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IN THE KINGDOM OF ASUNCIÓN, TRUKÁ REIGNS: LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

The present manuscript seeks to analyze the appropriation of the writing of the book “In the Kingdom of Assunção, Truká reigns” produced by the Indigenous Truká teachers in Pernambuco. The work is guided by the social and ethnographic perspective of literacy process and focuses as an object of study the appropriation of the writing of the book, the collective authorship of the teachers and the cultural hybridism, in light of the reviews of Canclini. The research reported here is part of the life experience of the teachers who recorded, for the first time, the version of the history of the Truká people, in search of the strengthening of their Indigenous identity. The analysis takes into account the experiences fomented in the writings, illustrations, and researches that compose this paper as a representation of local culture redesigned to understand the struggle for the identity affirmation of that Indigenous Community that means to be political and culturally engaging and resistant to the policy of denial.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a famous saying, “Who tells a tale adds a tail.” Thus, we begin by inquiring whether the stories told by the Indigenous teachers of the Truká Community, in the city of Cabrobó-PE, are part of the fanciful-invention of traditions, since, according to Hobsbawm and Ranger (2008, p. 9), individual values and norms of behavior are inculcated through repetition, and in this way, there is an automatic continuity in relation to the past. This continuity has been frustrated several times due to the attempts to silence the Indigenous people, since a few of us respect their customs, beliefs, modes of production, or even the way of life of those people (BAHKTIN, 2002). In the narrative of the book “In the Kingdom of Assunção, Truká Reigns” (SANTOS, 2007), conceived and produced by the teachers of the Indigenous Community, we perceive the attempt to show who they are and what they are recognized for throughout their history. These women do not abandon the search for social changes that favor

them or despise the “old traditions”, although they are not closed linked to new standards or adaptations of social reality. The teachers use literacy practices to present their historical records based mainly on the “gathering of oral histories guarded by wise men and women of the Kingdom of Assunção” using as Street says (2010), other ways of reaching the meaning. They retain old customs and old models to achieve new purposes in their festivals and rituals. This praxis approaches the ideas developed by Street (2010, p. 33-53) from his paper “The New studies on Literacy: History and Perspectives” in which he presents ideas and concepts related to the comprehension of literacy processes – in the plural – using cultural contexts. The manuscript also presents multiple identities of the Truká Indians, from the perspective of the Indigenous teachers, as well as concerning the way they deal with hybrid cultures in the strengthening of the Community, in accordance with Canclini (2008).

Literacy practices in the making of truká teachers

In the perspective of the meaning of literacy concerning the school practices of Indigenous teachers for the ethnic affirmation Truká, it becomes relevant to have the

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comprehension of literacy practices – in the plural – through cultural contexts. We perceive that different ways of representing uses and meanings of reading and writing in the various sociocultural contexts and that, from the ethnographic perspectives, the notion of literacy practices enables us to make a reflection that necessarily holds implications for education policies and therefore is not an approach that simply describes events and seeks regularities (STREET, 2010, p. 40). Accordingly, we understand that the practices and the uses of reading are part of the daily life of our society, so we present the book “In the Kingdom of Assunção, Truká Reigns”, the (re)affirmation that represents an essential contribution to the confirmation of identity of those people; long ago they were out and denied the right to be different. Regularly, the Indians, especially those in the northeast, according to Oliveira (2014) were, and are evicted from their language, their beliefs, their traditions, their memories, and even their social organization. Therefore, we advocate the importance of the technical-scientific or artistic-cultural production of traditional peoples, since:

Literacy practices are constitutive of identity and personhood, and that whatever forms of reading and writing we learn and use they are associated with specific social characters and expectations about models of behavior and roles to play (STREET, 2007, p. 466).

