

Cultural memory and deconstruction of the single story in Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (American hunger)

Memória cultural e a desconstrução da história única em Black Boy (American hunger), de Richard Wright

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Resumo: Este artigo objetiva analisar como a administração de narrativas operada na composição de *Black Boy* (American Hunger), de Richard Wright, participa do processo de constituição de uma memória cultural (ASSMANN, 1995) em relação à experiência afro-americana. Ademais, discutimos essa constituição da memória cultural como uma forma de ruptura da “história única” (ADICHIE, 2009), que, nesse caso, significa a História constituída na perspectiva da branquitude excluindo pontos de vista que escapam a esse grupo étnico. Para tanto, analisamos algumas passagens do texto concentrando nas histórias trazidas para constituir o tecido narrativo e como elas remodelam compreensões sobre o passado e questionam a História oficial.

Palavras-chave: Memória cultural. História única. Richard Wright.



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Abstract: *This essay aims to analyze how the narrative management operated in the composition of Black Boy (American Hunger), by Richard Wright, takes part of the process of constitution of a cultural memory (ASSMANN, 1995) on African American experience. In addition, we discuss this cultural memory constitution as a way of breaking with “the single story”*

(ADICHIE, 2009), which, in this case, means History made up in the white perspective excluding points of view that scape this ethnic group. To do so, we analyze some pieces from the text concentrating on the stories brought up to constitute the narrative fabric and how they reshape comprehensions about past and question the official History.

Palavras-chave: *Cultural Memory. The single story. Richard Wright.*

Introduction¹

Literary Studies has focused on the relations between Literature and other fields of knowledge, mainly Humanities. Pointing these dialogues out, subjects like History and Sociology have become very close to literary criticism. One of the most privileged themes comprised in these theoretical efforts is the past, how it is historically and socially constituted, as well as which is the role played by Literature in the social process of constituting a social imaginary of past.

Given this context, cultural memory (ASSMANN, 1995) has become a relevant topic in Literary Studies. The question here is to understand how the representational mechanics that shape past imagery into literary text works. Considering this, literary texts have a range of strategies through which images of past are shaped and transmitted through reading to readers.

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Taking these ideas as a reading key, we intent to analyze the autobiographical narrative *Black Boy* (*American Hunger*) (2005[1945/1977]), by the African American writer Richard Wright. We are interested in how this text provides some images that signify African American experience across History, going back from American Civil War to Jim Crow Laws. So, the narrator-character(-author) gets entangled to a mesh that reveals different stories that, together, reshape the understanding of African American past from the perspective of a black subject.

Thus, we present, in the first moment, the concepts of cultural memory, based on Assmann (1995) and Erll (2008), and the single story according to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's ideas. In the aftermath, we carry the literary analysis embracing the theoretical concerns introduced in the first part.

Cultural memory and the single story

In the 20th Century those fields of knowledge concerned with memory saw a shift in the established paradigm. It happened mainly after the studies of the French anthropologist Maurice Halbwachs that proposed the idea of "collective memory". The author states that "each individual memory is a point of view of collective memory, this point of view changes according to the place that I am and this place changes according to the relations we keep to other environments" (HALBWACHS, 2003, p. 69)². This statement is the core of the discussion proposed by Halbwachs: memory is shaped in the collective sphere, which means, in the social group, in the community. Thus, memory is constituted by a

² Free translation for: "cada memória individual é um ponto de vista sobre a memória coletiva, que este ponto de vista muda segundo o lugar que ali ocupo e que esse mesmo lugar muda segundo as relações que mantemos com outros ambientes".

dynamic of narrative management: some witnesses are included and others are excluded.

Towards this collective look at memory, the concept of cultural memory is coined by the German author Jan Assmann (1995) in the essay “Collective memory and cultural identity”. He intends, from Halbwach’s discussion, to distinguish communicative memory to cultural memory. The first one is explained by Assmann (1995) as the daily communication, since the subject memory is constituted by his communication to other people. This kind of memory is featured by oral transmission; according to Assmann’s words, this one does not last for more than a century:

this horizon does not extend more than eighty to (at the very most) one hundred years into the past time. The communicative memory offers no fixed point which would bind it to the ever expanding past in the passing of time. Such fixity can only be achieved through a cultural formation and therefore lies outside of informal everyday memory (ASSMANN, 1995, p. 127).

