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Embodying Bodies in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019)

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ABSTRACT: The 2019 novel *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo tackles concerns prevalent in contemporary society. Because the body is such an elemental factor in the novel, as it has become in different realms of life, the bodies of its twelve characters serve as a canvas through which various class, gender, ethnical, sexual, and religious paradigms are presented and questioned. This article intends to explore, through an intersectional lens, the experiences lived by some of these womxn which are reflected, conditioned and filtered through their bodies. It focuses on the role of the body as both a vessel for expression and/or oppression of identity, separately, having in mind that these womxn are (second-generation) immigrants of differing ages and socio-economic backgrounds.

KEYWORDS: Body, Intersectionality, Feminism, Otherness, Identity, Patriarchy, Representation

RESUMO: O romance *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) de Bernardine Evaristo aborda preocupações prevalentes na sociedade contemporânea. Visto que o corpo é um elemento essencial no romance, tal como se tem vindo a tornar em vários campos da vida, os corpos das suas doze personagens servem como uma tela sobre a qual diversos paradigmas de classe, género, etnia, sexo e religião são apresentados e questionados. Este artigo pretende explorar, por meio de uma perspetiva interseccional, as experiências vividas por algumas destas pessoas, que são refletidas, condicionadas e filtradas através dos seus corpos. O artigo foca-se no papel do corpo tanto como um veículo de expressão como um veículo de opressão de identidade, separadamente, tendo em conta que estas mulheres são imigrantes (de segunda geração) de diferentes idades e grupos socioeconómicos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Corpo, Interseccionalidade, Feminismo, Alteridade, Identidade, Patriarcado, Representação



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Perceptions of bodies are altered with time, as historical influences continually shape them. The body has long ago left the realm of biology to become a cultural expression, something that immediately exposes a socio-cultural identitary construct (Demello 2014, 5). Thus, following a social constructionist approach to the body, qualities like beauty, weight, sexuality and ethnicity are molded by the historical, societal, and cultural context (*idem*, 7). Women, in particular, suffer from these social constructs, since they are persistently objectified by society, as they are subjected to constant scrutiny from the male gaze (Conboy 1997, 54).

Contemporary culture, for instance, is obsessed with the body. It has become the center of contemporary feminist theory, offering a material *locus* for the critique of Western culture (*idem*, 55). Night television programs and media in general are focused on the body, emphasizing its performance and appearance. Continuously, various media sources convey messages about how bodies ought to behave and present themselves, whether by dictating clothing choices, ideal weight, leisure activities, and even their aging process, which tend to influence their audiences (Egbert 2012, 411). One can easily reflect on reality shows, which, by exploring the superfluous depiction of the body, especially the female body, perpetuate stereotypes¹ and narratives about how women should behave regarding their body. This is the case of shows such as *Keeping up with the Kardashians* (2007-2021) where the protagonists are constantly seen eating salads, exercising or trying on expensive clothes; or dating programs like *Too Hot to Handle* (2020-) in which physical appearance and attraction are the core of the show and its interpersonal connection. While many women dislike, or even attempt to challenge these unrealistic standards of beauty, many more exploit them to their own advantage, what sociologists call “patriarchal bargain” (Demello 2014, 122).

The patriarchy is the strongest oppressive force against all women (Walby 1991, 20). Being defined as institutionalized sexism (hooks 2018, 39) or as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate and exploit women (Walby 1991, 20), it is deeply connected with the capitalist system which supports colonial and hierarchical structures (hooks 2018, 185, 189), thus exercising colonization upon the female body, the first Other² it encounters. Judith Butler, in her 1990 groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, identifies the female body as an Other by arguing that the hierarchical power of culture over nature allows the first to “Otherize” the latter

by appropriating it limitlessly and imposing meaning onto it (2006, 50). This correlates to a misogynistic world in the sense that "reason and mind are associated with masculinity and agency, while the body and nature are considered to be the mute facticity of the feminine, awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject" (*ibidem*). It is only natural, then, that black women's body suffers not only from the sexist and class oppression that white women's do,³ but also from a racist one (hooks 2018, 24), establishing it as a victim of triple-colonization.

