

STILL THEY RISE IN THE CLASSROOM

“STILL THEY RISE” NA SALA DE AULA

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Abstract: This article examines *Still They Rise: Gender, Bodies, and Writing in Brazil and Beyond*, a co-taught advanced Portuguese course that approached language and literature as a single act of world-making. Grounded in feminist, decolonial, and queer epistemologies, the course proposed tension and confluence as guiding principles in the classroom, by bringing bodies, genres, and histories to the forefront, to unsettle canonical boundaries while cultivating collective forms of listening. We reflect on how these principles shaped the syllabus – pairing authors who rarely inhabit the same frame – and how our guests wove their voices into our trajectory. In practice, a discussion-circle format and student-led sessions shifted authority laterally, turning reading into a shared act. The final assignments translated these dialogues into materiality through translation, textiles, performance, and photography, exemplified here by a student’s diorama-house that reimagined a series of rooms “of one’s own” as a collective, intersectional home. Eventually, we argue that teaching Brazilian and Latin American literature abroad can build epistemic and affective bridges, transforming reading into a practice of relation and enabling students to think through difference and encounter.

Keywords: pedagogy; feminism; literature; confluence.

Resumo: Este ensaio examina *Still They Rise: Gender, Bodies, and Writing in Brazil and Beyond*, um curso avançado de português ministrado em conjunto que abordou a língua e a literatura como um único ato de construção do mundo. Baseado em epistemologias feministas, decoloniais e *queer*, o curso propôs tensão e confluência como princípios orientadores do diálogo em sala de aula, trazendo corpos, gêneros e histórias ao primeiro plano, de modo a desestabilizar fronteiras canônicas através do cultivo de formas coletivas de escuta. Refletimos sobre como esses princípios moldaram o programa do curso – combinando autoras que raramente se encontram no mesmo quadro de análise – e como nossas convidadas entrelaçaram suas vozes em nosso percurso. Na prática, um formato de círculo de

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discussão e sessões lideradas por alunas transferiram a autoridade lateralmente, transformando a leitura em um ato compartilhado. Os trabalhos finais traduziram em matéria esses diálogos por meio de tradução, têxteis, performance e fotografia, exemplificados pela casa-diorama de uma aluna que reimaginou uma série de tetos “todo delas” como um lar coletivo e interseccional. Por fim, argumentamos que ensinar literatura brasileira e latino-americana no exterior pode criar pontes epistêmicas e afetivas, transformando a leitura numa prática de relação e permitindo que as alunas pensem por meio da diferença e do encontro.

Palavras-chave: pedagogia; feminismo; literatura; confluência.

Introduction

In 1977, Audre Lorde declared that poetry is not a luxury. For women, she wrote, poetry is a vital necessity, a means of survival. It is “the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action” (Lorde, 2007, p. 37). Against the Western tradition that defines existence through thought – *I think, therefore I am* – Lorde proposes a different genealogy of subjectivity: *I feel, therefore I can be free*. Feeling, for her, is not merely the opposite of reason but the ground of freedom itself. Poetry, then, becomes a method for living otherwise, a political practice that transforms emotion into knowledge, and knowledge into action.

Poetry, in this sense, is a form of political action capable of transforming the world around us. Conceição Evaristo offers a parallel gesture when she turns writing into an act of survival through her idea of *escrevivência*, where she fuses the words “writing” and “experience” to describe a mode of storytelling rooted in lived reality. In *Becos da memória*, she affirms that writing is the reinvention of life, a way of reentering memory to remake it. She writes from within the voices that came before her: “Primeiro foi o verbo de minha mãe. Ela, D. Joana, me deu o mote”³ (2017, p. 11). The mother’s voice, the voice of the favela, the collective voice, all are folded into the text, refusing the singularity of the author. As she reminds us, echoing Lorde, *escrevivência* is not meant to lull the masters of the house, but to disturb their unjust sleep.⁴

Bringing these two authors into dialogue marks our intention to think and teach from a shared horizon of feeling and resistance. Both Lorde and Evaristo dissolve the boundaries between art and life. They show that writing (like teaching) begins in the body, in the felt knowledge of relation and risk. To teach Brazilian literature outside

³ First there was my mother’s word, Dona Joana. She gave me the theme. (All translations are ours, unless otherwise indicated.)

