



GRAFFITI AS A CULTURAL SCENE IN THE CITIES: DECOLONIALITY AND BIOPOLITICS

O GRAFITE COMO CENA CULTURAL NAS CIDADES: DECOLONIALIDADE E BIOPOLÍTICA

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ABSTRACT

Artistic manifestations afford our society the robustness to respond to potential human-rights violations, most notably freedom of speech in a hierarchical society governed by forms of power, which relate to the concept of biopolitics posited by Michael Foucault. It is believed that, within the scope of culture, art is restrained, governed and ranked by micro-powers that foment censorship, repression and restriction mechanisms, conceivably impeding democratic, constitutional accessibility to culture. Cultural control exerted by biopolitics on the society is perceptible in the expurgation of artistic manifestations, vitiation of the artist's image and escalating detraction of art in the political and institutional scope. The relation between art and power in Brazil features a perpetuation of colonial matrix that permits micro-powers to dismantle cultural policies geared to diversity-based artistic manifestations. Based upon such premise, this paper aims to analyze to what extent graffiti can be considered a territory esthetical occupation and simultaneously a symbolic encroachment of not-available-to-everyone spaces.

Keywords: Graffiti, Biopolitics, Descolonialism, Freedom of Speech.

RESUMO

As manifestações artísticas fornecem fôlego para a sociedade reagir a possíveis violações de direitos humanos, em especial ao de expressão, em uma sociedade hierarquizada e normatizada por sistemas de poder, que no presente artigo se relacionam à biopolítica conceituada por Michel Foucault. Entendemos que a existência de micropoderes no âmbito cultural, que controlam, normatizam e hierarquizam a arte, propiciam mecanismos de censura, repressão e cerceamento da liberdade de expressão que podem impedir o acesso democrático e constitucional à cultura. O controle cultural exercido pela biopolítica em uma sociedade pode ser identificado na higienização das manifestações artísticas, na estigmatização da figura do artista pelo preconceito e na crescente desvalorização da arte por esferas políticas e institucionais. No contexto brasileiro, as relações entre arte e poder expressam características da perpetuação de uma matriz colonial, a qual permite que micropoderes desarticulem as políticas públicas culturais voltadas para manifestações artísticas baseadas na diversidade. Com base nessa premissa, o presente artigo tem como principal objetivo analisar em que medida podemos considerar o grafite como uma tomada estética de territórios e ao mesmo tempo uma invasão simbólica de espaços que não estão disponíveis a todos.

Palavras-chave: grafite, biopolítica, decolonialismo, liberdade de expressão.



INTRODUCTION

The increasing practice of graffiti in cities has enabled new approaches to the role of urban art in terms of cultural, political and social reconfigurations observed in society today. There is an uneven, contradictory and excluding growth process in urban areas, which generate disputes over power and property. Cities present disparities in the usufruct of their common spaces, generating conflicts between the different social groups that share the urban space. The exclusion of individuals considered unfit for urban living reveals the city's permissiveness in terms of practices of segregation and hierarchy of the population into citizens and non-citizens. Considering this oppressive reality, which violates the fundamental rights of belonging to the urban environment, graffiti represents an aesthetic and political action that claims plural and democratic spaces of conviviality. Accordingly, the practice of graffiti involves a discussion both about the aesthetic taking of urban spaces that are not available to all citizens and about a symbolic invasion of private property. But to what extent can we consider graffiti in each of these aspects?

According to Márcia Tiburi (2011), in relation to the concept of symbolic invasion of walls, she points out that unauthorized visual interventions in urban space can represent a more complex social issue than aesthetic or semiotic discussions. According to her essay *Direito visual à cidade* (Visual Right to the City), the restlessness of a large part of the citizens about the graphic interferences in the walls comes from a hegemonic culture of repudiation of the manifestation of the "other". Accordingly, the concern of many to maintain the walls in their neutral, intact and private state makes it possible to identify an authoritarian and oppressive power system, which tends to eliminate the difference and existence of discriminated social groups, even if immaterial. The current urban aestheticization is therefore very much marked by façades that are impermeable to inclusion and diversity, which affects the citizen's right to be and be in the city.

The disputes over power and private property in the city involve mechanisms of exclusion of aesthetic interventions that do not follow the standards imposed by contemporary biopolitics in urban territories. This context of cultural segregation follows the idea of Tiburi (2011), which identifies in the city a system regulated by aesthetic and political conventions that promote the selection of what can be seen and shared as visual culture in urban spaces. The graphic interference on the city walls enables the visualization of discourses and claims of minorities not contemplated by the aesthetic molds of the hegemonic Eurocentric tradition. For a culture notably controlled by Eurocentric molds, such as the colonized countries, the maintenance of "clean" walls represents the socio-cultural hygienization imposed by biopolitics in cities. Thus, the appropriation of walls by plural aesthetic manifestations, such as graffiti,



tends to be opposed by those individuals who believe that these urban interferences are corrupting the aesthetic purity and safety of urban spaces.

Tiburi (2011) discusses the impact of aesthetic interference made by marginalized groups in the city through the analysis of the transgressive phenomenon described as graffiti. But considering graffiti as an analogous language, of rupture of the visual and cultural linearity of a normatized city, it becomes feasible to incorporate graffiti under its theoretical considerations. Graffiti and street art are, after all, part of the same process of taking possession of territories dominated by the inequality imposed by capitalism, as both dismantle aesthetic standards imposed by the current biopolitics in urban spaces, enabling a political action against the daily authoritarianism of cities. Thus, in Tiburi's words, graffiti represents

O fim da sociedade de aparência pelo direito visual à cidade como direito de aparecer. E como direito à impureza, à sujeira. E nesse sentido alguma coisa de verdadeiramente irritante para a sensibilidade fria e dura do capitalismo – e de seu agente burguês, o sacerdote da estética da fachada e sua devoção à limpeza, à higiene, ao branqueamento – que ao corromper o sistema da superfície lisa dos muros prejudica a ordem, acaba com o cinismo que garante que a vida em sociedade vai bem¹. (2011, p. 43).

Considering Tiburi's reflection on graffiti as an aesthetic and political act of claiming the city, it would be possible to consider graffiti in the same process, of giving voice to an urban manifesto against an aesthetic order of the neutrality of white facades, which exclude social and cultural differences. The observation of the omission of the “other” is analyzed by the author as a symbol of a society with a world view closed to diversity, in which the lack of otherness negatively affects urban coexistence, especially in the egalitarian right to exist as a citizen. According to Tiburi, “The closed worldview is like a white facade.” (Free translation. 2011, p. 43).

In this urban scenario of inequalities, graffiti can change the perception of the territories in which it is inserted, allowing the individual to re-signify concepts of belonging to the spaces of cities, thus admitting new relationships between the private and the public, between everyday life and politics, between the particular and the collective. In this way, possibilities for the construction of other spaces emerge in the urban territories, such as aesthetic, political and social.

However, the right to belong to the city and to enjoy urban spaces is directly related to the historical context of each city, which will influence the ways of reading the walls and all urban dynamics.

