



WRITING, *LUGAR DE FALA*, AND IMAGINATIVE LISTENING IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZILIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract: In discussions of literature, the term *lugar de fala* is understood and invoked in different ways, often during debates about what kinds of characters and stories a given author can reasonably and ethically write, given their own identity and life experience. In this article, we explore *lugar de fala* by analyzing short texts from four Brazilian authors: Geovani Martins’s “Espiral” (2018), a series of poems from Cristiane Sobral’s collection *Só por hoje vou deixar meu cabelo em paz* (2014), Adriana Lisboa’s short story “Glória” (2016), and Luiz Ruffato’s “Comer *sushi* em Beirute” (2014). Though often used in a negative sense to attempt to limit what authors and figures can or should say, we explore *lugar de fala* in an expansive sense and argue that, perhaps counterintuitively, the four authors in question view writing as an important form of imaginative listening.

Keywords: *Lugar de fala*; Contemporary Brazilian literature; Geovani Martins; Cristiane Sobral; Adriana Lisboa; Luiz Ruffato

Resumo: Em discussões sobre a literatura, o termo *lugar de fala* é entendido e usado de maneiras diferentes, muitas vezes durante debates sobre que tipo de personagens e histórias um determinado escritor pode escrever realisticamente e eticamente, dadas sua identidade e experiência de vida. Neste artigo, exploramos *lugar de fala* analisando textos curtos de quatro autores brasileiros: “Espiral” (2018), de Geovani Martins; uma série de poemas da coleção *Só por hoje vou deixar meu cabelo*

em paz (2014), de Cristiane Sobral; “Glória” (2016), de Adriana Lisboa; e “Comer sushi em Beirute” (2014), de Luiz Ruffato. Apesar de usado muitas vezes de forma negativa para tentar limitar aquilo que um autor ou uma pessoa pode ou deve dizer, exploramos o conceito de *lugar de fala* de maneira expansiva e argumentamos que, talvez surpreendentemente, os quatro autores sob consideração enxergam a escrita como forma importante de escuta imaginativa.

Palavras-chave: *Lugar de fala*; Literatura brasileira contemporânea; Geovani Martins; Cristiane Sobral; Adriana Lisboa; Luiz Ruffato

Situating *Lugar de Fala* in Contemporary Brazilian Literature

The term *lugar de fala* has become a buzzword in recent years, and—as happens with many such terms—people understand and use it differently. In this article we consider this concept in the context of contemporary Brazilian literature, to explore what limits (if any) exist in relation to the kind of characters and stories a given author can reasonably and ethically write. We propose a close reading of short texts by four different Brazilian authors: Geovani Martins’s short story “Espiral” (2018), Luiz Ruffato’s “Comer *sushi* em Beirute” (2014), a series of poems from Cristiane Sobral’s collection *Só por hoje vou deixar meu cabelo em paz* (2014), and Adriana Lisboa’s short story “Glória” (2016). The differences in gender, racial identity, and life experience among these authors—especially when compared to those of their characters—allow us to see different conceptions and explorations of *lugar de fala* in contemporary Brazilian literature. Alongside the analysis of the texts identified above, we include observations made by each of the authors during interviews with Jordan B. Jones.¹ Before diving into the stories and perspectives on *lugar de fala*, however, a brief overview of the history and uses of the term will be helpful.

In *O que é lugar de fala?* (2017), black feminist writer and thinker Djamila Ribeiro attempts to chart the history of the term in Brazilian parlance. Though she explains that “a origem do termo é imprecisa” (40), she suggests it may have come from the term *feminist standpoint*—a term encapsulated in the thinking of figures like Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and other important black feminists, who view black women as lacking the recognition and presence they deserve as members of Western

¹ Jones’s interview with Sobral was published in *Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea*, no. 69. His interviews with Lisboa, Ruffato, and Martins appear (or are forthcoming) in *Brasil/Brazil* nos. 76, 77, and 78, respectively.

societies. These problems arise from insufficient consideration of how black women's life experiences condition the ways they view the world and express themselves. In a similar vein, Adrianna Kezar and Jaime Lester discuss "positionality theory," with its focus on "the complexities of individual experience," as an outgrowth of standpoint theory (166). Citing author Enrique Dussel, Paula Moya uses the phrase "*who we are and from where we speak*" (Dussel 16) to invoke positionality and to propose that the identities of scholars and others are "important epistemic resources that are better attended to than dismissed or ignored" (Moya 83). Bruno Guaraná translates *lugar de fala* as "site of enunciation" (45), while Maria Fantinato presents the term "listening positionality" (35), and Karl Erik Schøllhammer engages this question by discussing what kind of "content [is] authorized by the 'locus of enunciation' (*lugar de fala*)" of a given author (57). Though each of these renderings conveys important aspects of *lugar de fala*, in this article we employ the Portuguese term, both to preserve the breadth of meanings it comprises and to underscore the importance of verbal production (whether written or oral), which is not always foregrounded in the notion of positionality.

After discussing the term's origins, Ribeiro succinctly explains, "Pensamos lugar de fala como refutar a historiografia tradicional e a hierarquização de saberes consequente da hierarquia social" (*Lugar de fala* 44). She later references the ideas of Afro-Portuguese artist and writer Grada Kilomba, author of *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism* (2008): "Kilomba toca num tema essencial quando discutimos lugares de fala: é necessário escutar por parte de quem sempre foi autorizado a falar. A autora coloca essa dificuldade da pessoa branca em ouvir, por conta do incômodo que as vozes silenciadas trazem, do confronto que é gerado quando se rompe com a voz única" (Ribeiro, *Lugar de fala* 54).

When considering "quem sempre foi autorizado a falar" (Ribeiro, *Lugar de fala* 54) in the Brazilian context, it is abundantly clear that white male writers have historically held a dramatic advantage in terms of publishing and disseminating their texts, whether academic or fictional. In her landmark 2005 study, Regina Dalcastagnè examines 258 novels released by major publishers between 1990 and 2004 and reveals that 93.9% of the authors who wrote these novels are white ("Personagem" 31); furthermore, of the 1,245 major characters who appear in the novels, 79.8% are white ("Personagem" 45) and 62% are male

(“Personagem” 35). In 2021 Dalcastagnè updated her findings to span 1990–2014, with similar results: only 2.9% of the authors published in her study were non-white, while another 2% were “sem identificação” (“Ausências e estereótipos” 120).²

In the last decade there has been a significant increase in the publication of black Brazilian writers (and those of other racial and ethnic identities), owing largely to continued anti-racist activism, along with the founding of publishing houses focused on black authors.³ Despite these advances, Dalcastagnè’s findings point to the urgent need to do what Cristiane Sobral advocates: “ampliar esses limites” and broaden the panorama of who is writing—and *whom* they are writing (Sobral, “Literatura negro-brasileira” 2-3). While Ribeiro and others often use *lugar de fala* more narrowly to invoke black female perspectives (indeed, Sobral’s attempt to broaden the panorama of writers carries a special emphasis on black women), by Ribeiro’s own logic “todo mundo tem lugar de fala, pois todos falamos a partir de um lugar social” (*Pequeno manual* 15). In this sense, *lugar de fala* resonates with *positionality theory*, which “emphasizes the position of or situatedness of identity” and which rejects attempts to privilege one standpoint over another (Kezar and Lester 166).

