersection of different existential territories through the lacerating processes of deterritorialization produced by invasions, abductions, and enslavements, which tragically inaugurate modernity. At the same time, these same processes intensify errancies and may open possibilities for new modes of nomadism and belonging (Glissant, 2021).

The acute trauma of colonization, in its desire for conquest and annihilation of opacity, paradoxically allows the opaque weaving of a network of extreme multiplicity and errancy that collapses presumed transcendent transparencies into a myriad of relative transparencies (Glissant, 2021). The violence of the single perspective of colonizing arrow-like nomadism produces a trauma from which emerges a web of multiple perspectivalisms that collapse the project of coloniality and its projections of purity and origins.

However, many of the languages stitched together by the errancies of the Poetics of Relation begin to be missed, insofar as they are violently erased by exclusive affiliative games that stigmatize them as “illegitimate,” bringing about a significant impoverishment of this Relation. After all, before human communities have learned to preserve their diversities together, how many languages, dialects, and forms of speech will have disappeared, shattered by the implacable consensus of the benefits and regencies of power? (Glissant, 2021, p. 124).

There are many ways to leave a people without ground, and colonialism seems to have surpassed itself in this enterprise, erecting a territory through paradoxical deterritorialization. On this soil of clay, tears, and blood grew our so-called

¹ The Big Other, here, is understood based on Lacan’s formulations: it refers to a function, a place, a symbolic structure that designates certain (in)determinations of the subject, presupposed in every society.

“Western civilization,” and there our “humanity” was instituted: this absurd civilizational abstraction (Krenak, 2020). It is no coincidence that the colonizer’s stereotype becomes a paradigm, a kind of “fatal destiny” embedded in our horizons (Freire, 1974; Martin-Baró, 1987/2017), whiteness as the only possible destiny (Fanon, 1952/2020), as the basic conductor of a culture and its worldview (Nascimento, 2016). In this regard, Fanon (1952/2020) mentions some cases of Antilleans who lived for some time in the metropole and then returned completely transformed, speaking another language: the closer he comes to the true man, the more he has incorporated the true language (Fanon, 1952/2020, p. 31).

This reveals a cleavage, a displacement in relation to one’s place of birth. In this context, as Fanon (1952/2020) reminds us, the local language, Creole, is despised and, in various spaces, prohibited. Thus, a culture becomes structured by the French of the colonizers, this language that seems to demarcate a single destiny, where the racist ideals of whiteness are mediated by that language. In this web traversed by the traumas of a constitutive violence of a contract of domination (Mills, 2013), speaking and writing “French in its purity” means practicing a “universal language”; it means piercing the enigma of the world, discoursing on humankind [emphasis added] (Mbembe, 2019, p. 108).

It is therefore unsurprising that one of the forms of domination developed by French colonizers was *petit-nègre*. Contrary to what is often assumed, *petit-nègre* was not a “simple French” mixed with local languages, nor even a pidgin, but a language invented by the French colonial administration with the aim of ensuring a subalternized position for colonized peoples. After all, as colonial administrator Maurice Delafosse ironically stated in 1904, how could they assimilate a language ‘as refined’ as French (Chemin, 2021).

With World War I, there was a large influx of recruits from sub-Saharan Africa into the French army, the so-called *tirailleurs sénégalais*, most of whom did not speak French. As a way of “universalizing” communication, the French army imposed *petit-nègre*, renamed in this context *français tirailleur*. In 1916, a military manual was published for French-speaking officers, intended to teach them how to “make themselves understood” by their men as quickly as possible.

Ultimately, this language became consolidated as a kind of simplification of French, revealing its intrinsically racist root (Ropert, 2018). According to Ropert (2018), Delafosse outlines in a few lines the “rules” of French *petit-nègre*: the use of verbs in their simplest form, the infinitive, and the elimination of distinctions of gender and number. Delafosse believed that, for rapid and accurate understanding to exist, the language had to be placed within the reach of Black people. Montvalon (2019) recalls that, according to linguist Laélia Veron, *petit-nègre* constituted a fundamental part of colonial ideology, deliberately teaching a kind of “sub-French” to those to whom French citizenship was not to be granted.