¹ The end of the society of appearance by the visual right to the city as the right to appear. And as a right to impurity, to dirt. And in this sense something truly irritating to the cold, hard sensibility of capitalism - and its bourgeois agent, the priest of facade aesthetics and the devotion to cleanliness, hygiene, whitening - that by corrupting the system of the smooth surface of the walls undermines order, ends the cynicism that ensures that life in society is going well (Free translation).

In cities with colonial heritage, such as Brazil, the relationship between the neutrality of walls and the social hygiene promoted by established groups is clearly strong. The discomfort caused by the visual disruption of graffiti and street art on walls and facades reveals the resistance to accepting any form of artistic expression that is not in accordance with the canonical molds of traditional European art. The white color itself refers to the metaphor of the domination of the city by the white and European individual. According to Tiburi, “The erasure is innervation, slap on the delicate 'skin' of the smooth white facade like the face of a white European man” (Free translation. 2011, p. 45).

In the visual perception of current cities, graffiti stresses the institutional art system eminently formatted by Eurocentric culture, as it expresses discourses, practices and cultural identities excluded by European art throughout history. According to the historical academic categorization of artistic manifestations between erudite and popular, the legitimacy of graffiti has been absorbed very recently, but still linked to this hierarchical system of art that determines which has greater or lesser value according to sociocultural criteria.

In the context of Brazilian culture, Marcelo Campos, in the essay *Herança conquistada, direitos esquecidos, espelhos devolvidos: a presença da ancestralidade africana no entendimento da arte e da cultura brasileiras* (2018), warns about art mechanisms that label certain artistic manifestations according to racist and discriminatory criteria. As if certain forms of art could not coexist in all cultural spaces, with a social selection of territories for each type of artistic expression. For this theorist, these class divisions must be eliminated so that freedom of expression is not violated in the exercise of Brazilian diversity. According to Campos,

Há muitas urgências a serem colocadas em questão. A separação entre kitsch e vanguarda, de Clement Greenberg, e o conceito de negatividade de Theodor Adorno funcionaram num momento em que uma conjecturada distinção formal se estabelecia, mas precisamos rever essas bases. O que se pede, agora, é a presença, a participação, a ampliação do contingente antes marginalizado nas bienais, nos salões, no sistema oficial. E todos precisamos rever as classificações comparativas e valorativas. Entre Volpi e Rubem Valentim, privilegiou-se o primeiro, mesmo tendo Valentim críticas positivas de Giulio Carlo Argan, por exemplo² (2018, p. 159).

The view of graffiti as art of lesser value comes from a Western cultural formation that does not privilege cultural codes of popular social strata, since it does not derive from a technical and cultural knowledge built by canons of a high art, called Eurocentric. Frederico Coelho, in his essay *Arte para quem?*

² There are many urgencies to be put into question. Clement Greenberg's separation between kitsch and avant-garde and Theodor Adorno's concept of negativity worked at a time when a conjectured formal distinction was being established, but we need to review these bases. What is now being asked for is the presence, the participation, the expansion of the contingent previously marginalized in the biennials, in the salons, in the official system. And we all need to review comparative and evaluative classifications. Between Volpi and Rubem Valentim, the former was privileged, even though Valentim had positive reviews from Giulio Carlo Argan, for example (Free translation).

Arte para todos (2018), analyzes how the visual arts that reflect the popular imagination – and in the present research we can refer to graffiti – are last in the art system. In other words, in a reductionist perspective of art, artistic manifestations of a popular nature end up being omitted from the process of construction and fruition of a country's culture. Thus, as Coelho says, “Visual art, in its historical autonomy in the public sphere of modernity, do not necessarily work from the logic of mass culture and popular consumption” (Free translation. 2018, p. 70).

In this sense, the practice of graffiti, for a normatized and hierarchized Western society in its social and cultural spheres, may represent an act of indiscipline committed by socially marginalized individuals who subvert the traditional concepts established about art and culture. The relationship between art and power can be discussed based on concepts by Michel Foucault presented in his work *Society must be Defended* (*Em defesa da sociedade*, 1999), which concern biopolitics in a system of normatization of society. Graffiti could be interpreted, in this way, as a micro power of resistance to this social control, in which the artist uses art as a political instrument in the relationship of forces between the individual and the control over his/her right to expression, characterizing a form of protest against a controlled society.

Artistic productions that do not follow the discourses of European art tend to be disqualified, as they do not connect to the historical narrative that underpins the traditional art world. Thinking about art beyond the limits of the European model means installing decolonial lenses on current artistic manifestations. As stated by Costa (2018), the contextualization of art today demands its adaptation to the principles of multiculturalism and globalization, which reveal other cultural matrices hitherto excluded from Western culture.

According to Quintero, Figueira and Elizalde (2019), decolonial studies represent a systematic set of theoretical procedures that revisit the issue of power in modernity. According to them, colonialism as a mechanism of domination structured asymmetrical power relations in modernity from Europe. The submission of much of the world's population to Eurocentric cultural patterns stems, therefore, from this asymmetry of power relations, which results in the subordination of the practices and subjectivities of previously dominated peoples. This cultural standardization imposed by Eurocentric cultural molds structures a specific form of knowledge and subjectivities in modernity.

The historical process of coloniality established relations of power, control and exclusion of identities and subjectivities through a system of domination and social exploitation that is perpetuated in current societies. The organization of a system of cultural domination in countries like Brazil comes from the reproduction of micropowers that control the production and reproduction of subjectivities linked to Eurocentrism and modern rationality. The existence of the colonial matrix of power in the history of Latin America outlines an ordering and accumulative system of sociocultural relations, which are active even



after decolonization. In this sense, Quintero, Figueira and Elizalde state that “It is clear that colonialism as a historical phenomenon precedes and originates coloniality as a matrix of power, but colonialism survives colonialism itself”. (Free translation. 2019, P. 7).

Through a decolonial look at the characteristics of Brazilian culture, it becomes possible to identify the sociocultural autonomy of artistic manifestations segregated throughout history, which in turn creates political actions of resistance to the continuous racial and social segregation in the country's art. Emancipation from the mechanisms of oppression and domination in colonized Brazilian society involves the understanding that marginalized artistic manifestations, such as graffiti and other forms of expression based on diversity, can break with the paradigms imposed by coloniality on Brazil's cultural scene.

The perpetuation of coloniality in Brazilian culture imposes processes of segregation of plural artistic expressions, including graffiti, revealing mechanisms of power imposed on the culture of countries that still model their institutions based on Eurocentric historical-structural dependence. Graffiti articulates the dismantling of this model of cultural stratification between Europeans and other racial categories marginalized in Brazilian culture. The freedom of expression of graffiti reflects Brazilian plurality and claims independence from a culture historically controlled and regulated by micro-powers of cultural subordination.

However, the condition for graffiti to implement a cultural process with its own and independent aesthetic matrices depends on the degree of cultural relevance it presents in today's society. In recent years, graffiti has gained more space in art circuits, including being inserted in galleries and museums, but there is still no consensus, including in the legal sphere, as to when a work of graffiti is art or vandalism. In Brazil, even though it was decriminalized by Law 12,408/2011³, the practice of graffiti remains closely associated with marginality and is still considered a source of expression for subaltern groups that seek public space as a form of belonging to the city. The understanding that graffiti has a cultural importance linked to the whole of society, and not only to excluded groups, prevents its practice from being viewed on the basis of cultural rights⁴ provided for in Article 5 of the 1988 Federal Constitution (FC).