It is in this sense that Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) perfectly reflects on this issue by portraying twelve womxn⁴ of different skin-colors, mostly black⁵ womxn, as unique mirrors of individual experiences, while keeping the intersectional lens that is examining how power relations, such as gender, ethnicity and class, are intertwined and dependent on one another (Collins and Bilge 2016, 28). Their bodies are depicted not as a stereotypical representation of a whole ethnic community, but instead defy the conception of the Other, turning it into the Self of each narrative told. The body of the text mirrors this singularity for its irregular structure defies normativity in form – there is no usage of capital letters, save for names and specific instances, there are no full-stops apart from the endings of individual chapters, and the text is not justified. A connection can be drawn between this body, a curvilinear body transformed with each turn of a page, and the womxn's bodies, having each womxn their own chapter, molded by their individual experiences.

Throughout this work, body will refer not only to a physical object, but also to a vehicle through which people articulate all their identifications of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion (Richardson and Locks 2014, ix). Having all these elements in mind, it is fairly interesting to consider in what way these womxn's bodies mirror their identity. Considering the intergenerational aspect of this novel, a proper way to analyze this matter is by exploring how the body of different generations manifests itself in relation to the outer world and to themselves as a vessel for the expression of identity or its repression. Therefore, this essay will be divided into these two main branches of analysis, exploring some of these womxn's stories.

The body is the stage that defines these twelve womxn and separates them from one another. Thus, paradoxically, the body is both their confinement and the key to freedom, since it serves as the root of prejudice, as mentioned before, but also as the

means through which they can express their individuality and/or rebel against the societal oppression imposed upon it, claiming their space and identity. This is the case of Amma, a single mother and middle-aged woman who works on alternative theater. She liberates herself from the stereotypes associated with her body, in particular with her skin color, when she boycotts her acting career, and her wish to succeed in this field, in order to stay truthful to herself and to refuse a direct act of racism and sexism. When she goes to an audition for a play about emancipation, Amma is told that “with African hips and thighs”, she is “perfect slave girl material” (Evaristo 6). On the one hand, by going against this opportunity, she is going against the instrumentalization of her body. She is also departing from the remnants of the Empire that prevail in England, when she refuses to act as a slave. According to Nripendra Kishore Mishra and Tulika Tripathi, “Women's agency is an important constituent of women's empowerment . . . being operative when it results in a fundamental shift in perceptions, . . . so that women are able to define self-interest and choice, and consider themselves as not only able, but entitled to make choices” (2011, 59). However, as stated by Pramod K. Nayar:

Within postcolonial studies . . . individual under colonialism has been for so long humiliated, rejected and marginalized that s/he loses all faith in her/his abilities to carry forth a plan of action or make decisions. Institutionalized marginalization, in the form of racism for example, denies the social and political structures in which an individual can assert choices or make decisions. (2015a, 5).

Amma recognizes that the director's words come from a place of prejudice, especially considering she is a daughter of immigrants and not an immigrant herself. Therefore, by refusing this role as Other and assuming her blackness as hers and hers only, Amma is, then, refusing to have her agency robbed from her. On the other hand, her refusal of this acting part is also a refusal of the fetishization, that is, the practice of objectification through (sexual) fragmentation (Hall *et al.* 2013, 256), of her body, seen as “more sexual, erotic, and exotic” simply by being black (Demello 2014, 106).

Bummi, one of the older womxn in this novel, is another example of body liberation as she defies the idea of an aged body as being a sexually dead one – she already has had kids and her husband died. In her essay “The Double Standard of Aging”, Susan Sontag argues that “Women become sexually ineligible much earlier than men do . . . Thus, for

most women, aging means a humiliating process of gradual sexual disqualification” (1972, 32). In a society where beauty is deeply connected to youth, and youth is connected to sensuality and fertility (Demello 2014, 46), being older equals having passed an expiration date, almost as physical bodies that wander around with no purpose any longer. Bummi deconstructs this idea surrounding her age and body by starting an intimate relationship with a woman and allowing herself to rekindle her sexual desires: “Bummi followed her into the room as if in a trance, just as she could help but allow Omofe to explore her relaxed and warm bathed body . . . Omofe felt like home to Bummi and her expert activities culminated in the most intense pleasure” (Evaristo 179). It is this denial of heteronormativity,⁶ of accepting the way that the world sees her and sees her body, that allows her to discover a side of her that has always been hidden, that allows her to rediscover her identity.

