

ΣΟΦΙΑ—SOPHIA

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18634/sophiaj.15v.2i.849>

Female identity in Afro-Colombian poetry*

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* Article derived from the Master's thesis: "Female Identity in Afro-Colombian Poetry" presented for the Master's degree in Literature at the Technological University of Pereira, Risaralda, Colombia.

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Article information:

Received: July 16, 2018
Revised: December 9, 2018
Accepted: August 30, 2019

How to cite:

Reyes, S.M., Arango, M.I., (2019)
Female identity in Afro-Colombian
poetry. *Sophia*, 15 (2); 118-125.



ISSN (electronic): 2346-0806 ISSN (print): 1794-8932

Abstract

This article presents a reflection about the teaching of literature in primary school, which privileges the study of the narrative text and the approach to poetry is done to identify the structure of the poem; in this sense, Afro-Colombian poetry is not considered in the curricula as a teaching axis. In fact, the recognition of Afro-Colombian cultural aspects is limited to participation in gastronomic and musical activities about the day of Afro-Colombians. The purpose of this investigation is to develop a teaching material for the teaching of Afro-Colombian poetry written by women. These strategies are based on the Basic Standards of Language Competences and the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies, which will allow professors to visualize the productions of these authors in the classroom and to promote the recognition of female identity within a multicultural society.

Keywords: Afro-Colombian poetry, feminine identity, Afro-Colombian women poets, teaching.

Introduction

Afro-Colombian poetry written by Afro-Colombian poets has received special attention in its evaluation, study and criticism, recognizing some poets as "classics"; such is the case of Jorge Artel, Candelario Obeso, Manuel Zapata Olivella, among others; the studies that have derived from their literary contributions have made their productions visible (Prescott, 1996;1999; Jaramillo, 2011; Ortiz, 2007; Valero, 2013; Cuesta and Ocampo, 2007; 2008; 2010; Lucrecia Pachano, 2008; Rengifo, 2009), and have managed to develop a greater awareness of the richness and diversity of Afro-Colombian literature. However, Afro-Colombian poets do not appear in the literary universe; it seems that the lack of knowledge of their work is related to the patriarchy that exists in Colombian society. In this sense, the evaluation, criticism, studies and publications of Afro-Colombian women poets have been few, almost non-existent.

As Prescott (1996) points out: Afro-Colombian literature suffers from oblivion and neglect, that is to say, it is evident that literature does not enjoy wide appreciation or knowledge within the country; and for other reasons, only certain writers are well known outside the national sphere.

This means that it is imperative to recognize the literary productions of Afro-Colombian female poets; in this sense, when reviewing the titles of the Afro-Colombian Literature Library, the works of male poets stand out over the works of Afro-Colombian female poets. Precisely, this author calls attention to the absence that prevails in the work of Afro-Colombian female poets, "[...] Studies are needed that analyze and evaluate the works of other lesser-known authors not only for their aesthetic value but also for what they reveal to us about the socio-cultural and political context from which they arise. (Prescott, 1999:558).

This absence in the publication of selections of Afro-Colombian women's literary productions would end in 2008 with the book *¡Negras Somos! Anthology of 21 Afro-Colombian Women Poets from the Pacific Region* (Cuesta and Ocampo, 2008). This anthology highlights the quality of the production of the poems and the affirmation of the identity of black women as the articulating axis of the development of

Colombian society. Similarly, the participation of eleven poets from this selection in the "Encounter of Afro-Colombian Women Poets", held since 1985 at the Omar Rayo Museum in Roldanillo, Valle del Cauca, allows us to establish that the works of Afro-Colombian women poets are recognized and should be studied.

In this way, the *Anthology of Afro-Colombian Women Poets* edited by Guiomar Cuesta and Alfredo Ocampo, which is part of the Library of Afro-Colombian Literature published by the Ministry of Culture in 2010, brings together in six chapters a selection of 58 Afro-Colombian women poets from the Atlantic and Pacific regions and the islands of San Andrés and Providencia, and is considered a continuation of the work initiated by these compilers in *¡Negras Somos! Anthology of 21 Afro-Colombian women poets from the Pacific region*.

In sum, this anthology, according to its editors, aims to fill a gap that is related to the presence and recognition of Afro-Colombian women poets in the literary production of our country, and to promote the study of the poetry of these authors, that is, "to review and disseminate this production and the creativity of these women poets (Cuesta & Ocampo, 2010:15).