We follow the lead of Martins, Sobral, Lisboa, and Ruffato, conceiving *lugar de fala* in a broad sense to explore how writers can and do create some characters who resemble them and others who do not. We subscribe to Kilomba’s affirmation that “é necessário escutar por parte de quem sempre foi autorizado a falar” (cited in Ribeiro, *Lugar de fala* 54), and we explore how the four authors who appear in this article—perhaps counterintuitively—view writing as an important form of imaginative listening. As Martins explains,

² Looking back even further, we find (according to Luiz Henrique Silva de Oliveira and Fabiane Cristine Rodrigues) that only 61 novels and 88 short story collections were published by Afro-Brazilian authors between the years 1859 and 2016 (92-94). When averaged by century, this equates to one work of prose being published every five years in the 19th century, one every two years in the 20th century, and one every three months during the first 16 years of the 21st century.

³ Examples include Mazza Edições (founded in 1981), Nandyala (founded in the early 2000s), Ogum’s Toques Negros (2014), and Editora Malê (2015). In its ten years of existence, Editora Malê has been particularly successful in attracting high-profile authors (e.g., Conceição Evaristo) whose works are consistently considered for the nation’s top literary prizes. Two of the 2022 Prêmio Jabuti winners were published by Malê: Eliana Alves Cruz’s *A vestida* (category: *contos*) and Marcelo Moutinho’s *A lua na caixa d’água* (category: *crônicas*).

[É] fundamental que os brancos, por exemplo, se interessem em falar sobre o racismo, se interessem em contar histórias sobre o racismo [...]. [Lugar de fala] é um conceito importante, mas percebo um movimento em que as pessoas de alguma forma tentam esvaziar esse conceito e usar isso como uma ferramenta de se omitir para certos assuntos. Como quem diz, “Olha, eu não posso falar sobre isso então eu não vou falar, porque esse não é o meu lugar”. E eu não acredito que seja por aí. (“Direitos humanos” 3)

Though *lugar de fala* is often used in a negative sense to attempt to limit what authors and figures can or should say (Jones 43), considerations of these authors’ perspectives make it clear that they view *lugar de fala* in an expansive, inquisitive sense. Furthermore, though lived experience is a crucial source of knowledge, these authors view literature as an imaginative opportunity to explore alternate life experiences and perspectives in a way that enriches and expands, rather than narrows, one’s worldview.

In this article we present the texts in question as experiments in imaginative listening, through which these authors consider a wide range of experiences and attitudes, some of which resemble their own and others of which diverge markedly. Cristiane Sobral and Geovani Martins write Afro-Brazilian characters whose gender and racial identities align with their own, but they also create white characters whose lived experiences they do not share. Conversely, Adriana Lisboa and Luiz Ruffato explore perspectives of characters who (like them) are white, as well as characters of other racial/ethnic/gender identities. In analyzing these authors’ stories, we draw on their interview comments to illuminate our reading and analysis, and we position the texts as case studies to see how their reflections about writing “others” align with their actual writing practice. In each case, the authors draw on their lived experience to the extent they can and, when venturing beyond it, they turn to fiction to imaginatively explore different ways of being in the world.

“Morro” and “Asfalto”: Geosocial Prejudice in Geovani Martins’s “Espiral”

Carioca author Geovani Martins rose to international prominence with *O sol na cabeça* (2018), a collection of thirteen short stories set in and around Rio de Janeiro favela communities, where Martins himself grew up and began writing. In “Espiral,” the unnamed narrator describes discrimination based on his appearance. As a boy he believed himself to be an unintimidating figure, and although he enjoyed the sense of power derived

from occasionally seeing people cross the street to avoid him, he later reflects, “eu não entendia nada do que estava acontecendo” (17). As he matures, he becomes more conscious of the thought processes at play behind others’ behavior. One day, upon joining an elderly woman at an otherwise empty bus stop, he experiences deep frustration when he realizes she is afraid of him: “Prendi a respiração, o choro, me segurei, mais de uma vez, pra não xingar a velha que visivelmente se incomodava de dividir comigo, e só comigo, o ponto de ônibus” (18). Though the narrator’s racial identity is not specified, the woman’s behavior (based strictly on appearances, given that the two strangers never speak to one other) suggests that he is visibly different from her and that, in her mind at least, he is dangerous.

After he decides to inch closer to her, “tentando parecer capaz de fazer qualquer coisa pra conseguir o que queria,” she begins to look around, “buscando ajuda” (18). When the woman abandons the bus stop, out of resentment and curiosity the narrator follows, sometimes increasing his pace to get closer to her, sometimes letting her pull ahead, and all the time “sentindo o gosto daquele medo” (19) until she enters a café and he keeps walking. He reflects on the episode: “fiquei com nojo de ter ido tão longe, lembrando da minha avó, lembrando que aquela senhora também devia ter netos” (19). The recognition of this woman’s humanity and his own insensitivity, however, is immediately followed by another realization: “lembrei que aquela mesma velha, que tremia de pavor antes mesmo que eu desse qualquer motivo, com certeza não imaginava que eu também tivera avó, mãe, família, amigos” (19). Invoking the emotions, friends, family, and lives of both characters—elements that are physically absent from the bus stop scene but subsequently imagined by the narrator—underscores the bilateral nature of such encounters and places guilt squarely on both parties’ shoulders.

When reflecting on his upbringing, the narrator concedes that, compared to “outras favelas na Zona Norte, Oeste, Baixada,” there is some truth to the argument that living in a “favela de Zona Sul” (where he grew up) “é privilégio” (17). Despite this relative privilege, living so close to Rio’s “bairros nobres” also puts him face to face with “o abismo que marca a fronteira entre o morro e o asfalto,” given that a fifteen-minute walk is all that separates him, the rats, and the open sewage of the favela (along with childhood friends who now carry “armas de guerra”) from a gated condominium, with its “plantas ornamentais” and

“adolescentes fazendo aulas particulares de tênis” (18). He observes, “É tudo muito próximo e muito distante. E, quanto mais crescemos, maiores se tornam os muros” (18). The narrator’s growing consciousness of the gulf separating him from those in richer neighborhoods—and his experience with the woman at the bus stop—lead him to conclude that, “Por mais que às vezes me parecesse loucura, sentia que não podia parar, já que eles não parariam” (19). The use of “eles” is significant here, as it points to the feeling that there are two groups pitted against one another: those who belong to the well-resourced “asfalto” and those who, like the narrator, live precariously on the “morro.”

