# THE CARIBBEAN ETHOS BETWEEN THE MYSTICAL AND THE CIVILIZING ELEMENT IN THE NOVEL *OF LOVE AND OTHER DEMONS* OF GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

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***Abstracto:*** *El genoma de la literatura de Gabriel García Márquez engloba las coordenadas espaciales y culturales del área sudamericana, marcada por toques de exotismo que se mezclan con las notas civilizadoras de la población europea. Teniendo una jerarquía social bien definida, la imagen de la sociedad del siglo XVIII en América Latina se superpone sobre la conducta moral y religiosa de la población local y del recién llegados. Al tener una estructura compleja que resulta de estos dos sistemas de valores, el ethos caribeño se adueña de los elementos definitorios del área exótica que permite una doble identificación, con el elemento español, o con los mitos arcaicos, representados por la cultura Yoruba.*

***Palabras claves:*** *polifonía discursiva, jerarquía social, religión, cultura yoruba.*

Starting from the cultural area represented by the Latin American space in which the mentality of the local population intertwines with the European civilizing spirit, Gabriel García Márquez's literature projects fragments from the coordinates of a world marked by exoticism, in which the writer said that "they mixed the boundless imagination of black African slaves with that of pre-Columbian natives and then with the fantasy of the Andalusians and the Galician's cult for the supernatural. This ability to look at reality in a certain magical way is peculiar to the Caribbean" (Mendoza, 2002: 45)

Positioning itself at this intersection established by the magical background and the elements of reality, the novel of the Latin American writer, *Of Love and Other Demons*, allows to the reader to identify in the text skeleton a mixture of discursive communication and the relationship between various narrative voices, which propels the whole construction to another level, that defines the characteristics of Márquez's literature. What this Latin American writer manages to create is a discursive polyphony that fits the

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paradigm imposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, for whom, the novel becomes the accessible ground for a diversity of individual literary voices, which allow the identification of social patterns, based on national elements, marked by cultural and psychological specificity. The Russian theorist emphasizes that the polyphonic aspect of the novel allows the exposition and contrast of different visions of social segments, represented by characters, on the reality, from which we deduce the social stratification of different ethnic groups in Latin American society. Although the narrative in the novel *Of Love and Other Demons* is not clearly divided between the characters, Márquez succeeds, by using dialogue and combining multiple visions, to define the continuity of the narrative act.

The Latin American writer manages to embody a dual vision represented by the ancestral values of the collective mentality, specific to slaves derived from their Yoruba religion and the new norms with civilizing notes, imposed by the religious spectrum of the Catholic Church, permanently identified with the functioning of the social regime brought together with Spanish values and the notion of upper class. This coexistence does not move away from a conflict system, in which the lines of inequality, motivated by the cultural, ethnic, and religious complexity of the time, project the narrative universe in an environment of instability. Thus, the text preserves its particular structure in which "the history of each character is not told from the official and generic schemes presented in the history texts but from the literary discourse orchestrated by the narrator and the different enunciators, corresponding to the diversity of voices and consciences" (Vidal, 1995: 307). Being a novel based on multilingualism and on the individual polyphony outlined through the voices of the characters, parts from the dialogues enters the narrator's discourse, creating a hybridization as a mixture of two different perspectives, of two antagonistic voices that promote conceptions about the world and historical epochs.

The genesis of the novel *Of Love and Other Demons* seems to be based on a real event, recorded by the writer during his years as a journalist in Cartagena de Indias, which he automatically links to one of his childhood stories. According to Márquez, the story has as antecedent "the legend of a little twelve-year-old marquise, with her locks crawling on the ground like a bride's train, who had died of rabies caused by a dog bite and was venerated in the villages along the Caribbean coast for the many miracles she had performed" (García Márquez, 2014: 11). We must not lose sight of the fact that the intimate space of childhood is a true source of the Márquezian imaginary, from which the writer models fragments that become projections at the level of narrative constructions. In his dialogue with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, Márquez stated the strong influence of his grandmother's presence in terms of his literary development: "At night, all of my grandmother's fantasies, predictions, and evocations materialized. That was my connection to her, a kind of invisible cord through which we both communicated with the supernatural universe. The day, my grandmother's magical world seemed fascinating to me, I lived in it, it was my world." (Mendoza, 2002: 86). Situated on the line imposed by the magical realism specific to Márquez's creation, the novel begins its narrative thread with characters and facts that are inscribed only in legend and mythical framework.

Anchored in the local culture marked by the colonial period, the action takes place in Cartagena de Indias, at the end of the 18th century, in one of the main slave ports on the continent. It should not be lost sight of the fact that in the context in which the novel takes place, slavery was considered an important commercial transaction, providing substantial amounts for those involved in sales at public auctions. This important social stratum is not limited in Márquez's novels to simple slaves who have only a limited role in



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the social but become a compact mass, defined by their values and rules through interaction with the white population. The novel *Of Love and Other Demons* bases its entire construction on this hierarchy established by the master-slave system, which is mentioned throughout the narrative.