The books, which are used in the classroom to support the learning process, have privileged the study of literature from a content of "teaching", the literary aspect is raised from the use of the fragment, historicism, which generates the total ignorance of the student's context and limits the possibility of dialogue with what is read.

In this order of ideas, it is easy to find different educational materials that guide the teacher in the execution of activities in the classroom, some of them oriented to the recognition of literary aspects. However, in the development of the processes of recognition and construction of the Afro-Colombian identity we find booklets such as *The Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies (CEA)* (Mayor's Office of Bogotá, 2014), which seeks to give an account of the implementation and development in the district educational system of Bogotá, in the period 2013-2014, both from the perspective of the District Education Secretariat (SED) and from the systematization of significant experiences of the Chair in district educational institutions.

Similarly, *Etnoeducación Afrocolombiana*, aimed at early education to promote educational processes, through stories about ethno-education and Afro-Colombianism (García, Jiménez, Moreno, Restrepo, et al, 2013).

In this sense, the booklet: *Construyendo y desarrollo identidad* (Banguero, 2015), presents in five units aspects related to the Afro-Colombian traditions lived in the municipality of Santander de Quilichao, among others.

Afro-Colombian poetry is part of the understanding of the country's culture and must be thought of from its historical context in order to be resignified at the time of its reading. To achieve this resignification it is necessary that the poem is approached from the author, the context and the sense of the reader. "Literature is the inalienable part of culture and cannot be understood outside the context of the whole culture of a given era" (Bakhtin, 1999:347).

From this relationship, a dialogue is established with the text, taking into account the feedback to build meaning. It is fundamental to observe the interaction of the poem with the cultural processes and how it speaks from its historical moment of creation, but it must be analyzed from the present, which is mediated by the reader.

For this reason, it is necessary for the reader to dialogue with the poem so that the reading pact suggested by the text and the author can be established. As Barthes establishes, the reader has the freedom to find pleasure in the text and its cultural relation, but the pretension of achieving the reading of enjoyment based on the poetic text suggests a relationship of rupture with the recognized literary canon and with the presuppositional reading (Barthes, 1982).

Likewise, Jurado (2008) and Vásquez (2008) formulate that the study of literature must be approached from the permanent dialogue between the texts, becoming a genuine experience of the enjoyment of the text, besides being an integral way of knowing that links emotions, feelings, understanding and analysis, these aspects are aimed at the study of identity from the field of literary production. "This means that, although Colombia was one of the first countries to redefine

itself constitutionally as multicultural and pluri-ethnic, there is a translocal logic of a global nature that has contributed to making the context a condition of possibility for the installation of "Afro-Colombian literature" as a classificatory category of analysis" (Valero, 2013:17).

For Jauss, the evaluation of a literary work depends, among other things, on the personal experiences of the reader that determine the horizon of understanding it. This is why it is necessary for teachers and students to link up with the reflections derived from the literary text so that they can resignify their own reality and re-elaborate the understanding of the experience as active readers.

In short, literature organizes and represents the anthropological and cultural imaginary of the spaces in which cultures are formed and meet each other. In order to establish meaning, it is necessary for the reader to construct his or her feelings in relation to what he or she has read. In this way, feelings are reconfigured with experiences in order to generate the necessary interpretations for dialogue with the text. In other words, the text as a cultural implication, the literary work also depends on the linguistic systems of the articulation with social life, culture, traditions to be understood.

The contributions of these authors are relevant because they will allow students to recognize the feminine identity of Afro-Colombian poets and assume a critical position with respect to what they have read and the social, political, and cultural implications that literature has.

Materials and methods

The methodology that guides this study is qualitative, because it establishes the relationships between the feeling and the development of the feminine identity in the students, which allows for the establishment of relationships with the experiences, attitudes, thoughts and reflections around the poetry written by Afro-Colombian women. The process began with the application of a diagnostic instrument to 32 teachers of Spanish language in the institutions Rufino José Cuervo-Centro and Los Quindos in the city of Armenia, later the corpus of the work is chosen: The Anthology of Afro-Colombian Women Poets, edited by Guiomar Cuesta and Alfredo Ocampo, which is part of the Library of Afro-Colombian Literature published by the Ministry of Culture in 2010, the Collection of

Illustrated Stories Afro-Colombian Children Pelito de Chacarrás, title *La Muñeca Negra*, by Mary Grueso; *La Palabra Poética del Afrocolombiano* by Hortensia Alaix de Valencia, 2001; and *Poemas Matriax: Antología de Poetas Afrocolombianas* by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Cali, 2012.