³Law 12,408/11 decriminalizes the practice of street art, as long as it is authorized by the competent public body. Otherwise, it can be considered graffiti and can be excluded from the space, since graffiti is considered a crime by the Environmental Crime Law. According to Art. 65 of Law 9,605/98, “Graffiti or otherwise foul an urban building or monument: Penalty - detention, from 3 (three) months to 1 (one) year, and fine. § 1 If the act is carried out in a listed monument or thing due to its artistic, archaeological or historical value, the penalty is from 6 (six) months to 1 year.” (Free translation. BRASIL, 2011).

⁴Although they are not expressly provided for in Title II of Fundamental Rights and Guarantees of the 1988 Federal Constitution, it is possible to affirm that cultural rights are part of fundamental rights, through Article 5 of the FC, in which cultural rights can be identified. According to Carvalho, “For example, freedom of artistic expression (item IX), copyright and related rights (items XXVIII and XXVIII) and the right to protection of cultural heritage (LXXII) are cited (Free translation. 2018, p. 43).



In the Brazilian cultural scene, graffiti tends to be considered art by the population in very specific situations: when it is the work of an internationally renowned artist or when it is legitimized through its institutionalization by public or private authorities. In these situations, graffiti is an intellectual property valued in the urban space, being viewed as a cultural asset and not as a depredatory act of the city. Therefore, it is possible to identify cultural vices inherent to some in evaluating art by the fame of the artist, and not by the aesthetic value of the work. The legal requirement of a permit for the execution of graffiti does not define its legitimacy as an artistic manifestation, as Franca Filho (2016) had already analyzed when identifying that the renowned graffiti artist Banksy never asked for permission to paint his million-dollar graffiti, which enhance the places where they are inserted.

The cultural valorization of only some graffiti exposes the existing contradictions in this artistic practice, since to be considered art they need to be institutionalized and thus have their legal protection guaranteed. However, Franca Filho (2016) interprets the relationship between art, law and urbanism as a partnership that benefits the generation of cities more prepared to develop cultural scenarios based on social inclusion. Thus, he analyzes that the Law contributes to graffiti by guaranteeing its integrity as a cultural asset and thus constituting, in his words, “creative cities”. According to this author,

Essa valorização cultural criou um certo paradoxo para a arte do grafite: originalmente concebido para ser algo anônimo, surpreendente, espontâneo, efêmero, marginal e transitório, o grafite e seus apreciadores começam a reivindicar alguma permanência, estabilidade temporal e proteção jurídico-estatal para aquela expressão artística. Não resta dúvida de que o grafite é uma manifestação artística essencialmente urbana. O lugar por excelência do grafite é a cidade, onde ele cria paisagens muito peculiares e enreda-se a outras manifestações culturais como a dança (*breakdance*) e a música (*rap*), formando o tripé do que se tem chamado do movimento *hip-hop*⁵. (2016, p. 1,348).

In Brazilian cities the growth of graffiti in public spaces has been noticed, however, this increase does not mean that there have been changes in society's reading of this form of artistic expression. The perception that not all graffiti is considered cultural property becomes apparent when there is a popular commotion only with the erasure of graffiti by renowned artists or in specific urban spaces⁶. Meanwhile,

⁵ This cultural valorization created a certain paradox for the art of graffiti: originally conceived to be something anonymous, surprising, spontaneous, ephemeral, marginal and transitory, graffiti and its lovers begin to claim some permanence, temporal stability and legal-state protection for that artistic expression. There is no doubt that graffiti is an essentially urban artistic manifestation. Par excellence, the place of graffiti is the city, where it creates very peculiar landscapes and entwines other cultural manifestations such as dance (*breakdance*) and music (*rap*), forming the tripod of what has been called the hip-hop movement (Free translation).

⁶Case of the removal of graffiti from 23 de Maio Av., in São Paulo, in 2017. On the occasion, the mayor of the city, João Dória, authorized the exclusion of graffiti to install a vertical garden on the site. Due to protests and lawsuits, the city was ordered to pay compensation for the intervention on the graffiti, which was reverted to the Fund for the Protection of Cultural and Environmental Heritage from São Paulo (Fundo de Proteção do Patrimônio Cultural e

countless anonymous graffiti are daily excluded from the cities, and there is no kind of assessment about the violation of cultural rights, about the social and cultural impact of the exclusion of these graffiti for the city.

Surveillance and censorship of graffiti occur in a veiled way by hygienist criteria, which reveal racism and violate the right of expression of minorities in the context of culture. Even if graffiti is no longer considered a crime, there is a selection and spatial and cultural hierarchy of its insertion in urban space. This relationship between art and a hygienist policy can have its principles structured in the biopolitics approached by Foucault (1999c), through which it is possible to identify an urban policy that also governs the cultural life of citizens.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ART WITH BIOPOLITICS

Michel Foucault (1999c) presents the idea that at a certain point there was an internalization of war in Western Europe in the modes of social organization. This shifted the value of war to domestic politics, positivizing it, and legitimizing war itself as a way of governing and, consequently, as a way of life.

This veiled war in today's society, due to social patterns of domination, can be perceived very subtly in art control strategies, that is, when the right to freedom of expression of artistic manifestations is violated. Accordingly, the suppression of the right of expression is justified by the maintenance of order and good customs in society, just as war has already been scientifically justified in the name of the evolution of species.

In the current Brazilian sociocultural scenario, the normatization of society, as Luisa Duarte points out in her work *Arte, censura e liberdade* (2018), violates freedom of expression in artistic manifestations, a fact perceived on the occasion of the prohibition of recent exhibitions, such as *Queermuseu – Cartografias da Diferença na Arte Brasileira* in 2017, at Santander Cultural (Porto Alegre), or by the moral aggression against artists, such as Wagner Schwartz, on the occasion of his *La Bête* presentation, in 2015, at MAM (São Paulo).

According to Duarte, art is currently a territory at war, in which there are constant attacks against artists and the right of expression. The wave of conservatism, which erupts against freedom of expression, accentuates the lack of information in the field of artistic knowledge and distorts the political and sociocultural function of Brazilian art by criteria of racism and social segregation.

Ambiental Paulistano – FUNCAP). Article on the subject can be seen in full at: <https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2019/02/26/justica-de-sp-condena-doria-ea-prefeitura-por-remocao-de-graffiti-on-23-de-may.ghtml>. Accessed on: 30 Aug. 2020



Just as Duarte (2018) identifies in the Brazilian art scene the delegitimization of artistic manifestations based on diversity, Campos (2013) considers that graffiti is a particular target of the war on insubordinate art, with many graffiti being constantly excluded from urban spaces by public agencies as a form of reaction to non-standardized art that subverts the standardized aesthetic logic of the city. As an example one can cite the case of graffiti that was erased by the São Paulo City Hall in 2017 on 23 de Maio Avenue, violating both the artist's right of expression and the citizen's cultural right to enjoy the urban art installed as a material support of their identity and cultural memory. The exclusion of graffiti and the closure of art exhibitions transform Brazilian culture into a minefield, in which artistic manifestations result in an explosion of cultural, religious, political and social offenses and intolerances between artists and art recipients.