⁴ “A nossa escrevivência não é para adormecer os da casa-grande, e sim para acordá-los de seus sonos injustos” (Evaristo, 2021).

Brazil, then, may be to reinforce this double gesture, by understanding the classroom as a site of invention, where language becomes a form of resistance, a way of making the world otherwise. This convergence is the grounding principle of the course *Still They Rise: Gender, Bodies, and Writing in Brazil and Beyond*, which we co-taught at Princeton University in the spring of 2024.

The course was part of the spring offerings of Princeton's Spanish and Portuguese department, under the Portuguese track, and was made possible by a co-teaching initiative that paired the two of us: Pedro Meira Monteiro, a faculty member, with Tatiane Rangel, a Ph.D. candidate in the Spanish and Portuguese doctoral program. From the beginning, we intended to pursue a collaborative teaching experiment that could question hierarchies of gender, language, and of academic authority. Offered at the advanced level, the course welcomed students who had already completed intermediate Portuguese or who were fluent speakers. Most were juniors and seniors, with a few sophomores enrolled. Although the course was taught entirely in Portuguese, its pedagogy did not center on grammar instruction. Instead, we treated language and literature as part of the same act of world-making.

Therefore, literature was not treated as a supplementary tool for practicing the language, but as a communicative practice in its own right, one that activated speaking, listening, reading, and writing in advanced analytical and interpretive modes. Conceived from the outset for advanced Portuguese-speaking students and designed without reliance on any textbook, the course aligns with the central argument of de Andrade and Oliveira's recent work, "Language and Literature Divide: An Analysis for Teaching Portuguese as an Additional Language" (2024), which identifies as essential to overcoming the traditional language-literature split in Portuguese pedagogy that "literary texts have an important role to play in language learning but can often be underused or underestimated in their potential to promote communication, literacy, and cultural knowledge" (2024, p. 89). Drawing on this premise, *Still They Rise* emphasized literary literacy – motivating, introducing, reading, and interpreting diverse texts, especially by peripheral, Black, Indigenous, feminist, and queer authors – to cultivate a community of readers who negotiated meaning collectively. Each text invited students to develop intercultural awareness and critical agency, transforming reading into an active encounter with language, and with history and difference.

In this article, we aim to reflect on our experience of teaching as the creation of a site of encounter, where language and politics converge to produce a collective

practice of knowledge. Our purpose is to show how teaching Brazilian and other Latin American literatures abroad can generate epistemological and affective bridges by enabling spaces where students, beyond (but also *because they are*) learning a language, come to inhabit its histories and resistances. We divide this reflection into three parts: first, the making of the syllabus and its theoretical grounding; second, the contact with students and classroom dynamics; and finally, the creative and political outcomes of the final projects. Through these layers, we wish to demonstrate how our course, *Still They Rise*, serves as an example of how alternative ways of engaging with texts can generate forms of thought that are politically and symbolically relevant to students, becoming meaningful approximations to the Portuguese-speaking world that exceed the boundaries of the classroom.

Teaching this course at a time when Latin American studies, languages, and cultures are increasingly under threat in U.S. institutions reinforced our conviction that classroom experiences such as this are urgently needed. They are spaces where knowledge is not extracted from the Global South but created within its premises, where, to echo Lorde, feeling becomes the condition of freedom, and to echo Evaristo, writing can become the practice of life and survival.

Composing Confluences – The Making of a Syllabus

Designing the syllabus for *Still They Rise: Gender, Bodies, and Writing in Brazil and Beyond* gave us the opportunity to begin from a question rather than a canon. What does it mean to teach Brazilian literature abroad without reproducing the hierarchies that have historically defined what counts as **literary**, **canonical**, or even **(women's) writing**? Our goal was to assemble a constellation of texts that could unsettle those boundaries and invite students to read across languages and temporalities, as the course's theoretical grounding emerged from our shared commitment to feminist, decolonial, and queer epistemologies that privilege the body as a site of knowledge. The syllabus was conceived, therefore, as a political artifact as much as a pedagogical one, and it sought to foreground the relational and the affective while engaging with Latin American and Lusophone cultures in the U.S. academia.