Thus, *petit-nègre* is configured as a device designed to chain Black people to an image of control (Bueno, 2020; Collins, 2019) produced by the colonizer, in an attempt to fix a subalternized positionality. It is an exclusionary affiliative dynamic (Glissant, 2021) that produces the illegitimate and the legitimate within its linguistic games. It is no coincidence that, in a group of young Antilleans, the one who “expresses himself well” and masters the French language inspires fear – one must be careful with him; he is almost white (Fanon, 1952/2020, p. 35). This fear reveals the terror of extension, in which the Poetics of Relation erupts and destabilizes the narcissism of the ideal of lineage and nation (Glissant, 2021).

In a certain way, this is language performing its function, imposing a law without authority, as Mbembe (2019) aptly states, masking its violence by inscribing it within a system of fictions that present themselves as neutral – humanism, civilization, and universalism. To impose *petit-nègre* is to reaffirm the law of the colonial Oedipus (Glissant, 2021), with its prohibition of “mixtures” and of the inventive agency of those who escape the frameworks of bourgeois and patriarchal whiteness. It is to stage the interpellation: you there, stay where you are (Fanon, 1952/2020, p. 48).

It is within this devastated and devastating scenario, deeply marked by the colonial trace, that Western “civilization” formulates its fictions. It is with these languages, largely those of the colonizers, and with their games that we attempt to narrate our pain. It is with this brutally imposed rhythm that we seek to recover and give voice to violently silenced existences. It is with this rhythm that we learn to exist in the world according to the Other. Our processes of alienation are constituted in language games that traverse bodies, inscribing in them a place through the law. But, as we well know, every law can be subverted. Or, at least, it should be.

Langue, Language, and Alienation: Coloniality’s Delusions of Transparency

To unfold a little further these questions concerning *langue*, language, and alienation, let us turn to the mirror stage formulated by Lacan (1996). When inserted into the symbolic field of language, a subject is instituted in a body, producing a series of fantasies that unfold from the experience of the fragmented body to a supposed totality – and finally to the armor of an alienating identity, which will mark its rigid structure throughout the subject’s entire mental development (Lacan, 1996, p. 100). There is therefore an instituted signifier; however, this signifier is neither self-caused nor does it represent the subject’s ultimate destiny.

For Gonzalez (2020), this process fulfills a function: the internalization of values, the immersion in a narrative ecosystem that sketches the existential landscape of collectives. However, it does not represent the “end of history” for the subject, nor a final move that imprisons the subject in an eternal fiction. This is because, in this movement of symbolic fixations,

an ego is instituted that supposedly recognizes itself as “whole” and “total,” alienated in the illusion of completeness and transparency with itself and the world (Glissant, 2021). Narcissism – the mark of the modulation of whiteness (Bento, 2022) and the basis of our constitution as subjects – sustains this fantasy of absolute transparency, which classifies and stigmatizes alterities as othernesses (Kilomba, 2019) in an altericidal manner (Mbembe, 2018), while erecting for itself an idealized image of an intact and supposedly unbreakable mirror.

This ego, conscious of its body in the world, also entails another subjective dimension: that of the projections it elaborates about itself and the phantoms that haunt it—the unconscious instituting a fractured reality, the not-all subject, our condition of lack-of-being (Lacan, 1992) or excessive condition (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000), always overflowing, infinitely and infinitesimally, every sensitive and intelligible framework of understanding. In Lacan, there is no Symbolic except in a Borromean linkage with the Imaginary of projections and with the Real, which shelters the portion that is never symbolized.

The irruption of the Real, in this case, may be understood as the institution of “equivocation”: the point in the metonymic chain at which the possibility opens of enunciating another meaning for what has already been instituted (Tfouni et al., 2017). It may also be understood as the emergence of the Body without Organs, with its radical ruptures in the possibility of codification, amid molecular, multiple, diffuse, and confused lines of force, as well as molar lines, whose overcoding coordinations institute images of thought, producing deterritorializations and lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1996, 2000).