This veiled war, perceived in the elimination of works resulting from artistic practices that challenge common sense about values of morality, sexuality or ethics, enables the relationship of art with the regulating domain of life, that is, the biopower expressed by Foucault: "[...] the power to 'make' live and to 'let' die. The right of sovereignty is, therefore, to make die or to let live. And then, it is this new right that is installed: the right to make live and to let die". (Free translation. 1999b, p. 287). This power, perceived by him as sequential to the sovereign power, was to make die in order to let live. By this logic, it is possible to interpret that the censorship of art operates by criteria of hierarchy, that is, not all manifestations of art deserve to exist.

The regulatory power of biopolitics, according to Foucault (1999c), began to manifest itself from the 19th century onwards as the one that manages society, through a policy for life and, specifically, for the healthy life of the population. This technology of power can also act on art under the same political criteria. Just as biopolitics analyzes what types of life should be preserved, one can also think of a type of power that decides what kind of art should be allowed and regulated in urban space.

Based on the idea that some artistic manifestations are considered unworthy to exist in the city, Dias and Teixeira (2019) analyze in which situations graffiti can be considered an illicit act, since even having been decriminalized by Law 12,408/2011, it is considered an act of vandalism by the population. Thus, the recognition of graffiti as art is resisted by those citizens who are opposed to this form of expression, considering it a gesture of aggression to the city, unworthy of being legitimized as an artistic and intellectual expression. According to Dias and Teixeira

Mesmo no campo doutrinário, registra-se certa hesitação em classificá-la como obra intelectual a ser protegida, não obstante a definição ampla de 'obra intelectual'



disposta na Lei n.º 9.610, de 19 de fevereiro de 1998 (Lei dos Direitos Autorais) (BRASIL, 2013), para fins de proteção jurídica⁷ (2019, p. 113).

The insertion of graffiti as public art acquires importance in the cultural scene of cities but involves many controversies regarding the legality of its practice in urban spaces, mainly due to the inconsistency in defining the rights of execution, preservation, and removal of the works performed. The decriminalization of graffiti changes the legal context of the practice of graffiti in urban spaces, and it is necessary to understand what rights are involved from the production to the reception of this artistic expression. In this regard, there is currently a demand to evaluate the new urban rights, as Franca Filho emphasizes, in order to "examine whether, in fact, there is any subjective right of the graffiti artist to the integrity and preservation of his/her urban artwork". (Free translation. 2016, p. 1346).

The valorization of graffiti in the urban scenario depends on the definition of its cultural characteristics in a legal, artistic and urbanistic scenario. In other words, how the practice of graffiti should be interpreted in the spheres of law and contemporary art. Regardless of the location or the length of time graffiti has been present in a certain place, it is necessary to have an updated legal apparatus to deal with the new relationships between graffiti artists and the city. The right to art, as Franca Filho (2016) argues, grounds the right of expression of the graffiti artist in urban space, enabling legal resources to ensure the practice of this artistic manifestation protected from prejudiced attacks on the graffiti artist social figure and the cultural production itself.

Amidst the urban hostility resulting from the dispute for territories, art represents one of the only resources of access to the city for socially excluded groups. Thus, to guarantee the rights of graffiti's freedom of expression is to offer resistance to the biopolitics of maintaining control over art and graffiti.

The presence of biopolitics, as emphasized by Foucault (1999c), is translated by technologies of domination over life, a kind of regulatory power that acts over society as a whole and not only over an individual, an individual body, controlled by a disciplinary domain. In art, the transformation of disciplinary power into a regulator underlies the idea of control no longer over the work of an isolated artist, but over the collective in art. In other words, when graffiti is censored or eliminated, a control is being imposed over an entire collectivity of a marginalized group in society, which, through art, tries to be visualized in the urban space. Graffiti, in this aspect, is one of the manifestations most curtailed in its expression, because it translates the collective, a group that demands rights violated by the regulatory power. This tends to normalize the entire culture and not only the individual work of an artist, and an entire cultural dynamic of giving visibility to diversity ends up being censored.

⁷ Even in the doctrinal field, there is a certain hesitation in classifying it as an intellectual work to be protected, despite the broad definition of 'intellectual work' provided for in Law 9,610, of February 19, 1998 (Copyright Law) (BRASIL, 2013), for the purpose of legal protection (Free translation).



According to Foucault (1999c), the regulating power does not exclude the disciplining power, since both types could be present in society, one directed to the man-body and the other to the man-species. Based on this idea, in situations in which graffiti is censored as a language of collective expression, it is actually the individuals who are being watched, punished, curtailed in their right of expression as citizens belonging to the city. Therefore, when multiplicity is governed, it ends up having repercussions on the individual, that is, subjectivities are also affected, as Foucault points out: "Discipline attempts to govern the multiplicity of men insofar as this multiplicity can and must result in individual bodies that must be watched, trained, used, eventually punished". (Free translation. 1999b, p. 289).

Control over art is also a form of dominion over life, because when it differentiates what is art from what is not, it ends up naturalizing the right to exclude identities, minorities, diversities and forms of life that, through art, try to exist in a society. Likewise, the categorization of graffiti as inferior in a hierarchizing art system reveals that certain identities are considered inadequate to the status quo of art, that is, one can perceive the existence of a mechanism of social hygienization according to which, for an identity considered superior to exist, it is necessary to eliminate others, considered inferior, as Foucault points out: "if you want to live, it is necessary that the other dies - in a way that is entirely new and precisely compatible with the exercise of biopower" (Free translation. 1999b, p. 305).

According to the principle of the naturalization of the right to die as a condition to make the strongest live, presented by Foucault (1999c), art constitutes a means to resist the continuity of the war in the fight against the power devices that reproduce segregation, inequality, racism, intolerance, and censorship. André Carminda (2011) points out that through art it is possible to make up other uses of space, besides generating new discourses in more affective social relationships. Therefore, one can analyze graffiti as a form of resistance present in the urban space against the excessive curtailment of subjectivities and the annulment of identities that prevail in today's society, reacting against oppressive sociopolitical narratives.

The perception of a biopower in the practice of graffiti acquires sharper contours in the current process of institutionalization of this artistic manifestation in urban spaces. For Fernandes (2018), the insertion of graffiti in cities reflects public and private interests in giving prestige to the urban language as a mechanism of cultural increment, through popular participation in national and international graffiti events in several Brazilian cities. However, in many of these events it is identified a control in the mapping of the insertion of these graffiti, demonstrating that some urban spaces are not accessible to this type of artistic manifestation and delimiting social cells in the city impermeable to the discourses of graffiti.

This context reveals Fernandes' (2018) perception that the institutionalization of these collective movements, initiated in the marginality, is being disciplined through biopolitics in the access to public



spaces. According to her, the emergence of rules and boundaries on the use of streets has been promoting a progressive control of veiled powers over art. Its institutionalization, when conditioned by discriminatory norms, affects the right to freedom of expression and access to the city through art.

