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Decolonising Academic Debate
and Space: An Analysis of
Djamila Ribeiro's Works

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Abstract

The aim of the present article is to introduce and discuss the decolonial vision of the Brazilian philosopher, Djamila Ribeiro, through an analysis of her books, *O que é lugar de fala?* (2017) and *Pequeno manual antirracista* (2019). In particular, I want to stress the importance of academic debate where everyone takes part equally in order to decolonise knowledge, inside and outside the academic domain. Since academia is still consolidating the hierarchical distinctions among races and genders in terms of knowledge production and fruition that reverberate outside the university environment, I use Ribeiro's works as a starting point to develop a wider debate. This relates to the processes of suppression by silencing all those who are situated outside the hegemonic white, male, and heterosexual discourses and to the subversive power of acknowledging one's own social positioning, *lugar de fala*.

Ribeiro is widely inspired by a long list of writers and thinkers from different parts of the globe who deconstruct and criticise long-established mainstream "western" thought, hence allowing a shift in perspective from the standpoint of the dominant to that of culturally and physically dominated figures, through the act of speaking. Despite their immateriality, words are a strong weapon of subjugation and domination, having been used for centuries to establish and exert power. Finally, this article stresses the importance of 'listening' as a fundamental and complementary act to that of 'speaking' in order to decolonise physical as well as intellectual spaces of knowledge production and fruition.

Keywords: Djamila Ribeiro, racism, intersectional studies, black feminism

Introducing Djamila Ribeiro and the Decolonising Debate

The aim of the present article is to introduce and discuss the decolonial vision of the Brazilian philosopher, Djamila Ribeiro, through an analysis of her books, *O que é lugar de fala?* (2017) and *Pequeno manual antirracista* (2019). In particular, I want to stress the importance of academic debate where everyone takes part equally in order to decolonise knowledge, inside and outside the academic domain. Since academia is still consolidating the hierarchical distinctions among races and genders in terms of knowledge production and fruition that reverberate outside the university environment, I use Ribeiro's works as a starting point to develop a wider debate. This relates to the processes of suppression by silencing all those who place themselves outside the hegemonic white, male, and heterosexual discourses and to the subversive power of acknowledging one's own social positioning, *lugar de fala*.

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Born in 1980, Djamila Taís Ribeiro dos Santos is a Brazilian philosopher, writer, scholar and columnist at *Folha de S. Paulo*, *Elle* and *CartaCapital on-line*. She graduated in Political Philosophy at Universidade Federal de São Paulo (Unifesp) and was appointed São Paulo's Vice-secretary for Human Rights and Citizenship Affairs in 2016. She became famous in Brazil and abroad for her engagement in human rights issues. Due to her activity in the struggle against racism, Ribeiro received several prizes, such as *Prêmio Cidadão SP em Direitos Humanos* (São Paulo Citizen Award in Human Rights) in 2016; *Trip Transformadores* in 2017; best columnist for the *Troféu Mulher Imprensa* (Woman Press Trophy) in 2018; and *Prêmio Dandara dos Palmares* in 2017. Additionally, she is listed as one of the 100 most influential people in the world by MIPAD for 2018. By highlighting and reflecting on real-life experiences of everyday racism in Brazil, Ribeiro shares some of her life with her public and discusses how she came to elaborate the ideas outlined in her books (Malcher and Rial 2019: 2).

Black Feminism and Beyond

In an interview given in 2019, Ribeiro revealed the difficulties encountered as a black woman in the Brazilian academic environment. For instance, her undergraduate philosophy curriculum did not include female authors, neither white nor black. Moreover, it would have been impossible to get approval for her idea of working on a dissertation regarding black feminism. For this reason, Ribeiro initially proposed she would carry out a comparison between Beauvoir and Butler and then, when her project was approved, she changed it to discuss black feminism (Fernandes *et al.* 2019: 282). The lack of representativity of black

female scholars in academic debate and the underestimation of their abilities reveal deeper structural issues within Brazilian society, which provoked Ribeiro to sustain an ideological fight against injustice and inequality, through her social activism and academic research after her Master's degree (Fernandes *et al.* 2019: 283).