We also emphasize that the model of literacy called by Street (2007, p. 467) of ideological literacy, which is not “*only a cultural model, although it is this, but ideological because there is power in these ideas, [...] powerful models for the consequences they entail.*” For this reason, we perceive from these women’s speeches, in the perspective of record history and show the importance of the environment in their identity marks in their mark of identity, the recognition of the Truká people as main characters. Furthermore, we clearly see throughout the whole narrative a sequence of literacy practices of the Truká people, describing the Cabrobó City Fair, the work of Indigenous health agents, craftsmen and artisans, the work of teachers, as well as researchers of their history, of the people who cook lunch in the schools of the community, amongst others. As Street says, there is many literacy practices going on.

The book “In the Kingdom of Assunção, Truká Reigns” presents in its eight chapters the result of the appropriation of writing by Indigenous teachers and members of that community. This work was carried out with the support of the Luiz Freire Culture Center; Organization of the Truká Indigenous Teachers (OPIT), Organization of Indigenous Teachers of Pernambuco; Federal University of Minas Gerais – UFMG in the year 2007. The Truká women leave valuable information in the previously mentioned book, and from its initial pages it is pointed out how cultural hybridism is a constant in the community. In the confrontation between these “white” and “non-white” crops, there is a part overlapping over the other, from the loss of the land of the natives until the alteration of the name of that people, with conventional questions of a dominant group, to the detriment of the studies of Canclini (2008). When they justify the spelling of the name Truká, they attribute the origin of the name Truká to the Charms of Light (Ancestors), more precisely to a dream of the elder Acilon Ciriaco who said he heard the quote: Tuxi, Tuxá, Tumbalalá, Turká Nation. Yet, in addition to people changing its letters, the government officials have written the way they

wanted to. Thus, in a graphocentric society just like ours, Turká soon became Truká. The story of life, colonization, endurance and the struggle of the Truká people is now known through the account of these people. The question now come with the *between-place*, which according to Bhabha (2003, p. 20), provides the ground for elaboration of strategies of subjectivation – singular and collective – that jump to new signs of identity and innovative posts of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining its own idea of society. Undeniably, the Truká people have undergone various European cultural influences, although the group of women is responsible for transmitting to the youngest elements of the culture of the natives that they cannot forget, such as language, religion, habits and customs. Religious influence is the first element used by Indigenous women to tell the beginning of the history of their people. At the time, it emerges as a strong brand of cultural hybridism, the fusion of the Indigenous sacred with the sacred of the non-Indian. It is explicit the involvement of a God with the first Indian “the old Cá” who lived in the desert with Saint Peter (Saint of the Catholic Church) and with the Jurema-tree of sciences for them Indigenous (SANTOS et al., 2016; SANTOS et al., 2018).

“When God created the world, He had this man by name of Old Cá. He was an Indian who lived in the desert. God used to walk with Saint Peter and rest under a Jurema-tree”. Organization of Truká Teachers – (OPIT, 2007, p. 14).

In this way, the cultural hybridism of builders and users, as cited by Canclini (2008, p. 304), entwine in the same street styles of various eras. Moreover, in several passages of the narrative, this intersection is present. Thus, even having Our Lady of the Angels as the patron saint of the Isle Assunção and enjoy having fun at the feast of St. John, the Truká community, does not give up the Toré, which is a sacred ritual for those people, as well as the “Mesa or Particular”, a ceremony restricted to its members. For them, it is in the Toré that they receive some orientation from the Enchanted (Ancestors), and drink the Jurema – a drink that purifies and gives knowledge through the path of the Truth. Then, the teachers begin to build their otherness from a subaltern place, the colonizer’s glance on the Indigenous people. Thus, we resume the interactionist studies of Bakhtin (2002) to define otherness because of how we see the other and how the other sees us. Thus, our discursive practices depend on and reveal this social relationship. This is the way we are constructing a difference that we will explain throughout the subsequent sections of this paper.