A similar liberation is seen in the case of Winsome, a woman in her 70s. She reaches the peak of her sexuality in this stage of her life when she starts having an affair with her son-in-law, Lennox. This sexual liberation is reflected on the daring and evocative descriptions of their exciting encounters: “who was this woman who kept up with this young man who exploded multiple times inside her and because he was virile and could go on forever and so could she until they died from exhaustion because she was completely out of her mind and inside her body?” (Evaristo 272-273). In contrast, her relationship with her husband, Clovis, to whom her body has always belonged, is a stable and comfortable one. This stability and comfort, however, are associated with dullness and lack of sexual fulfillment, as it can be deduced from the following passage: “I was grateful to having him to support and steer me, even though he wasn’t particularly good-looking or with a dashing personality . . . it was easier to dream than it was to make the dream come true” (258). This is in direct opposition to the relationship she has with Lennox: “he . . . kissed her the way Clovis never did because when they first met he’d said full-on kissing was unhygienic” (272). In a sense, she allows herself the exploration of her sexuality, something stifled until then and only mobilized to correspond to the social roles expected of women’s bodies.

As a transgenerational narrative, these acts of transgression towards the norm can also be viewed in the younger womxn of this novel. They also use their bodies in an attempt to oppose cultural hegemony, in this case by modifying its image as an act of insurgence (Richardson and Locks 2014, 78). Even though these womxn are trapped by the color of

their skin, they find ways of freeing themselves through other elements of their bodies. In Morgan's case, a young adult that at the beginning of the chapter goes by Megan, there is an active distancing from gender and sexuality norms. Morgan changes their pronouns, shaves their head, tattoos their body to fight against the hetero-cis-normative system ("except it felt wrong, even at a young age something in her realized that her prettiness was supposed to make her compliant, and when she wasn't, when she rebelled, she was letting down all those invested in her being adorable"⁷; Evaristo 308), but also stays truthful to themselves as the body becomes a mirror to their own true identity. To modify one's body means to reclaim control over it, to reclaim what was stolen by the patriarchal and colonial structures (Richardson and Locks 2014, 78). Hence, Morgan weaponizes their body against the oppressor, transforming what could have been their prison into a stronghold. When they shave their hair, for example, they cut the archetypal of femininity, beauty and sexuality,⁸ rendering them unapproachable and untouchable (Morris 2004, 14). The same happens when they change their clothing style and tattoo their arm, treating the body as a blank canvas over which they have full control and through which they can express themselves. They are unapologetically themselves even if it means going against everything they know.

Yazz's relationship with her hair is not too dissimilar from that of Morgan's, meaning that it represents, for both these individuals, a source of empowerment. However, while Morgan sees it as an element associated with social constructs, Yazz sees it as the representation of who she is, something that perfectly encapsulates her identity and does not restrain it. Her hair is described as "amazingly wild, energetic, strong and voluminous afro" (Evaristo 41), and she appears to embrace the stereotype associated with her black body and displays it with pride.

Even though this work shows this possibility of liberation through the female body, the body is also the thing that condemns them from the start, since ethnic characteristics are inscribed on the actual body; it is essentially connected to their skin color. In Yazz's story, throughout her journey at university, it is evident that she has this perception of herself as a free woman who is accepting and proud of her history, and this is shown through her hair and body. Nonetheless, this mentality has never gone unquestioned and her agency is in reality just an illusion, for this hair she is so proud of is tied back in the same sentence, ". . . because people sitting behind her in venues complain they can't see

the stage” (Evaristo 41). Yazz does not see this statement as a racist micro-aggression, however, this can already be perceived as her trying to diminish these issues for the sake of her survival in a society that will always have internalized racism, manifested in the smallest of actions. This is made even more obvious in stories such as Shirley’s, when “. . . women clutch their bags nervously when they pass her in the street or sit next to them on the bus . . . Shirley tries not to succumb to the paranoia that comes from thinking every negative reaction is due to her skin colour” (224). Moments such as these prove the structural racism that the white privileged people do not even consciously inflict upon these womxn and their bodies.