In both her social and her intellectual activities, Ribeiro considers black feminism as a tool to overcome the limits within the Brazilian patriarchal and classist society of colonial heritage, as well as valuing it for its theoretical and practical contributions in promoting equal human rights (Ribeiro 2016: 103). Black women tend to be silenced in Brazil, ideologically and physically. She links the fact that they are not considered political subjects to the physical oppression manifest in the progressive increase in murders of black women, contemporarily with a decrease in murders of white women (Ribeiro 2016: 102). According to the report, *Atlas da Violência 2020*, black women made up 68% of all the women killed in Brazil in 2018, with a death rate of 5.2 per 100 thousand inhabitants (IPEA 2020: 47). In regard to this, Ribeiro (2016: 102) makes clear that the combination of prejudices regarding race and gender in the social inequalities of Brazil is something that can be tackled through intersectional theories and practices. Meanwhile Núbia Moreira highlights how the relation between black women and the feminist movement was consolidated during the third *Encontro Feminista Latino-Americano* (Latin American Feminist Meeting), which took place in Bertioiga in 1985, where the need for black female intellectuals to gain political visibility emerged (2006: 1). Back then, several important organisations were founded, including *Geledés*, *Fala Preta*, and *Criola*, as well as other intellectual groups (Ribeiro 2016: 101).

Because of the racial hierarchisation even within feminist studies, the ideas of white female thinkers still appear as dominant. For this reason, Ribeiro underlines the importance of counter-discourses and counter-narratives by black thinkers, not only for an epistemological aim, but also to simply affirm their existence (Ribeiro 2016: 101). Since academia was created and developed by and for white individuals, Ribeiro argues that the participation and contribution of an increasing number of black thinkers is likely to bring changes within the academic environment (Fernandes *et al.* 2019: 283).

However, because canonisation of the work of western, white male intellectuals developed to the detriment of others within academia, based on racial and sexual discrimination, people from underrepresented sections of society rely on different ways to divulge and discuss topics that would otherwise be ignored or silenced. In this regard, Ribeiro emphasises the importance of social media; for instance, in the development of social and cultural initiatives —such as the website, *Blogueiras Negras* (Black Bloggers)— to counter the white patriarchal discourse rooted within Brazilian society (Fernandes *et al.* 2019, 284). According to Bastos (2020), despite her popularity (due to the social networks widely used in contemporary Brazil), Ribeiro is not yet considered as a 'canonised intellectual'. However, her ideas have considerable repercussions and reverberate in transversal debate around contemporary Brazilian society, reaching a wide number of people, especially among the young (2020: 16). Through simple and direct language, the Brazilian philosopher is able to address important issues, particularly those discussed in black feminism, hence becoming a reference point in this field (Gemelli and Fraga 2019: 218). Nonetheless, Ribeiro's philosophical production goes beyond the feminist sphere to embrace a broader number of marginalised social subjects, not exclusively black women.

For instance, *Pequeno manual antirracista* (2019) shows how the race debate involves everyone, from the privileged to the disadvantaged, thus inviting rediscussion to end the structural racism rooted in society:

White people need to critically answer for the System of oppression that historically privileges them, producing inequalities; and black people can acquire knowledge about historical processes so that they do not reproduce them. This book is a small contribution to stimulate self-awareness and the construction of anti-racist practices (2019: 43).¹

The term 'structural racism', as intended by Ribeiro, is inspired by Silvio Almeida's definition in his homonymous book, *Racismo Estrutural* (2019). Here, racism is defined as a consequence of societal structure that conceives as 'normal' the racist behaviours and mechanisms sustaining the political, economic, juridical, and even familial relationships (Almeida 2019: 33). Based on the distinction between individual racism (representing episodes of racism such as murder or derision), institutional racism, (referring to all those mechanisms that regulate the political order within a state) and structural racism (resulting from historical and political processes), Almeida's argument makes clear the roots of social conditions through which racialised groups are systematically discriminated (Almeida 2019: 34).