As the story continues, the narrator toys with other “victims” and begins repeatedly stalking a man named Mário. His interactions with Mário and his eventual decision to follow him all the way home represent an escalation in how the narrator feels and how his “victims” react. The story ends when, after being trailed yet again, Mário darts into his apartment building and soon appears at his window with a gun trained on the narrator, who then realizes that “se quisesse continuar jogando esse jogo, precisaria também de uma arma de fogo” (22). By this point, readers understand why Mário is afraid, but they also understand what Mário apparently does not: in their first encounter, Mário reacts in fear because of the narrator’s appearance—an act of discrimination which, in the narrator’s eyes, justifies his decision to stalk Mário. As readers gain insight into both viewpoints, they are equipped to recognize the thought processes on either side, along with the ways prejudice carries the potential for violence in both directions.

Precisely because it is disturbing, this story invites its readers to feel empathy, which, according to Martins, is the “papel principal da literatura e da arte” (“Direitos humanos” 1). Many of Martins’s depictions about life in the favela are unflinchingly gruesome and violent, and these shocking stories elicit strong emotions that carry the potential to stir in readers a desire to change and to be more understanding of those around them. For Martins, *lugar de fala* is an essential element of generating such emotions and creating stories that produce real albeit difficult-to-quantify societal impacts, since literature allows a person to “não apenas conhecer, mas de fato sentir alguma coisa” (“Direitos humanos” 1). In short, the ability to create and consume literature and art from

the perspective of others whose circumstances do not mirror our own is an important way to develop understanding and connection in relation to other people.

As suggested earlier, the narrator of “Espiral” likely possesses (as does Martins himself) physiological characteristics typical of Afro-Brazilian individuals, and he resides in a favela community, as did Martins for much of his life. Along with the other stories that make up *O sol na cabeça*, “Espiral” foregrounds life in the favela, doing so in a way that avoids “artificialidade,” given that Martins resembles his characters in many ways and writes “a partir da experiência de ser um jovem de uma favela carioca imerso nesse universo” (Martínez 290). By channeling his lived experiences and way of speaking into his writing, Martins engages a “lugar de fala [que] legitima a linguagem oral que ele constrói” (Martínez 290) and that “possibilita ao leitor questionar o lugar desse sujeito no mundo e ao próprio sujeito subverter a lógica preestabelecida a ele – o lugar de ‘marginal’, ou seja, aquele que ocupa e sempre ocupará a margem” (Peixoto 27). Through his stories Martins invites his readers—especially those from upper-class backgrounds—to question the way they perceive and treat those from low-income backgrounds, so that they will not always occupy the margins. This invitation to empathy is central to what Martins hopes his works will produce, and it hinges on helping readers consider experiences and individuals that are “other” to them.

If strictly observed in a prohibitive sense, *lugar de fala* would prevent writers from creating characters different from themselves in any way. As noted by Adriana Lisboa, “se eu restringir o lugar de onde narro à minha própria experiência, terei que falar de uma mulher da minha idade, da minha classe social, com a minha história de vida, que seja mãe... entende? [...] Levando isso ao extremo, chegarei a um ponto em que só vou poder escrever sobre mim” (“Literatura, luto” 2). And though a large portion of Martins’s characters arise from the favela, they are not simply carbon copies of himself; rather, many of them are loosely based on family and friends (“Direitos humanos” 7-8). As noted earlier, in “Espiral” the main character remains unnamed, and we know little about his personal life, which impedes attempts to determine how closely he resembles Martins himself. Ultimately, this story portrays a young man who is discriminated against and who then retaliates in ways that place him and others in potentially dangerous and destructive

situations. By his own account, Martins and his friends have experienced similar discrimination (“Direitos humanos” 7, 11-13)—indeed, Schøllhammer notes that Martins’s writing activates “the experiences of thousands of black and poor youth who grew up in the favelas and peripheries of the big city” and that this represents “a great achievement for Brazilian fiction” (58). Different from the events in “Espiral,” Martins’s literary explorations of difficult topics constitutes an alternative to the confrontational—even hostile—path the narrator chooses.

Regardless of how closely Martins and the protagonist resemble each other, Mário and the other “victims” with whom the narrator interacts represent very different perspectives. Though some might criticize Martins for his pessimistic portrayal of these characters’ reactions to seeing someone they presume to reside in the “morro,” Martins’s own lived experience supports these explorations into what might go on in the minds of upper-class and/or white Brazilians as they encounter their marginalized counterparts.⁴ Thus, Martins’s explorations of *lugares de fala* that both reflect and differ from his own lived experience bring to light biases that can at times be difficult to discern, helping readers consider alternate points of view and reflect on how their own estimations of others have been and continue to be constructed. Creating such characters comes with obligations, however; as Martins explains, “eu sou super a favor de que as pessoas escrevam sobre o que quiserem, mas sabendo que qualquer tipo de publicação gera uma responsabilidade” (“Direitos humanos” 3). So, while producing different manifestations of *lugar de fala* can facilitate the generation of empathy within diverse readers, communicating an authentic message demands thoughtful representation of each “other” an author creates. In “Espiral,” as in the rest of *O sol na cabeça*, Geovani Martins seeks to “trazer esses personagens no auge de suas humanidades o tempo todo” and show that “cada um é o seu próprio universo” (“Direitos humanos” 11). He effectively brings attention to the lives of those from the favela by blending elements based on his experiences with characters and storylines that

⁴ Research by psychologists R. Thora Bjornsdottir and Nicholas Rule confirms the reality that individuals begin judging others’ socioeconomic status the moment they see them, based simply on “minimal facial cues” which can have “significant ramifications” (530) and lead them “to make consequential social judgments” (541). “Espiral” certainly explores the consequences of making snap judgments, and the damage this can inflict on all parties involved.

depart from his own life. And just as the protagonist alternately enjoys his power over others and feels sick at causing others distress, the story prompts readers to consider their own interactions (good and bad) with others. Exploring various *lugares de fala* to create a range of different characters that can resonate with readers in multiple ways—independent of whether those readers are from the “morro” or from the “asfalto”—Martins invites personal connection and genuine emotional responses from his audiences, emphasizing solidarity over difference and prioritizing the “ampliação de perspectivas e de possibilidades” afforded to and by his readers (“Direitos humanos” 14).