Similarly to Yazz’s, Bummi’s liberation is prone to end, when the moral compass is influenced by the external, heteronormative society. As aforementioned, she discovers her sexuality and that she might be attracted to other women, but after some time she starts questioning her actions and internalizing the heteronormative discourse, self-inflicting prejudice upon herself. She terminates the relationship with Omofe in favor of one with a man, even though she still thinks about Omofe affectionately (Evaristo 187). More so, in a previous point in the story, she is forced to sell her body to a pastor in order for him to give her a loan to start her private cleaning company, since after her husband’s death, this is the only way that she can find to survive financially. It is only through the objectification of her body that she would be able to achieve some form of emancipation, even though her body here is turned against her to degrade, threaten and constrain her.

The same can be said about Bummi’s daughter, Carole, a married, successful banker. Notwithstanding the fact that her parents immigrated to England to be able to provide her with a better life, Carole experiences a similar situation to her mother’s when she is raped.⁹ Thinking back to Amma’s story, and on how these black womxn are put in positions of inferiority, rape is compounded by the legacy of racist and controlling images of women as overly sexual, intrinsically connected with colonialism, and the legitimization of rape of black women by slave owners (Collins 2000, 69). It is due to this deeply rooted mentality that Carole loses control over her body at the age of thirteen and a half, and this elimination of her agency leads to a traumatized mind that desperately tries to separate itself from a traumatized body, as if it no longer belongs to her and her to it (Herman 1997, 58). This could explain why, from this moment on in her narrative, Carole appears to be in a constant search for a new identity in order to annihilate the one that was violated that

night, even considering taking her own life, that is, killing her impurified body. It may also be perceived as an attempt to protect herself by rejecting the physical characteristics that might have led to her being raped. In itself, her behavior is a proof that patriarchy runs deep even in those most affected by it as Carole's first instinct is to blame and immerse herself in guilt and shame in the aftermath of the sexual abuse: "Carole never told a soul definitely not mama who tell her off for lying or LaTisha and the others because everyone said it was Sheryl's fault for wearing slutty clothes when it happened to her . . . was it Carole's fault? she suspected it was . . ." (Evaristo 127). This reaction is explained by Prachi Bhuptani and Terri Messman-Moore, who claim that rape is "a highly stigmatized experience", since, unlike with any other groups of trauma, "victims are blamed for their ordeal" (2019, 309).

However, it perhaps also reveals the internalized racism and the colonial structures still prevalent in Britain, because when Carole decides to retain control over her body again, she starts assimilating¹⁰ into everything but her parents' culture, the one with which she was educated. Here it could even be applied the term *mimicry*¹¹ to describe Carole's behavior – she stops eating with her hands and using idiomatic expressions of her African heritage. The same changes can be seen in her body. For instance, "she ditched the weaves sewn into her scalp for months at a time . . . she then had her tight curls straightened, Marcus said he preferred her natural hair, she told him she'd never get a job if she did that" (Evaristo 137), meaning here that the hair is not a symbol of freedom, but of forced assimilation, as the hair remains a domain where beauty and acceptability are heavily influenced by ethnical distinctions: this bias favors long, sleek, and smooth hair as the epitome of beauty and femininity, excluding individuals with naturally curly or kinky hair from this conventional standard (Morris 2004, 17-18). Carole also pursues other people's hobbies, namely that of doing fitness exercise, blood measuring, among other things that not only bring her closer to the society she wants to integrate, but also results in a materialization of the stereotypical Western beautification of the body. In the passage

Freddy arranged for Bummi to meet his parents in a London restaurant, which she was looking forward to

except he warned her that although they'd warmed to the idea of Carole, once they saw how classy, well-spoken and successful she was (most importantly for his mother, how slim and pretty, too) (Evaristo 186)

Carole's body color is ignored in favor of her beauty attributes which progressively resemble those of a white woman's idealization. This is why she is accepted into social spaces that she would not have been otherwise, such as her fiancée's white, British, upper-class family. It is also through the clothes she wears that she is able to better blend in with these groups and eventually succeed in her career as a respectable banker. The passage "Carole came in before going to work looking all *English*, as usual, her navy-blue raincoat tightly to show off her reduced waist, her hair slicked back into a bun, pearls around her neck" (Evaristo 157) reunites the aforementioned ideas, showcasing this construction of her body as a new identity.

