Ephemera
Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Cênicas
Instituto de Filosofia, Artes e Cultura
Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto
ISSN: 2596-0229

ENCHANTING THE LANGUAGE:
marginal poetry as a weapon against erasure and invisibility

ENCANTANDO A LÍNGUA:
a poesia marginal como arma ante o apagamento e a invisibilidade

Natana Coelho
https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9416-4288

doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v8i16.8295

Enchanting the language:
marginal poetry as a weapon against erasure and invisibility

Abstract: This article investigates the experience of young black and/ or peripheral with the word-poetry, analyzing their possibilities as an instrument of reexistence in a historical context of erasure and invisibilization. The text is the result of a master's research carried out in 2023 whose initial objectives sought to understand about the involvement of these youth with poetry at the interface with the manifestation of the word in school life. Its character is qualitative and it was held in a sarau of marginal poetry that takes place in a public high school. Used as methodologies: participant observation, discussion group and individual narrative interviews. The interlocutors of the research were 5 high school students who are also poets. The results indicate that the word-poetry is experienced symbolically by young people as a "weapon" to face social problems such as racism, inequality and erasure. The production of words-poetry, in this sense materialize as a possibility of life production, in contrast with the production of death imposed by society to several socially vulnerable groups from a dispute of narratives and power. It is concluded that the marginal poetry, sung by black and peripheral youth, is a practice that points to possibilities of existence in hostile environments. She produces "reexistence literacies" (Souza, 2009), confronting stigmas and reaffirming authentic discourses. The production of the poetic word is configured as a social practice that allows the registration of these young people in society, affirming their identities and resisting hegemonic discursive logics.
Keywords: marginal poetry; reexistence literacies; youth cultures.

Encantando a língua:
a poesia marginal como arma ante o apagamento e a invisibilidade

Resumo: Este artigo investiga a experiência de jovens negros e/ou periféricos com a palavra-poesia, analisando suas possibilidades como instrumento de reexistência num contexto histórico de apagamento e invisibilização. O texto é fruto de uma pesquisa de mestrado realizada em 2023 cujos objetivos iniciais buscaram compreender o envolvimento dessas juventudes com a poesia em interface com a manifestação da palavra no cotidiano escolar. Seu caráter é qualitativo e ela foi realizada em um sarau de poesias marginais que acontece em uma escola pública do Ensino Médio. Utilizou enquanto metodologias: a observação participante, a realização de grupo de discussão e entrevistas narrativas individuais. Os interlocutores da pesquisa foram cinco estudantes do ensino médio que também são poetas. Os resultados indicam que a palavra-poesia é vivenciada simbolicamente pelos jovens como uma "arma" de enfrentamento a problemas sociais como o racismo, a desigualdade e o apagamento. A produção das palavras-poesias, nesse sentido, se materializam como possibilidade de produção de vida, em contraste com a produção da morte imposta pela sociedade a diversos grupos vulneráveis a partir de uma disputa de narrativas e poder. Conclui-se que a poesia marginal, entoada por juventudes negras e periféricas, é uma prática que aponta para possibilidades de existências em

ambientes hostis. Ela produz "letramentos de reexistência" (Souza, 2009), confrontando estigmas e reafirmando discursos autênticos. A produção da palavra-poética se configura como uma prática social que permite a inscrição desses jovens na sociedade, afirmando suas identidades e resistindo às lógicas discursivas hegemônicas.

Palavras-chave: poesia marginal; letramentos de reexistência; culturas juvenis.

1 Introduction

This work is the result of a study on the word. The word and its adventures, its power games, its cunning and persuasion. The living word; the one that dwells in people's mouths, especially among black and peripheral youth. A word heard in the streets, in the alleys, in the favelas, on the buses, in the schools, and in bedrooms behind closed, silent doors in the dark. A word that lives within, in intimacy, in the depths of the soul, in the ferment of emotions, and a word that lives without, in conversations, debates, speeches, and rallies. Words that emerge, not always as words, and may require more than words to be spoken. The living word, advocate for our desires, fears, anxieties, and thoughts. As well as for our lies, omissions, and pretenses. A word that takes form through thoughts, gestures, bodies, voices, and even in silence. We shall not remain silent; instead, let us exchange a few words.