Dreams, Otherness, and Occupation in Cristiane Sobral’s Poetry

Just as “Espiral” centers on physical acts and the attitudes behind them, Brasília-based writer Cristiane Sobral regularly portrays external changes in an individual’s appearance, the thought processes that lead to them, and the implications those changes carry in terms of self-conception and interpersonal relationships. In her short stories “Cauterização” (2009) and “Garoto de plástico” (2010), for example, readers encounter a female and a male protagonist, respectively, who spare no pains to appear white and to hide typically Afro-Brazilian features—Socorro straightens her hair and carefully applies makeup to make her nose and lips seem thinner, while Maurício buzzes his hair once a week to hide its natural texture. Both characters have moments of awakening, however, in which they decide to embrace their Afro-Brazilian heritage. And as Sobral emphasizes through her narration, embracing their physiognomy—especially their natural hair—symbolizes their development in asserting their blackness with pride.

In her 2014 poetry collection *Só por hoje vou deixar o meu cabelo em paz* (which also foregrounds the connections between hair and racial identity, as the title makes unmistakably clear), Sobral consistently raises questions about racial injustice and discrimination—occasionally from the perspective of those struggling to come to terms with their blackness, but most often from the perspective of those who have already undergone the same transformations as Socorro and Maurício. This is the case of “Cabeça feita,” in which the poetic voice explains, “Resolvi fazer a cabeça / Ocupar páginas em branco / Com palavras negras / Para refletir a nossa luz” (1-4). Sobral’s contrast of white

pages and black words openly invokes racial difference and reflects a determination to “invad[ir] a cena” (as she explains in “Haicai cabelo”) and flood the public’s consciousness with Afro-Brazilianness. It also reflects a more systemic movement, in which historically white pages penned primarily by white authors are increasingly occupied by the black words of black writers from various social strata—not so that white authors are pushed out of writing non-white characters entirely, but to the point that there is more representation in terms of who is writing whom. As Sobral explains,

Nós queremos ampliar os limites para que outras mulheres negras possam estar nesse espaço criativo. [...] [A]cho que as pessoas que lutam por transformações não têm de se privar de escrever sobre personagens negras. Se têm sensibilidade e interesse em falar sobre isso, falem. Tem uma preocupação de complexificar as personagens, de querer de fato chegar um pouco mais perto, para olhar melhor. Acho que todo mundo pode fazer isso. (“Literatura negro-brasileira” 3)

In short, Sobral is less concerned with limiting non-black authors’ attempts to write black characters as she is with the lack of visibility and opportunity afforded to black writers—especially women writers—in exploring their societies through literature. Consequently, in “Cabeça feita” she models how it is that black writers can “Ocupar páginas em branco / Com palavras negras” (2-3) and implicitly invites black readers to join her in these efforts.

At times Sobral emphasizes the common humanity of her readers, regardless of racial identity, while at others she calls attention to the barriers separating them from each other. In “Os outros,” for example, she contrasts blackness and whiteness by talking about those who, like her, are “do lado de cá” (black Brazilians) and their non-black counterparts — “os que estão do lado de lá” (2, 4). In language that parallels Martins’s depictions of those from the “asfalto” versus those from the “morro,” Sobral underscores the contrast between the way those “do lado de lá” treat those they encounter: “tratam muito bem os seus / Mas agriDEM os outros / Os que não conhecem e por isso desprezam” (3-5). This contrast between white and black, between Us and Them, is a constant theme of Sobral’s writing, and she is not shy about criticizing those who buy into such distinctions precisely because they do not know their counterparts.

Sobral asserts the humanity of those “do lado de cá” when she critiques the tendency of non-black Brazilians to be “Altruístas com os seus” and “Cruéis com os outros” (7), and when she observes that many non-black Brazilians are simply “Homens com medo de homens” (9). In using the collective term “homens” to refer to both black and non-

black Brazilians, Sobral places them on the same plane, a clear reminder to readers that their counterparts, regardless of their identity, possess a shared humanity that should be recognized. By repeatedly calling non-black Brazilians “*estranhos*” (which she does four times throughout the poem), she defamiliarizes the behavior of those who mistreat Afro-Brazilians, calling this behavior what it is: irrational (10). Whereas Afro-Brazilians might recognize themselves in “*Cabeça feita*,” this poem seems directed more toward non-Afro-Brazilian readers, who can see in the behavior of those “*do lado de lá*” both unreasonable fear and twisted logic. “*Os outros*” calls upon such readers to distance themselves from the violence of discriminatory behaviors and to develop relationships with those who may be different from them. (Sobral herself has experience in this regard, as she was raised by an adoptive white mother.) She repeatedly emphasizes the importance of a “*pedagogia da convivência*,” lamenting “[o] fato da não convivência entre negros e brancos” and asserting that literature can play a role in bridging this divide: “*à medida que alguém que não é negro lê um livro que fala de personagens negras, isso pode contribuir para uma pedagogia da convivência*” (“*Literatura negro-brasileira*” 3).

True to her word, Sobral uses many different approaches to connect with a variety of readers and to generate “*convivência*.” As noted earlier, she sometimes writes for a general audience, sometimes for a black readership, and often for white readers who are unfamiliar—and perhaps unwilling to interact substantively—with their black counterparts. In her 2010 poem “*Lente de contato*,” Sobral asks pointedly, “*Será que dá pra você tirar essa lente distorcida / Que tanto atrapalha o nosso contato?*” (13-14). The poetic voice clearly assumes Afro-Brazilian heritage, using phrases like “*Sou negra*” (5) and “*Ah, o meu cabelo natural, isento de culpa, / Vai bem obrigada*” (9-10). In doing so, she positions her interlocutor as white (or at least non-black), giving the exhortation “*Esquece o que o seu pai disse!*” (3) and explaining that she is waiting for the reader to “*despir o seu preconceito*” (7) so they can have meaningful contact with each other. The notion of figuratively stripping oneself of prejudice calls attention to the artificiality of racism and to readers’ ability to doff it with sustained effort.

Such a notion of racial prejudice gains power in her 2014 poem “*Fantasia*,” in which Sobral portrays the poetic voice imaginatively donning whiteness and exploring the world

through this perspective. The opening lines (“Hoje acordei branca / Loira, olhos azuis” [1-2]) represent a departure from much of her writing in that the poetic voice explicitly assumes a white woman’s perspective (albeit through a dream or daydream), and the poem invites readers to consider the efficacy of such a representation. Sobral continues the imaginative exercise, explaining that, because she is white, she does not have to go to a job interview, “Porque como as brancas / Já estou empregada” (9-10). She proceeds, detailing all the things she does not need to do, given her temporarily assumed racial identity, and basking in the many things she is now able to do. Her hair is “[a]ceito por todos,” she drives her car from her garage to the mall, and she is well treated by those she encounters there. When a police officer smiles at her and asks if she needs anything, however, she reverts to her habitual perspective: “Eu gelei de medo / Ainda habitando pelo menos por dentro / O corpo negro perseguido / Escravizado / Tão sofrido” (23-27). When she responds by sitting on the sidewalk and crying, she receives job offers, marriage proposals, offers for her to be a model — “Um sem fim de propostas” (34) from those who perceive her white exterior. This scene, whose outlandish elements are dramatically exaggerated to drive her point home, invoke the poem’s title (“Fantasia”) and echo the fantastical ending of “Cauterização,” in which characters’ attitudes about race and racism shift dramatically and unrealistically from one moment to another.⁵