If, on the one hand, we recognize the power of the institution of equivocation, on the other, we perceive that what is fixed as equivocation is better understood as a Poetics of Relation that intensifies creation (Glissant, 2021). Where the moralists of grammar see the absence of normativity, we see the power of errancy, the inventive force present in the constant reinventions of languages.

In this way, the world becomes an unlimited finite of possibilities of experience (Deleuze, 1975): a chaosmos traversed by virtualities from which we always extract only one possible experience – delimited by the immanence of our modes of existence (Deleuze & Guattari, 1992). These modes territorialize spatiotemporalities that, in fragile relative transparencies (Glissant, 2021), tend to simplify and homogenize the errant dimension of the evental web in becoming (Whitehead, 1929/1956).

Thus, the mirror stage is configured as a kind of drama that fabricates, for the subject captured in the lure of spatial identification, an alienating identity (Lacan, 1996). In this way, the greatest of fictions is engendered: the ego, master of its own house; the subject as self-caused, which grants space and legitimacy to the plundering and annihilating heroism (Le Guin, 2022) of coloniality.

The idea of the “mirror” in Lacan (2008) lies precisely in the subject’s capture by the image reflected in the gaze of the Other – which designates the master signifier (S1) – within the illusion of the concreteness of a total body. Thus, the subject of the unconscious is always under the signifier that develops its networks, its chains, and its history (Lacan, 2008, p. 204) and, at the same time, subjected to the split of this signifier (Lacan, 1998c). In other words, the subject both is and is not, at the same time, in a determined place, because what determines the subject is also what makes the subject a site of indeterminacy. Since Freud, we have known that the ego is not master in its own house. This means that the effect of language is the cause introduced into the subject (Lacan, 1998c, p. 849), and therefore the subject is not self-caused, but carries within itself the germ of the cause that splits it and makes it overflow beyond itself.

However, when desire gains space in this signifying cut, metonymy takes place, and thus the topology of the subject is projected in the instant of fantasy, sealing the subject. This causes the subject of desire to know itself as an effect of speech – or nothing more than the desire of the Other – opening space for the experience of opacity as radical alterity, always overflowing the altericidal logics of otherness. Alterity ceases to be something contained in an “other” and becomes constitutive of me; that is, geometry with centralities is undone, and everything becomes periphery (Glissant, 2021), making us strangers to ourselves, in an opening to errancy that could collapse the self-enclosed pacts of whiteness with itself.

This means that no subject can be self-caused and that no affiliative origin can be established or taken as linear or pure. It is here that the function of the *vel* (or, in Latin) of alienation comes into play, condemning the subject to appear only in this split across two moments: on one side, as meaning – before the fictions we create about the world and that sustain our illusions of certainty; on the other, as *aphanisis*, in the fundamental division that institutes the dialectic of the subject, in the lapse where the strange makes itself present.

With this, Lacan shows us that the definition of the subject is constituted in inconsistency, because, at the moment when the subject is represented by the signifier, it does not acquire an “essence” through this designation. The *vel*, therefore, stages a paradoxical relation: the “or” is a consequence that marks the split – “neither one nor the other” and, at the same time, “always one and the other” – in which “and” and “or,” “lack” and “overflow,” cease to be opposites, since they simultaneously point to the unfinishedness of constant invention.

That said, we may think that, with regard to our psychic constitution, every definition is never total; it is traversed by the fissure of becoming, constituting itself as not-all. This means that despite alienation, and because of it, movements of separation may exist. Of course, these are not simple or easy movements. In fact, arduous work is required if we wish to act in the field of decolonization, considering the language that traverses us and leaves its marks.

Toward a Poetics of Relation that Subverts our Theoretical Grammars

Among many other things, coloniality concerns a language. If we begin from the hypothesis that the unconscious is structured like a language (Lacan, 2008), we cannot simply disregard the fact that we also speak the language of the colonizer. For this reason, coloniality is not a reality left behind with the end of the colonies; it is our condition par excellence, the coordinates of the “postcolonial” world.