Here, the word is understood as a manifestation of expression, encompassing writing, reading, and orality, situated within the realm of discourse and communication. The word as a mediating element in human relations, both at the social and collective spheres and at the intimate and subjective level. The word, therefore, was the central theme discussed and analyzed in the master's research (completed in 2024), which unfolded into several reflections, including this article. However, the focus here is not on just any words. At first, this research sought to understand the engagement of peripheral youth—residents of peripheral areas and neighborhoods on the outskirts of urban centers—with writing and poetic performance (spoken poetry) in relation to the manifestation of the word, whether spoken or written, in their everyday practices and schooling activities. In this sense, we employ the term word-poetry and / or poetic word to discuss the narratives of the young poets who participated in the study. The purpose of this designation is to situate the youths' narratives and accounts within the dimension of discourse, emphasizing that such discourse is mediated by the condition of "being a poet" experienced by these young individuals.

The research and theoretical studies that inform this discussion (Gomes, 2002; Ramalho, 2019; Souza, 2009) indicate that word, creation, and expression through speech and writing are crucial elements in the constitution of the self and the relationship that young people establish with the world. This premise called for a reflection on the factors that influence and enable such manifestations, therefore, we turned to two of the environments in which their development is particularly privileged: the school and the sarau of marginal poetry[1]. Moreover, the same profile of young people who are, for the most part, protagonists in saraus of marginal poetry also appear in alarming rates of inequality in school census data.

Of the total number of young people who dropped out of or never attended high school, 71.6% are black (pretos or pardos) and 27.4% are white (IBGE, 2023, p. 10). The same study

1 The saraus of marginal poetry and the condition of "marginal poets" will be discussed in the next subsection.

shows that among black youth aged 18 to 24 who managed to complete high school by 2023, only 16.4% were attending higher education, while 29.5% of white youth were already enrolled in undergraduate programs (IBGE, 2023, p. 9).

Data from the School Census (IBGE, 2023) and the theoretical discussions employed here point to an experience of marginality that is central to the analyses presented in this article: the experience of marginal poetry and the school experience from a place that is commonly marginalized, the place of black youth. All these considerations led to the selection of the research site, a sarau of marginal poetry—the Sarau da Firmina—held at the State School Professora Maria Firmina dos Reis[2], located in a peripheral neighborhood of a city in Minas Gerais. Both the school and the poetry sarau share a student profile marked by daily experiences that intersect with marginality. They are, for the most part, black students living in peripheral and /or working-class neighborhoods.

We speak of a condition of marginality in the sense of a peripheral experience, one that is not central, that stands or is placed at the edges, at the margins, estranged. Aníbal Quijano ([n.d.]) defines social marginality as a historically produced social condition imposed by the unequal social, economic, and political structures that prevail within the capitalist system and sustain coloniality. From this perspective, marginalized people are an inherent part of the system, yet they occupy subordinate positions within it and are therefore subjected to greater social vulnerability.

This condition is a central analytical category in this article, as it leads us to the main objective guiding the analyses presented throughout: to reflect on the experience of black and / or peripheral youth through word-poetry and its possibilities for becoming a tool of re-existence and social literacy in a historical and social context marked by erasure and invisibilization. In this sense, the school is an agency of both literacy and erasure, as discussed later on.

From this context, five high school students were invited to participate as interlocutors in the study. They are also marginal poets, exploring the word from different perspectives within the school environment, whether in classrooms or in poetry saraus: Anna, Arthur, Marquin, Vitin, and Mathias. They are all residents of peripheral and / or working-class neighborhoods; also, three of them—Arthur, Marquin, and Vitin— are black, and two—Mathias and Anna—are white. At the time of the study, their ages ranged from 16 to 19. Here, they are referred to by their real names. Besides reflecting the youths' own preference, the choice to use their real names is grounded in the recognition and valuing of authorship in their artistic work, given their narratives will be presented and analyzed throughout this article.

