

ABSTRACT

Tzvetan Todorov's premise concerning the importance of the subject, when away from his home country, acknowledging his place of enunciation in order to go on being, was our starting point to analyze, in four of Moacyr Scliar's narratives, the ways five of his characters, exiled in Brazil at first or second generation, searched for such a place, thus creating new identities or becoming hybrids. Edward Said, who wrote about exile, Stuart Hall, who wrote about identity and, finally Nestor Canclini, who wrote about hybrid cultures, supplied us with theory for the analysis.

KEY WORDS: identity, exile, culture.

FROM SILENCE TO ENUNCIATION: FORMATION OF IDENTITIES IN MOACYR SCLIAIR'S NARRATIVES

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RESUMO

A premissa de Tzvetan Todorov sobre a importância de o sujeito, quando fora de seu país de origem, reconhecer seu lugar de enunciação para continuar a existir, serviu como ponto de partida para analisar, em quatro narrativas de Moacyr Scliar, como cinco de seus personagens, exilados de primeira ou segunda geração no Brasil, buscaram este lugar, criando, para isso, novas identidades ou tornando-se híbridos. Edward Said, que escreveu sobre exílio; Stuart Hall, sobre identidade e, finalmente, Nestor Canclini, sobre culturas híbridas, forneceram o suporte teórico para a análise.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: identidade, exílio, cultura.

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I start this text with a quote from Tzvetan Todorov, a literary critic who was born in Hungary and now lives in France: "If I lose my enunciation place, I cannot speak anymore. I do not speak; therefore, I do not exist" (TODOROV, 1999, p. 21).

This saying, produced when he returned to his home country to make a speech after 18 years of a self-imposed exile in France, reveals how important it is for the subject to know the way and the place he is enunciating from. At the time, as Todorov mastered not only the French but also the Bulgarian language, he questioned whether he wanted to be recognized as a French citizen or a Bulgarian one. If he chose the Bulgarian language, he would be considering his life in the other country as a "dream"; if he chose the French language, he would give up his identity with Bulgarian culture.

But the characters analyzed by Moacyr Scliar here have not had a linguistic or a political choice. Running away from their home countries, they came to Brazil without knowing anything about our customs or our language. Some of them, as we will demonstrate later, could find this "enunciation place" and form an identity, and thus guarantee their existence. There were others who were not so lucky: oscillating among several enunciation places, they became beings who had different cultural identities and ended their lives in a kind of non-place or non-existence.

The text that follows shows how the characters from four of Moacyr Scliar's novels – *O centauro no jardim* (1980), *A mulher que escreveu a Bíblia* (1999), *O exército de um homem só* (1973) and *Os leopardos de Kafka* (2000) made an effort to conquer a new enunciation place and an identity.

Guedali, the main character in *O centauro no jardim*, may be considered, among the novels analyzed, the greatest exponent of identity crisis for, swinging from the condition of centaur / quadruped to the human / biped, he cannot define which species he belongs to, nor which body he intends to keep alive. Therefore, the enunciation power that usually works as a natural outcome of the cultural and well inserted being is for him an extremely distant objective.

The other characters – the anonymous woman, from *A mulher que escreveu a Bíblia*; Mayer Guizburg, from *O exército de um homem só*; Benjamim and Jayme Kantarovitch, from *Os leopardos de Kafka*, have attained the power of enunciation but, as occurred with Todorov, they are not always able pacifically to renounce their cultural origins. Besides choosing Brazilian nationality and the Portuguese language, their speech reflects their enunciation place – Central Europe – with serious consequences for their cultural and identity formation.

Before examining the identity crises the characters listed here undergo, it is necessary to start from some common premises on cultural identity established by Stuart Hall, on hybrid culture by Canclini and on exile by Edward Said.

CULTURAL IDENTITY, HYBRID CULTURES AND EXILE

Stuart Hall's three concepts concerning cultural identity are essential for the consideration of the exiled characters in Moacyr Scliar's work: a) the Enlightenment subject; b) the sociological subject; c) the post-modern subject.

Concerning the first one, it is understood that he is "a completely centered, unified subject, imbued with reason, consciousness and capacity for action, whose core consisted of an inner nucleus [...]. The essential self-core was a person's identity" (HALL, 2003, p. 10).

As for the second one, it is inferred that he is no longer an individualist, he is a subject formed by his relationship with other "important people for him, who mediated values, senses and symbols – culture – for him, from the worlds where he lived . [...] Identity is formed by the interaction of the self and society" (HALL, 2003, p. 11).