According to Ribeiro, in order to break with the historical and political legacy left by centuries of colonisation and racial submission, everyone needs to think about their condition of privilege or disadvantage, without feelings of guilt, but with the strength and willingness to change interpersonal relationships both at individual and institutional levels (Ribeiro 2019: 15). If human beings do not actively question and change the latent mechanisms of interaction at all levels of society, from the familial environment to the political organisation of a state, racism will not cease to exist. Hence, the same implicit and explicit forms of oppression based on the racial factor, as inherited from colonialism, will be replicated. It is everyone's responsibility to act in order to change things and move forward towards a more egalitarian and fairer society.

Despite the focus on episodes of discrimination against black women and men, Ribeiro's book seeks to consider all victims of structural oppression whose experiences are in some way similar to those experienced by black people. The aim of the manual is, in fact, to discuss, face and fight against any form of oppression, regardless of race. In order to do so, Ribeiro evokes Audre Lorde in discussing the need to break with systemic forms of everyday oppression. Paraphrasing Lorde's words, the Brazilian philosopher suggests that we need to kill the oppressor within us, and this comes at a cost (Ribeiro 2019: 17-18). According to Lorde (2007), we need to face the oppressor that is rooted in ourselves and change our attitudes and behaviours, based on the "tactics" and "relationships" established by the oppressors themselves (2007: 130). The North American writer and human rights activist admits the difficulties of the struggles against the oppressor within our own selves, but asserts that it is necessary for every one of us in order to survive (Lorde 2007: 130). As we grow in a world where racism is something that is part of our societies, we have to admit that it is impossible not to be racist: what we need to do is to acknowledge it and change all

¹ Personal translation from the Portuguese version.

those behaviours that visibly or latently reinforce social discrimination (Ribeiro 2019: 17). The reasons behind these discriminations in contemporary society are linked to the consideration of difference as a deviation from the mainstream “norm”:

Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behaviour and expectation. Racism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance. Sexism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance. Ageism. Heterosexism. Elitism. Classism

(Lorde 2007: 123).

Involving a combination of factors, whether racial, sexual or societal, oppression acts to different degrees in everyday society and all of us need to think of “other ways to exist” (Ribeiro 2016: 100). In order to create a new model of society, humans would need to rethink and rediscuss their place in the world, as a consequence of an intersection of elements that places them in a situation of oppressor or oppressed, according to the circumstances created. For this reason, Ribeiro considers the theoretical-critical framework of intersectional studies put forward by black feminism as a starting point for structural change —not only for black women, but also including other racial and social realities in order to understand the various forms of oppression (Ribeiro 2016: 100).

In this regard, Ribeiro remembers the pioneering studies of Kimberlé Crenshaw who, back in 1989, coined the concept of intersectionality, starting from the assumption that discrimination needs to be viewed and studied as a combination of factors which cannot be analysed in isolation, as this would erase certain segments of society through what is defined as “single categorical axis” (Crenshaw 1989: 140). In detail, what Crenshaw suggests is that limiting inquiry to the study of cases based on racism would ignore the sexual and class distinctions of the discriminated subject; similarly, while investigating cases of discrimination based on gender, the racial and class distinctions among the same discriminated subjects would be ignored (Crenshaw 1989: 140). With this in mind, the racial, sexual and societal characteristics of each individual are all relevant in the systemic discrimination rooted in society. Each of us needs to acknowledge the privileges and disadvantages associated to race, gender and social class, based on what Lélia González calls the “euro-Christian superiority” (1988: 71) of the white male European heterosexual canon in its explanation of society.