Regarding the selection of the youth interlocutors, the initial expectation was that most would be black, since, as Nilma Gomes (2002) demonstrates, the educational trajectories and

2 Pseudonym. The school's original name honored a male teacher. To replace it and preserve the school's identity, it was renamed after a woman who played a key role in the education of black and poor people in Brazil: Maria Firmina was a teacher—the first Black woman to work as a teacher in Maranhão—a novelist and abolitionist, the daughter of an enslaved and later freed woman, and founder of one of the first public coeducational schools, that is, one that served both boys and girls, located in her home state (Maranhão, Brazil) before slavery was officially abolished in the country.

school experiences of black youth reveal important particularities and are linked to the structuring of a society that carries the legacies of colonization and enslavement in its history as the model of a colonial economic system (Ramalho, 2019).

Field research took place over the course of one year, from April 2023 to March 2024. It was qualitative in nature, and the methodological instruments included participant observation in the school's poetry sarau, a discussion group with young poets and students, and individual narrative interviews with a biographical focus. Additionally, notes from the field diary were used as analytical material and will be presented later in this article, together with excerpts from accounts drawn from the discussion group and individual interviews, as they offer important observational insights for building the reflections developed throughout the text.

It is also important to emphasize that, in addition to speaking as a black woman researcher, I also speak as a marginal poet. Therefore, the research setting was an environment close to my own lived experience. I emphasize this point as it directly relates to the objectives of this article, which seeks to discuss the processes of visibility and invisibility surrounding the narratives of those who stand at the margins of hegemonic discourses and who, for that reason, may have their voices disregarded or silenced in favor of the dominant discourse. The commitment to situated writing is not born of whim or intellectual vanity. It is a commitment to the entire chain of knowledge production and, by extension, to the discourses that circulate through scientific research. This commitment is sustained by the belief that questioning the colonial logic of knowledge production, and bringing to light other ways of speaking, theorizing, and creating science, is an act of democratizing scientific knowledge itself and shaking the foundations of the hegemonic power to speak.

This work, therefore, seeks to approach the word that moves through the mouths of young people, especially peripheral poets and public high school students from a municipality in Minas Gerais. Young people who were able to find themselves through words, who engaged with the word in an environment where it is usually most present—the school—and who, in this process, were able to give it new meanings and significance, one of them being the act of making poetry. The study sought to examine this process through which the young participants encountered the poetic word. We speak of an encounter because we can assume that these young people, from a very early age, were already familiar with words. Yet it was within the school that they were able to experience it in a way that is not always accessible to all students. The written poetic word that dared to be spoken, proclaimed, recited, or even performed. The main element of analysis in this text is the production of the word; therefore, the youths' narratives will be examined here as reflective narratives intertwined with those of theoretical authors who study the relationship between youth and schooling.

Next subsection introduces the movement of marginal poetry known as Sarau Marginal, a contemporary artistic manifestation that holds an important place in the analyses developed in this article. Sarau Marginal is a space where young people have been gathering together and fostering

an environment where their artistic creations can be manifested, works that were often kept unseen amid the pages of their poetry notebooks.

By expressing their poetic words, many young people who had long moved through paths of invisibility found in the sarau a possible space for existence and recognition. This theme of invisibility versus recognition will be discussed further in Section 2 of this article, which explores the possibilities of affirmation and acknowledgment of one's identity and existence within a social context that persistently silences black and peripheral youth.

1.2 Saraus of Marginal Poetry

The Sarau of marginal poetry is a gathering of people with the purpose of sharing their diverse artistic expressions. Given its origins, it is mainly associated with the artistic language of poetry, but has gradually evolved and is no longer confined to that form. Today, saraus also feature musical performances, singing, dance, theater, circus arts, and even exhibitions.

In nineteenth-century Brazil, the word sarau was used to describe the social gatherings—or soirées—held in aristocratic salons, a tradition introduced by the Portuguese court and slowly reshaped within Brazilian society. Participation in these events was limited to members of the elite, who showcased their poetry and the classical music of the period. Prominent artists attended the saraus, which were greatly appreciated by the elite (Oliveira, 2020).