The third one is considered to be a fragmented subject, no longer composed by a single identity but by several, sometimes contradictory or non-resolved identities.

The subject assumes different identities at different moments, and they are not united around a coherent "self". There are contradictory identities inside us that push us in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously displaced. (HALL, 2003, p. 13)

Although Stuart Hall declares that all three concepts of subject are simplifications, they are quite effective to demonstrate how Moacyr Scliar's main characters in the novels *O centauro no jardim*, *A mulher que escreveu a Bíblia*, *O exército de um homem só* and *Os leopardos de Kafka* strive to understand that the unique, centered subject who is identified with themselves and their group – a family with strong Jewish liaisons – cannot fulfill himself and so falls into deep self-conflicts, abandoning cultural roots several times so that, after a long alterity/identity building process, he can reassume them in a more pacific and harmonious way.

The concept of hybrid culture proposed by Canclini refers to "the modern intercultural mixes, among others, as those that are generated by the national States, integration, political populism and the cultural industries" (CANCLINI, 2003, p. XXX).

As the characters of the four Scliar novels are exiled, they end up working as agents of an intercultural mix. Although they are little adapted to the new context in which they are inserted they become, one way or another, influenced by the State and by the cultural industry. Just as an example, I mention the passage that will be taken up again later in the text, in which Mayer Guizburg's father (a character from *O exército de um homem só*) interprets Marx's property concepts from the sacred Jewish texts, point of view, differently from his son who has got to know them through the printed works of the German thinker.

Scliar's characters are exiled from first or second generation and, if analyzed through Canclini's proposal of hybridism, they win and lose experiencing the country's definitive change:

[...] it is attractive to treat hybridism as a translation term among miscegenation, syncretism, fusion and other expressions used to designate particular mixtures. The decisive question may not be to establish which of these concepts is more all-inclusive and more fertile, but how to continue building theoretical principles and methodological procedures to help us make this world more translatable, in other words, easier to live with, among all its differences, and to accept what each individual wins or loses when he becomes hybrid. (CANCLINI, 2003, p. XXXIX)

However, the experience of exile is not deprived of frustrations and suffering. As Edward Said reminds us (2003, p. 47), exile is produced by human beings towards other human beings who, obliged to depart from their traditions, language and culture, from their sources of income, feel obliged to set up in other places, sometimes living miserably, and being homesick. The exiled individual, who feels as if he were a "different" being, often refuses to belong to another place and becomes inflexible, spending a great part of his life trying to compensate his losses, creating a new world – a hybrid one.

HYBRID CULTURES

A) GUEDALI – THE MAIN CHARACTER FROM *O CENTAURO NO JARDIM*

The novel starts like this:

No galloping now. Everything is all right now. Now we are all alike. We don't call anybody's attention. [...] Are we weird? No. Last week Peri, the sorcerer, came here to look for Tita and that was really a weird man – a short, thin Amerindian (*bugre*), with scant beard, wearing rings and necklaces, carrying a stick and speaking a confusing language. It seems odd that such a strange creature has come here to look for us; however,

anyone is free to ring bells. And, in fact, he was the one wearing strange clothes, not us. Us? No. We bear a completely normal appearance. (SCLIAR, 1997, p. 10)¹

Without any previous reference, the reader comes across this first person narrator, who confesses an immense relief at now being “like any other”, and not being “weird” anymore. The other one is weird – that Peri – who dresses and adorns himself in a strange way, besides speaking a “confusing language”.

We can notice, in the first two paragraphs, the narrator’s need to belong to a group with which he wants and is able to identify – they are his friends, his own children and his friends’ children. As the reading goes on, the reader comes to know that the narrator, namely, the main character Guedali, was born a centaur on a farm in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul and that his childhood was fraught with terrors and small pleasures. The identity torment young Guedali experiences may be identified in this passage, where he notes he is a quadruped but, at the same time, he descends from human parents.

[...] I am a centaur, a mythological being, but I am also Guedali Tartakovsky, Leão and Rosa’s son, Débora, Mina and Bernardo’s brother; the little Jew. That is why I don’t go crazy [...]. (SCLIAR, 1997, p. 34)²

Guedali grows up in the course of time and his doubts regarding his origin disturb him more and more. Living in Porto Alegre, hidden in the rebuilt storehouse in the backyard, he starts his tireless reading marathon to find answers concerning his origins: ranging from contemporaneous literature to the Old Testament and Greek mythology. He continues with Marx, Freud and Scholem Aleichem, all of them of Jewish origin – and he still cannot find any explanation for his origin.