It means that communicative memory is not enough to accomplish a significant reworking of past. To do so, a cultural formation able to give some solidity to representation of past is demanded. In other words, memory becomes more consistent as long as it is put in perspective to culture.

In this scenario, Assmann (1995) defends that a transition from communicative to cultural memory comes out from its articulation to what can be called objectivized culture. So, the author defines cultural memory as it follows:

The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image. Upon such collective

knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity (ASSMAN, 1995, p. 132).

By these words, we can understand cultural memory as the symbolic capital – expressed by texts, narratives, images etc. – that represents the past of a collectivity. Such memories, kept by culture, build up an image of the social group they belong and they, as a certain knowledge about past, project strength to accomplish unity and particularity, which means, they impact in identity constitution.

Therefore, there is the maintenance of a mnemonic rage in cultural production, among which Literature is located. As Astrid Erll (2008) observes, fiction has the power to shape collective imaginaries about past: “Fictions, both novelistic and filmic, possess the potential to generate and mold images of the past which will be retained by whole generations” (ERLL, 2008, p. 389). Thereupon, it is possible to consider literary narrative as a way of reshaping cultural memory, since the literary field is a cultural practice, it builds, keeps, and resizes meanings on past experience.

As long as memory is transmitted as narrative, we cannot put aside the idea of Peter Meusbürger (2011), in the essay “Knowledge, cultural memory, and politics”, that dominant groups have a project of memory. This thought means that memory, and its articulation as narration, is traversed by power. The author says:

Memories imposed on people by state authorities, colonial powers, religious institutions, or ruling elites. In this case the population is indoctrinated with the myths, narratives, and interpretations of history through schools, media, national museums, exhibitions, national holidays, and religious ceremonies. Monuments and performances serving this kind of collective memory are located at

central or highly symbolic places and are primarily supposed to sway, educate, or reeducate the observer and to exclude other memories or believe systems. They are aimed at the whole population and are intended to homogenize collective memories and believe systems, to create national identity and unity, and to foster commonly shared interpretations of history (MEUSBURGER, 2011, p. 53).

According to this quotation, there are social elements that reinforce some version of past and weaken other ones. This is a question of power: they try to impose their perspective of past with different purposes by dismantling, excluding, or marginalizing sources of memory that question and stand as opposition in relation to the ones of the dominants.

This point of discussion takes us to what the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) calls “the single story”. The author assumes the position of a storyteller and goes back to her past as a reader, when she was a child and an adolescent, and used to read American and English novels. In contact with those narratives, she did not feel represented, she could not see herself in those stories. This representation was found just years later, when she got closer to African Literature, reading novels by Chinua Achebe and Camara Leye, for example. Reading these books, otherwise, she felt connected to the stories. About the discovery of African writers, she says: “I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature” (ADICHIE, 2009, s/p). After that, she could see herself and her culture and realize the similarities between her experience and the stories she read.

With this personal account, she is demonstrating that if stories are told in just one perspective, by voices from the same

matrix, there is danger. This threat is the construction of stereotypes of people, places, and cultures that end up with a distortion of identities. The author talks about the African example: the existent narratives about Africa, told by Europeans, used to bring a discourse describing African people as savages and animalistic. Those stories were used to dominate and subalternate those groups and stand as the core of colonial rhetoric. Thus, if stories told by Africans are not considered, the image that is formed of these peoples is based in European narrative: there is the danger of a single story. If the narrative offers comprise just one perspective, there is the maintenance of oppression dynamics that are reinforced by stereotypization of the other.

Given this context, Adichie (2009) asserts that:

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is "nkali." It's a noun that loosely translates to "to be greater than another." Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali. How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power (ADICHIE, 2009, s/p).

Considering these words, narrative, as any other field of human experience, is crossed by power. The Igbo word "nkali" means opposition of strength. Stories, in this bias, are fields of tension between different strengths: the perspective of the colonizers in relation to the colonized, of the domineers in opposition to the dominees, or even, through the lenses of Walter Benjamin (2012), the winners versus the losers. Thus, the Nigerian writer comes up with some ideas that can be useful to question narratives: how stories are told, who tells them, when they

emerge, and how many are told. All these questions are crossed by power dynamics.

In the aftermath, the author says:

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity. [...] when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise (ADICHIE, 2009, s/p).