Such goal was inscribed in the very title of the course, inspired by Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" (1978). The poem's insistence on rising again and again, against the weight of racial and historical violence, offered us a conceptual pulse for everything that followed. It allowed us to ask questions that would echo throughout the

semester: Whose voice does rise? From what body, what language, what silences? How do collective wounds become forms of collective knowledge? And perhaps most crucially: What does having a voice even mean when we consider structures of power, diverse cultural frameworks, and bodies that are disabled, nonconforming, or historically excluded from speech?

Two words guided the creation of the course: tension and confluence. We borrowed the first from an extraordinary talk given by Angela Davis at Princeton a few months before Donald Trump's second term began, in which she urged the audience to learn to sustain the tension – the tension between incompatible truths, between what cannot yet be reconciled. To sustain tension, Davis suggested, is to resist both despair and false harmony, to remain within contradiction long enough for something new to emerge. Following her words, we came to see tension as both a method and a condition for teaching together. As co-instructors, we had to confront our own differences in generation, gender, and institutional position. Our perspectives sometimes diverged, our approaches to pedagogy were distinct, and yet it was precisely within those frictions that the class took shape.

This co-teaching structure made visible the very question of **positionality** that we hoped our students would grapple with when engaging with texts such as Djamila Ribeiro's *Lugar de fala* (2019). How does one speak from within attributed and lived differences? How does authority circulate within academic spaces, and what kinds of knowledge are legitimized or silenced by it? By holding these tensions rather than resolving them, we made room for the second guiding word: confluence. In our course, confluence translated the deliberate coming together of distinct forms of knowledge. It described a pedagogical and an ethical stance, where tension is not resolved but reoriented toward collective creation.

These guiding words, tension and confluence, are reflected in the syllabus, in which we placed side by side authors and artists who might not ordinarily meet within the same academic framework. To cite a few: Clarice Lispector and Conceição Evaristo, so that one could be rewritten through the other; Virginia Woolf and Carolina Maria de Jesus, so that the idea of "a room of one's own" could be reimagined from a São Paulo favela; Deaf slam poet Edinho Santos and American artist JJJJJJerome Ellis, so that the visual poetics of sign language and the temporal poetics of stuttering could converse as parallel ways of reimagining what it means to have a voice. These encounters made visible the unequal conditions under which writing and authorship

emerge, exposing how race, class, gender, and geography shape access to voice and space. Yet rather than reinforcing hierarchies or drawing fixed contrasts, the syllabus asks students to read these differences as points of encounter.

Confluence, for us, also meant inviting other voices, scholars, artists, and activists to weave themselves into the fabric of the course. This practice of confluence materialized through the presence of our guest speakers. Luana Reis, a poet, professor at Princeton and scholar of Afro-diasporic literature and culture (particularly the works of Lélia Gonzalez and Beatriz Nascimento), taught a class about *quilombo* as a locus of connection and survival. She invited students to imagine dialogues between the authors they had read until then, staging meetings between Clarice Lispector and Macabéa, or between Dandara of Palmares and Nêgo Bispo, turning the classroom into a living *quilombo* of voices. Later in the semester, Lilia Moritz Schwarcz joined us to introduce the exhibition she had curated, *Andar pelas bordas* (2023), and guide students through the embroidery and textile works of Rosana Paulino, Hariel Revignet, and Heloisa Marques, where domestic craft becomes a political gesture of resistance and repair. Finally, Johari Terra, a then Ph.D. candidate in Anthropology at USP and visiting student at Princeton, and ballroom performer herself, shared her ethnographic work on ballroom culture, introducing us to voguing and the embodied knowledge of performance.