His identity crises abates for a short while when Guedali, an adult now and married to the centaur Tita decides to undergo a surgery in distant Morocco to be rid of his quadruped condition. A new crisis sets in: Guedali

1 In Portuguese: “Agora é sem galope. Agora está tudo bem. Somos, agora, iguais a todos. Já não chamamos a atenção de ninguém. [...] Esquisitos, nós? Não. Na semana passada veio procurar a Tita o feiticeiro Peri e, aquele sim, era um homem esquisito – um bugre pequeno e magro, de barbicha rala, usando anéis e colares, empunhando um cajado e falando uma língua arresvada. Pode parecer inusitado uma criatura tão estranha ter vindo nos procurar; contudo qualquer um é livre para tocar campainhas. E, mesmo, quem estava vestido esquisito era ele, não nós. Nós? Não. Nós temos uma aparência absolutamente normal (SCLIAR, 1997, p. 10)”.

2 In Portuguese: “[...] sou um centauro, um ser mitológico, mas sou também o Guedali Tartakovsky, o filho de Leão e Rosa, o irmão de Débora, Mina e Bernardo; o judeuzinho. Graças a isso não enlouqueço [...].” (SCLIAR, 1997, p. 34).”

cannot live with his totally human body and, 13 years later, he returns to Morocco to ask the same surgeon to transform him back into a centaur again. However, the surgery is not performed and Guedali continues being human until the end of the story, although he feels the pulse of a centaur in his veins.

Although Guedali is an expert reader of several text genres, he is not able to elect a single enunciation place, for he swings between the human and the centaur conditions, just as Todorov hesitated between speaking French or Bulgarian when visiting Bulgaria, as we mentioned at the beginning of the text.

B) THE UGLY WOMAN – THE MAIN CHARACTER FROM *A MULHER QUE ESCREVEU A BÍBLIA*

Without a name of her own, the main character in this novel is most salient feature is her amazing facial ugliness, although she had an “attractive body”. She finds out, through past lives therapy, that she had been an ancient citizen of biblical times in Canaan, the daughter of a goatherd.

The fact of searching in her unconscious past reminiscences for the explanation of affective failure allowed the main character to achieve a happy ending: she quits the last analysis sessions, writes her biography anonymously and sets out cuddling her regained love for a new and unknown fate.

The scene where she realizes, in a past life session, how ugly she is, is the one that brings her the mark of her identity:

I looked at myself in the mirror, that's all: I would never forget what I saw. But I needed at least advice, if not comfort. I had to know the reason why I had been chosen to display such ugliness. Nature could not have acted in vain when making my face. (SCLAR, 1999, p. 25-26)³

Like Guedali in *O centauro no jardim*, the main character tries to find explanations for her aberration. Although she was not a woman that lacked the limit between human and animal like Guedali, the main character feels set apart from the rest of humanity and searches in her family origin (and not by reading several texts) for the explanation for her facial defects. She concludes that her ugliness was due to the fact that her mother, during her pregnancy, admired the mountain facing the village so much that a symbiotic process occurred between the fetus in formation – her – and her mother's vision:

3 In Portuguese: “Eu tinha me olhado no espelho e pronto: o que tinha visto, não esqueceria. Mas eu precisava, senão de consolo, ao menos de explicação. Tinha de saber a razão pela qual coubera a mim tamanho quinhão de feiúra. A Natureza não poderia ter procedido em vão, ao obrar a minha face (SCLAR, 1999, p. 25-26).”

My nose was a protruding rock; my mouth corresponded to one of the many dark cave entrances. Many people see faces in clouds; in the mountain I saw – a monument to the extraordinary – the reproduction of my own face. The impressions my mother had during her pregnancy were indelibly engraved on her daughter's face. (SCLAR, 1992, p. 27)⁴

After marrying King Solomon, the main character receives from her husband the mission of helping the ancient wizards write the Bible, a task that helps her to assume her identity and value herself:

That night, I looked into a mirror. Once again, I had the impression I had changed: my features were then a little less harsh, the expression a little sweeter. I was sure I was on the way – in life and in the text. (SCLAR, 1992, p. 143)⁵

Different from Guedali, who surgically rejects his centaur identity, the main character of *A mulher que escreveu a Bíblia* finds peace when she understands her ugliness, even reconciling with it, feeling a little more beautiful when she realizes she can be sexy through her skill with written words.