According to this quotation, we understand that the plurality of stories is crucial. That is why, in the historical mesh of power, narratives achieve an operation of subversion of absolute truths, historically used to oppression. The author says that stories have the power to restore dignity, what actually happens: if the dignity of a people was taken out through narratives told by domineers, it is logic that it is restituted through the narratives of the dominees. Therefore, we see that political, social, historical, cultural, and ideological dimensions come up from the position the subject takes before narrative offers, what implies in an ethical choice: accept and corroborate with the single story or reject it and expand it in a movement to deconstruct the hegemonic discourses that legitimate excluding and oppressive practices.

Taking these ideas into account, we can perceive that cultural memory and the single story are deeply connected. The single story is the unilateral perspective of cultural memory. Thus, to deconstruct the single story is to look for, to enhance, to bring to light, those stories that carry the perspectives of the excluded from the official narrative, those who were dominated and explored, and had their lives crossed by violence. Thereby, a new

cultural memory comes up, reconstructing the story/History of a people.

Richard Wright's Black Boy (American Hunger) and its versions of past

When we look Wright's narrative through the lenses of memory, we can observe a gesture of constructing cultural memory. That is why the narrating self undertakes as a strategy of narration the management of narratives of other subjects that compose his social group in an entanglement of meshes; So, contemplating other stories, that affects him, we can see an attempt to shape cultural memory linked to American nation.

This process can be seen as in the text as in the work³. As text, by reading it is possible to ascertain that as the end of the narrative comes closer, which means, in the time level in which the staged experiences get closer narrator's present the narrative voice starts to question his relation to the nation⁴.

Before we go into this point, we call attention to an information that is implicit in the text: Richard expands his understanding about the world through narratives. These stories came to him by orality, as the family story transmitted by his grandmother, that is how he could access the world. So, narratives have an important role in the socialization process he undertakes.

³ We differentiate text and work through Roland Barthes (2004), based on the understanding that text refers to the process of meaning making, it is the fabric of a semantic dynamic, in a constant becoming of meanings, and that is read without the mark of authorial affiliation. Text is always in construction and it is accomplished by writing. Work, otherwise, to Barthes, is the complete product, an object of consumerism.

⁴ We think nation as an imagined community, concept coined by Benedict Anderson (2008). According to this perspective, nation is a social construct founded on the perception of different subjects as they belong to a group.

We say that because besides this narrative capital, fiction also had a privileged position in this operation. In the aftermath, we present the analysis made by the narrator about what he used to read when he was a teenager, when was becoming a reader:

The papers arrived and I scoured the Negro area, slowly building up a string of customers who bought the papers more because they knew me than from any desire to read. When I returned home at night, I would go to my room and lock the door and revel in outlandish exploits of outlandish men in faraway, outlandish cities. For the first time in my life I became aware of the life of the modern world, of vast cities, and I was claimed by it; I loved it. Though they were merely stories, I accepted them as true because I wanted to believe them, because I hungered for a different life, for something new. The cheap pulp tales enlarged my knowledge of the world more than anything I had encountered so far. To me, with my roundhouse, saloon-door, and river-levee background, they were revolutionary, my gateway to the world (WRIGHT, 2005, p. 129).

Working selling newspaper, Richard had access to some material to read, like pulp fictions. Examining this element of his biography, the narrator observes that a new possibility to access the world had been opened. It is not precise the meaning of the adjective “modern” used by the narrative voice; even though, we interpret that the narrator is referring to its meaning in the common sense, as something new, and so the narrator enunciates a new possibility to see the world. These stories fuel his desire for a new life, what will be turned into his project to migrate toward north. Thereby, it is possible to see the entanglement of this self revealed by narration with stories, that is what shapes his comprehension of the world and the condition of being in the world – associated with the social structures upon him.

It is not given explanations about the content of those narratives, it is just said that they presented him a new world and,

doing so, new possibilities of being. What happens is that a similar process is described by Adichie (2009) about the single story: Richard just had contact to stories that show him narrow perspectives about the world, considering the social vector of racial violence. However, accessing other narratives he could imagine other worldviews.

In a certain way, those narratives, as cultural objects, brought an index of cultural memory. To Richard, they represented an imaginary of society. So, the fictional figure could access other stories and expend his understanding about the world.