The insertion of art in the urban space affects the established rules about who can manifest or what can be part of the public space, enhancing the dialectical relations of reaction and counter-reaction between divergent social groups. In this way, graffiti will hardly be accepted equally by all individuals, since it represents different interests in the process of dispute over the city's territories. Such competition can be discussed based on the work *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, by Foucault (*Uma trajetória filosófica: para além do estruturalismo e da hermenêutica*. 1995), in which he elucidates that power arises from the tension exercised between subjects, in the midst of whom social relations occur dialectically according to the conjunction of social, political, economic and ideological forces. The individual is therefore endowed with the freedom to accept or not the disciplining norms and to offer resistance to the systems of social control.

Thus, graffiti establishes a reaction against the forms of control over individuals in urban space, enabling the propagation of discourses that escape the “normality” imposed on society. According to the logic of biopower, urban space is appropriated by graffiti in a system of resistance to the attempt to “normalize” the individual and art itself. Therefore, when art becomes standardized – due to different interests – there is a risk of annulling the only democratic spaces of reaction against the imposition of standardized criteria that suffocate and violate the right to coexistence of diversities in urban space. The power game loses its meaning when there are no opponents in the public arena of cities, that is, when art ceases to be resistance and gives up fighting strategies.

Graffiti's normative micropowers reflect the power principles exposed by Foucault (1995), based on a tension exerted between subjects, in which for each imposition there is a contrary reaction, a resistance. In this sense, the resistance discourses of graffiti favor urban dialogues contrary to discriminatory, hierarchical and punitive determinations existing in power relations in cities. Just as Fernandes (2018) points out, cities present a relation of forces in which there is no passivity, but rather a constant game of confrontation of forces, between the established power and the power of resistance. The dispute of powers is part of the urban dynamics and art assumes great responsibility by guaranteeing spaces of struggle in social relations to ensure freedom of expression and fundamental rights.

The homogenization of citizens through the imposition of conducts systematically controlled by moral and behavioral norms does not fit the transgressive nature of graffiti, since ruptures in normality and predictability cannot be accepted in a normatized society, in which individuals and their thoughts tend to be homogenized, which also characterizes a normatization of culture, excluding any manifestation



that does not fit the criteria of "normality". According to Fernandes, "The normalization of subjects would cause a functional regularity in the social network and this disciplining is of the order of biopower" (Free translation. 2011, p. 5).

Cities are made up of rules that govern behavior, gestures, conduct and perceptions in urban spaces and are imposed by discourses of domination that affect freedom of expression. According to Foucault (1995), legislation, surveillance and punishment and even censorship are common tools employed as forms of social and cultural control by micropowers. From this point of view, freedom of expression is fundamental to guaranteeing the territories of graffiti resistance and enabling individuals to be free to accept or contest the orders that regulate society. As mentioned by Fernandes,

Conforme Foucault (1995), o poder é um modo de *ação sobre a ação de outro* ser humano livre, quer dizer que cada sujeito é dotado de liberdade para aceitar ou não as ordens que normatizam a sociedade e pode afrontá-las. Na arte de rua, o grafiteiro usa suas inscrições como gesto de saber artístico para enfrentar um poder instituído. Dessa forma, cada um de nós tem um leque de possibilidades de reação diante dos fatos, cada sujeito opta por seguir ou não as normas estabelecidas⁸. (2018, p. 101).

The political, ethical, social, and philosophical problem of power structures tied to the totalizing dominance of the state can be characterized, according to Foucault (1995), by the form of domination that power structures homogenize a society through the individual monitoring of each citizen. State power operates a political force that is concerned with the interests of the totality or majority of a society. There is an individualizing technique by micropowers that norms society according to hegemonic criteria. Accordingly, the individuality imposed by the State and State institutions compromises the construction of new subjectivities, necessary for a plural and democratic coexistence.

In Foucault's conception, there is no power, but a series of powers orchestrated by various institutions linked to the family, education, health, politics. Art can also be considered one of these social spheres, from which power relations emanate that influence the action of individuals. Artistic manifestations are forms of communication that act on others, acting according to the principles of action present in power relations. According to Foucault,

O exercício do poder não é uma relação entre "parceiros" individuais ou coletivos; é um modo de ação de alguns sobre outros. O que quer dizer, certamente, que não há algo como o "poder" ou "do poder" que existiria globalmente, maciçamente ou

⁸ According to Foucault (1995), power is a way of action on the action of another free human being, it means that each subject is endowed with freedom to accept or not the orders that regulate society and can face them. In street art, the graffiti artist uses his/her inscriptions as a gesture of artistic knowledge to face an established power. Accordingly, each of us has a range of possibilities of reaction to the facts, each subject chooses to follow or not the established norms (free translation).

em estado difuso, concentrado ou distribuído: só há poder exercido por “uns” sobre “os outros”; o poder só existe em ato, mesmo que, é claro, se inscreva num campo de possibilidade esparso que se apoia sobre estruturas permanentes⁹. (1995, p. 242).

Such a form of power relationship is defined by a mode of action that does not act on the other, but on the action of the other. It is, therefore, an action over another, whether this action is eventual, current, present or future. A relationship of violence against the other is a force of coercion and not of power, because according to Foucault, for power to exist there must be no passivity on one side, because then there would be no resistance or dispute of powers through the chain of actions upon actions.

The exercise of power is, therefore, a way of acting on the action of others, in a system called by Foucault (1995) the “government” of men, whereby the exercise of power consists of “governing” or “conducting conducts” from other individuals. “Governing, in this sense, is structuring the eventual field of action of others” (Free translation. FOUCAULT, 1995, p. 244). In this system, freedom is important, since for one individual to act upon the other it is necessary that both be free to effect the mutual play of action and resistance, thus making possible the exercise of power.

Graffiti is a typical example of this mutual game of action and resistance exposed by Foucault (1995), as it is currently no longer a coercively prohibited language, but is censored in a veiled way. Graffiti is not prohibited, but people's behavior is shaped to reject it through prejudice, the hierarchization of art, the absence of public policies and the commodification of urban art. Graffiti is progressively acquiring cultural relevance and legal protection but wrapped in power molds that stipulate ways of using and reading its manifestations in urban spaces.

In contrast, the practice of graffiti presents a power of resistance that contains a mechanism of struggle against attempts to subordinate art to the powers of sociocultural hygienization present in society. Graffiti can thus represent a form of freedom of expression that keeps open and dynamic the power relations in which the construction of alternative modes of knowledge, perception, and existence in cities is allowed.

Graffiti, as a micro-power of resistance, reveals the structure of power relations in art, as well as the origins and methods used for the control of artistic manifestations contrary to the established hegemonic cultural model. In the dispute for power over the use of public space, graffiti offers resistance

⁹ The exercise of power is not a relationship between individual or collective "partners"; it is a mode of action of some over others. Which is to say, certainly, that there is no such thing as "power" or "of power" that would exist globally, massively, or in a diffuse, concentrated, or distributed state: there is only power exercised by "some" over "others"; power exists only in act, even if, of course, it is inscribed in a sparse field of possibility that rests on permanent structures (free translation).

to the control of the right to individual expression, the fight for freedom of expression being a claim that seeks to preserve individuality, according to the following analysis exposed by Foucault:

São lutas que questionam o estatuto do indivíduo: por um lado afirmam o direito de ser diferente, enfatizam tudo aquilo que tornam os indivíduos verdadeiramente individuais. Por outro lado, atacam tudo aquilo que separa o indivíduo, que quebra sua relação com os outros, fragmenta a vida comunitária, força o indivíduo a se voltar para si mesmo e o liga à sua própria identidade de um modo coercitivo¹⁰ (1995, p. 234).