Maybe this is an opposite and more refined Scherazade: whereas Scherazade is beautiful and can postpone her condemnation by her ability to tell the sultan stories, the main character of *A mulher que escreveu a Bíblia* is saved because she can fully attain the enunciation place. She is not only the author of a *Bible* version, in a previous life, but also writes her autobiography.

C)•MAYER GUINZBURG – THE MAIN CHARACTER OF *O EXÉRCITO DE UM HOMEM SÓ*

The main character in this novel has a double identity: Mayer Guinzburg – name and surname of markedly Jewish origin – and Capitan Birobidjan – the military rank replacing the first name and a noticeably foreign last name.⁶

Such an ambiguous construction of the main character's identity was not by chance. The novel was written and published in the 70's – the apogee of the military dictatorship in Brazil – and Mayer Guinzburg was both a

4 In Portuguese: "Uma protusa rocha era o meu nariz; a escura entrada de uma das muitas cavernas correspondia à minha boca. Muitos vêem faces em nuvens; eu via na montanha – monumento ao insólito – a reprodução de meu próprio rosto. As impressões que minha mãe tivera durante a gestação se haviam gravado de maneira indelével na face da filha (SCLAR, 1999, p. 27)".

5 In Portuguese: "Naquela noite, olhei-me num espelho. Mais uma vez, achei que havia mudado: minhas feições agora eram um pouco menos duras, a expressão um pouco mais doce. Eu tinha a certeza de que estava a caminho – na vida e no texto" (SCLAR, 1999, p. 143).

6 "Birobidjan" is the name of an area located in Eastern Siberia that, in 1928, was given to the Jews by the Soviet government so that they could establish an autonomous Jewish region and thus halt Japanese expansion. This character sometimes behaves like a military man, sometimes like a civilian.

Russian exile and a staunch communist. Therefore, he was an individual who joined two characteristics that would immediately place him under suspicion of subversion, in case he fell into the hands of Brazilian political police at the time.

His exile starts in 1916 when he leaves Russia at nine years old with his parents and brother. Living in Porto Alegre, more specifically in the Bom Fim district, the main character easily integrates with the social environment.

As he grows up Mayer Guinzburg accompanies, through his readings, the political changes his home country goes through and dreams of a new society in Brazil, where everyone could be treated as “comrades”, sharing tasks and responsibilities, under an irrefutable leadership. However, to do so, it was not enough to be only Mayer Guinzburg. It was necessary to enhance his person with a name that could confer on him respect and authority and, at the same time, intimidate potential enemies – real or fictitious. “Capitan Birobidjan” fit the bill quite well, once it simultaneously made an allusion to a military rank (a fact that, *per se*, in a civil society, distinguished him from others) and would pay homage to the place set aside in his home country where the Jews could live in safety.

Thus the character may not only maintain his political convictions when he acts as Capitan Birobidjan but also be considered part and parcel of the exiled Jews, when he is Mayer Guinzburg. According to his convenience, the character sometimes assumes the name Mayer, sometimes Capitan Birobidjan.

When, at 22 years old, Mayer, travestied as Capitan Birobidjan, begins, for the first time to establish “his” Birobidjan, that is, the New Birobidjan, with his friends from the Jewish community in an abandoned farm in 1929 he behaves in such an authoritarian way that the experiment folds in a few days.

On his return to the New Birobidjan, in 1942, the failure repeats but this time he is alone. After facing several attacks by the vagrants who used to be nearby, he receives Santinha, a young Brazilian with harsh features. On that occasion, the main character is a 35-year-old man mature, father of two children.

His first attitude towards Santinha is to change her name to Rosa de Luxemburgo, for Mayer considered it to be reactionary. Although she could not entirely grasp the reasons alleged by the main character, her material want is so dire that she quickly accepts her new identity. In this society they begin to form, there are two individuals who, for several reasons, change their original names. Being called by a different name for Santinha is just a detail, but for the main character, renaming himself and others is full of symbolic import, and he believes that, by doing so, people acquire a new identity, breaking with the previous one.

A few days later, the Brazilian Rosa de Luxemburgo renders all kinds of services to her “comrade”, as Mayer wants to be called: she performs odd jobs, begs for money, cleans the house, plants corn, and improvises the bed where they lie together.

During the two years the main character tries to establish the New Birobidjan, he starves and wears ragged clothes. When Rosa abandons him, she reassumes her name as Santinha, and he resists a few more days but then returns to his family life for another ten years.