The sense of contrast allowed us to avoid, when talking about the materials on focus (in addition to texts, there was a significant number of audiovisual materials on the syllabus), any essentialization of the “feminine” and even of the “feminist” gesture. Furthermore, generational differences appeared not only in our own differing views and repertoires as co-instructors, but also frequently arose in the definition of the corpus. For example, we analyzed in parallel Eliane Potiguara’s poetry and film appearances of Txai Suruí and Ehuana Yaira Yanomami, thus looking for nuances so as to avoid homogenized views of the “indigenous”. Another example is the audio recordings of Stella do Patrocínio and the ensuing discussion about power relations involved in the capture, conservation, and interpretation of those wonderful yet disturbing sonorous archives. These intersections opened the way for the dynamics that would take shape in the classroom.⁵

⁵ For a complete view of the syllabus, click [here](#).

Holding the Tension: Dynamics of the Classroom

Most of the classes were conducted, as if spontaneously, in a discussion circle in which the students' comments on the assigned materials were contrasted, compared and often woven together. We frequently explored controversial points collectively, without, however, eliminating differences through some supposedly appealing common denominator. The right tone of voice, the silences, the reactions, and the need to wait for the other person to speak were important issues that occupied us both in our class preparations and in the many discussions we had since we decided to offer the course together. This dialogical format reiterated the principles of tension and confluence that had guided the making of the syllabus. The circle as a spatial setting helped students understand that knowledge was to move laterally, not vertically.

The dynamics of power was especially important in a predominantly female environment, where, in addition to our own positions as instructors (white Latinx, cisgender man and woman of different generations and different academic positions), we had eight women and only one man among the undergraduate students attending the course. This composition influenced the classroom dynamic in subtle but significant ways. The prevalence of women's voices made power relations more perceptible, as we noticed who felt comfortable speaking, who preferred to listen, and when silence, as suggested above, emerged as another kind of statement. For us as instructors, the challenge was to be attentive to how our own institutional and generational positions intersected with these dynamics, revealing the tension between authority and horizontality that defined our co-teaching practice.

An interesting and powerful example was the reading of *A hora da estrela* (1998), and the discovery that a new generation of students can hardly refrain from strongly criticizing the portrait of the vulnerable Macabéa, whose subjectivity seems to have been stolen from her by the novel's male narrator. We were teaching students quite sophisticated in their understanding of the narrative voice and the complex fictional construction of the other. Even so, the author's insurmountable distance from the character seemed to take on a particularly important dimension for the students, who therefore opened our eyes to new issues, which might be encapsulated in a single question: To what extent does the de-subjectification of Macabéa, even if critically addressed by Clarice, manage to maintain her humanity as a fictional character

representative of flesh-and-blood people, namely poor migrant women exposed to the violence of the city and the masculine world?

As mentioned above, we read Clarice Lispector alongside Conceição Evaristo, whose *Macabéa: flor de mulungu* (2023) offers a poetic and urgent critique of that unavoidable distance between Clarice the woman and Macabéa the (fictional) woman. In the book, a narrator closely resembling Evaristo reaches out to the dying Macabéa from the end of Lispector's novel, lifting her from the asphalt and saving her from death foretold – a social death that mirrors the fate of the poor and marginalized within colonial and patriarchal structures. Our students received Evaristo's rewriting of Macabéa not only as a gesture of reparation but also as a provocation, one that challenged the boundaries and fictional interplay between author and character in Lispector's novel, offering a fierce critique of Macabéa's representation. We responded to their reading through the same two principles that guided the course – tension and confluence. We placed the texts in tension by reading them together, so that a confluence could emerge from their encounter, a conversation across time in which one writer's voice rewrites what the other left silent and unsaid.

It is true that offering Conceição Evaristo's text as a counterpoint to Clarice Lispector's may have prompted instant sympathy for the reparative gesture through which the narrator of *Macabéa: flor de mulungu* rescues Lispector's character from the depiction of a miserable, meaningless life. In fact, Evaristo reclaims, on behalf of the broader Macabéa lineage, the forms of knowledge that come from lived experiences, and from careful observation of people and things – forms of knowledge that come, in short, from an ancestry that unites the Northeastern woman with the wider Afro-indigenous embodied by authors such as Conceição Evaristo herself. Ultimately, this pairing set the tone for the rest of the course, showing how reading together can be less about agreement than about learning to inhabit – and to create from – tension.