Graffiti is thus conceived as a struggle against the imposition of a hegemonic culture on a society, and not specifically against a certain institution of power or a certain social group. In addition, control over graffiti does not end with the institutionalization of its language, because even though it is authorized in the public space, it will lead to conflicts between opposition elements in the dispute for social, political, economic and cultural power in the city.

RACISM IN GRAFFITI FOR A DECOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF ART

Biopower, through biopolitics, is centered in society, based on a comprehensive type of control that disciplines and regulates, but also produces a massification of individuals. According to Foucault (1999c), there is a technology of power that governs the entire dynamics of society, that is, the set of control processes of civil society and/or the State, as is the case of birth and death records, as well as the surveys that reveal the rates of reproduction, fecundity, immigration, housing, and sexuality. In this system of coordinating life is Medicine, whose function, of public hygienization, is to coordinate medical treatments, prevent diseases, vaccinate against endemics, and manage life. But these state or civil society regulatory mechanisms, despite being designed for the entire population, do not reach everyone, because in the massification there is a hierarchization of individuals according to hygienic criteria, which can permeate racism. According to Taylor,

Quando combinada com o racismo, essa administração passa a ser formulada como uma preocupação com a pureza racial de um povo. Em *A sociedade deve ser defendida*, Foucault argumenta que o biopoder é quase necessariamente racista, uma vez que o racismo, amplamente interpretado, é uma “condição prévia indispensável” que confere ao Estado o poder de matar. Sob tais condições erradicar grupos dessa população é percebido como uma forma justificável de administrar e proteger um povo¹¹ (2018, p. 70).

¹⁰ They are struggles which question the status of the individual: on the one hand, they assert the right to be different, and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on him- self, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way (FOUCAULT, 1995).

¹¹ When combined with racism, this administration comes to be formulated as a concern for the racial purity of a people. In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault argues that biopower is almost necessarily racist, since racism, broadly interpreted, is an “indispensable precondition” that gives the state the power to kill. Under such conditions,



This means that racism, in a broader sense than simply related to race, is linked to the biopower structures that define who will live and who will die in society, which can be understood as social racism, as Foucault points out: “not strictly ethnic racism, but evolutionist racism, biological racism” (free translation. 1999b, p. 313).

According to Taylor (2018), social racism is a way of filtering what does not adapt to the established standardization, what does not follow the necessary standardization for the social organism to function in a homogeneous way and provided for by regulatory structures. And in this management of life, through biopolitics it is necessary to put to death what does not fit the political, social and cultural criteria of the established life project. Thus, Foucault mentions that

O que inseriu o racismo nos mecanismos de Estado foi mesmo a emergência desse biopoder. Foi nesse momento que o racismo se inseriu como mecanismo fundamental do poder, tal como se exerce nos Estados modernos, e faz com que quase não haja funcionamento moderno do Estado que, em certo momento, em certo limite e em certas condições, não passe pelo racismo¹². (1999b, p. 304).

According to this perception, Foucault points out that through racism there was a shift from war to biopolitics, to the population's way of life. There is then a biological hierarchy and a war arises whose objective is to eliminate the other in order to protect one's own life. It is not a military conflict, but a biological one, through the elimination of individuals considered disqualified by the normalized molds. This suppression of subjects unfit for the established biological criteria fragments the population into inferior and superior groups, revealing racism as a mechanism of this hierarchical process of society. According to Foucault,

De uma parte, de fato, o racismo vai permitir estabelecer, entre a minha vida e a morte do outro, uma relação que não é militar e guerreira de enfrentamento, mas uma relação do tipo biológica: “quanto mais espécies inferiores tenderem a desaparecer, quanto mais os indivíduos anormais forem eliminados, menos degenerados haverá em relação à espécie, mais eu – não enquanto indivíduo, mas enquanto espécie – viverei, mais forte serei, mais vigoroso, mais poderei proliferar¹³. (1999b, p. 305).

eradicating groups from this population is perceived as a justifiable way of managing and protecting a people (free translation).

¹² What inserted racism into the mechanisms of the State was the emergence of this biopower. It was at that moment that racism was inserted as a fundamental mechanism of power, as it is exercised in modern States, and it means that there is almost no modern functioning of the State that, at a certain moment, in a certain limit and under certain conditions, does not go through racism (free translation).

¹³ On the one hand, in fact, racism will allow me to establish, between my life and the death of the other, a relationship that is not military and warlike confrontation, but a biological type relationship: "the more inferior species tend to disappear, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in relation to the species, the more I - not as an individual, but as a species - will live, the stronger I will be, the more vigorous, the more I will be able to proliferate (free translation).



Social segregation by racism also promotes fear and intolerance to the presence of the other. In the 19th century, Europeans and North Americans were already expressing repudiation and intolerance of vulnerable groups in the cities because of the increase of urbanization, slums, and the number of unemployed. Rates of crime, mental illness, alcoholism, promiscuity, and prostitution were growing more than the middle class. The result was a progressive fear of the middle class that the increase in these groups would corrupt and degenerate their racial descent. The possibility of degeneration on a national level then provoked a wave of anxiety in Europeans and North Americans that is perpetuated and can be observed in many phenomena today, such as the fear of migratory waves corrupting the social, political and economic structures of their countries (TAYLOR, 2018).

This context of exclusion of differences, based on the fear of racial degeneration, reveals how a Eurocentric hegemonic culture coordinates and perpetuates the imposition of moral, social, political and cultural values on societies. Therefore, art is affected by racism in a veiled war carried out by biopolitics, as a form of cultural selection by extinguishing the right to express the identity of racial groups considered inferior. To that end, Duarte (2018) reflects that only racism can justify the extermination of indigenous culture on the grounds of cultural backwardness, just as racism justifies the discrimination of diversity in the culture of a society. The identification of a biopolitics in art is based on the perception that there is in it a hierarchization based on social criteria, analogous to the social segregation process arising from racism, as pointed out by Foucault,

Com efeito, o que é o racismo? É, primeiro, o meio de introduzir, afinal, nesse domínio da vida de que o poder se incumbiu, um corte: o corte entre o que deve viver e o que deve morrer. No contínuo biológico da espécie humana, o aparecimento das raças, a distinção das raças, a hierarquia das raças, a qualificação de certas raças como boas e de outras, ao contrário, como inferiores, tudo isso vai ser uma maneira de fragmentar esse campo biológico de que o poder se incumbiu; uma maneira de defasar, no interior da população, uns grupos em relação aos outros¹⁴. (1999b, p. 304).