In this process of coming of age, represented through memory figurations and his entanglement to narratives, the narrator starts to analyze his relation to the nation and, in another level, to African American community in the United States. In one of these comments, the narrative highlights the silence imposed upon them about some topics in American society, issues that southern white man do not treat with black people, as is described in the following piece:

Among the topics that southern white men did not like to discuss with Negroes were the following: American white women; the Ku Klux Klan; France, and how Negro soldiers fared while there; Frenchwomen; Jack Johnson; the entire northern part of the United States; the Civil War; Abraham Lincoln; U. S. Grant; General Sherman; Catholics; the Pope; Jews; the Republican party; slavery; social equality; Communism; Socialism; the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution; or any topic calling for positive knowledge or manly self-assertion on the part of the Negro (WRIGHT, 2005,p. 231).

In the list presented by the narrator we can notice some topics: white women, specially the French ones; historical-political aspects involving racism, mentioning the Ku Klux Klan, and

Lincoln, the north, the Constitution and Civil War, as symbols of abolition; and also, religion, what can be seen by allusions to the Pope and Catholicism. Such issues, according to the narrator's analysis, are deafened because they could reclaim some positive knowledge or self-affirmation to black people.

Thus, we can see through these comments the social production of silence, an obliteration of discourses and memories that could be useful to resist against racism. It is important to observe that some of these topics evokes cultural memory: references to the past, like the Civil War and slavery, for example, are framed by the hegemonic discourse according to the interests of the dominant group. In this historical scene of racial relations, it is not too much to point out, as Richard H. Schein (2018) does, that in American society, the racial group that has the hegemony is the white group. Therefore, this group shapes the ways of representing the past – and the present of that context – in such a way that the discourses are controlled and so they can exercise social control.

Wright's narrative, albeit, tries to break this silence. It is accomplished not just because the narrator cites those topics, but also because he uses them as meaning vectors to his narration. It is ensured by the entanglement of the self to the narrative of migration towards north, as well as the family story in the context of slavery and his personal relation to communism.

Doing so, the text gathers meanings that converge to the life story depicted in the narrative. The meanings claimed by the narrator to build up his biographical plot connect the variety of

thread that compose this fabric and accomplish signification in their dialogue to the historical past.

From this scenario, the narrator presents his point of view about nation:

(As I, in memory, think back now upon those girls and their lives I feel that for white America to understand the significance of the problem of the Negro will take a bigger and tougher America than any we have yet known. I feel that America's past is too shallow, her national character too superficially optimistic, her very morality too suffused with color hate for her to accomplish so vast and complex a task. Culturally the Negro represents a paradox: Though he is an organic part of the nation, he is excluded by the entire tide and direction of American culture [...])

Our too-young and too-new America, lusty because it is lonely, aggressive because it is afraid, insists upon seeing the world in terms of good and bad, the holy and the evil, the high and the low, the white and the black; our America is frightened of fact, of history, of processes, of necessity. It hugs the easy way of damning those whom it cannot understand, of excluding those who look different (WRIGHT, 2005, p. 272)

Here the narrator expose how he perceives the way in which the United States deals with its past: in a shallow way, crossed by a narrow optimism, and a moral code erased by racial hate. In the horizon of the analysis we propose, it is important to highlight what would be this superficiality reported by the narrator in the issue of racial tensions and the past. Starting from the idea of the past, as a time category, is seized by narrative, what we can understand is that the way this past was narrated, or the way this past was turned into narrative, was shallow.

So, why is the narration of the past shallow? Reinforcing Shein's (2018) words, the hegemonic racial group in the United States is white, and it is in perspective to the discussion about memory proposed by Meusbürger (2011). In accordance with him,

the elites, or the dominant groups, have a project of memory – sometimes it succeeds, sometimes it does not – of imposing their version of the past, which means, to shape the representation of collective past experience according to their interests. The author observes this situation:

Memories imposed on people by state authorities, colonial powers, religious institutions, or ruling elites. In this case the population is indoctrinated with the myths, narratives, and interpretations of history through schools, media, national museums, exhibitions, national holidays, and religious ceremonies. Monuments and performances serving this kind of collective memory are located at central or highly symbolic places and are primarily supposed to sway, educate, or reeducate the observer and to exclude other memories or believe systems. They are aimed at the whole population and are intended to homogenize collective memories and believe systems, to create national identity and unity, and to foster commonly shared interpretations of history (MEUSBURGER, 2011, p. 53).