Undoubtedly, the central discursive courts of the text remain the record representations at the level of the black population, placed in parallel with the social elite of whites. Being a portal to the collective mind of Yoruba culture, the slave discourse allows the identification of the private world, with intimate touches, marked by the colour of rituals and customs with esoteric values. The first sequence of the novel brings together three distinct elements that refer to the specific culture of blacks in Africa. The presence of the main character, Sierva María, and her copper-coloured hair, together with the symbolism of the name of the servant (Caridad del Cobre), and the appearance of the woman sold for her weight in gold reinforce the suggestion that the text encapsulates a syncretized form of Orisha. In the Yoruba religion, the goddess that is correlated with gold and cooper is Oshún, who is also associated with female beauty, seduction, and the water's archetype.

According to the Yoruban cosmogony, all elements have a primordial existence and another one that has a complex form, which moves between the human and the spiritual. (Olejuba, 2003: 88). The narrative context allows the identification of a high number of situations in which the female character represented by Sierva María is in the presence of the aquatic element. The waters of the Caribbean are present in the novel as a bridge that connects the microcosm of Cartagena with the rest of the world, having also the connotation of a cemetery for Afro-descendant communities, since the sea, accepts the corpses of Africans killed during voyages. What is more, since the birth of Sierva, water has been a fundamental part of her characterization, whether in the form of rain or propitious waters: "One morning of late rains, under the sign of Sagittarius, seven-month-old Sierva María de Todos los Ángeles was born" (García Márquez, 2014: 48). In the Caribbean culture, the goddess Oshún is directly related to the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, a religious patron of the island of Cuba. This name is not limited to a simple religious reference in Yoruba culture but is also present in the image of the companion that Sierva María has with her at the beginning of the novel. The main connection between Sierva and Caridad del Cobre is mentioned by García Márquez from the prologue. The first characteristic that invites the writer to recreate this story is undoubtedly the copper-coloured hair that sprouts disproportionately from the tombstone.

This technique, which involves dividing a sacred element into fragmented representations, is also found in other sequences of the novel. The image of the dog in the first part of the novel maintains the line of symbolism by its association with the presence of Saint Dominic, also known as the patron of the Inquisition actions; the spiritual role of the animal is also enhanced by the textually identified description of "a gray dog with a star on its forehead" (García Márquez, 2014: 13). The specialist did not lose sight of the description attributed to Cayetano Delaura, marking his appearance with a white strand on his forehead, nor the sequence in which this description is placed, where, in addition to the already mentioned element, appears the name of the character Abrenuncio de Sa Pereira Cao whose second surname means "dog" in Portuguese. (Corwin, 2016: 152)

The symbols of the goddess and the one that is connected with Saint Dominic can be limited to the representation of the Yoruba religion and the catholic one. But in the end of the novel, the female character represented by Sierva María, loses her connection with the space of the archaic religion by accepting an entire process of harm and mistreatment



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that transforms her into the image of a Roman Catholic saint. This last representation is in symmetry with the image from the beginning of the novel, in which the young marquise, who died of rabies, was revered for the miracles she performed.

Although Cayetano's image tends to be more towards the religious side imposed by the Catholic Church, studies of ancient religions have mentioned the possible association of the character with the representation of Oddúa, a deity belonging to the Yoruba religion who appears with a double face. This association is also supported by the gesture of the female character who offers Cayetano the representative necklace for this deity: "Before he left, Sierva María gave him the beautiful Oddúa necklace: eighteen inches of pearl and coral beads" (García Márquez, 2014: 134). Although this interpretation would resonate in the Yoruba culture space, Cayetano's image from this perspective does not allow an explanation for the metamorphosis that the female character suffers.

The role accepted by society for slaves is one of submission. But in some parts of the novel, the degree of relationship under which we are presented with the image of slaves and domestic space induces a note of familiarity, an aspect found in the relationship between Sierva María and Dominga de Adviento. Márquez is not the only author of the twentieth century who promotes the image of the mother-child in which the role of mother is replaced by that of maids. In fact, the majority of the novels (William Faulkner's novels) that bring to the forefront the population of color have developed the images of the maternal instinct that are identified in the narrative development. The narrative discourse presents her as a transit character, Dominga de Adviento being "a formidable black woman, who ruled the house with an iron fist until the night before her death, was the link between the two worlds" (García Márquez, 2014: 17). The character of Dominica reveals the birth of a new religious form that combines and completes the beliefs found in the New World. Dominga is described as personifying syncretism between Caribbean-born religions as a result of her act of becoming "Catholic without renouncing her Yoruban belief, and she practiced both religions at the same time, and at random" (García Márquez, 2014: 17).