This is only one among many possible examples. The classes that followed carried the same concerns and frictions forward, as each new set of readings opened a fresh terrain of negotiation. Every week, one of the students led the discussion, making their own questions guide the collective reading. These moments of student-led debate represented yet another shift in authority, as interpretation emerged as a shared act among them. Therefore, language and literature also became inseparable. As they read and analyzed the texts, the students engaged with the variations of the Portuguese language, feeling its histories, and questioning the power dynamics

inscribed within it. Our class dynamic ultimately confirmed that teaching Portuguese through literature is less about mastering linguistic forms than about engaging in the continuous practice of listening, translating, and reimagining meaning together.

Such was our intention with the decision to use the Portuguese feminine in our speech and writing. In Portuguese, the pronoun *nós* (we) is not gendered, but grammatical agreement requires that everything following it, such as adjectives, participles, and nouns, assume gender. Being a man and a woman leading the class, we therefore used forms such as *nós duas somos professoras* (“we two are professors,” feminine) instead of the conventionally neutral or masculine *nós dois somos professores*. This deliberate choice unsettled the linguistic hierarchy that privileges the masculine as the universal form, reminding all of us that grammar is also a site of ideology. Through this small but persistent gesture, we turned language itself into a space of resistance, and it was from within this shared awareness that our students should conceive their final creative projects, translating these ideas into productions that could give our classroom’s dialogue new and unexpected forms.

What Matters: The Final Projects

The final projects were indeed conceived as the culmination of everything we had built together during the semester. As stated in the syllabus, the final assignment was meant to bring together linguistic knowledge, collaborative experience, and the reflections on gender and embodiment that had guided our discussions. Each student or group of students was invited to choose a form that could best translate their engagement with the course materials, whether textual, artistic or performative. They were asked to develop a project that responded to a single question: How to transform what had been discussed in class into an act of creation, thus making ideas tangible. As a result, the projects became an extension of our conversations, translating into matter and image what had begun as reading and dialogue.

Inspired by Alice Walker (1983), Lilia Schwarcz (2023), Ana Mendieta’s *Siluetas* series, and Tina Campt (2017), one of the students worked on cyanotype on fabric and brought us to tears when she explained its contents and form, through which she both honored women from her family and was trying to mourn her beloved grandmother. Another student beautifully translated an excerpt of Camila Sosa Villada’s *Las malas* (2021) in English and reflected upon the once gratifying and frustrating translator’s task. Equally moved by Sosa Villada’s oeuvre, another student worked on eleven

poems by the Argentinian writer and translated them into English, looking for the “punch” one can feel under the surface of apparently ordinary words, as she aptly put it. Another student brought several of the women whose works we had analyzed to a single room (a “room of us all,” as she called it) and imagined a dialogue among them, thus creating a kind of echo chamber of our seminar. A couple of students decided to transform Eliane Potiguara’s poem “Terra-Mulher” (2004) (Earth-Woman, where *terra* means both territory and land) into a song, helping her words “burden the many layers of the colonial dogma.” Eventually, a Brazilian visiting undergraduate student built upon her own previous experience as a slam poet from the Cariri region to create a fanzine – an A4 page folded and cut accordingly – which was also a conversation with “Preta Poeta” Natália Pinheiro, as well as a deep reflection on the *cordel* tradition and woodcut aesthetics of Brazil’s Northeast.

One student’s final project stood out for the originality of its approach. A senior majoring in engineering, she approached the assignment with the same curiosity and precision that characterizes her profound engagement with the Portuguese language. We chose to show her project in greater detail, as it captures with clarity how the students translated the course’s discussions into material forms. In her project (fig. 1), she transformed a shoe box into a house.⁶ The playful dimension of manual labor, as much as the reuse of an everyday material, was not accidental in this case. When presenting it to the rest of the class, she smiled, somewhat embarrassed, and said that she had revisited a kind of work she had not done since her early school years. Of course, she was in no way assuming a childish position but rather revisiting the power of a child’s **poiesis**. In so doing, she created a hiatus in a scholastic practice that usually distances itself from the **matter** it deals with, as if its validity depended solely on abstraction. It may not be incidental that, as a future electrical and computer engineer, she was fascinated by what happens inside the tiny matter of a circuit board, as she once confided to us. By handling the chosen materials with precision, she explored the potential of **matter as a producer of meaning**.