Racism arising from historical structures of coloniality in Latin America established mechanisms of power that socially and culturally segregated artistic manifestations. When censorship and punishment occur in art, micro-powers of sociocultural segregation are exercised by institutional spheres that hierarchize art into superior and inferior, according to the same logic of racial subordination developed

¹⁴ Indeed, what is racism? It is, first of all, the means of introducing, after all, in that domain of life that power has taken charge of, a cut: the cut between what must live and what must die. In the biological continuum of the human species, the appearance of races, the distinction of races, the hierarchy of races, the qualification of certain races as good and of other, on the contrary, as inferior, all this is going to be a way of fragmenting this biological field that power has taken charge of; a way of lagging, within the population, some groups in relation to others (free translation).



by coloniality. Censorship, in many cases, is a way of exterminating the right of expression and, therefore, the existence of minority groups, under prejudiced justifications that the art of these groups is a threat to the traditional Eurocentric standards established as official art. And this can be revealed in the right to usufruct the city.

Foucault (1999c) states that racism makes it possible to take the life of the other not by direct killing, but by exposing him/her to death through exclusion, rejection, and omission. Referring again to art, this racism would operate cultural death, since expressions of art considered "outside normality" tend to be censored and eliminated. A kind of biopolitics defines the type of art that should be excluded in order to prevail another, said to be superior. The control over art is a control over life, because when an institutional power defines what is art and what is not, it naturalizes the right to exclude identities, minorities, diversities and subjectivities of the subjects.

A decolonial perspective on art manifestations that challenge the European artistic tradition validates the importance of valuing cultural manifestations that validate the modes of art and culture production. Among these manifestations, graffiti involves life practices and sociocultural resistance that reveal the possibility of the manifestation of other narratives and historical influences in art. According to Campos (2018), the contemporary art scene must be open to sociocultural updates of recognition of subaltern cultures, which were silenced by societies marked by colonial behaviors, inheritances and historical attempts to perpetuate inequalities between classes, genders and ethnicities.

The development of decolonial theory¹⁵ gained strength from the 1990s onwards in the United States, led by Latin intellectuals established in the country, such as the Peruvian Aníbal Quijano and the Argentine Walter D. Mignolo. The formation of the collective M/C, modernity/coloniality deepened a theoretical thought focused on the problem of subalternization contextualized in Latin America. Quijano and Mignolo, in a proposal to analyze colonialism through currents unrelated to the Eurocentric view, guided the term Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP) to express another type of study, called "internal colonialism". The CMP emerges as a critique of post-colonial and post-structuralist studies, which according to the authors were very much guided by currents of thought constructed by Europeans, with the need to form a local epistemological critique. According to Mignolo,

"colonialidade" equivale a uma "matriz ou padrão colonial de poder", o qual ou a qual é um complexo de relações que se esconde detrás da retórica da modernidade (o relato da salvação, progresso e felicidade) que justifica a violência da colonialidade. E descolonialidade é a resposta necessária tanto às falácias e ficções

¹⁵The word "decolonial" is used instead of "descolonial" [as spelled in the Portuguese version] as suggested by Walter D. Mignolo to differentiate the purposes of the collective modernity/coloniality and the struggle for decolonization in the post-Cold War, as well as post-colonial Asian studies (ROSEVICS apud REIS; ANDRADE, 2020, p. 3)



das promessas de progresso e desenvolvimento que a modernidade contempla, como à violência da colonialidade. As três palavras designam esferas de dicção e de ação e são interdependentes¹⁶ (2017, p. 13).

The imposition of the universality of modernity has silenced the local, ancestral, community and non-industrial knowledge and cultures linked to the peripheral societies of the contemporary world, developing a social structure that consolidates Western white supremacy through a biopolitics in subalternized societies. According to Gomez and Sales (2020), the African American philosopher Charles Mills, in *The racial contract* (1997), illustrates this context of sociocultural segregation by identifying a racial state in which the structural character of racism enshrines racially demarcated hegemonies and subalternizations. According to these authors,

O que é entendido como periférico, subalterno ou marginal revela-se como um importante aparato, um constructo social amplamente demarcado pelo biopoder (Foucault, 1987), um tipo de poder regulador de vidas e também de ficções e das representações acerca da vida do “outro”¹⁷ (2020, p. 5).

According to Reis and Andrade (2018), decolonial thinking proposes to problematize the maintenance of the historical conditions of oppression and domination in the colonized countries of Latin America. The interdisciplinary articulation between culture, politics, and economics proposes to establish mechanisms of emancipation from the cultural legacies imposed by the colonial process through a perspective of the colonized and no longer of the European colonizers. Decolonialism structures a critical line of thought based on the gaze of the colonized and is therefore different from the studies of a postcolonial analysis. Reis and Andrade (2018), judge necessary to identify the differences between the terms "post-colonial" and "decolonial", given the specificities of each theoretical matrix in the understanding of coloniality in Latin American countries.

The post-colonial project, according to De Novais Reis and Andrade (2018), the antagonistic relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, revealing the different forms of domination and oppression suffered by subalternized peoples. As a school of thought, postcolonialism does not have a single theoretical matrix, being mainly associated with the Subaltern Studies Group, created in 1970 by the Indian Ranajit Guha. The decolonial idea reveals how the process of subordination imposed on the

¹⁶ “coloniality” is equivalent to a “colonial matrix or pattern of power”, which is a complex of relationships that hides behind the rhetoric of modernity (the account of salvation, progress and happiness) that justifies the violence of coloniality. And decoloniality is the necessary response both to the fallacies and fictions of the promises of progress and development that modernity contemplates, and to the violence of coloniality. The three words designate spheres of diction and action and are interdependent (free translation).

¹⁷ What is understood as peripheral, subaltern or marginal reveals itself as an important apparatus, a social construct largely demarcated by biopower (Foucault, 1987), a kind of power that regulates lives and also fictions and representations about the life of the "other" (free translation).



colonized became a prolonged event with many ruptures, and not as a historical stage that has already been overcome. Decolonial consists of an understanding of a continuous evaluation of the presence of colonial power matrixes in today's societies, which have not yet managed to break free from the hegemonic European domination system (DE NOVAIS REIS; DE ANDRADE, 2018).

Understanding how racism influences the segregation of graffiti requires recognizing, from a decolonial perspective, that colonialism meant cultural submission by military and economic power, but basically by the difference of race. From the Eurocentric values introjected by the colonizer into the culture of subaltern societies, a system of cultural domination is developed based on criteria of racial, linguistic, economic, social and military hierarchy. According to Fanon (apud De Novais Reis; De Andrade, 2018, p.4),

Todo povo colonizado-isto é, todo povo no seio do qual nasceu um complexo de inferioridade devido ao sepultamento de sua originalidade cultural- toma posição diante da linguagem da nação civilizadora, isto é, da cultura metropolitana. Quanto mais assimilar os valores culturais da metrópole, mais o colonizado escapará de sua selva. Quanto mais ele rejeitar sua negridão, seu mato, mais branco será¹⁸.