Who can Speak? Giving Voice to the Other

In her anti-racist manual, Djamila Ribeiro clearly states that, in order to face and fight against any kind of oppression, we need to think about the place of the oppressed, as well as that of the oppressor, and give equal importance in the study of what the Brazilian scholar calls *Branquitude*; that is, the condition of being white as the counterpart of the cultural movement of *Negritude*. In one chapter, Ribeiro puts emphasis on the privileged position taken by white men in places of power (2019: 15). This position of dominance is the result of

implicit structural mechanisms that places a small segment of society in a role of superiority compared to other racial, sexual and social realities (Ribeiro 2019: 15). This behaviour can be explained by the ways in which European colonisers justified their superiority through the idea of “primitive customs” of the colonised and incorporated this into the rational administration of the colonies, in such a way that would exert domination without physical violence, through acts of *overt* and *disguised racism* (González 1988: 71-72). The first happens through segregation, and the second by alienating the colonised (González 1988: 72). If, for example, in everyday contemporary society, less prestigious or badly remunerated jobs are taken by non-white people, it is because of the sedimentation of overt and disguised racial attitudes perpetuated since colonial times that relegate non-white people to conditions of inferiority, hence the structural racism previously mentioned. Thus, remembering Grada Kilomba’s assertion that racism is a “white problem”, Ribeiro acknowledges that white people need not blame themselves for their ethnic background but, rather, should reconsider their place of privilege if they want to truly fight against racism (Ribeiro 2019: 15-16).

With regard to the above statement, Ribeiro remembers the question posed by Kilomba in the chapter ‘Who can speak?’ of her book, *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism* (2010). Kilomba is a Portuguese writer, psychologist, theorist and interdisciplinary artist of Santomean and Angolan origins, who criticises how the Eurocentric vision of knowledge is still used as the parameter to define what is knowledge, based on the colonial vision of white superiority. This attitude can be seen even in the academic environment, where curricula are designed on the basis of conceptions rooted in the colonial vision of knowledge. Whatever belongs to other cultures takes on a marginal place, hence being disregarded and, eventually, silenced. The above statements are, among others, inspired by the article, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, written by the Indian scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993), who discusses the concept of *epistemic violence*. This latter can be described as the obliteration of the Other (the subaltern, the colonised) by deconstructing their physical and cultural characteristics through the eyes of the Self (the coloniser) who claims to be superior, based on the “scientificity” of their knowledge of Eurocentric inspiration (1993: 76). This process of subordination pervades every aspect of a person coming from a minor, dominated culture, hence taking control over the most natural human action: speech.

With regard to this, Kilomba, in the introduction to her book, *The Mask*, mentions the “mask of speechlessness”, an instrument of torture used during colonial times to silence the African slaves and force them to work endlessly in the plantations (2010: 16). Despite the “official” end of colonialism, the author shows us how people of African origins are still silenced or disregarded in everyday life due to their race, especially if they are women. To corroborate this, the author describes concrete situations, based on interviews collected among women of different ages who disclosed their traumatic experiences, characterised by episodes of racism of different sorts. By giving a psychological insight into these reported episodes, Kilomba highlights how difficult it is for a black woman to fit into German society, in which the author and interviewees live.

The descriptive and analytical approach adopted here, in turn, reminds us of the studies carried out by Frantz Fanon, the Antillean psychiatrist and writer who studied the emotional dimensions of marginalised black people, from Africa and the diaspora, who constantly questioned their identities, whether they related to black or white people, both in the colonies and in the motherland. *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) develops an

understanding of the multiple dimensions of the interactions between oppressor and oppressed, where the latter strives to be like the former in order to be accepted. This behaviour creates emotional instability due to the gradual loss of one's own identity through repressive, extreme processes methods, which, as I mentioned above, are latent and active in today's society.