Finally, in 1952, Mayer and a friend from the Jewish community become real estate agents. Although their project is promising, the main character goes into irreversible decline. By 1957 he will have already lost his business, his marriage, his life with his children, and his friendship with his former Jewish companions. Mayer is financially maintained by one of his sons and is placed in a boarding house where, for the third time, he imagines New Birobidjan.

At that point there are quite significant passages concerning Mayer’s identity fragmentation. Living in the boarding house, he starts a relationship with, among others, David Benveniste, an 81-year-old Egyptian Jew.

Disputing the only boarding house bathroom with David and always waiting for the next meal, Mayer goes from an initially irritating condition to delirium in the two years he lives there. His life with David, a person he could greatly identify with, once both of them are elderly Eastern Jews, triggers a breakdown in Mayer’s fragile emotional balance.

The following passage shows what I am trying to demonstrate:

It is June 7 (1967), the third day of the Six-Day War. Israeli tanks advance through Sinai. Mayer Guinzburg and Benveniste listen attentively. When the program finishes, Benveniste turns off the radio.

– Yeah – he groans – it seems it’s all decided.

– I guess so – says Mayer, cautiously. He feels an argument is about to start.

– It serves Nasser right – Benveniste is irritated. It’s his fault I’m here at this boarding house. I could be in my office, in Cairo... It serves him right. That demagogue. He’s paid the price.

– However - Mayer considers – he is a man of great personality. A real leader; even Ben Gurion admits it. He tried to pull his country out of under-development.

– That’s true – David acknowledges. (SCLAR, 1983, p. 145-146)⁷

7 In Portuguese: “É 7 de junho [de 1967], o terceiro dia da Guerra dos Seis Dias. Os blindados israelenses avançam pelo Sinai. Mayer Guinzburg e Benveniste ouvem com atenção. Terminado o informativo, Benveniste apaga o rádio.

In this excerpt we can identify a growing tension between Mayer and David in the air, “Mayer feels an argument is about to start”, with the explanation by another exile, from another country, about the reasons that brought him to Brazil: the demagoguery of Nasser, president of Egypt at the time.

Although it was expected that Mayer would support his pension colleague in his criticism of Nasser, once Arab politicians are usually a threat to the Jews’ physical survival and to their permanence in the State of Israel, Mayer does the opposite and, mentioning Ben Gurion, one of the leaders of the Independence of Israel, he praises Nasser’s enterprising qualities.

In spite of the fact that Mayer shared exile and religion with David, he insists on establishing a difference with his conversation partner. It is as if the initial dispute between them for the time they spend in the bathroom has attained new dimensions, that is, the conflict migrates from a private domain (clever and metaphorically represented by the bathroom) to a public one, the country.

As each of them has a different national origin – Russia for Mayer and Egypt for David – the main character does not, at any point, see David as an ally, but always as an opponent, worth provoking at any time, as the continuation of the dialogue mentioned above between the two characters suggests:

- Sooner or later – Mayer interrupts – you would have to face him [Nasser]. Anyway, he was a dictator. People of this kind change suddenly.
- Maybe – David Benveniste says. But it is true that we have lived well in Egypt. For centuries [...] But you, Russian Jews, had to invent Zionism and Israel. Just because you were bothered by anti-Semitism and pogroms you decided to compromise us. We had nothing to do with your plight. We were prospering...
- Sure – Mayer irritably exclaims. – Whereas the Egyptian people lived in absolute misery you were rolling in wealth!
- It’s true – Benveniste admits. – Intrinsically we were foreigners. And it was not easy to stand the people’s envy. Sooner or later we would have to leave and go to another country, to Israel, who knows...

– É – murmura – parece que a coisa está decidida.
– Parece – diz Mayer, cautelosamente. Sente que vai começar uma discussão.
– Bem feito para o Nasser – Benveniste está irritado. – É por causa dele que estou aqui nesta pensão. Podia estar no meu escritório, no Cairo... Bem feito. Aquele demagogo. Pagou caro.
– No entanto – pondera Mayer – é um homem de grande personalidade. Um verdadeiro líder; Ben Gurion mesmo admite isso. Tentou tirar o seu país do subdesenvolvimento...
– Isto é verdade – reconhece David” (SCLAR, 1983, p. 145-6).