Notwithstanding its hyperbole, the poem offers readers a chance to reflect on the privileges afforded white Brazilians, in contrast to those available to black Brazilians. The poem’s title is, after all, “Fantasia,” and what happens in it, though not strictly plausible, represents the poetic voice’s perception of “Como a vida poderia ser diferente da que eu vivia” (41) if she were white, rather than black. By imaginatively “swapping skins” (Weinstein 156), Sobral elucidates for readers the reality of racial injustice and the differentiated citizenship that seems built into Brazilian society (Holston 5) and that is so

⁵ In this story the Afro-Brazilian protagonist, Socorro, transforms from “uma mulher cauterizada” into a self-assured woman who is proud of her racial identity. In response to her transformation, which occurs in the middle of a busy street, onlookers cheer, make peace with estranged family members, and kiss, and one man promises never to tell a racist joke again. Sobral ends the story with a provocative, one-word query that casts doubt on the likelihood of such a generalized transformation: “Será?” (26). For a deeper analysis of this ending, see “‘Refazendo cabeças’: a valorização da negritude nos contos de Cristiane Sobral,” by Jordan B. Jones (*Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea*, no. 69, pp. 1-13).

frequently conditioned by racial identity. In short, Sobral points readers to the difficult truth she explains in her interview: in relation to human rights, “[p]arece que alguns sempre foram mais humanos que outros” (“Literatura negro-brasileira” 2). Her poetry pushes back against this differentiating tendency, summoning readers in no uncertain terms to embrace difference and to view it as an opportunity to learn and live alongside others.

Racialized Trauma, Gender, and Self-Worth in Adriana Lisboa’s “Glória”

Adriana Lisboa’s short story “Glória” (from her 2016 collection *O sucesso*) constitutes yet another example of an author creating a narrative that foregrounds characters with different lived experiences from her own—in this case a working-class narrator named Rosa. The text explores the complicated nature of sexual assault through Rosa’s recollections and her encounter with her abuser 55 years after her sexual trauma, when he is on his deathbed. “Glória” dissects abuses of power (including the exploitation of the working class), along with positive and negative representations of masculinity, and literature’s capacity to address complex human experiences. The story is typical of Lisboa’s writing style in that it investigates life’s gray areas and constructs complex and relatable characters—including Rosa’s aggressor, Rubem. Regarding her intentional humanization of Rubem, Lisboa explains that “é importante a gente saber da nossa própria complexidade” (“Literatura, luto” 12). Using the characters in “Glória,” Lisboa challenges her readers to confront their own biases about race, gender, and trauma. Furthermore, she shows that no single experience is totalizing, and that literature can function as a tool to explore our own doubts and questions about life in productive ways.

In her interview, Lisboa notes that she takes inspiration from the seminal Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa, invoking his notion that literature is “uma confissão de que a vida não basta” (“Literatura, luto” 1). Questions inherent to the notion of *lugar de fala* are a consequence of this type of thinking; authors who are curious about others’ lives may use literature as a space to explore their questions and emotions. The first-person narration in “Glória” places Lisboa’s readers in the middle of complicated and intense emotions, challenging them to make interpretive decisions and process events that they

otherwise may have never needed to process. Moving from the countryside of Rio de Janeiro to the middle-class neighborhood of Glória, 16-year-old Rosa finds work as a live-in maid for a family whose financial means far surpass those of her own family. After being raped by Rubem (her employers' college-aged son), Rosa eventually miscarries the baby resulting from this act of sexual violence, and she moves across town. While recovering, Rosa meets Orlando (her nurse), and they build a life together. She does her best to move on from her experience in Glória, but fifty-five years after the rape, Rubem sends Rosa (now age 72) a bouquet of roses on her birthday, along with a note that suggests he wants to ask her forgiveness. While readers do not discover for sure whether she grants that forgiveness, Rosa later observes that she has found a “glória” that no one can see or take away from her. In short, she has found peace in relation to her own worth and perspective (170).

“Glória” is an interesting addition to the conversation about *lugar de fala* because of how Lisboa writes male characters and a racialized working-class narrator. She uses characters in “Glória” to investigate questions of masculinity and how men can interact with women in positive or negative ways. In constructing different characters, Lisboa views writing as a way to search for the “other”: “No caso da escrita de ficção, por exemplo, incorporamos outros através da criação de personagens e mundos, e da forma como esses personagens interagem. Todas essas experiências, para mim, como autora, são tentativas de ver a realidade, o mundo, de outras maneiras” (“Literatura, luto” 1). To more deeply explore the male experience, then, Lisboa creates male characters and tries to understand the world through their point of view. The experiences of these characters show her—and readers—other ways to see the world, expanding their vision. Significantly, Lisboa includes two contrasting male figures in the story: Rubem and Orlando. One finds Rosa at the peak of her excitement about life and breaks her down; the other finds her in despair and helps her build herself back up. The story’s portrayal of these two men contrasts negative and positive models of masculinity. Rubem, the attractive and influential college student studying civil engineering, meets an excited young woman, and then manipulates his relationship with her to violate her at a party.

Interestingly, Lisboa does not portray Rubem as a villain from the outset. He is consistently described as smart, handsome, and charming. He engages in conversation with Rosa and encourages her to come to his parties. In Rosa's description of her first interactions with Rubem, the reader sees that Rosa is interested in Rubem and some of that interest seems to be genuinely and healthily directed back towards her. Readers' perception of him changes quickly when he abuses his position of power and uses his physical force to exploit her: during a party he gives her alcohol, leads her to her small room in the depths of the house, and forces himself on her despite her protests, instructing her, "Seja boazinha e pare de gritar" (162). During this scene, Rosa's (and readers') feelings towards Rubem immediately change from excitement and interest to disgust and disdain. However, they do not stay that way. When, at the end of the story, Rosa visits an ostensibly penitent Rubem, readers encounter a sickly and broken man that pushes readers to feel something akin to pity. Lisboa is very intentional about her humanization of Rubem—she tries to "trazer para os livros personagens que sejam multidimensionais, não uma caricatura, uma coisa só" ("Literatura, luto" 11). Rubem is not just a rapist or just a handsome college student; he is a mixture of all his interactions with Rosa, and not all of them are negative. This is critical for the reader to understand, because readers themselves are not just one thing; they too are a mixture of their interactions with others. Lisboa's intention is to usher readers into a space where we can confront "nossa própria complexidade" ("Literatura, luto" 12).