Following the noteworthy contributions of the above scholars, Ribeiro underlines the difficulty of dominated, colonised people in expressing themselves, and stresses the importance to speak up to subvert the implicit and explicit hierarchical orders rooted in society. Spivak emphasises the impossibility for the subaltern to speak, with reference to the sacrifice of widows and their obligation to remain silent. Together with Kilomba, she thinks of the category of the Other as a subject, as opposed to the European Self (Ribeiro 2019: 46). Further, Spivak sees the importance of the intellectual and political roles in defending the subaltern role of women (Ribeiro 2019: 46). However, as Ribeiro mentions, both Patricia Hill Collins and Grada Kilomba consider Spivak's position problematic as the silence of the subaltern is described in absolute terms, thus consolidating the norms established by the coloniser and confirming the discourse of the white male subject as dominant (Ribeiro 2019: 46). Furthermore, Collins discusses the concepts of self-definition and self-valuation among black feminists. Starting from the stereotypes and commonplaces rooted in the white male "Self", the "Other" becomes the opposite of how black women actually see themselves, indeed, as a virtual antithesis of the image portrayed by whites (Collins 2016: 105). This is a consequence of an act of self-valuation from the point of view of the Other who criticises and defines herself in relation to what has been defined from an external point of view (Collins 2016: 105).

Similarly, Kilomba switches from the place of the Other to that of the Self by decolonising the dominant discourses through acts of "opposition" and "reinvention" (2010: 13). By giving value to the voices of the marginalised in episodes of everyday racism and criticising the positioning of the object as imposed by the dominant colonising discourse, Kilomba's contribution seeks to turn objectified black women into subjects (2010: 13), starting from the testimonies of the "objectified subjects" themselves. Thus, even though Ribeiro acknowledges the difficulties of subaltern groups to express themselves, she moves from Spivak's position to align with those of Collins and Kilomba, among others, and proposes a more "liberating" stance of freedom. Ribeiro's works, in fact, overtly promote concrete actions aiming at breaking with any sort of oppression, not only in *Pequeno manual antirracista*, as the title itself expresses, but also, and most importantly, in the previously published book, *O que é lugar de fala?*.

O que é Lugar de Fala?

This essay constitutes the first volume of the collection *Feminismos plurais* (Plural feminisms), born from Ribeiro's desire to transfer the virtual political debates into a book in collaboration with the portals *Justificando* and *Grupo Editorial Letramento* (Sifuentes 2018: 205). Launched in 2017, the work aims to popularise the themes of intersectionality and inequality, as well as to reach a wider public through a simple and direct language (Freitas 2019: 362) at an accessible price (Kyrillos 2018, 209). Thanks to her fluid and informative

writing, Ribeiro provokes her readers to rediscuss their social loci and reflect on their points of view, by bringing a diverse range of intellectuals into the debate (Sifuentes 2018: 209). Over the five chapters of the essay, Ribeiro critically analyses the concept of *lugar de fala* (literally translated as 'locus of speech') starting from feminist theories and moving on to apply this definition to a broader perspective. As the philosopher states, the origin of the expression is unclear, however it comes from an English *feminist standpoint*, and the expression has been moulded by various social movements as a political tool that gives authority to what is said (Ribeiro 2017: 36).

One of the first scholars who shaped the perspective of standpoint feminism is Dorothy Smith, whose sociological investigation focuses on women's experiences and shifts them from objectified forms of knowledge outside the discourses defined by men, so as to acquire visibility and elaborate a critical standpoint: "We make a new language that gives us speech, ways of knowing, ways of working politically. At the moment of separation from established discourses, the objectified forms of knowledge they embody become critically visible" (Smith 1990: 11). In its formation, this approach had to face two main limitations: the first being represented by the methodological and theoretical frameworks built around the male social universe. The second, conversely, is the fact that a women's standpoint is developed from a place of subalternity compared to men, as women have been predominantly relegated to the domestic environment, even though they also occupy other places (Smith 1990: 13).