⁶ We thank Rena Feng for allowing us to reproduce here excerpts of the essay she submitted together with the “Casa da Palavra Feminista,” as she called it. Photos are from Rena Feng and Pedro Meira Monteiro.



Fig.1

This is how she described her own work:

Primeiro, eu voltei aos textos para encontrar citações que refletissem espaços, corpos, objetos e as suas relações. Eu enfoquei especificamente nos espaços domésticos para poder colocá-los na casa e ressaltar a tensão entre tradição e revolução. ... Utilizei uma mistura de cartão, papel, cola, argila e outros materiais pequenos que encontrei no meu quarto e nos Makerspaces do campus para criar este projeto. A parte mais difícil foi decidir o que colocar na casa de maneira metódica e intencional, e também como utilizar um espaço tão pequeno para capturar algumas ideias-chave das obras e do curso.⁷

She essentially created a house full of **rooms of one's own**. She took Virginia Woolf's claim seriously and built a collective home in which several of the authors we had discussed could find their own rooms. However, the house is not a mere reproduction of something once found in a poem or a novel. Rather, each detail operates as an intricate **interpretation** of a work or passage analyzed in our course. The front door, for instance (fig. 2), is inspired by Camila Sosa Villada's

⁷ First, I looked back at the texts to find references that reflected spaces, bodies, objects, and their relationships. I focused specifically on domestic spaces to place them in the house and emphasize the tension between tradition and revolution. ... I used a mixture of cardboard, paper, glue, clay, and other tiny materials I found in my room and in the Makerspaces on campus to create this project. The hardest part was deciding what to put in the house in a methodical and intentional way, and also how to use such a small space to capture some key ideas from the works and the course.

aforementioned novel, as it replicates and reinterprets Tia Encarna's house. In *Las malas* (2021), Encarna is a sort of holy mother of the *travestis*, and she asks her protégées to take off their shoes before entering the house, as if affirming that the space they are about to enter is pristine, almost sacred and fully protected from the “costumes ou estereótipos que dominam um mundo sem empatia pelas experiências e comunidades trans e feministas.”⁸ In the photograph, we can see two pairs of shoes placed at the front door.



Fig. 2

The living room (fig. 3) was designed to welcome all visitors. It was inspired by the discussions on *quilombola* communities led by Luana Reis, and by Christine Sun Kim (2025), a Deaf artist whose work we studied for the way it reimagines sound and language through visual form. The need for constant transformation, for moving through different metamorphoses, is evoked by the butterflies printed on the curtains. To clarify the scale of the house, the curtains created by the student are no more than 3 inches tall. Still in her accompanying essay, she explains that the image of the *Virgen del Valle* on the left references a similar portrait hanging on the wall of Tia Encarna's house. In her words, “esta interpretação reimaginada dá à *Virgen del Valle* uma identidade racializada, autônoma e cheia de resistência: muito diferente da imagem

⁸ Habits or stereotypes that prevail in a world lacking empathy for trans and feminist experiences and communities. (All quotations in this section are from Rena Feng's essay submitted together with the cardboard house.)

passiva e embranquecida que normalmente aparece na iconografia religiosa.”⁹ Finally, the picture on the wall above the couch shows the student herself and her best friend, whom she met in an engineering class and felt instantly connected to, as they were the very few women in a predominantly masculine environment. In her friend, she found “o verdadeiro significado da irmandade entre mulheres.”¹⁰



Fig. 3

The second room was designed to welcome Virginia Woolf (fig. 4). A cozy office, it is composed of a desk, a chair, and several books. It is the “most literary” corner of the house, according to the student, and is meant to allow writing to happen without interruption. “There must be freedom and there must be peace. Not a wheel must grate, not a light glimmer. The curtains must be close drawn” (Woolf, 2020). The African motifs on the curtains, she explains, are meant to remind us of the first words we ever hear: the words that come from the mother’s mouth. However, this “room of one’s own” is not intended to be Virginia Woolf’s exclusive place. The student explains that the room “pode ser usado por todas as mulheres na casa e fica perto da sala de estar para dar inspiração constante e fomentar comunidade.”¹¹ Its materials suggest

⁹ This reimagined interpretation grants the Virgen del Valle a racialized and autonomous identity, full of resistance and far from the passive, whitened image that typically appears in religious iconography.