The “post,” in this sense, does not refer to a designation of the past, as though it marked a previous situation, but rather to a deplorable condition of the present, a living inheritance of death, a later moment that keeps us bound to what came before (Pavón-Cuellar, 2021). This is why, for Pavón-Cuellar (2021), we must give the term a precise meaning, recognizing the objective and subjective continuation of the devastating colonial logic that persists even after colonialism in the strict sense, as in African, Latin American, and Southeast Asian countries.

Our processes of alienation – our constitution as subjects in/of the world – are traversed by the colonial grammar that is renewed as it assigns places. The great Other, which designates the master signifiers that initially reference our chain of associations and meanings, carries the weight of colonial processes. It is no coincidence that we are products of disavowal, as Lélia Gonzalez (2020) notes when referring to Brazilian racism, which affirms a “racial democracy” and seeks to erase or diminish the African and Indigenous presence that deeply marks our culture.

Disavowal is one of the pillars of coloniality, the fuel that makes it possible to maintain a certain repetition by relying on the logic of “neutrality.” After all, what supposedly does not exist – such as racism and so many other atrocities of our social bond – reveals the places of privilege and who, in fact, is allowed to speak in our society. It also reveals who may live and who must die. The claim to neutrality, in this case, operates as a form of depoliticization of subjectivities, marking a discursive position that assumes it speaks from a total place and, therefore, from a place without the possibility of rupture.

When we recognize colonization as a constitutive mark par excellence of the coordinates of the postcolonial world, we perceive the only destiny instituted in this process: it is white, as previously mentioned. When Frantz Fanon (1952/2020) and Abdias Nascimento (2016) question this fact, they are referring to the symbolic universe at stake: European culture imposed an existential deviation on Amerindian peoples.

The modern-colonial civilizational project instituted a single truth – founded on absolute and affiliative transparency – that, even today, reinvents itself very little. We need only observe the universalist conceptions that sustain our everyday fictions: on the one hand, the civilized white subject, the European archetype, the patriarchal family; on the other, images of control associated with dangerousness and subalternization, articulated with those racialized as Black or Indigenous within our narrative ecosystems. The language that symbolizes the bar that splits us is composed of a grammar that carries the weight of this “civilizing” process.

However, there is always a portion that escapes the whole and invites movements of separation, a dynamic that allows a subject of the statement to be instituted – that is, one who manages to deviate from what was designated a priori. In other words, we may think of it as a breach that allows becoming, in the sense that one can construct the mark of a difference in relation to the dominant powers that capture us.

Thus, Relation as errancy occurs through common elements shared in the encounter among peoples, not in search of a generalizing universal, but in the sense of opacities that renounce claims to totality (Glissant, 2021). It is in this sense that we can understand Glissant’s (2005, 2021) idea of creolization: the part of the shattering of cultures that does not mark their dilution, but rather a fragile sharing, consented to and not imposed, woven through effort and not taken as given or natural.

Is this not the very movement Lélia Gonzalez (2020) invites us to undertake when she recognizes that portion of Brazilian Portuguese traversed by African marks, *pretuguês*? By proposing this neologism, Lélia recovers an important part of our language and, consequently, of our processes of alienation. The mark of Africanization shows that colonial processes, although they presume themselves eternal (Fanon, 1959/1965), are fractured and therefore open to other inscriptions. Despite attempts to erase African culture through the institutionalized racism of the myth of racial democracy, it insists and resists, enabling a language game that institutes another way of being-in-the-world. It is a way of cheating with language, cheating language (Barthes, 2013, p. 17), provoking a deviation that allows us to hear it beyond the edges of power, in the splendor of a permanent revolution of language (p. 17).

We must not forget that this African inheritance in language can also be readily observed in many other places in Latin America, such as in Cuban Spanish, where we perceive a fracture that institutes another form of becoming, a world-echo born of Relation. It is a movement of separation from the totality of colonization, based on resources invented with this grammar that persists despite attempts at erasure.