Consequently, the colonial heritage in the colonized countries of Latin America, such as Brazil, leaves cultural sequels that perpetuate practices of discrimination and devaluation of artistic manifestations linked to non-European identities. Graffiti, from a decolonial point of view, represents a way to transpose the post-colonial thought in the sense of enabling an autonomy of art in relation to the canons of Eurocentric art, that is, to propose to think art under the eyes of the colonized and not under the eyes of the colonizer. The perception of graffiti breaks with the modernity's logic of hierarchizing art according to Eurocentric art values. Graffiti thus gives voice to narratives of cultural experiences lived locally by individuals subalternized by the colonial heritage.

In Brazil, as in other Latin American countries, the process of cultural decolonization through graffiti is not easy, given the remnants of colonialism impregnated in Brazilian society. The segregation of graffiti within discriminatory classifications, associated with marginality and inferior art, demonstrate the permanence of a hierarchization of culture by social, economic, and racial criteria. This subordination of graffiti in Brazilian culture is the result of the coloniality of power discussed by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2010), who relates how coloniality operates according to capitalist mechanisms of hierarchizing society according to an ethno-racial logic, thus subsidizing the "coloniality of power" within current societies. Thus, coloniality would explain the devaluation and stigmatization of artistic expressions

¹⁸ Every colonized people - that is, every people in which an inferiority complex has been born due to the burial of its cultural originality - takes a stance before the language of the civilizing nation, that is, the metropolitan culture. The more it assimilates the cultural values of the metropolis, the more the colonized will escape from its jungle. The more he rejects his blackness, his bush, the whiter he will be (free translation).



such as graffiti, as a symptom of a cultural classification based on cultural aspects of control and domination performed by historical colonialism.

Thus, the decolonial logic, according to Reis and Andrade (2018), opposes the mechanisms of coloniality, as it reconfigures the perspectives of world conception, and questions the power spaces of the geopolitical territories in which power relations are materialized. The decolonial project means, therefore, the condition of visibility and recognition of the cultural, political, economic, and ideological authenticity of peoples subalternized by colonization. According to this idea, we can glimpse the representativeness of graffiti in this process of emancipation and liberation from cultural stigmas imposed by racism in the culture of Latin American countries such as Brazil.

In the Brazilian context, the categorization of graffiti as art of lesser value comes from a colonial history that stigmatized Afro descendants in Brazilian culture. Graffiti represents the discourse of marginalized groups, silenced by unequal jobs and social conditions, who are constant victims of prejudice and sociopolitical violence of various kinds. The Brazilian cultural diversity is kept silent and marginalized, which is evidenced in the seclusion of artistic manifestations in hills and slums, revealing the prejudice against peripheral cultural manifestations. About this, Campos says: "But let's be careful, because exclusionary practices are stimulated all the time, every day, in the absence of black, poor, trans, women from exhibition lists, museum rooms, the art market, art history classes" (Free translation. 2018, p. 153).

Among the artistic manifestations, graffiti represents the main target of racism in societies based on Eurocentric culture. Racism linked to the practice of graffiti began with the black movement and hip-hop. Currently, it is in the outskirts of large cities in the United States, mainly New York City, that the language of contemporary graffiti is developed, with greater aesthetic intention and dialogue with the urban space and passersby.

After the consolidation of social activism linked to ethnic groups, mainly blacks, important movements of contestation and artistic expression emerged. The strongest of them was, without a doubt, the hip-hop. The expression of graffiti based on American hip-hop and the black movement has been pulverized by other countries since the 1980s as a symbol of struggle for the aesthetics of the culture of the periphery to the detriment of the Eurocentric hygienist culture.

Graffiti, allied to hip-hop, symbolizes a micro power of resistance that contributes to the diffusion of dialogues that diverge from the dominant and totalitarian discourses that tend to homogenize cities. As Bourguignon and Sarmiento (2019) point out, graffiti, arising from a counterculture aesthetic, with a mobilizing and questioning character, fights for discourses that generate new forms of communication and identity, which allow the inclusion of ethnic, black and vulnerable minorities. Hip-hop allowed graffiti



to express meanings to the city omitted by the racism inherent in the ethnocentric organization of urban spaces.

Also according to Bourguignon and Sarmiento (2019), graffiti makes it possible to recognize forms of expression not accepted by standardized society, interfering with the dynamics of social, cultural and political relations. Therefore, it represents, in the conception of the aforementioned authors, a movement that would be producing new flows of artistic expression, which disrupt the prevailing racism in the urban game of hegemonized identities that restrict the freedom of expression of minorities.

Graffiti, as a cultural agent, transforms and restructures the city not based on the utopian and progressive criteria of modern art, but based on sociocultural methods of integrating the plurality of urban spaces. Urban art, mediated by graffiti, presents a well-defined cultural project that preaches the democratic access to cultural goods in urban spaces. In the context of contemporary art, graffiti does not follow hygienist models, in the molds of a contemporary coloniality, but emancipating strategies of biopolitical regulation that may violate the freedom of expression in art.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The relationship between biopolitics and art, from a decolonial perspective, allows us to reflect on the power that administers society. Based on the discourse of a policy in favor of the healthy life of the population, it can influence the forms of assimilation of art, especially in the practices of graffiti in urban spaces. Just as biopower determines what kinds of life should be preserved, there is also a kind of politics that decides what kind of art should be allowed in cities.

The practice of graffiti, when not censored by filters of social segregation, allows the individual to establish new relationships with the social and historical space of cities. Amid the disciplining actions of individuals in urban space, graffiti comes to offer a zone of resistance, in which control over the citizen can be contested by artistic language. Therefore, moral and behavioral standards of society can be transgressed through graffiti, leading to a dispute over the domain of public space. This urban art form articulates the struggle of individuals for visibility in the same society that excludes them for not fitting into the regulatory system of sociocultural and economic criteria.

The urban intervention of graffiti seeks to value and highlight identities excluded from the urban space, representing a way for subalternized subjects to belong to the city. The interaction of the individual with the urban space through the language of graffiti contributes to the establishment of a sociocultural dialogue that aims to sensitize the other about some problem. In the Brazilian context, graffiti is an attempt to escape cultural massification and project unrecognized subjects into a society standardized by



racist and Eurocentric criteria. From a decolonial perspective, it represents discourses of rescue of cultures and memories exterminated by colonialism in Latin America.

In the Brazilian urban context, graffiti encourages the sharing of city spaces by proposing a type of art that stimulates the individual's critical awareness of the need for urban living based on more plural, fair and dignified human relationships. Graffiti is, therefore, an art form that is essentially concerned with the human issue in the city, since its mechanism of appropriation of urban space is essentially motivated by the ideal of reacting to the problems of subalternization of the subject - such as prejudice, violence, racism, corruption and social inequalities.

In Brazil and Latin America of the 21st century, more and more blacks, afro-descendants, post-colonial and decolonial subalterns have created, through art, micro-powers of resistance to the historical violation and segregation of peripheral cultures to Eurocentric culture. And graffiti, in the contemporary sociocultural context, leads the fight against racism and other forms of stigmatization of cultures that were subalternized by European domination models, making it possible to help redefine the cultural boundaries of Brazil and other countries violated in their sociopolitical and environmental diversity. Graffiti thus signifies a contemporary cultural project that reclaims the city for neglected groups to resist and re-exist as subjects belonging to the city and, above all, to humanity.

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