Around the 2000s, poetry saraus seemed to reemerge, yet this time they were led by a public and situated in a context markedly different from their original form. They encompassed a wide diversity of participants, now spearheaded by black and / or peripheral youth. Youth groups, movements, and collectives claimed their place in reality by setting their own rules and creating spaces that reflected the genuine expression of who they were and what they recognized as their own.

The aristocratic saraus were redefined by poets from peripheral areas—initially in São Paulo, with Sarau Cooperifa—which is now known as Sarau Marginal: a space for the dissemination of poetry and artistic productions by poets and artists who had long been excluded from the dominant circuits of artistic production, circulation, and consumption; hence, marginal, that is, those who remain at the margins of such spaces (Sepúlveda, 2017). Through this movement of appropriation, the young people who revitalized this new form of poetry sarau subverted its original proposal—once elitist and exclusive—transforming it into a public and open space where artists who, until then, had been marginalized, could give voice to their poetic word.

The use of the word marginal as a condition linked to being a poet represents an act of affirming an identity that is frequently stigmatized in the ways black and peripheral youth relate to

the world. Marginal poet Vitin illustrates how the concept of marginal can take on new meanings, not only for the poet who embodies it but also in the face of prejudiced perceptions:

> I think the word… the expression 'marginal poetry,' is wild, 'cause, like, we're right in the middle of this thing, right? And, like, with all these messed up people, we're doing something here that's really dope! And until someone realizes we're doing something good, they still call us 'fuck-ups,' like we're caught up in shady stuff instead of doing anything that matters. And, like, when I started expressing my poetry up there, in front of everyone, when I started leading the sarau and throwing myself into it, I saw that even other people's views of me changed (Vitin, individual interview, March 13, 2024).

In this process, a racist and prejudiced stigma (the "fuck-ups") is confronted by the image of the young poet and his skill with words, a transformation that replaces stigma with prestige and recognition in the school environment: "I kinda became someone quite influential." (Vitin, individual interview, March 13, 2024). 2024).

The saraus emerge as spaces where youth expression—through word, voice, and performance—is not only recognized but also becomes a starting point for other forms of collective creation, whether artistic or social, such as the development of youth identities or a critical awareness of lived reality (Sepúlveda, 2017). Young people's participation in saraus involves an exercise of creation and expression. The shaping of this space reveals an environment where youth express their sense of self through the spoken, performed, read, and sung word. It is a process of creation that takes place both during the performance and throughout the organization and execution of the sarau.

In a social context where black individuals are often encouraged—either explicitly or implicitly—to conceal or soften traits and elements of their racial identities, we understand that "being one's authentic self," embracing your identity and authenticity, may feel as an act of resistance and affirmation in the face of a colonial logic that continuously attempts to impose itself. In his account, Vitin reflects on how embracing the poetry saraus with his body, his lyrics, and his voice allowed him to revisit and, at times, reformulate the perception he once had of himself, especially when compared with the way other people saw him:

> Like, what really changed a lot—like, a lot—was mainly because when I first came here [to the sarau], I used to hide my true self, you know? […] I used to care a lot about other people's opinions, you know? But then when I came here [the sarau] and started writing, you could see me through my lyrics. Then things started coming up, like, 'how can you write about this if you lived something else?,' you know? So what changed when I started coming here, man, is that I started being 100% myself, see? (Vitin, discussion group, December 14, 2023, emphasis added)

When, in the act of its enunciation, the poetic word confronts the young person with their own subjectivity, it opens a path toward deeper self-knowledge. In the case of the young poets in the poetry sarau, the exercise of writing precedes that of performance. After confronting themselves,

they find in the sarau a space to confront the audience as they present themselves through their poetic word. When the audience receives them with openness, this act of self-exposure can be understood as positively reinforced, in contrast to the experiences of discrimination presented earlier.

In her analysis, Nilma Gomes (2002, p. 39) argues that black identity in Brazil is formed through social, cultural, and historical processes and through relational encounters—with and through the gaze of the other, for, as she writes, "a gaze that, when confronted with that of the other, turns back upon itself, for only the other calls our own identity into question." The gaze of the other urges Vitin to turn his gaze inward, encouraging him to be "100% himself": "The sarau has brought to surface someone who was already inside me—it allowed me to show people something that was inside me!" (Vitin, individual interview, March 13 2024).