> "Dominga de Adviento suckled her, baptized her in Christ and consecrated her Olokun, a Yoruban deity. […] Left in the slave yard, Sierva Maria learned to dance before she could speak, learned three African languages at the same time, learned to drink rooster's blood before breakfast and to glide past Christian unseen and unheard, like an incorporeal being. Dominga de Adviento surrounded her with a procession of black slaves, mixed-race maids, Indian women, who bathed her in water, purified her with Yemaya's verbena and cared for her hair like a bush of roses. (García Márquez, 2014: 48-49)

Between the master and the slaves, the relationships are woven into each other. If in the case of Dominga and the girl the maternal candor predominates, in the opposite plan, the relationship between Bernarda and her slave, Judas, completely reverses the pre-established hierarchical order. Not only the power relations but also the boundaries of the relations between the ethnic groups become unclear. Bernarda decides to choose a boyfriend, a behavior, in fact, atypical for the social class she belongs to. To this first violation is added that of social class and ethnicity. Judas becomes the lover of Bernarda, a situation that changes the classical order in which black women were subjected to abuses by their masters. Under this conduct, the male character gains a reaffirmation of his power and the order he occupies in the social system, instead of limiting his rights, he gives him more freedom.

Beyond the connection that begins between the two social classes, we must not lose sight of the fact that the nature of this ethnic discourse present in the novel *Of Love*



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*and Other Demons* occurs against the background of the process of colonization undertaken by Spaniards in South America. The entire path taken by the European population in the archaic environment of the New World comes as a result of the desire to implement the values of Catholicism and to give the indigenous peoples a new vision of the religious system. There are two separate religious traditions among the characters. These two very distinct religious traditions are both convergent and antithetical in their visions of the divine nature. The Spanish Inquisition defines its mission as an ecclesiastical tribunal that oversees the implementation and promotion of the values imposed by Catholicism. Forcing automatically the local population to submit and deliberately accept the new religious trajectories provokes a visible revolt and generates multiple forms of conflict. The powerful racist touches implemented by the courts of the Catholic Church lead to the desire to eliminate everything related to racial impurity. Although after the conquest of the territories by the Spaniards much of the native population takes over the customs of the new rulers, in the strict vision of the clergy, the supreme form of purity will never be the prerogative of the New World which requires a maintenance of the original hierarchical system, between Europeans and South Americans. The ideological differences are highlighted in the conversation between Cayetano Delaura and the abbess of Santa Clara Monastery, Josefa Miranda. And if Delaura's speech marks the opening in terms of interpretation and implementation of religious norms, the abbess's chaste monologue induces the rigors of the inquisitive spirit, intolerance, and non-acceptance of the integration of new visions about the divine sphere. The lack of tolerance and the rigid customs in which the Catholic Church is embedded are best illustrated by the sequences in which the Sierva María is subjected to exorcism rituals and living conditions, seen as penance for her demonic acts. The whole picture of the child subjected to a procession marked by any lack of candour and understanding denotes an annihilation of the values of love and self-help promoted by Christian dogma. The whole description given by the narrator induces a false attempt to free the so-called possessed, and implies, rather, a certain form of ill-treatment: "It was the ritual of a death row inmate. They forced her to the gutter in the yard, washed her, threw buckets of water over her, tore off her beads, and put the barbarian shirt of heretics on her. A nun in charge of the garden cuts her hair to the nape of her neck" (García Márquez, 2014: 147).

Apart from Cayetano Delaura, the only clergyman who shows tolerance to the status of the local populations turns out to be the priest named Tomas de Aquino de Narváez. Born of a Spanish father and a mixed-race maid, he feels the almost total lack of tolerance exercised by the Catholic clergy. His inclination towards the world of those who come from the colonies or the native population allows him a high degree of relationship with the character Sierva María. Tomas's meeting with the twelve-year-old marks their orientation towards the symbolic line of religion known to the girl when she receives her bead: "[Sierva María] listed and described them in African languages: red and white is for love and blood of Changó, red and black, that of the life and death of Elegguá, blue and piercing like water are the seven beads of Yemayá." (García Márquez, 2014: 140). In this limited system, which respects the rules and does not discount the imposed names, there are figures of some promoters who know how to induce the new religions beyond the brutal forms of implementation.

In the novel, the consciousness of each character is completed by the narrator's interventions and by the angles from which the other characters see the narrative development. Outlining an area that is at the intersection of religious norms imposed by



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Catholicism and the archaic culture of blacks in the colonies, the area of the universe presented in the novel *Of Love and Other Demons* is a combination of the Roman Catholic Church as a specific element of the Spanish culture, with the Yoruba religion, represented by Oshún, the symbol of female beauty, eroticism and rebirth which have syncretized into a single system of beliefs, unique to the Caribbean area.

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