In contrast to Rubem, Lisboa uses Orlando to investigate alternative male-female interactions. As noted earlier, Rosa originally meets Orlando while recovering from her miscarriage of Rubem's child, and he embodies attributes that contrast with Rubem and with the stereotypical masculine persona (154). Significantly, between descriptions of every interaction with Rubem, the narrator recounts memories of Orlando as counterpoints. Rubem is harsh, while Orlando is gentle; whereas Orlando always finds an excuse to come talk with Rosa, Rubem keeps his attention from her until she finds an excuse to interrupt him (154-155). And in addition to the glaring example of sexual assault, Rubem repeatedly pushes her on her boundaries, whereas Orlando respects her opinion (e.g., he never asks her about what preceded her hospital stay) and only pushes her to pursue an education

(154). Furthermore, Rubem is studying to become a civil engineer (a stereotypically masculine job), whereas Orlando makes his career in nursing, a stereotypically feminine field (154). The tone and warmth of Rosa's memories of Orlando give the readers a sense of safety notably absent in her recollections of Rubem.

Though Orlando and Rubem are the most obvious manifestations of Lisboa's creation of characters that differ from her, Rosa herself is likewise an individual with which Lisboa has relatively little in common. Whereas Rosa is a young, working-class girl from the countryside of Rio, Lisboa grew up in Rio's urban spaces. And unlike Rosa (who had to drop out of school at 12 years old to help her family with bills), Lisboa has two graduate degrees and has taught at multiple prestigious universities. Furthermore, while it is never explicitly stated, textual cues make it clear that Rosa is a woman of color. Rosa's descriptions of Rubem's friends — "todos ricos, brancos, inteligentes [...] [a]s moças com aqueles cabelos sedosos" (158)—suggest that her skin color and hair texture are different, as does her coworker Carmela's decision to take her to a salon with the goal of "darem um jeito na gaforinha" (156). Furthermore, when giving Rosa a dress, her employer observes, "este vestido vai ficar lindo em você, com o tom da sua pele" (157). Sometime later, Rubem throws a party at his house, and partway through (at his request) Rosa puts the dress on, but even so "não esperava que ele me levasse para a sala, para o meio dos seus amigos, é claro" (160). Each of these comments point to Rosa's understanding that she is part of what Martins calls "o morro," and what Sobral calls "os do lado de cá." Rosa's lack of education, her socioeconomic status, and her apparent Afro-Brazilianness greatly influences the course of events in the story: it is what takes her to Rubem's house as a domestic worker, and it is what leads him to do to her "o que não faria com nenhuma das outras moças ali presentes" (169). In short, it is precisely her vulnerable position in the house that gives Rubem power to exploit her. Another point of divergence between Lisboa and Rosa is that when narrating the story Rosa is 72 years old, which represents a decades-wide gap between Lisboa and her narrator.

Because Lisboa's life experience differs significantly from Rosa's, by writing the story she grapples with questions of *lugar de fala*. When asked about her role in telling stories that stray from her own experience, Lisboa explains, "é como se a nossa experiência,

quando fica restrita a nós mesmos, fosse um pouco medíocre” (“Literatura, luto” 1). For her, there is no pre-determined limit to what authors can write: “não existe um ‘onde parar’. Acho que tenho o direito de escrever sobre qualquer coisa. O complicado é ‘como’ fazer isso” (“Literatura, luto” 3-4). In other words, the debate over *lugar de fala* should not draw an arbitrary line in the sand; rather, it should focus on how authors go about writing characters different from themselves. At their best, authors “não [estão] ali para explicar o outro, mas sim em nome de uma experiência” undertaken to explore and investigate (“Literatura, luto” 2). Moving readers through Rosa’s memories and allowing them to witness portions of Rosa’s final conversation with Rubem, Lisboa allows readers time to sit with complicated emotions and think about how they may be reflected in her complex and compelling characters, who on the surface may seem vastly different.

Both male characters in “Gloria” play a unique role in Rosa’s journey. Each one changes her trajectory and affects the rest of her life. Lisboa uses these characters and the events of the short story to take her readers on an investigation into some of life’s decisive moments. “Gloria” is a strong example of how authors can use literature to step into the lives of people very different from themselves, not to dominate the space, but to explore it, with the goal of empathizing with those in the space. Lisboa and her readers can benefit from this exploration, walking away from Rosa’s story with new experiences and perspectives on life and its questions.

Slippery *Lugares de Fala*: Interlingual Filtering in Luiz Ruffato’s “Comer *sushi* em Beirute”

When considering *lugar de fala* in the works of Luiz Ruffato, perhaps the most obvious example is his seminal 2001 work *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, which portrays dozens of discrete scenes and characters during a single day in the city of São Paulo. These characters—men, women, and children (and even a stray dog)—represent a wide sampling of Brazil in terms of identity, experience, age, and socioeconomic status. To be sure, *Eles eram muitos cavalos* is an illustration par excellence of exploring *lugar de fala* through literature, and much has been said about it elsewhere. More pertinent to this article is Ruffato’s 2014 collection *Flores artificiais*, which also represents fertile ground for

exploring this topic. According to the book's preface, the stories derive from the recollections of one Dório Finetto, a Brazilian engineer who traveled internationally for many years as a consultant for the World Bank (and whose actual existence remains an open question throughout the book). Finetto allegedly offered his notebooks to Ruffato for him to use or discard as he saw fit, and from the hundreds of pages he received, Ruffato chose eight stories to rework in his own style, translating six of them from English, Spanish, and French (10).⁶

The story “Comer *sushi* em Beirute,” which appears near the end of the collection, portrays Finetto's experience at a restaurant in Lebanon's capital, in which he meets Marcelo Barresi, a man described early on as “[g]rande, gordo [...] enfiado num batido terno preto” and as having “[u]ma risada larga, ruidosa, avassaladora, que chocalhava seu enorme corpo gelatinoso, Hahahahahaha!” (110). During their conversation at the restaurant, Finetto initially recoils at the “escandalosa risada” (113) of the man, “cujos olhos cintilaram de gulodice” (112) upon seeing the food before him. The narrator's opinion changes, however, as Marcelo recounts his story: in light of a contentious family life in his native Argentina, he left home upon reaching adulthood. He soon became involved in political resistance efforts—much to his family's dismay, given that his grandfather had disappeared years earlier, presumably killed because of his political militancy. While visiting his home after a months-long absence, Marcelo learned from his father that his mother had died by suicide; a few years later, his father also died, “tomado por uma tristeza generalizada” (119). Sensing trouble after Isabel Perón's overthrow in 1976—and never willing to risk too much in his resistance efforts—he fled to Brazil, eventually becoming a professor of sociology in France (which led to his presence in Beirut, to teach a course at one of his university's partner institutions).