A brief analysis of the identity of women, indians, teachers, writers

Understanding tradition as a verbally testimony transmitted from one generation to the other, the Indigenous teachers of the Truká Community decided to listen to their elders, aiming to record their experiences. Now with a cultural empowerment of these warriors who did not bow to the desires of the State and the Church that always insisted in treating them as subordinates, non-civilized, and undomesticated. Nowadays, the teachers begin to build up a new concept of otherness, with the authority of whom lived all oppression of the dominant classes and recognize the speech not only as a mean of daily communication, but also as a mean of preservation of their ancestors’ wisdom, venerated in what they call key-utterance: the oral tradition according to Vansina (1992).

The book "In the Kingdom of Assunção Truká Reigns" is the result of the appropriation of writing by Indigenous teachers and members of the Community in an attempt to promote the word, as Vansina says (1992), because, almost everywhere, the word has mysterious power and creates things. Thus, the history of life, colonization, resistance and struggle of the Truká people are told now using the speech of those people. This "*in-between-place*", according to Bhabha (2003, p. 20), provides the ground to elaborate strategies of subjectivation – singular and collective – to lead off new signs of identity and innovative posts of collaboration and challenge within the act of defining the appropriate sense of society. It is essential to take in consideration that the whole history recorded and rescued by the Truká teachers now come to us through written accounts, a result of a delicate process of listening. After all, how many oral narratives of the Community evidencing cultures, religion, struggles, and resistances did these Indians hear throughout this trajectory?

From different spaces, it emerges stories built by the hands until recently "invisible" like those of these teachers. In the book, a woman identity placed as a leading character at home, in the land, in the ritual, and mainly at the struggle for their people, from the old ones to the youngest of the new generations. According to the narrative, these young people go far beyond, with more active participation and increasingly relevant roles.

The experiences of older warriors tell us about their struggles: women, always farmers, housewives, educators, health agents, women about to be doctors, women about to be mothers, young and old, who are beautiful as the Sao Francisco river, who will be fighters and always Truká women (...). Organization of Truká Teachers (OPIT, 2007, p. 12).

The struggle of these women has the size of their dreams and they did not stop in the records that give birth to the book published in 2007. They managed to modify the school curriculum, the school itself and the educational material. Moreover, the dreams go beyond that: the Indian people want to be treated by Indian doctors in the Community they live. It is noteworthy that throughout cultural studies, stories like the ones about the Truká women are not lost at all. From the marginality, they resist cultural erasure, they fight for the recognition of their identity, appropriating the language of the dominant classes to benefit the Indigenous Community, documenting and creating archives of an Indian memory that cannot be annulled or evicted as happened before.

"Truká identity is born and built in this territory. It is rediscovered and asserted in the history told by the elders. Our character is dynamic and feeds on the fight for the land, in the Toré, at the bath on the river, in the environment. Being Truká is all this, and the school has to strengthen it" (Idem, 103).

The narrative brings an approach on the relationship between the environment and the identity of the Truká classicizing the São Francisco River (Opará, in their native language) as the main element of this identity relationship.

He is like the blood that runs through our veins. When he is weak, we become weak too, but when he is full of life,

we feel strong! With this, our identity is strengthened (Idem, p. 75).

In relation to their children, the dedication of the Truká people is also addressed to them in the struggle for strengthening their identity and their culture:

Here in Truká, very early, children already have to learn to deal with Mother-Earth, with the river, valuing and caring. Home learning is essential in your training, and when you go to schools in the village, you know more deeply about the history of our ancestors, they mature, their skills and develop their knowledge acquired with their parents. Every Truká child must know how to sing the lines of the Toré, how to dance, and know how to see the history of his people (Idem, 91). The schools at the Truká community are considered rural institutions and obey the regiment imposed by the Education Secretariat, but the teachers and leaders felt the need to organize themselves to fight for a change in the way of teaching. They fought for "a training school of warriors." Thus, the practice was qualified and with it emerged the production of their own educational material, such as the booklet "Indian education is learned in the Community"; the newspaper "A Bodurna" (an Indian weapon), the books "Notebook of the Time and my People Count", "the Indigenous Calendar", and other didactic materials. Since, to the Truká women, a school must be a place of affirmation of identity, exchange of knowledge, and formation of warriors. In addition, to form warriors, it is necessary to know the history of the community itself to become allies in defense of its people. As an example of this hybridism and unequal struggle of the Indigenous Community about the imposition of graphics and Eurocentric dominancy, permeated by excluding powers in the politics, economics and religiosity. It then emerges confrontation and re-dimensioning deemed as necessary to the struggle for self-identification and ownership. Undoubtedly, religion has become a fertile field for these battles. Therefore, as a sacred place, the land is presented to the reader as the residing place of the "Enchanted of Light" (Ancestors, Guides) and the location of physical-cultural survival. A place marked by disputes between the Indians of the Island of Assunção and the invaders, amongst them the settlers who expropriate the land to breed livestock, as well as religionists who since 1770 are present in the region through Religious missions. Based on the studies of Batista (2009), the work of catechesis gave rise to conflicts about the possession of the Island of Assunção, because, "*at that time, the villages would have been naively donated by the Indigenous to the Cabrobó matrix*" (FLORÊNCIO, 2016, p. 43). Accurate news about these Indians and the loss of their lands appear a century later through the "Report about the Settlement of Indians in the Province of Pernambuco" elaborated by commission appointed by the provincial governor and published in the Diário de Pernambuco of April 4th, 1973. From the reports, we extracted the information that confirms the power of the dominant classes over the dominated ones, in a period of violence and expropriation guaranteed by the government officials and members of the Church at that time, according to Oliveira (2014) and Batista (2009).

The land of this village has been entirely usurped. From old tales, it is inferred that a judge of Capellas, on the pretext that the area of the town was the inheritance of the matrix (of which, however, did not have a single proof) rented the island for nine years and sold the livestock

which belonged to the villagers. (INSTITUTO DE DESENVOLVIMENTO DE PERNAMBUCO, 1981. P. 44).

Therefore, we preserve the importance of essential factors for the maintenance and re-signification of individuals from the Indigenous Community largely in the thought of the Community ownership. In addition, religious and cultural rituals are essential elements in the fight for cultural re-signification of contemporary society. The teachers in their work highlight as sacred rituals the Toré, danced in holy places and the Terreiros (a religious precinct), a territory under the guidance of the Enchanted Ones, as well as the Desk or Private which cannot be revealed. They also support that the Church imposed the Roman Catholic rituals in the period of the colonization. Yet over the time, this religion was reformulated using elements of the Indigenous culture in the masses celebrated there. The lines of the Toré (Assonant) carried out on the Island of Assunção, and at the Day of the Indians during the novena of Our Lady of Conception (which in the Indigenous tradition reminds the Queen of the Waters), at the Mother-Church in Cabrobó-PE. Besides the Feast of Our Lady of the Angels, patron saint of the Truká Community. This, at least, is what prevails in most African civilizations, as is the case with the rituals experienced in the Community. Rituals like the Toré, at that time only practiced among them, today is part of the Mass of Our Lady of the Angels – at the feast of the patron of the Community. Like religious parties, we highlight São Gonçalo, consecrated to the saint for payment of promises; The Week of the Indigenous Peoples; Saint John; Novena of Saint Francis of Assisi; the Night of the Penitents. It is consecrated during the period of Lent, once or twice a week to fulfill the Repentance of Lent, with the anonymity the most striking characteristics of these religions. All these elements, re-signified and re-appropriated are highlighted here, in light of the studies of Canclini (2008), as referential of the hybridization process perceived by the narrowing-border of cultures. The making of these people in the present days reflects the influence of the culture of the non-Indian on their everyday activities, such as dressing, eating, dancing, praying, reading, entertaining, etc. However, it is not disregarded the relevance of the ancestors in their identity constructions. The hybrid culture of the Truká Community, with the actions of women in that place, are increasingly consolidated and propagated. The book created by those women reflect the struggle for the preservation of cultures. This is because the cultures are no longer grouped in fixed groups and therefore disappear the possibility of being cultured, knowing the repertoire of “great works”, or being popular because it dominated the meaning of objects and messages produced by a Community more or less closed (an ethnicity, a neighborhood, a class), still according to Canclini (2008).