In the world perspective shown by Wright's narrative, it is possible to understand this shaping of the past, specially in the United States, as an erasure of slavery past. The symbols of this violence were kept, as bell hooks (1996) observes in her memoir *Bone Black*, that in American schools in the South during the 1950's and at the beginning of the 1960's there were in classrooms the Confederate flags. That means that there was a symbol of slavery, racism, and racial violence, setting semantic values projected to the past by white hegemonic perspective.

The narrator's observation builds meanings about hoe this fictional subject interacts with the national project. The narrating self, when refers to the nation, handles the discourse with a structure of adjectives in a way that gets him closer to this imagine community: firstly, by using the possessive adjective "our", which means, with this linguistic articulator he utters a

sense of belonging to the group; besides that, with “too-young” and “too-new”, expressions formed by intensity adverbs and adjectives, he is characterizing the United States as a young nation and presents some contrasts. The narrator associates its strength to loneliness, its aggressivity to fear, and the social organization insists in a binarism that put black and white in opposition. By these gaps the national project is build up excluding the other.

In a more accurate way, the narrator analyses the fact that black people is excluded from American culture, read as white hegemonic culture. Thus, black people is a paradox: it is a central point of national formation, but it has the rights of belonging, attending, and representation denied.

Not enough, the narrator examines the conditions of black people in a country that put them aside, marginalizing them:

I felt that the Negro not live a full, human life under the conditions imposed upon him by America; and I felt, too, that America, for different reasons, could not live a full, human life. It seemed to me, then, that if the Negro solved his problem, he would be solving infinitely more than his problem alone. I felt certain that the Negro could never solve his problem until the deeper problem of American civilization had been faced and solved. And because the Negro was the most cast-out of all the outcast people in America, I felt that no other group in America could tackle this problem of what our American lives meant so well as the Negro could (WRIGHT, 2005, p. 197-298).

Here we deal with some meanings that came up through narrator’s account and semanticize the development of an historical and political awareness on black people condition in a racist country like the United States. The analyses undertaken by the narrator is precise putting a spotlight on the fact that black people are the most excluded among the excluded. So, if this

community would solve their problems, a great part of the rips of the social fabric of American society would be sewn. What calls attention is that this development, or improvement of awareness about racial issues, is that it is symmetric to the life story depicted in Wright's narrative. Therefore, here, the narrator presents a perception that the possibilities of being in the world are restricted by historical exclusion of black people in American society.

In terms of narrative composition, as the narrator gets closer to his narrative present, the process of becoming-of-age is more visible. This process means that the narrator increases a knowledge about the self, life, and the world he lives in, considering the racial issues that cross his biographical story, by the chronology that reconstitutes his experiences and the stories that are sewn in the diegetic universe.

As he gets closer to the end of the narrative, he says:

(I feel that the Negroes' relation to America is symbolically peculiar, and from the Negroes' ultimate reactions to their trapped state a lesson can be learned about America's future. Negroes are told in a language they cannot possibly misunderstand that their native land is not their own; and when they, acting upon impulses which they share with whites, try to assert a claim to their birthright, whites retaliate with terror, never pausing to consider the consequences should the Negroes give up completely. They never dream that they would face a situation far more terrifying if they were confronted by Negroes who made no claims at all than by those who are buoyed by social aggressiveness. My knowledge of how Negroes react to their plight makes me declare that no man can possibly be individually guilty of treason, that an insurgent act is but a man's desperate answer to those who twist his environment so that he cannot fully share the spirit of his native land. Treason is a crime of the state.) (WRIGHT, 2005, p. 302).

In this piece, the narrator manages meanings about belonging. According to the narrative voice, it is taught that land is not theirs, which means, he, the narrator, should not belong to that place, it is like he does not fit to that national project. Besides that, every time they try to resist, the dominant group uses violence to supersede any act that can go against the established system. This tension, according to this quotation, makes that treason, as a resistant gest, even as an individual act, reveals the collective social forces that act upon the subject and exclude him.

Considering this analysis, in conformity to the other ones, we observe that through the text, which means, the process of meaning making underling the narrative, it is semanticized the relation the narrator, a black man, keeps with nation through the way the past is handled. Here, the personal past crosses the historical national past: violence and racism experienced by the individual are laid symmetrically to the social structure that traverses the national project and accomplishes an historical frame of racial violence, started during slavery and kept by Jim Crow Laws.