This is a consequence of the relationships of power established at societal level which determine the place of subalternity of women compared to men. In this regard, Ribeiro evokes the work of Patricia Hill Collins, who describes the feminist standpoint in conjunction with the intersectional theories of race, class and gender to define the subaltern place of black women in expressing their views (Ribeiro 2017: 37). In addition, Collins stresses the need for US black women to find a safe space where they can freely discuss their sexual, racial, and social issues without being threatened, thus allowing self-determination (2000: 151). In politicised settings, there is a need for more debate around problems relating to discrimination as a black woman, both in the private and the public spheres of society, without the discussion being controlled and repressed by more powerful groups (Collins 2000: 151). In a broader sense, Ribeiro defines the *locus of speech* as based on standpoint theory, which unifies the members of a specific group for sharing common experiences of discrimination as well as privilege, hence transcending the individual life-stories of each member (Ribeiro 2017: 38). In this sense, the personal experiences of each subject are important *per se* but need to be framed within a common history of people who share racial, sexual, and social similarities in order to understand, rethink and eradicate the structural cases of oppression which prevent certain groups from being able to speak (Kyrillos 2018: 210). As stated by Ribeiro, the experiences of those socially localised groups demonstrate how their intellectual products, knowledges, and voices have been silenced and structurally put in a subaltern place, at the political, cultural and intellectual levels (Ribeiro 2017: 40).

Even though social groups are understood as a totality of people with their own shared characteristics, *lugar de fala* does not support an essentialised vision of these groups or a restricted debate among them regarding being historically marginalised. In fact, as Ribeiro clearly states, not only can black people speak about racism, and members of the same group are allowed to talk about specific subjects, but a broader reach is essential (2000: 41).

With the concept of *lugar de fala*, the Brazilian philosopher advocates a wider, structural debate, with the aim of understanding how the social locus can provide more or fewer life opportunities for certain people (Sifuentes 2018: 208). The fact that individuals from the same group occupy the same social location, based on hierarchical relations of power implicitly established within society, does not necessarily mean that all those individuals have the same experiences (Ribeiro 2017: 41). For instance, some black people may not have experienced or realise they have experienced cases of racism (Ribeiro 2017: 43).

In other words, *lugar de fala* does not mean that specific members of a group can only talk about specific subjects, rather, it implies the awareness of occupying a specific place (whether privileged or disadvantaged) when tackling a specific topic (Kyrillos 2018: 213). Every one of us is allowed to talk about every subject, but we all need to acknowledge our own condition, or locus of speech, to justify a specific judgment. To talk about loci also means to break with the conception that only subaltern people can speak to discuss their subaltern condition, which reinforces the distance between social groups (Ribeiro 2017: 53). For example, a white heterosexual man from a wealthy background can and, indeed, should talk about racism, but to do so, he needs to frame his judgements with awareness of his privileged position to affirm the disadvantage experienced by those who do not belong to the same racial, sexual, and social group.

Supporting Ribeiro's defence of an open, transversal dialogue, *O que é lugar de fala?* concludes with the statement that everyone has a locus of speech. The acknowledgment of the diverse experiences lived by people from different loci of speech allows a break with a fixed universal worldview (Ribeiro 2017: 38). The recognition of the personal locus of speech allows questioning of the concept of objectivity that legitimises the standpoint of the people of a dominant group to the detriment of those who do not belong to that group (Kyrillos 2018: 211). In fact, Ribeiro's work seeks to rediscuss the concept of objectivity and the legitimisation of discourses based on the criteria of an alleged objectivity. The construction of a place of privilege or disadvantage depends on the structural imposition of conditions that maintain a colonial domination. The imposition of colonial logics implies that only certain worldviews are valid, hence reinforcing the dominant place of those people behind those views (Malfrán and Lago 2019: 196). Related to the place of privilege, "privileged knowledge" dominates other knowledges on the basis of ethical, political and epistemological criteria (Hartsock 2019: 106). In this manner, Haraway criticises the assumed objectiveness of the scientific discourse developed by the white male scholar, by arguing that the Other is portrayed and disqualified through an imaginary 'we', created by a restricted group of privileged people who vehiculate their ideas to a specific segment of the population through games of power (Haraway 1988: 575). Based on these premises, Haraway reviews the term 'objectivity' in relation to feminist studies to highlight the variables involved in how issues are seen through the perceiver's perspectives and ways of seeing:

The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision. All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. The "eyes" made available in modern technological

sciences shatter any idea of passive vision; these prosthetic devices show us that all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building on translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life. There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organising worlds. All these pictures of the world should not be allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability but of elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another's point of view, even when the other is our own machine. That's not alienating distance; that's a possible allegory for feminist versions of objectivity. Understanding how these visual systems work, technically, socially, and psychically, ought to be a way of embodying feminist objectivity

(Haraway 1988: 583).