¹⁰ The true meaning of sisterhood between women.

¹¹ Can be used by all women in the house and is located near the living room to provide constant inspiration and foster community.

that it is soundproof, reinforcing the feeling of wellbeing, while the texture of the floor adds to the sense of a silent, welcoming space.



Fig. 4

The bedroom above the living room is Macabéa's (fig. 5). Following Lispector's plot, the space is shared with four other saleswomen, yet the student reminds us that Macabéa preserves her individuality through the few belongings visible on the typist's bunk bed. First, there is the radio through which she listens to *A Hora do Brasil* and occasionally talks back to. The student recalls the day off Macabéa took from work, when she dances to the radio as if she were in a castle. Second, there are the newspaper clippings Macabéa zealously keeps and reads under the covers at night, by candlelight. The most precious item is an advertisement for a hand cream she dreams of buying, which turns out to be too expensive. The student, however, chooses to place the desired cream on her bed, as an act of poetic justice, giving Macabéa what she deserves but could never have.



Fig. 5

The following (fig. 6) is the bedroom of Tia Encarna, Sosa Villada's character who seems to have particularly captivated the students. Here, the novel's description is closely followed, including pictures of Ricky Martin, teddy bears, and a portrait of Encarna's mother, among other details. The panties hanging from the dresser – as if something is always about to slip away from order – offer yet another example of what we call a meticulous **interpretation** of the text through the concreteness of art. Every detail, crafted in cardboard or other materials, functions the same way a powerful sentence would work in a piece of literary criticism.



Fig. 6

The following (fig. 7) is called the “Attic of Colonial Trauma.” As the student recounts, “os fantasmas de dívidas e dores irreconciliáveis percorrem os cômodos da casa e se penduram na mobília”¹², echoing what we had read in Jota Mombaça’s “O mundo é meu trauma” (2017). The attic is also the interpretation of a powerful line from “Para este país” (To This Country), a poem by Lubi Prates (2018), whose ancestors once traveled without being allowed to carry their belongings. Their nonexistent suitcases reappear here, spectral yet enduring, underscoring all that is carried and refuses to perish in the Middle Passage. As the student wrote in her essay:

Essas lembranças do passado colonial traumático assombram as autoras, mas é difícil decidir o que fazer com esse espaço. Às vezes, elas se dispõem a enfrentá-lo e a domá-lo. Em outras, preferem não revisitar sua bagagem, porque o mundo já as força a encarar tanto disso.¹³



Fig. 7

Finally, behind the house lies a beautiful garden (fig. 8). As part of the course assignments, students watched a conversation between Alice Walker and Conceição Evaristo at the 2021 Paraty International Literary Festival (Flip), which centered on literature and plants. As the student recalls, at one point Alice Walker says, “I garden, I have always gardened, I learned from my mother” (*Em busca do jardim*, 1:14:00–

¹² The ghosts of irreconcilable debts and pain roam the rooms of the house and hang from the furniture.

¹³ These memories of the traumatic colonial past haunt the authors, but it is difficult to decide what to do with this space. Sometimes they are willing to confront and tame it. At other times, they prefer not to revisit their painful inheritance, for the world already forces them to face so much of it.