– Well – now Mayer is conciliatory –, they did not have the right to expel you [...] (SCLJAR, 1983, p. 146)⁸

The above transcription is quite suggestive because it not only modulates Mayer's mood between provocation and conciliation, but also makes David clearly express feelings that might have been experienced by Mayer too: he always feels like a foreigner, whether in his home country or in the country where he lives in exile. Referring to his fellow Egyptian citizens as "those people" as David does, demonstrates that despite the nationality they have in common, the Jewish religion makes him feel different from the others. In relation to Mayer we can state that, as David reminds us, simply for being a Jew he is a victim of the *pogroms* in Russia.

Or, in other words: not only David but also Mayer lived their exiles in the countries where they were born. Therefore, in Brazil they live an exile inside another exile. Not even the common religion and desolation can unite them.

Mayer's displacement is almost as old as his own life. Indifferent to his parents and brothers, he wants to live in a separate world, in "New Birobidjan", something he cannot put into practice but it highlights his emotional and political confusion. The Jewish religion does not help him constitute a more fixed identity either. He systematically refuses to read the sacred books suggested by his father and in their place he proposes Marx's texts, whose ideas are explained to the old Guinzburg like this: "Marx knows everything! He knows there shouldn't be hunger or injustice. There should not be "mine" or "yours", it should be like this: "What is mine is yours; what is yours is mine" (SCLJAR, 1983, p. 25).

As if he could foresee his son's somber future, the old father answers as follows:

8 In Portuguese: "– Mais cedo ou mais tarde – interrompe Mayer – vocês teriam de enfrentá-lo [a Nasser]. Afinal de contas era um ditador. Um tipo destes sempre muda de uma hora para outra. – Pode ser – diz David Benveniste. – Mas o certo é que nós vivemos bem no Egito. Há séculos. [...] Mas vocês, judeus russos, tinham de inventar o sionismo e Israel. Porque estavam incomodando vocês com anti-semitismo e pogroms, acharam que deviam nos comprometer. Nós não tínhamos nada a ver com a situação de vocês. Estávamos prosperando... – Claro – exclama Mayer, irritado. – Enquanto o povo egípcio vivia na maior miséria vocês nadavam em dinheiro! – É verdade – reconhece Benveniste. – No fundo, éramos estrangeiros. E suportar a inveja daquela gente não era fácil. Mais cedo ou mais tarde teríamos de sair de lá e ir para outro país, para Israel, quem sabe... – Bem – Mayer agora está conciliador –, no fundo, eles não tinham o direito de expulsar vocês.[...]" (SCLJAR, 1983, p. 146).

– It is written in *Mishná*⁹ that there are four types of men: the *vulgar* one says: “What is mine is mine; what is yours is yours”; the *wicked* one says: “what is mine is mine; what is yours is also mine”. As for me, I prefer the *holy man’s* words that say: “What is mine is yours and what is yours is yours”. But you, my son, say: “What is mine is yours and what is yours is mine”. And these, according to *Mishná*, are the words of an *eccentric*, of a stranger among men. I think you will suffer greatly, son. (SCLLIAR, 1983, p. 25)¹⁰

As he is deprived of three types of identity – his own name, nationality and religion – and he is excluded from family life, Mayer’s fragmentation is inevitable. Like Guedali, he cannot reach an enunciation place and his speech sounds like hallucinations.

D. BENJAMIN AND JAYME KANTAROVICH – CHARACTERS FROM *OS LEOPARDOS DE KAFKA*

In this novel by Scliar published in 2000, it is Benjamin Kantarovich who comes to Brazil in 1917, also with his parents and brother, exiled from Bessarabia.

Like Mayer, Benjamin is a communist and his family and political lives are equally disastrous. Still in his home country, Benjamin, whose cousin gave him an issue of the Yiddish *Communist Manifesto*, shares the same dream with him: “A world where nobody is persecuted, where the Jews can be like any one else” (SCLLIAR, 2000, p. 15).

Although in *Um exército de um homem só* the explanation of communism is more good humored than the one described above, both novels predict societies where there would be no persecuted or exiled people (“the Jews would be like any one else”), if they adopted communism as their political and economic system.

The sudden and untimely death of his cousin, from whom he inherits a secret mission, brings about a change in Benjamin’s life. He must leave the village, go to Prague by train, stay at a certain hotel, look for a man he had never met before (but he knew he was a Jewish writer), whose name and

9 While the Torah is considered a compilation of oral law, transmitted by God to Moses at Mount Sinai, the Talmud discusses and clarifies all Jewish laws and rituals. The Mishna, one of the books from the Talmud, is composed of a series of declarations, organized by subject and topic and it teaches the laws, the tradition and the Jewish history. (Consulted Site: http://www.morasha.com.br/conteudo/artigos/artigos_view.asp?a=413&p=0, in 04/27/06.)