Then, a didactic sequence is designed with five 90-minute sessions to be developed in the fifth grades of the educational institutions. This sequence is formalized as an In Situ training protocol that was modeled in a Situated Work Session (STS) to the teachers; in this sequence the cooperative work of Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, and Saldarriaga (Saldarriaga, 2004) is privileged, which allows the development of linguistic, thinking and social skills so that the students can discuss, interpret and dialogue with what they have read. The events during the initial intervention was recorded and the partial results of the intervention were evaluated.

Finally, the didactic material “Afro-Colombian Female Identity, for the teaching of Afro-Colombian poetry booklet for 5th graders” was produced.

Results

The survey was applied to 12 teachers from the institution Rufino José Cuervo-Centro and 20 teachers from the educational institution Los Quindos, with the objective of investigating their conceptions of Afro-Colombian poetry in the classroom. Through closed and open questions with field of explanation to determine at an early stage what knowledge teachers have about Afro-Colombian literature.

The most significant results of the survey are:

Q. 1. *Which of the following literature genres from the Semilla Collection have you worked with in your class?*

Of the 32 teachers surveyed, 28 (87.5%) responded that they work on short stories from the Semilla collection, while 7 (21.8%) responded that they work on albums, 8 (25%) work on comics, 9 (28.12%) work on myths and legends, 2 (6.25%) work on novels, 5 (15.62%) work on poetry, and 1 (3.12%) works on theater.

Q. 2. *Which of the following poetry texts from the Semilla Collection have you worked with in your class?*

Of the 32 teachers surveyed, 1 (3.12%) worked in the classroom with the *Antología de poetas afrocolombianas*, 3 (9.37%) worked with *Poemas de juguete*, 5 (15.62%) with the text *Duérmete, niño: antología de nanas*, 3 (9.37%) worked with *Pisa pisuela color de ciruela: poesía de tradición oral*, 3 (9.37%) worked with the text *Una morena en la ronda*. 24 (75 %) have not worked on the texts of poetry from the Semilla Collection.

Q. 3 *Which of the following Colombian poets have you worked on in your classes?*

Of the 32 teachers surveyed, 2 (6.25%) have worked on the work of Manuel Zapata Olivella, 1 (3.12

worked with the work of the poet Mary Grueso, 1 (3.12 %) worked with the work of the poet Yesenia María Escobar, 1 (3.12 %) worked with the work of María de Los Ángeles Popov, 27 (84.37 %) said they had not worked and did not know the poets.

Q. 4. *Define Afro-Colombian Literature*

Of the 32 teachers surveyed, 20 (62.5%) respond that Afro-Colombian literature is a cultural manifestation of the black communities; 12 (37.5%) recognize some aspects such as: folklore, oral tradition, expression, rhythm, stories of ancestors and association to ethnicity.

Q.5 *Define Afro-Colombian Poetry*

Of the 32 teachers surveyed, the vast majority 25 (78.12%) responded that Afro-Colombian poetry is texts written by black people; however, there is no evidence of precise mention of characteristics of this literary genre, 6 (18.75%) did not answer this question, 1 (3.12%) defined the genre by stating the characteristics associated with the rhythm, themes, lexicon used.

Q. 6. *When planning your classes, do you take into account Afro-Colombian Literature in order to develop the Literature factor of the Basic Competency Standards?*

Of the 32 teachers surveyed, 29 (90.62%) state that they have not used Afro-Colombian literature in class planning; 3 (9.38%) state that they prepare activities for Afro-Colombian week. It is evident that teachers do not plan activities that involve the recognition of the different manifestations of Afro-Colombian literature.

Q.7. *Do you think that Afro-Colombian poetry written by women allows students to recognize the Colombian feminine identity?*

Of the 32 teachers surveyed, 29 (90.62%) believe that the female identity cannot be recognized from reading Afro-Colombian poetry. 3 teachers (9.38%) consider that some aspects of the feminine identity can be recognized. It is inferred that this is due to the fact that Afro-Colombian literature is not brought into the classroom and that its characteristics are not recognized.

Discussion of results

There is a direct relationship between the lack of knowledge of Afro-Colombian literature and the planning of classes by teachers of the basic primary level in the Rufino José Cuervo-Centro and Los Quindos institutions, this is evidenced by the high percentage expressed in the answers to question 2: *Which of the following poetry texts from the Semilla Collection have you worked with in your class?* 75% of the 24 teachers who answered this question said that they had not worked on the poetry texts in the Semilla Collection.