1:14:03). Conceição Evaristo agrees, adding, “é uma delícia porque você fica observando... você fica esperando quando que vai nascer, mas não adianta você fazer força... que ela vai nascer no tempo exato”¹⁴ (1:15:00–1:15:55). Another reference comes from JJJJerome Ellis’s *Plant and Garden Concert*, which, as the student notes, “leva a audiência a refletir sobre o passo do tempo e como os processos naturais não seguem nenhum horário imposto pela sociedade, por alguma pessoa ou por um sistema.”¹⁵ It is also worth noting that the choice of trees is not a random one:

Para incluir a conexão entre a mulher afro-brasileira e afro-americana com sua terra materna, o continente africano, e ressaltar a importância da ancestralidade no encontro e descobrimento da sua individualidade e comunidade, eu incluí um baobá no jardim. Essa árvore se parece com uma árvore invertida, muito simbólica da revolução que as escritoras e poetisas mulheres promovem com suas palavras, seus poemas cheios de emoção e obras com reflexões profundas sobre a importância da mãe, da família improvisada e da comunidade de mulheres. A árvore também é um símbolo de vida e tem uma longevidade muito grande, indicando uma resiliência e força que eu quis refletir nas mulheres abordadas no curso. Também incluí uma árvore de mulungu como homenagem à verdadeira Macabéa: a Macabéa que é muito mais do que uma má compreensão de olhos julgadores e depreciativos. Essa árvore honra sua resistência silenciosa, porém poderosa. Para terminar, foi imperativo incluir plantas nas janelas porque a conexão da natureza cruza a linha entre o interior e o exterior da casa: “O casarão rosado, do rosa mais travesti do mundo (há plantas em cada janela que se enredam noutras plantas, plantas férteis que dão flores como frutos, nas quais abelhas dançam)” (Sosa Villada 16).¹⁶

¹⁴ It’s a delight because you watch... You wait for it to sprout, but there’s no use pushing it... It will spring up at the exact right time.

¹⁵ Makes the audience reflect on the pace of time and how natural processes do not follow any schedule imposed by society, by any person, or by any system.

¹⁶ To include the connection between Afro-Brazilian and African American women with their motherland, the African continent, and to emphasize the importance of ancestry in the encounter and discovery of their individuality and community, I included a baobab tree in the garden. This tree looks like an inverted tree, quite symbolic of the revolution that women writers and poets promote with their words, their poems full of emotion, and works with profound reflections on the importance of the mother, the provisional family, and the community of women. The tree is also a symbol of life and has a very long lifespan, indicating a resilience and strength that I wanted to reflect in the women addressed in the course. I also included a mulungu tree as a tribute to the real Macabéa: the Macabéa who is much more than a poor misunderstanding of judgmental and derogatory eyes. This tree honors her silent and yet powerful resilience. Lastly, it was imperative to include plants in the windows because the connection to nature crosses the line between the interior and exterior of the house: “The pink mansion, the most travesti pink in the world (there are plants in every window that entwine with other plants, fertile plants that bear flowers like fruit, on which bees dance).



Fig. 8

To close this section, it is worth underscoring what these works, taken together, made visible. The projects defied any single genre or rubric; instead, they modeled how reading can become making, how citation can turn into care, and how studying a language can mean inhabiting histories and stories rather than merely describing them. Through different scales and media (paper, fabric, song, image), students learned to let Portuguese speak through texture, rhythm, and gesture. Among these, the diorama-house we analyze above stood out as a perfect architecture of everything the course sought to offer. Such a work materializes the somewhat abstract conversations we had about space, gender, and ancestry, showing that interpretation can be an act of construction, as much as theory can take the form of a home. In the hands of our student, cardboard became critique, and the “room of one’s own” has become a room for many.

Conclusion

We began with a hypothesis: that tension and confluence could be more than mere themes. They could be a form of pedagogy. Co-teaching made positionality visible as we redistributed authority, while the pairing of authors across time and geography taught students to read difference as relation rather than rupture. By the semester’s end, “voice” no longer meant a singular speaker but a practiced composition (sometimes sung, sometimes written, sometimes stuttered, sometimes

stitched) through which language and literature become one act of world-making. Our course suggests that teaching Brazilian and Latin American literature abroad can be about co-creation. What endures, we believe, is not a canon mastered but a method inhabited, one that keeps tension alive as a condition for building relations, and one that transforms friction into a mode of thinking, thus turning confluences into collective invention.

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