10 In Portuguese: “— Na Mishná está escrito que há quatro tipos de homens: o vulgar diz: “O que é meu é meu; o que é teu é teu”; o perverso diz: “o que é meu é meu; e o que é teu também meu”. Quanto a mim, prefiro as palavras do homem santo, que diz: “O que é meu é teu; e o que é teu é teu”. Mas tu, meu filho, dizes: “O que é meu é teu; e o que é teu é meu”. E isto, segundo a Mishná, são as palavras do excêntrico, do estranho entre os homens. Acho que vais sofrer muito, filho (SCLLIAR, 1983, p. 25).

telephone number were in a sealed envelope hidden inside *The Communist Manifesto* and say the following password: "I am in charge of receiving the text".

That man would hand him a secret message that could only be deciphered if placed alongside the sheet from the envelope. Only after Benjamin had finished this part of the task could he know where his mission would lead him and what he should do.

Just the trip to Prague would be quite an adventure for someone who had never left his home village. At that time it could be said that Benjamin, for the first but not the last time, would experience the feeling of an exile: the strangeness of the place, lack of command of the local language and lack of familiar references. Although Benjamin was a short distance from his home town, Prague will be no more familiar to him than Porto Alegre, the city that will receive him about a year later, as we will see further on the text.

Benjamin leaves Bessarabia and, as planned, he disembarks in Prague but he notices, as soon as he checks into the hotel, he has forgotten his rucksack in the train with the *Communist Manifesto* and the envelope inside.

Evidently, all his efforts to recover his rucksack are useless. In the following days, already resigned to his carelessness, he tries to find out who the man who would complete the ciphered message was. He wanders around the city and, although the narrator suggests it is merely by chance, Benjamin

"when he realized" he was in a place that looked familiar to him: in some spots there were even signs in Hebrew. It was Maisel street, in the old Prague ghetto. Before him, the legendary *Alteneuschule*, the old, compact, somber synagogue. (SCLIAR, 2000, p. 36)¹¹

It doesn't seem to be mere coincidence that the solutions to his problem begin to appear exactly in the Jewish district, that is, at the only place in the strange city that is less strange to him. Through the old synagogue janitor, Benjamin comes to know that a Jewish writer, Franz Kafka, lived not far from there. As he was convinced that was the man he should get in touch with, he finds out his telephone number, calls him and, thrilled, repeats the password he had learnt from his cousin.

Kafka, in return, seems to be surprised with the call and, on the following day, gives Benjamin a text in German. Even after having translated

11 In Portuguese: "quando deu por si" estava num lugar que lhe pareceu familiar: em alguns lugares havia até letreiros em hebraico. Era a rua Maisel, no antigo gueto de Praga. Diante dele, a lendária *Alteneuschule*, a velha sinagoga, maciça e sombria. (SCLIAR, 2000, p. 36).

it to Yiddish, with the help of the synagogue janitor, Benjamin cannot understand it and visits Kafka, in the hope he could decipher it. Even though the author receives him kindly, he cannot do anything about it.

Overcome by tiredness, lack of proper clothes and the money that was about to run out, Benjamin decides to put an end to his first exile and returns to his village. The only concrete things he brings from Prague are the paper with Kafka's text that he keeps always on his person, and the sense of failure.

As soon as he returns, he feels absolutely adapted to the environment and learns with his father, with no difficulty, how to become a tailor. In 1917, fearing the Bolsheviks, Benjamin embarks for Brazil with his family.

Like Mayer, the Kantarovich family stays in the Bom Fim district, in Porto Alegre. Benjamin works as a tailor but drifts apart from his family and, like Mayer Guinzburg and for the same reasons – adherence to the communist way of thinking – he is considered a strange person by his closer relatives.

Meanwhile, Benjamin's brother gets married, separates, but before that he has a son – Jaime – who is the only relative Benjamin feels affection for. Jaime, bearing sequelae of poliomyelitis, when he comes to know that although his uncle leads a modest life he is the owner of a select library, starts to visit his house.

Being a student activist since becoming a teenager, Jaime, who has become a Stalinist, has heated arguments with his trotskyite uncle but, even having such different opinions, their affection towards each other does not diminish.