Pretuguês shows that processes of alienation – although unavoidable, and precisely for this reason – can constitute a breath of relief for the inscription of the new. This leads us to reflect on processes of creolization (Glissant, 2005, 2021), in which, through the encounter of cultures – from the remnants and traces of a language – subjects compose “Creole languages and art forms valid for all, such as jazz music, which is reconstructed with the help of instruments adopted by them, but from traces/residues of fundamental African rhythms” (Glissant, 2005, p. 20). Relation, however, only becomes

effective when cultural elements come into contact without hierarchies of value. It is in this field that resistance manifests itself through invention, instituting games of improvisation (Sodré, 2019) that displace and dissolve striated molarities into playful and inventive territories (Noguera, 2019).

It does not seem accidental that Lélia seeks to recover this world-echo that is *pretuguês*, insofar as it designates a reorganization of language from remnants that resist and reinvent themselves. This perspective becomes clearer in her proposal that we are not Latin Americans, but Ladino-Amefricans. By replacing the T with a D, Lélia shows that Brazil – as well as other territories in the Americas – was constituted not only by white and European formulations, but above all by the reterritorialization of African and Indigenous memories that persist in the face of attempts at erasure imposed by the structuring racism of coloniality. The category of Amefricanity is a proposal for recognizing this condition, a recovery of what resists attempts to universalize colonial processes.

We are Ladino-Amefricans, as Lélia Gonzalez proposes; there is a shared common beyond objective visibilities. Within this common there is a “shared trauma” (Pavón-Cuellar & Guzmán, 2017), insofar as processes of racial and cultural mixing occurred, to a large extent, through violence, imposition, and the laceration not only of cultures but of the bodies that bled, and continue to bleed, on these lands. Grada Kilomba (2019) revisits her work, *Plantation Memories*, as a key to understanding the contemporary territorialities of whiteness in their narcissistic-resentful dynamics, which activate and sustain necropolitics (Mbembe, 2017): a trauma present in the structuring of contracts of domination (Mills, 2013).

This trajectory, a modern-colonial inheritance, brings to the fore a politics guided by principles that found the modern cosmology of whiteness, which is related to certain myths of origin understood as civilizational myths (Souza et al., 2020). Why then should we not set aside these imperialist reproductions and reaffirm the particularities of our experiences in the Americas as a whole, considering our deep ties to Africa? (Gonzalez, 2020).

Lélia invites us to a critical exercise of recognizing these artifices that capture us and allow the reproduction of a certain status quo. This strategy aligns with Pavón-Cuellar’s (2021) proposal when he states that Latin American psychology should recognize its postcolonial character and, from there, critically and creatively assimilate this inheritance in order to reinvent itself through other languages, operating clinically and politically upon itself so that it may then compose processes of decolonization of our existential territories.

This is not a matter of simply denying coloniality within us – an impossible task, since there is no way to entirely disentangle ourselves from this condition – but of recognizing it and taking it to its extreme, intensifying its errancy by weakening the affiliative myths of origin of whiteness and exposing them in their inherently provincial and situated condition. Such weakening opens space for the lacks and overflows that engender new languages within a Poetics of Relation, which no longer takes becoming as error, but as errancy: a way of creating narratives that make it possible to inscribe new meanings in the common space. We must use the weapons available to us – whether they are a historical inheritance from our ancestors or brought from the other side of the world across the seas that both connect and disconnect us.

Thus, we ask: what would be the movements of extension, of lack-overflow, in our theoretical grammars of psychoanalysis that have been taken as errors, but could easily foster the powers of errancy? To unfix theory itself in its modes of narration, making psychoanalytic belonging a non-affiliative extensivity, involves embracing the opacity of no longer knowing exactly what psychoanalysis is, so as to assume the infinitive invention of experimenting with what psychoanalysis can do in different contexts and modulations – even to the point of barely recognizing itself in a mirror.