Through its conceptual separation between body and soul, human and nature, which has been consolidated through centuries of philosophical debate, the western perspective has been seen as superior compared to other views, which are considered as "primitive" (Smith 2006: 48) and compartmentalised in a desire to study them as objects of research, rather than accepting them as subjects (2006: 61). According to Hartsock, detachment, impersonality and indifference are behaviours deployed in most scientific debates, together with discourses avoiding human interaction, in an attempt to separate observation from participation (Hartsock 2019: 113). From the Renaissance on, European modernity changed the idea of knowledge in terms of scientific experimentation, transcending the natural world and locating humanity in the centre of history, as a means to acquiring the capabilities needed to control and manipulate the world through science (Negri and Hardt 2000: 74). At the same time, this period developed a conception of human equality, individualism, and cooperation, which translated into a desire to expand outside the European continent, initially in a thirst for discovery and then to subjugate other populations (Negri and Hardt 2000: 76-77). Subsequently, the Age of Enlightenment developed and consolidated the idea of dominating the spiritual immanence of Medieval heritage by creating a "transcendental apparatus capable of disciplining a multitude of formally free subjects" (Negri and Hardt 2000: 79). In this context, the relationship between nature and human experiences is described as a result of an intellectual process deriving from the separation between natural phenomena in schematism of actions and reactions (Negri and Hardt 2000: 79-80). Knowledge is, thus, formulated in terms of impressions of objects, through reflection or imitation, to understand and control factors such as the relations of time and place, quantitative proportions, types of quality and so on (Hartsock 2019: 113).

Considering that all these processes result from human observation, social science methodology needed to reduce the variables of error by circumscribing phenomena occurring under specific circumstances so as to reduce the number of external factors as these affect the level of agreement and so meant that things could not be assessed as categorically true or false (Hartsock 2019: 113). However, as opposed to the sterile separation between mind and body through processes of abstraction which give a partial vision of the world, Haraway advocates the politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating. These highlight the complexities of bodies as they partially

perceive and are partially perceived in different circumstances and perspectives; hence the impossibility of assigning universal statements to define knowledge (Haraway 1988: 589).

Thus, rational positioning in a marginalised social location produces a situated knowledge that is valid for a specific circumstance. In terms of movement, the mobile positioning to a specific location allows one to see from the viewpoint of the subjugated, on the one hand, but denotes the impossibility of the subject being more than one thing at the same time (Hartsock 2019: 585). From my understanding, for example, as a white, male, European scholar, I can try and methodologically place my reasoning from the standpoint of a specific subjugated social group; however, I cannot impersonate members of that specific group, but only rationally attempt to see the world through the perspective of those members, without forgetting the significance and influence of my own. Thus, "location is about vulnerability" (Hartsock 2019: 590); it denotes the games of power within society and its internal hierarchies. In relation to this vulnerable location, the situated knowledge describes a subjugated standpoint, hence allowing the multiplicity of angles of observation and the transforming interpretations of the world. This multifaceted perspective redefines the concept of objectivity through a feminist approach, where the 'traditional' conceptions of true and false are not fixed but are always susceptible to interpretations in accordance with a diverse number of variables.

Proposing an Inclusive, Plural and Equal Debate

As mentioned earlier in this article, despite the feminist starting point of Ribeiro's work, *O que é lugar de fala?* and *Pequeno manual antirracista* are books addressed to everyone, thus allowing an inclusive debate. Her works advocate a plurality of opinions and viewpoints, all equally important, as opposed to the hierarchical games of power, implicitly or explicitly rooted in society, that cause a structural discrimination inherited from centuries of colonialism and white male domination. In their analysis of Ribeiro's work, Gemelli and Fraga recognise, for example, the ability of the author to break with the hegemonic lines of thought in debating the concept of *lugar de fala* and recognise the multiplicity of views at different levels of society (Gemelli and Fraga 2019: 220).