Also, it reveals a process of increasing narrator's perspective on the historical and political dimension of his own experience, which is reinforced by narrative development. The becoming process of meaning making is accomplished also as the becoming of existence: not only the meanings are modified across time, but also existence is constantly reshaped.

With this, we intent to say that as text, as a semantic fabric, the textual dynamics comprises the erasures of representation of the national past. These are projected ad meaning through his

perception and analysis that drives the narration transiting between personal and collective, which means, putting in perspective his personal story, to his family story, the community story, and the national narrative.

Taking Halbwachs' (2003) theory back, we can see in the textual fabric the narrator presents his individual memory, and entangles it to other narratives. Doing so, we have a narrator as subject of remembering in full attempt to (re)construct a memory: the narratives in which he is entangled are other witnesses he claims to shape a record. Thus, by sewing his memory to those, expressed as narratives, we can observe, in the text, the conformation of this memory as meanings in a becoming process of reshaping.

As work, which means, as final product, *Black Boy* (American Hunger) may be taken as a cultural object. So, making this movement from text to work, or, from meaning making process to cultural object, we have before us the aspect mentioned that Jan Assmann (1995) understands as the transition from communicational memory to cultural memory. Thereby, through the variety of witnesses that are raised from the narratives in which the narrator is entangled in and from its own, becoming cultural objects, they are turned into a symbolic capital that carries a representational index on collective past, since it transits from the individual aspect to the collective, from the individual being to nation.

It is reasonable to question in which perspective this discourse is affiliated: to the hegemonic one, aligned to whiteness, or to counter-hegemonic, aligned to blackness? The answer, at

this point very obvious, is that the work utters a memorialist discourse that put to question, that destabilizes, the hegemonic discourse: as a “counter-narrative”. Thus, it is possible to say that it deconstructs the “single story” (ADICHIE, 2009) architected by the dominant group. Through this new perspective of narrating the past, historical fractures are exposed since they are projected in the diegesis and cross characters’ subjectivities, as well as the racial violence is reported.

Therefore, reading *Black Boy* (*American Hunger*), the reader is able to access to a story composed under the sign of those subjects that were – and still are – victims of racial violence in the United States. Following Wright’s life story, the reader rebuild meanings on the past of that country and, doing so, the literary narrative is confirmed as a mean through which cultural memory is shaped.

As Adichie (2009) mentioned, narrative is crossed by power, since stories were (or, it is possible to state, they still are) used as devices to destroy the humanity of a people or to reconstruct it. It has to do with cultural memory: as we pointed out, the single story may be taken as the imposition of a single version of the past, so, an imposition of a restrictive, authoritarian, and oppressive perspective on cultural memory. Thus, Wright’s narrative offers another view on the cultural memory of the United States on racism since it is composed in the perspective of the victims of racism. In addition, the relation of the fictional subject to national past revels erasures and silences in cultural memory formation.

Conclusions

Deconstruct the single story means questioning the “official” narrative of the past. It is related to cultural memory because it deals with the symbolic capital that depicts nations past. The narrator-character along the narrative thematize his relation to the past of his country. This process of narrating himself having the individual and collective past as mark makes clear some erasures, gaps, and silences that cross the shaping of cultural memory. His relation to the past is marked by signs of violence, oppression, and exclusion. Thus, when the narrative subject modulates the past through these signs taking his life story as the starting point, we can realize that his life is connected to a social structure build by racism. What he makes, then, is to semanticize the collective past from his individual past. And, doing so in a cultural narrative, which means a cultural object, he takes part in the dynamic of constitution of cultural memory.

In addition, the narrating self mobilizes a range of narratives that crosses his narration. Bringing those stories to his, the narrator faces a narrative management that can be seen as a gest of shaping cultural memory. It is the bunch of narratives brought to narration that converge to the same point, racial violence, and strengthen the perspective presented.

Beyond the text, as a constant and open process of meaning making, and going into the work itself, as a closed production, the perspective in which the past is depicted offers to the readers another view on cultural memory, different from the “official” one. The work binds the perspective of a victim of racism, so it carries a version of past that goes against the one sustained by white hegemony.

Doing so, the narrative, both as text and work, destabilize meanings on national past. In this process, the “single story” maintained by power structures is put to question and another version of past can come out through literary narrative.

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