As Finetto and readers learn of the tragic episodes in Marcelo's life, what emerges is his pervasive sense of loneliness and in-betweenness: “sou argentino, ou fui... um dia... [...] Já eu não tenho lugar algum para regressar...” (111-12). Though they spend only a few hours together, the narrator comes away from his conversation with Marcelo with a

⁶ Ruffato specifies that “Uma história inverossímil” and “Susana” were written in Portuguese, but he does not specify the original language(s) of composition for the other six stories (10).

markedly different estimation of the man before him. Given that the story is devoid of observable actions beyond those common to any dinner scene, the crucial role of speech and language in the change in Finetto's assessment becomes clear. Interlingual communication features prominently this story: though readers encounter it in Portuguese, it was allegedly recorded originally in Spanish or English or French (Ruffato does not specify which) and is set against the primarily Arabic-speaking backdrop of Lebanon. The Asian server speaks to the men in English, despite Marcelo's attempts to interact with her in French (108-09), a language commonly spoken in Lebanon due in large part to the twenty-year French Mandate that began in the 1920s. And though the main characters' conversation begins in French, it shifts briefly to Italian and then to Portuguese before continuing in earnest in Spanish. Intermingled with these descriptions, the narrator uses Japanese terms to identify what lies before them: *sushi*, *misoshiru*, *hashi*, *shoyu* (111). In addition to English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, and Japanese, the text invokes a host of other East Asian languages and cultures: Finetto initially describes their server as "uma jovem sorridente oriental, talvez tailandesa" (108), but as the story progresses he emends his descriptions to "tailandesa, ou vietnamita talvez" (109), "vietnamita, ou birmanesa talvez" (109), "cambojana talvez" (109), "chinesa talvez" (110), "laosiana talvez" (111), and "malaia talvez" (112), before finally settling on a decision tinged with ambivalence: "sim, talvez tailandesa" (112). This signals the elusive and shifting nature of *lugar de fala* and identity as projected onto others by observers, and it continually points the readers to a complex network of languages and cultures as they proceed through the text. Indeed, discussing *Flores artificiais* as a whole, Schøllhammer notes in Finetto's point of view a "double perspectivism" that "becomes a way to think of [...] the globalized world and abandon the particular contentions of a realism bound to the local or national experience" (43-44).

While including so many languages in the story's seventeen pages transcends national borders and signals disorientation and miscommunication (as occurs between the server and her customers, for example), it also facilitates mutual understanding for Marcelo and Finetto, as they discuss personal connections to each of the languages they use. At the risk of stating the obvious, *lugar de fala* depends on language, and people's mastery of a

given language necessarily affects the way and the extent to which they can express themselves. As noted earlier, Marcelo tries unsuccessfully to communicate with the server in French, but she responds “num inglês arrevesado” (109). Witnessing this scene produces sympathy in Finetto, who observes the woman “tentando explicar, numa língua que não era a sua, as diferenças entre os diversos pratos de uma culinária em tudo a ela alheia” (109). When their food arrives, Marcelo explains to Finetto that he hadn’t meant to order what she serves him—when he had pointed to an item on the menu to ask what it was and the server “interpretou como um pedido, ele resolveu não discutir, Hahahahahaha!” (111).

Likewise lacking the linguistic knowledge needed to engage with the server in her native language, Finetto apparently communicates with her in English. Combined with the power dynamic manifested in their interactions (she is the server; he is the customer) this linguistic impasse restricts the narrator’s access to her perspective and lived experience. It also limits his descriptions of her coworker, who he characterizes simply as “uma senhora baixinha e empertigada,” and whose only narrated action in the story is to open the swinging kitchen door and shout “algo em seu idioma nativo” (109).

Limited linguistic proficiency surfaces in Marcelo’s and Finetto’s interactions as well: it puts Finetto off balance when, upon hearing the narrator’s last name, Marcelo attempts to speak with him in Italian, to which Finetto responds (in French) that “embora *oriundi*, não falava a língua de meus avós” (110). After learning that Finetto is Brazilian, Barresi formulates a few phrases in Portuguese but soon shifts to Spanish, explaining, “Até falava português, mas esqueci, hahahahaha!” (110). In forgetting the Portuguese he used to know, Marcelo’s *lugar de fala* shifts into a different space that, while still multilingual, must be plotted along different lines. As for Finetto, who is a native Portuguese speaker but who (perhaps due to his time abroad) writes in what Ruffato calls “um português bastante peculiar” (10), we sense traces of strangeness in his writing but do not see it in this story, as it was reportedly translated into Portuguese by Ruffato.

This story, which is far more complicated in the telling of it than in its plot points, also emblemizes the evolving nature of *lugar de fala*, which can sometimes be presented as if it were a static facet of a person’s identity but that—given that it comprises our lived experiences, which continue to be added to daily—is, in reality, constantly shifting. In this

text, the exploration of *lugar de fala* occurs not so much through the identity of the main characters (whose ancestors are Italian, as are Ruffato's), but rather through the exploration of "fala" itself: that is, the way language appears in the story. In addition to the languages listed above, gestures are a crucial part of the (mis)communication that occurs in the story—from the toast Marcelo proposes and Finetto's subsequent "movimento qualquer" (110) that Marcelo interprets as an invitation to join him at his table; to the server's misinterpretation of Marcelo's act of pointing to the menu and his subsequent recourse to "fazendo sinais para a moça" (112) to communicate with her; to his "risada escandalosa" (113) that symbolizes a grotesque rupture in the quiet ambience of an otherwise quiet restaurant, as noted earlier; to the way Finetto's private thoughts are violently "guilhotinadas por Marcelo me perguntando se me importava se ele fumasse" (112); to the embrace Marcelo gives Finetto at the end of the story (124).

Stepping back to consider the structure of the story itself, we see a tangled web of language that includes various instances of turning over the narrative: most of Marcelo's story originally comes to Finetto in Spanish, and he records it in his notebooks in either French, Spanish, or English. Finetto later turns his notebooks over to a woman named Míriam, whom he hires to type them up on the computer (14). Then, he sends the documents to Ruffato, who (after Finetto declines an invitation to co-author the stories with him) turns the narrative over to the narrator (the possibly fictional Finetto), who in turns yields the narrative to Marcelo for most of the story. There is no way Finetto could have written Marcelo's story down during the dinner at which he heard it, however, which makes it clear that he is recalling his interlocutor's language after the fact, and then giving it to Ruffato, who then changes it: "elegi alguns capítulos para, refeitos, compor o livro" (10). Ruffato notes that, in the process of being translated, the texts "perderam suas características, resultando numa linguagem bastante homogênea" (10). This story, then, is filtered through multiple memories and perspectives and languages, with plenty of ambiguity present that would frustrate attempts to reconstruct its editorial process. To complicate things even further, the story is notable in its almost complete lack of quotation marks, which effectively blurs the lines between Finetto's speech and Marcelo's, thereby

complicating readers' attempts to decipher whose *lugar de fala* takes center stage at any given moment.