The sarau movement has grown significantly in the capital and throughout the state of Minas Gerais. Camila Félix (2017) mapped the saraus active in Belo Horizonte and its metropolitan area up to 2016, identifying twenty-six such spaces, all organized and led by young people.

It is important to emphasize that the marginal poetry saraus movement reemerged across urban peripheries, led by black, mixed-race, and peripheral youth—a defining feature for understanding their modes of operation, thematic concerns, relationships, effects, and all that they represent. Since their revival, the saraus of marginal poetry have remained under the leadership of this social group, even as they have expanded, multiplying their spaces of performance and increasing the diversity of those involved—participants as well as spectators.

2. Bringing Magic into the Language: The Word as a Weapon[3]

> Whenever we speak, babbling,
> And write with poor spelling,
> Whenever we sing off-key,
> And dance out of rhythm,
> When we paint by smudging,
> And draw askew,
> We're not making mistakes,
> We've just not been subjugated.
> (Leiros, *apud* Santos, 2023)

People are unique, with distinct personalities, histories, and life trajectories. In this sense, the possibilities for human experience are infinite. Amid this sea of infinitudes, what captures our gaze are the things that repeat themselves. Even when repetition takes on different forms—since no two experiences, however similar, are ever the same—the similarities between experiences are compelling elements that unite and draw people closer.

3 The title alludes to a quote by Nêgo Bispo, who says, "We must bring magic into the language" (Santos, 2023, p. 4).

In the course of fieldwork, one particular repetition drew our attention, especially since this element had already come up in several previous experiences related to poetry and rap. During multiple instances of listening to the poetic words voiced by the young poets, it became possible to notice a recurring association of poetry with a universe of signifiers related to weapons, ammunition, shooting, and attack. The poetic word that is cocked and ready. What is this word defending itself against? What dangers does it face, if the poetic word is shot as it leaves the mouths of so many marginal poets? What are its targets, and where is it aiming? In listening to the poetic words voiced by the young poets of the Sarau da Firmina, a number of hypotheses emerged, which will be analyzed in the course of this section.

At a sarau held in May 2023, the young poet Arthur evoked the idea of the armed poetic word, prompting the first notes and reflections on this theme to be recorded in the field diary:

> Arthur opens his performance by explaining that his poem addresses the case of racism experienced by soccer player Vini Jr. He urges the audience to recognize that racism must not be visible only when directed at public figures. Some excerpts include: "You won't take offense unless it's on TV, when it finally starts to make sense." "Here's some ghetto representation to you." *"A shot through the verse, instead of a black body*." Marginal poets often speak of the word as a weapon, a means of facing the many social struggles and injustices that surround them, including racism and inequality. In this movement, they draw an association between the weapon "that can create, stands in defense of life" and the weapon that takes lives, mostly those of black, indigenous, and peripheral people (Field diary, May 29, 2023, emphasis added).

A young black man of indigenous descent, Arthur writes his poetry on racism through the lens of the experiences lived by soccer player Vini Jr. In this context, poetry emerges as an element that produces life, in opposition to another element that ends the lives of black people: "A shot through the verse, instead of a black body."

On another occasion, Mathias also armed himself with his words: "Cursed be these peoples, this era, cursed be this rotten government that keeps slavery alive. I wield my pen as a weapon, and I'm never short of ammo" (Mathias, field diary, September 5, 2023). In a country that enslaves even beyond abolition, Mathias declares that his word—embodied through his pen—is the weapon that gives him strength to confront the forms of enslavement that persist.

In one of his poems, Vitin states that he was: "Armed to his teeth with hip-hop" (Vitin, field diary, June 26, 2023). Ana Lúcia Souza (2009, pp. 21–23) observes that, since its arrival in Brazil, the *hip-hop* movement has carried a contestatory force in its artistic manifestations—born from the concrete realities of artists who denounce the injustices they live, the violence that traverses their bodies, and the invisibilities to which they are subjected. From this perspective, to "arm oneself with hip-hop" may represent a condition of enunciation for critique, denunciation, and transformation—that *rap*, as the linguistic expression of *hip-hop*, enables not only Vitin but also the diverse youth involved in the movement.