This allows for the recognition of what the Portuguese scholar, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, defines as *abyssal thinking*, involving an imaginary dividing line that needs to be overcome (Santos 2009: 40). For Sousa, *abyssal thinking* characterises the western modern thought that establishes a division between two conceptual universes either side of an imaginary line (Santos 2009: 23). The first relates to knowledge as conceived by western modern societies (Santos 2009: 25) while what is located after the line is considered non-existent and, hence, becomes radically excluded (Santos 2009: 23). However, the "existence of the non-existent" reinforces the existence and importance of the (scientific) knowledge located before the *abyssal line* (Santos 2009: 24). To break with the structural discrimination created as a consequence of colonisation, Santos defends perspectives from the other side of the *abyssal line*, (*post-abyssal*) hence encouraging every one of us to locate our epistemological vision in the non-imperial global South, conceived as a metaphor of systemic human suffering (Santos 2009: 40).

This line of reasoning resembles the situated knowledges promoted by scholars like Hartsock and Haraway, mentioned above, but the vocabulary used expands their decolonial perspective to a global level, in terms of geographical and ideological locations, historically and ontologically labelled with the broader terms of 'North' and 'South'. Santos, in fact, proposes an intellectual journey to the South, to learn from and with it. By recognising the existence of the global South and the rich diversity of this imaginary big geographical and cultural space, we are able to rethink and discuss what the North defines as an absolute certainty. Because of the heterogenous multiplicity of knowledges within the global South, Santos challenges the monocultural modern science with what he calls an *ecology of knowledges*, an exchange of knowledges producing real knowledge (Santos 2009: 45). This approach seeks *inter-subjectivity* through a disposition to learn across different scales (*inter-scalarity*) and durations (*inter-temporality*). Every cultural production is equally important and worth being known, without forgetting where we come from and who we are (Santos 2009: 49).

The healthy and fairer dialogue, explained above, is advocated by Ribeiro who, once more, quotes Grada Kilomba when she states that "listening is, in this sense, the act of authorization toward the speaker. One can (only) speak when one's voice is listened to" (2010: 21). Following Kilomba's position, Ribeiro is aware of the fact that many white people are unable to listen, because of the unease caused by discourses raised by those who have always been silenced, thus breaking the comfort zone created around them, after centuries of hegemonic power (Sifuentes 2018: 209). For this reason, the coloniser does not want to face themes such as slavery, colonialism or racism, thus the repressive attitude demonstrated by the hegemonic white men to keep these truths "quiet" (Kilomba 2010: 20). To break with this silence, Dhawan stresses the need to create the right conditions so that the silenced can be heard: "What allows the unsayable to speak is the undoing of the spoken, whereby since the spoken is haunted by what remains silent, undoing the spoken gives voice to the inherent silence" (Dhawan 2012: 59). However, this act poses the risk that saying what is unsaid may reproduce the "endless spirals of silences" by imposing "the logic of speech" (2012: 59). These negotiations between the listener and the speaker (Kilomba 2010: 20) are, in fact, reflected in everyday situations when the oppressed wants to discuss and criticise cases of racism, gender oppression and other forms of delegitimization but is stigmatised for being "boring" (Ribeiro 2017: 50-51).

For this reason, Ribeiro, through a widely articulated philosophical debate, which gives room to scholars who criticise the mainstream systems of knowledge production and fruition, is able to reach her readers with a clear and direct language, aimed at destabilising the hegemonic norm from within and at its foundations. To use Mignolo's words: "the first task of decolonising epistemology consists in learning to unlearn in order to relearn and to rebuild" (2012: 26). As Ribeiro shows in her philosophical line of thought, every person needs to participate in the struggle against oppression by questioning the very basis of our perception of the world while understanding our place in society and how our social condition is determined by a series of factors that rules the implicit games of power established after centuries of domination. In order to do so, we need to undo these social structures and rebuild them from scratch through open, honest and fruitful dialogue.

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