This is not based on a presupposition of emancipation, but on the recognition of points of alienation and the attempt to displace them into lines of flight that may allow new possibilities to slide into a psychoanalysis that plays with the rhythms and rites of its territories (Sodré, 2019), without fear of losing itself in this play – since it is precisely in this mystery that its power lies in misencounter (Noguera, 2019).

We would be naive to believe that, through language alone, we will free ourselves from coloniality or completely decolonize our psy perspectives. And we would be even more naive to believe that we can fully rid ourselves of this condition. Coloniality is part of what we are and, unfortunately, always will be. This does not mean a “fatal destiny.” To recognize this mark is to move in the opposite direction of disavowal – it is to assume our share in its perpetuation. We may say that recognizing the marks instituted by violence and trauma constitutes an ethical movement of recovering our history: the possibility of creating new narratives and, consequently, tracing new destinies.

Language is a game, and its meaning depends on the chains established among the signifiers at stake. These signifiers, in turn, do not possess a fixed or a priori meaning: they depend on articulations in a chain – i.e., a signifier only acquires meaning when articulated with other signifiers. For Lacan (1998b), signification in a language emerges from the correlation among signifiers and the signifier in question, for the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning, unfolding its dimension before it, as it were. This is what one sees at the level of the sentence when it is interrupted before the meaningful term (p. 505).

With this, Lacan (1998b) states that “it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning insists, but none of the chain’s elements *consists* [emphasis added] in the signification of which it is capable at that very moment” (p. 506). What is therefore imposed is the incessant sliding of the signified beneath the signifier – what Lacan calls the metonymic function of language, or

displacement [Verschiebung]. Metonymy is movement: the condition of activity of significations, a know-how with lalangue.

Thus, we may take languages here as a field of virtualities, conditions of possibility and possibilities of condition, both in becoming, while the concreteness of their expressions, or propositions, presents itself as a process of actualization that finds, in metonymic movement, a line of flight (Deleuze, 1975, 1988, 1964/2003; Deleuze & Guattari, 1996, 2000). In these concrete meanings and in their always variable affectations, meanings never remain inert – and neither do words. The movement of decolonization, therefore, invests in critique as a kind of trench and in the poetic function of language, which creates and disarticulates worlds through explosions of meaning.

Moving through the field of langue, language, and alienation is a fertile path for reflecting on the paradoxical processes of colonization and decolonization. Fanon warned us decades ago that decolonization will never be a definitive movement, nor even a gentle path. When one attempts to foreclose the becoming of the conditions of possibility of languages – through the sacralization and/or naturalization of our psy theories, in a closure to the becomings of the world – one seeks to silence, within our listening, the language of subject-territories, preventing us from instituting other ways of narrating. Thus, a relation of subalternization and/or annihilation of alterities is reinstated. This is a process of radical alienation that assigns places as though they existed a priori. With this, we perceive the subtlety of power: it is often exercised through langue and language – in what and how one must speak, narrate, and listen, from the positionalities of psychologies and psychoanalyses. This is why, at certain moments, the signifier may be organized according to the laws of a closed order (Lacan, 1998b), insofar as words are already inscribed as codes, that is, as stagnant signs. However, as Lacan (1985) himself clarifies, it is necessary to invest in lalangue, in the equivocation that denounces the incompleteness of language itself—or, on the other hand, to invest in the constant inventive overflows of languages, in their virtualities of meanings and manifestations (Deleuze, 1975).

With Lélia Gonzalez and *pretuguês*, or with Glissant and the Poetics of Relation, we understand the importance of denouncing the subalternizing and affiliative processes of disavowal of whiteness, so as to make visible the inventive power that always resists and overflows hegemonic frameworks – however violent and altericidal they may be. In other words, it is a matter of recognizing our alienated and, above all, subversive condition. In doing so, we recover the possibility of listening to and narrating other stories, recognizing both the traumatic violences and the inventive powers that constitute our time and our psychoanalytic and psychological languages.

To postpone the end of the world, as Ailton Krenak (2020) teaches us, is not only to be able to tell more other stories, but also to be able to listen to and narrate other histories. Let us sharpen – and, at the same time, weaken – our words in order to decolonize our listening.

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