Final Considerations

Indigenous knowledge is a traditional millennial expertise that needs to be valued, recognized and inserted in the processes of Indigenous school education. What keeps alive the wisdom of the new Indigenous generations is probably the appreciation of the culture of tis people, consistently widespread amongst Indigenous Communities. It aims to ensure that tradition and learning are used once the youngest Indian alive and the school cannot be ousted of the process of building knowledge, education and teaching. It is mainly designed for political engagement with land-homeland, the universal affirmation of

diversity, and the school is in this case a fortunate place. The school as an educational environment and space for the formation of people is built by a diversity of actors who think and act in everyday life, forming a network of relationships based on a culture of its own and full of meaning, as well. The “manners of doing” at school are part of the practices drawn up within the school routine and form a set of collective actions, making each school reality a unique one. What can be identified in the statements of the Truká teachers, especially in which is related to authors of hereinabove mentioned book, is that the ideas more specifically to the theme of cultural re-signification are linked to the intercultural education: it means a direct and immediate relationship between cultural identity and schooling process. Florêncio (2016) asserts that better than speak of human nature is to speak of human condition, once we are children of time, culture and educational processes that society create and recreate. That is why it is necessary to understand the expansion of studies on the knowledge presented in school education processes, distinct perspectives on the teacher, student curriculum. We always see through the glasses of the culture of our identity (FLORÊNCIO, 2016). The project *Teachers Authors*, premeditated by Gomes (2014), is the realization of a dream held by the Indigenous Communities: produce their own educational material. The teachers and students of the Truká Community in the mother village of Assunção have written and illustrated the books during the year of 2012. Through public policies to encourage the production of this educational material, they have edited, distributed and used them in the classroom as an interdisciplinary educational material or support in the practice of intercultural literacy. The book “In the Kingdom of Assunção Truká Reigns” is a vivid example of this material. At no time, we perceive the denial of one culture for the benefit of the other. On the other hand, women can take ownership of hybrid cultures that intersect on the Island of Assunção and re-signify them through the teachings passed on to their native children. From an early age, children live together with multiple cultures and their influence on local community. Be it through school, parties, religious rituals, uses and customs. Beliefs and faith take on different targets; gods live together with Catholic saints, the Portuguese language crosses with the language of the Trukás.

With this, we perceive that this literature analyzed goes beyond what was written; native women manage to implement literacy practices with local children. A literacy practice that does not hold in teaching to read and write the language of the village. The basic notions children learn almost “naturally”, and are taught the cultures and influences in each other’s lives, the struggles of the people and its consequences, besides the importance of preserving the oral tradition for the preservation of the Community itself. To put an end to this text is just a manner of opening some new pages in the study of literacy process in the Indigenous Community, once we perceive through the hereinabove mentioned book written by a group of Truká teachers on the Island of Assunção, in the city of Cabrobó, published with the support of Centro de Cultura Luiz Freire, Organization of the Truká Indigenous Teachers of Pernambuco – OTITP, and the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) that the women feel increasingly empowered. And the Island of Assunção é more than a dreamland, it is in fact a result of a reality made of struggles and losses. Keeping the territory in their hands is not an easy task. It means a process linked to a life project encompassed by all villagers, engaged in the maintenance of their culture, the ritualistic

practice in their religiosity, the learning opportunity in their school environment, the preservation of their social organizations, besides the ownership/appreciation of the Truká being. A state of mind present and active throughout the Truká Community of the Island of Assunção.

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