Jaime does not have close relations with his parents or with the rest of the family, like Mayer and also Benjamin. Different from his party comrades, Jaime enjoys Kafka's texts and learns to read them in the original language. That is, even being a Brazilian, Jaime also experiences the feeling of exile, both with his family and in political militancy. For Jaime, exile is surely a more ambiguous feeling than for his uncle and for Mayer Guinzburg, once he has not been expelled from his home country, he knows the national language, becomes a militant of a local political party and dates a Brazilian girl. But he surely is another person, for, except for his uncle, he does not live or have a relationship with his original family anymore, he has a physical deficiency and he likes an author who is despised by his comrades from the party.

In 1964, when the military coup strikes in Brazil, Jaime is a junior in a college and publicly protests against the government. For being persecuted by the political repression, he is advised by his comrades in the party to move to São Paulo. Benjamin solves his monetary problems by telling his adventure in Prague for the first time and offering the paper he has with

Kafka's signature, which, according to specialized valuers, is worth at least eight thousand dollars.

But Jaime is then arrested by *Deops* agents while he is still in Porto Alegre. Once again, his uncle helps him. He bribes the police officer with the best suit he had ever made, in order to free his nephew.

Something his uncle does not know until he gets to the police headquarters is that Kafka's text, the one that leaves his safe and enters Jaime's pockets, ends up in the police officer's hands. Instead of being a solution for Jaime, the literary production by Kafka complicates the tense release negotiation at first, but as the words of the Czech author do not have any meaning to the police officer who, until that day, had never heard of Kafka, the worst thing happens: just "as a precaution", the police officer, having accepted his new suit, shreds Kafka's text and throws it away.

Jaime is freed and, even having lost Kafka's text and being broke, goes to São Paulo. That same night, his uncle, with the help of a taxi driver, steals the police headquarters' trash can and recovers a single piece of the original text by Kafka: a fragment of the first phrase, of a total of four.

On the night before his death, in 1980, Benjamin has a delirium and pronounces some words from the Kafka text. His nephew, who is with him by his bed, knows that he is finally deciphering the mysterious message and he is conquering his enunciation place at last. But for Jaime, his enunciation place is the student movement of which he becomes a militant.

CONCLUSIONS

As we could see in analyzing the identity of Guedali in *O centauro no jardim* and of the main character in *A mulher que escreveu a Bíblia*, both characters struggle to know, after all, which social group they belong to and which place they occupy in the society they live in. Both of them know about their Jewish ancestry: Guedali knows his parents, religious persecution stories in Russia very well and the harsh conditions they faced setting up in Rio Grande do Sul. The main character in *A mulher que escreveu a Bíblia* learns, through past lives therapy, that she lived in Palestine many centuries before and that she dwelled in King Solomon's palace, with his other wives and concubines. However, she does not have any reference about the intermediate generations, how she survived and came to live in Brazil, such a far country from the biblical Palestine.

As for the other characters – Mayer Guinzburg, Benjamin and Jayme Kantarovich – they know their origins very well because they are exiles themselves or their first descendants.

At first sight, none of the characters analyzed questions his freedom: it seems that, somehow, all of them recognize themselves as Brazilians, even those who were not born here. However, if we remember Todorov's premise at the beginning of the text, we can notice that of the five characters analyzed in the four novels, only the main character in *A mulher que escreveu a Bíblia* and Jayme Kantarovich really reach an enunciation place, confirming not only their "existence", as Todorov writes, but also their cultural identification with Brazil.

Guedali, Tita, Mayer Guinzburg and Benjamin Kantarovich, still according to Todorov, seem to be floating characters, regarding the creation of a cultural identity, once they are not sure about their enunciation places. Guedali oscillates between recognizing himself as a quadruped or a biped; Mayer Guinzburg fragments his identity so much, as the two names by which he is called suggest, that he does not even know who he is as an individual, where he is speaking from and who to. Benjamin Kantarovich cannot disconnect from his distant past or from his attempts to establish bonds with the Trotskyite movement in Central Europe. He leaves Bessarabia but it as if he has never arrived in Brazil, although he has lived most of his life in this country.

Actually, the only character that seems fully to assume an enunciation place is, perhaps, the only female character: the main character in *A mulher que escreveu a Bíblia*. An expert in writing, she transcribes episodes she witnesses and researches her own version of the *Bible* and, centuries later, she is the author of an autobiography.

Understanding why Scliar has given pride of place to a female character regarding the attainment of an enunciation place is the subject for another text and research. However, what is evident is the fact that the author, himself the son of an exiled couple, through these five characters and the four novels analyzed, has represented a culture marked by hybridism and confirmed Todorov's premise, that is, our need to search for an enunciation place so that we may continue being.

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