Irrespective of this attempt to fit in, the idea previously mentioned returns: oppression always sneaks up even on those who work hard to deny it. As a black woman working in the investment sector, Carole experiences great hostility, since even with her classy style and elegant personality, her clients cannot hide their shock when she introduces herself and excels at her job. Not only do people not expect her to be an investment banker, they also mistake her for the waiter in meetings (Evaristo 117). Similarly, Shirley's workplace exercises discrimination upon her when other teachers dismiss her opinion and/or judge Shirley as a whole because of her blackness: ". . . when Shirley and the other women try to interject, their less assertive voices struggle to be heard, are cut off by the alphas before they've even finished making their points" (225). Both Carole and Shirley, then, are perceived as Others in their workplaces, because, in the first place, they are women occupying positions that used to be attributed to men and, in the second place, their body puts them immediately in a subaltern¹² position as the vicious cycles of societal oppression often locate black women in non-qualified jobs (Bell 1990, 461).

Additionally, Shirley's story offers the perspective that the mere fact of being a woman does not automatically align with embracing feminism in the broadest sense of the term (hooks 2018, 256). The same happens to Penelope, a white teacher and colleague of Shirley's. In her chapter, one notices that her narrative reveals her enduring status as a victim subjected to double colonization throughout her lifetime, illustrated by the following passage: "she raised the issue of returning to her job as a teacher with him . . . he replied that it was impractical to have two masters: a boss at work and a husband"



(Evaristo 287). Despite grappling with the weight of this, through adherence to stereotypes and stigmas associated with black skin, Penelope paradoxically exercises a form of colonization on Shirley, akin to the historical oppression imposed by men upon her, thereby perpetuating the colonial and patriarchal discourse:

Penelope

is the only woman to speak up at staff meetings . . .

whose superior voice slices through the booming alpha-male teachers . . .

Shirley abhors the fact that they're all pathetically resigned to letting the men, and Penelope make decisions for the rest of them . . .

Shirley decides it's time to step up and speak out . . .

Penelope doesn't disappoint, I, for one, am not a social worker, she replies in a tone that affects great weariness at Shirley's obvious naiveté and dim-wittedness, and I really think more than two terms on the job before you challenge someone with fifteen years' experience to a duel

Someone who actually knows what she's talking about (Evaristo 225-227)

Hence, it is not solely racism that becomes ingrained in women's thoughts, as previously mentioned, but also sexism through the adoption of patriarchal principles; these notions aligning together when observed through an intersectional perspective.

LaTisha's story is an example of how this mindset shapes black women's experiences and how they use their bodies. On different moments of her narrative, LaTisha has sexual intercourse with three different men with no condom. In these instances, sex is something that she does not see necessarily as hers but is inherently connected with the man she has it with. There is an everlasting hope or ingenuity that men are not objectifying, sexualizing or prostituting her, even though this is the case in the three occasions: "she couldn't believe her luck and what with his bedroom eyes making her feel sexy and the drink making her feel romantic, she gave it up without protection in the back of his car in an empty parking lot that very evening" (Evaristo 208). The three times she became pregnant and was left on her own to take care of the children. In this case, her body is used as an expression not of rebellion against the system, but of this inherently patriarchal mindset that is present in women, so much so that it replaces all their sense of self-esteem and self-care. This is even more apparent when considering the stereotypical images of

black women's bodies as ready sexual objects for men's use; already degraded and constantly available (Ptacek 2023, 44).