Also, the answers to question 3: *Which of the following Colombian poets have you worked on in your classes?* The answers of 27 teachers that correspond to the (84.38%) say that they have not worked the poets. Question 6: *When planning your classes, do you take into account Afro-Colombian Literature in order to develop the Literature factor of the Basic Competency Standards?* 29 teachers (90.62%) of the population surveyed stated that they have never planned their classes taking into account Afro-Colombian literature.

The disciplinary training of the teachers does not guarantee the study and teaching of Afro-Colombian literature in the classrooms, because they continue to work with textbooks that privilege canonical literature (written by Caucasians) and the emerging literary manifestations are not recognized, this is added to the fact that the teaching of literature in the basic primary school privileges narration as the base text to encourage reading behavior in the students.

It is evident that the biggest obstacle is the lack of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1987) on the part of the teachers to plan the classes, moreover, it can be said that there is no structure of articulation with the Curricular

Guidelines of Spanish Language (Ministry of National Education, 1998) and the Basic Standards of Competence (Ministry of National Education, 2006). In addition, in the classrooms there is a lack of knowledge about Afro-Colombian authors, and there is no evidence of pedagogical practices that promote the development of linguistic, thinking and social skills that privilege Cooperative Learning (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1991). The approach to Afro-Colombian culture is done through gastronomic and musical activities on the day of Afro-Colombianity.

It is important to remember that in these two institutions, there is not a majority population of Afro-Colombians. However, there is an ethnic diversity (Afros and Emberas). Therefore, it is necessary that this proposal be implemented to promote the recognition of literature written by authors other than whites and mestizos who contribute to the literary production of our country.

It is necessary to point out that the diagnostic instrument allows us to characterize in a convincing way the need to develop strategies so that teachers can teach Afro-Colombian poetry in the classrooms and that it is planned from the area plans of the Spanish language and not as an activity to comply with the National Day of Afro-Colombianism, May 21.

Conclusions

This proposal for the production of didactic material called "Afro-Colombian Female Identity, for the teaching of Afro-Colombian poetry booklet for 5th graders", allows for the bringing of Afro-Colombian poetry written by women to the classroom. It is pertinent because it seeks to specify strategies for teaching poetry based on the didactics of literature and the development of Cooperative Learning (CA) proposed by Johnson, Johnson & Holubec (1991) and Saldarriaga (2004); this material was received and valued by the teachers because it promotes dialogue with what is read and is related to the context.

On the other hand, Afro-Colombian literature, especially poetry written by women, is not brought into the classroom and is not established in the area plans of the institutions. This work allowed the teachers of both institutions to get closer to this type of literature, as well as the commitment to include it in their language area plans as an obligatory study within the transverse teaching of the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies.

The sequence, besides being modeled to the teachers, was implemented in the fifth grades of Los Quindos and Rufino José Cuervo- Centro institutions. During the application it was possible to observe the general lack of knowledge that children have about Colombian poetry and poets and much more about Afro-Colombians. Their knowledge of poetry and poets is too limited and they only have one common reference, Rafael Pombo.

Poetry brought to the classroom in the primary grades allowed the children to approach literary texts different from the narrative ones, it was possible to motivate students and teachers to be interested in the study of poetry as an artistic and literary expression deserving of an important place within the classroom.

On the other hand, it is necessary to recognize that this proposal will strengthen the pedagogical planning and practices of teachers based on the didactics of literature, privileging the dialogue with the text, the pleasure and the enjoyment of poetry to recognize the feminine identity inherent to this literature and that is part of the conformation of interculturality.

When analyzing the results of the diagnostic instrument, it is concluded that the proposal is pertinent, and it responds to the need that exists in the intervened institutions as far as generating strategies of teaching from the didactics and the study of the Afro-Colombian poetry written by women because a general ignorance of authors, texts, intentions and characteristics of this literature was evidenced.

Likewise, the contribution to the articulation of the quality referents of the MEN with the *Plan Nacional Decenal de Educación* and the development of linguistic, thought and social skills of Cooperative Learning based on Afro-Colombian poetry written by women not only privileges the learning of students but also the training of teachers in methodological strategies that should start from the didactics of teaching literature so that students recognize themselves and others in the dimensions of culture and humanity.

It should be noted that this proposal allows teachers to be trained and therefore improve their pedagogical practice, encouraging the study of other literatures that promote the development of cultural aspects of the country, in addition to giving a privileged place to the study of poetry as a text that sensitizes, recognizes and generates a dialogue with the text and context which promotes an aesthetic around the feelings of the student and humanize classroom processes.

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