When Marcelo begins recounting his story in earnest, there are opening quotation marks, followed by an eleven-page narration with no separation of paragraphs or quotation marks used for conversations he recounts. Similar to what happens when he learns of his mother's death by suicide ("corri para o banheiro e vomitei, vomitei, vomitei" [118]), it is as if in Marcelo's narration to Finetto he is disgorging himself emotionally, expelling repressed trauma and tragedy in an attempt to work through them (LaCapra 717). The extended speech act he engages in seems to have a therapeutic effect on him since, after dinner ends and they enter the elevator together, "Marcelo desceu no sétimo andar, e, ao se despedir, abraçou-me emocionado" (124). It is notable that he opens up most fully when speaking in his native Spanish, once again signaling a connection between people's ability or willingness to express themselves and the language in which they are doing so.

In coming to know Marcelo, Finetto feels empathy for him, despite his (and readers' potential) discomfort at his irreverent behavior. According to Ruffato, this is precisely one of the functions of literature — "tem esse papel de te colocar o incômodo" ("Literatura, empatia" 5). It is this discomfort that initially predisposes readers against Marcelo and sets the stage for them to be surprised if and when, as they learn his backstory, they find themselves sympathizing with him. This shift in attitude occurs because Marcelo recounts his story in a language familiar to him and is thereby able to convey all that he wishes. Similarly, Ruffato translates the story into Portuguese for his Lusophone readers. This interlingual process calls attention to the slipperiness of language and to the inevitable changes in meaning that occur when filtered through an additional language, perspective, or medium (e.g., the written version of Marcelo's words does not convey his intonation or speech rate during his extended monologue).

In describing the potential impacts of his writing on readers, Ruffato explains, "se eu quisesse criar um efeito [...] seria esse: de provocar incômodo, de as pessoas se sentirem incomodadas. [...] [S]e você incomoda o leitor, ele passa a ter uma visão do mundo diferente, e portanto vai ser uma pessoa melhor em relação ao mundo" ("Literatura, empatia" 6). "Comer *sushi* em Beirute" provides multiple opportunities for readers to feel

such discomfort and to question the *lugares de fala* they encounter in it, the most prominent of which are not so very far removed from Ruffato's own trajectory (Finetto is a fellow *mineiro*, after all, and both Finetto and Marcelo are descended from Italian immigrants to Brazil).⁷ Notwithstanding these regional and ancestral parallels, the text represents a rich exploration of the way that language can complicate, enrich, and limit an individual's *lugar de fala*. Confronting the slipperiness of *lugar de fala* and the interlingual filtering at play even between two seemingly similar characters can perhaps motivate readers to listen more carefully to those around them, learning their stories and being willing to continually reevaluate their attitudes toward them.

Final Thoughts

Each of the texts examined in this article includes characters or poetic voices whose identities, choices, and life experiences diverge from those of their authors in minor or major ways. Viewed from the restrictive sense sometimes employed in discussions of *lugar de fala*, these texts might represent transgressions of what should be done. Against the backdrop of Ribeiro's stated goal of destabilizing "a hierarquização de saberes consequente da hierarquia social" (*Lugar de fala* 44) and the desire to "rompe[r] com a voz única" (54), however, these texts represent thoughtful expansions of the kinds of "listening positionality" (Fantinato 35) readers have access to. They demonstrate how *lugar de fala* can be meaningfully brought to bear, independent of the degree to which characters and authors resemble each other. Looking beyond the texts analyzed here, we could identify in the oeuvre of each author a multiplicity of additional experiments in imaginative listening that bear out the attitudes toward *lugar de fala* expressed in their interviews. In short, Ruffato, Lisboa, Sobral, and Martins consistently manifest through their texts the belief that writing, reading, and empathy interconnect and can have real implications for interpersonal and political relationships.

⁷ Notably, the Asian server and her unidentified colleague have very little screen time in this story, perhaps precisely because of the linguistic barriers standing between them and the male characters. In other words, this story focuses on Barresi's *lugar de fala* as one of multiple languages, but it is also notable because of what it lacks—because of its denial of a meaningful *lugar de fala* to the female characters.

In keeping with this, we contend that an expansive approach to *lugar de fala* enables writers and readers to consider a comprehensive range of influential factors, including the identity and positionality of speakers, the historical and political backdrop of speech acts, the geopolitical and cultural places occupied by those who speak, and the significance of the stories being told in relation to wider contexts. Ruffato's story, for example, is impactful in its own right, but it becomes more so when readers are reminded, at the end of the text, that Finetto and Marcelo's conversation takes place in Beirut, and that from his hotel room the narrator can see, "na esquina da quadra, um prédio em ruínas, ainda com marcas do bombardeio da última guerra..." (124). These marks of trauma and violence call to readers, reminding them of what remains largely unsaid and unnoticed in Finetto's story.

Beyond what remains unsaid in a given story, imaginative listening also encompasses the geospatial locus of readers in their reception of that account. As readers engage with texts that push them towards discomfort, empathy, and a reexamination of their perspectives, they undergo individual exercises in imaginative listening. Their geographical locations play a role, as do the mental and emotional spaces in which they read. These factors can all predispose readers to take a text seriously and continue to ponder it long after they have finished the act of reading, thereby helping them perpetually and imaginatively explore different ways of being in the world.

The commercial and critical successes of Ruffato, Lisboa, Martins, and Sobral attest to their ability to successfully connect with readers across different settings. And while they clearly view *lugar de fala* in a flexible and permissive sense in theory, they also caution against cavalier appropriation of others' perspectives and life experiences in practice. In other words, they understand that exploitative and extractive enactments of *lugar de fala* carry the potential to reinforce the problematic sociopolitical dynamics that Ribeiro, Dalcastagnè, and so many others warn about, in which certain groups enjoy privilege more than others. Notwithstanding these risks, the authors' narrative explorations, along with their interview comments, make it clear that they do not shy away from creating characters who are "other" to them. Instead, they focus on developing rich narratives that push their readers to think differently and to listen more attentively.

Furthermore, while Ruffato, Lisboa, Martins, and Sobral may limit their imaginative ventures to fiction, their texts invoke very real sociopolitical issues: the pervasiveness of (often racialized) sexual violence, as signaled in Lisboa's "Glória"; racial profiling in social interactions and in policing, as in Martins's "Espiral" and in Sobral's "Fantasia" (and other poems); and the trauma and destruction of war that haunts Ruffato's "Comer *sushi* em Beirute." These texts remind us, sometimes in subtle ways and at other times directly, that these persistent problems are all too often the result of an incapacity or unwillingness to "escutar por parte de quem sempre foi autorizado a falar" (Ribeiro, *Lugar de fala* 54). Stated another way, these texts enjoin readers to adopt a posture of forbearance and of imaginative listening that carries the potential to reduce interpersonal conflict and ameliorate the divisive tendencies embedded so deeply in—and across—societies.

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