In *Girl, Woman, Other*, womxn's bodies are, thus, not a clear expression of their identity, of their true selves. Instead, their bodies serve as a space through which both inner and outer forces battle each other, serving, then, as a *locus* of conflict, imposed conflict even when it is self-conflict. On the one hand, there is a system of stigmatized values associated with the body and the way it is perceived through a capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal society that surrounds and suffocates these womxn, turning them into racialized and politicized bodies. On the other hand, there is still a search for identity within the borders of each womxn's body as a form of resistance to the systemic structures aforementioned. It can be said that they struggle as their identities become nothing more than resistance and their bodies mirror this battle between who they feel they are and who they ought to be. For example, returning to Bummi's story, she indulges herself in this other side of her sexuality only to force herself back to her previous role as an obedient partner to a man; or Carole who molds her appearance in conformity to the norm in order to fit in, even though by doing this she is forced to reject familial ideals. What is more striking is that these womxn fall into the trap of self-erasure, in a way, as if it is something natural, because this enemy is a silent one. The Self builds an identity in opposition to the Other for these womxn react to their own Alterity and it is in this space that they find themselves. Obviously, every single aspect of these womxn's lives constitutes their story and not only the ones discussed. It is the contact between every little aspect of these womxn's lives that shapes them in different ways. The fact that these womxn are so similar, yet so singular, is the core of Evaristo's novel. These womxn are not meant to be the archetypes of their ethnicity; these womxn are not meant to be the archetypes of their gender; these womxn are not meant to be the archetypes of their class, because their bodies are multilayered, unique and complex.

END NOTES

¹ This article will follow Stuart Hall's definition of stereotype: "Stereotyping, in other words, is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is 'Other', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', Us and Them. It facilitates the 'binding' or bonding together of all of Us who are 'normal' into one 'imagined community'; and it sends into symbolic exile all of Them" (2013, 248).

² "Alterity [or 'Otherness'] is what enables us to distinguish ourselves from the world, to see the world as outside us and our consciousness. Within postcolonial studies the term is deployed to convey the sense of a radical racial-cultural otherness and the *processes* through which this 'otherness' is constructed." (Nayar 2015b, 6-8).

³ Drawing on Gayatri Spivak, Maria Teresa Pinto Coelho reflects on the concept of "dupla colonização feminina", concluding that women are both subject of oppression in the domestic sphere and in the public one (2005, 21).

⁴ The word "women" is changed to "womxn" due to the existence of a non-binary character in the novel, Morgan. This term will be used to refer to the characters of the work whenever this one is included.

⁵ "In Britain the term 'Black' is used to designate a broad spectrum of people including Asians, Africans, Caribbeans, Latin Americans, and Arabs" (Ray 1997, 51).

⁶ According to Robinson, "Heteronormativity is a hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality" (2016, 1). Additionally, Warner purposes an exercise of imagining a world where heterosexuality is not the norm stating, however, that "People are constantly encouraged to believe that heterosexual desire, dating, marriage, reproduction, childrearing, and home life are not only valuable to themselves, but the bedrock on which every other value in the world rests. Heterosexual desire and romance are thought to be the very core of humanity" (2000, 47).

⁷ At this point in the novel, Morgan still uses she/her pronouns.

⁸ According to Morris, "For men, this shaved look has nearly always been unappetizing and . . . has had little or no sex appeal, being a complete denial of all that is sensual about long female hair" (2004, 16).

⁹ According to Ptacek, "Rape is often related with class" (2023, 84) and ". . . poor and working-class women reporting more sexual abuse as children, pornography, attacks on the sexual parts of their bodies, and forced sex" (*idem*, 99).

¹⁰ Even though this expression can be used in a current discourse, in a Postcolonial context of analysis, to be assimilated or “*assimilado* . . . indicates a colonial policy that consciously determined to make the colonized subject assimilate into the European country/culture” (Nayar 2015c, 15).

¹¹ In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha claims that *Mimicry* “is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (2004, 120-121). As Teresa Pereira further explains: “Mediante o recurso ao termo *mimicry*, Bhabha descreveu a reconstrução dos nativos à semelhança dos europeus, através da assimilação da religião, da educação, da literatura e de práticas culturais europeias. Os nativos pretendiam aumentar o seu grau de parecimento aos europeus, anglicizando-se ou europeizando-se” (2023, s/p).

¹² According to Nayar, “Within postcolonialism’s reading of colonial histories of South Asia, Africa and South America, the subaltern might be defined as the racial, cultural, gendered and ethnic subordinate of the white colonial, the product of colonial hegemonic practices and discourses. Postcolonialism’s interest in post-independent nations’ subalterns focuses on structures of power . . . and forms of discourse . . . that exclude the experiences, life stories, belief systems and knowledge production of particular groups of people . . . from the discourse of the nation” (2015d, 143). It can be added to this definition that “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak 1988, 287).

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