If these young people—most of them black and residents of working-class and peripheral neighborhoods—experience forms of violence that are denounced in their poetry, we understand that the word that denounces has countless reasons to arm themselves in a movement that rises in search of self-defense. In this landscape of concrete violence and violated rights, the poetic word shatters the limits of metaphor to take shape in the substance of reality itself. In this light, poetry is no longer "fired" metaphorically but turns its aim against the very processes of violence, emerging—tangibly now—as a force for the making of life, rather than the making of death:

> Back there [where Mathias lived], I had two paths before me: to pull the trigger of the pen, or the trigger of the gun. Thank God I only ever held a gun after I turned fifteen—and even then, it was at a shooting range. It was a crazy experience, but that's it, basically that: I traded a gun for poetry. (Mathias, discussion group, December 14 2023).

> "In the periphery, poetry becomes a way for young people to escape their reality, because life there means constantly running… So it's like this: you've got a gun in your hand, and you have to choose whether to fire bullets or words." […] So, given the choice between a knife and a pen, I believe a young person could choose the pen if that option is available and the sarau finds its way to them and they gain access to it. It might be their salvation. Later on, they could even make something of themselves." (Anna, individual interview, March 7, 2024).

> Today I chose to be a dealer—and my trade is information. (Vitin, field diary, May 29, 2023).

As Anna observed, for Vitin, Mathias, and many other potential black and peripheral youth, engagement with poetry has become a means of reflection and self-awareness, enabling them to confront the realities that shape their lives. This invites us to think that, while the lure of paths such as drug trafficking still exists—and will persist—poetry has somehow crossed that line, producing meanings, bonds, and relations that may have allowed these young people to see themselves, and their condition as black and peripheral youth in the world, with a critical eye. And if such paths expose young people to greater risks of violence and death, the encounter with other paths—those that create meaning and nurture belonging and recognition—could improve the chances of giving symbolic form to their realities, beyond what is (supposedly) already given.

Could poetic word truly be that powerful? What makes it resonate so deeply on all individual, subjective, collective, and social levels? Through one of his verses, young poet Marquin declares: "uniforms are scared of what we have to say."(Marquin, field diary, September 5, 2023). What is it about the verses within these young people's poetic words that instills fear even in the uniformed men who are supposed to stand for the maintenance of security?

Reflecting on the attempts to censor the Sarau da Firmina within the school, Vitin stated: "If someone's talking bad about it, it means you're doing something big, man, you get me?" […] Seems like the bigger it gets, the more people there are against it." (Vitin, individual interview, March 13, 2024). In a reflection that resonates with Vitin's perception Foucault (2014, p. 10), observes that: "The prohibitions which strike discourse reveal its link with

desire and power. Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but that for which and by which one struggles, the power which one seeks to seize."

At this point, we understand the word—within the dimension of discourse—as an instrument of power. It is also worth emphasizing: the poetic word is also discourse. Within the Brazilian context, however, we must situate it historically in order to trace possible answers to the questions raised throughout this section. What makes the word something to be feared by those in uniform? Why so many attempts to control, censor, or silence it?

Ana Lúcia Souza (2009, p. 36), citing Barros (2005), depicts the historical context of slavery in Brazil, when enslaved black people were prohibited from attending school and thus from learning to read and write, based on the allegation that "spreading instruction among the enslaved class" would heighten the risk of rebellion and "disobedience" among black populations. In his analysis of discourse, Foucault (2014, pp. 47–48) acknowledges this possibilities by identifying a "fear of discourse", since utterances could spark events that unsettle continuity and disturb the established order.

From its very inception, the Sarau da Firmina too became the target of censorship and attempts at suppression by the school's director at the time (2016). In the field diary, I noted a passage from a conversation with João Paiva, the teacher who first conceived the Sarau:

> João reported having frequent, daily conflicts with the school's director at the time. He was strongly against the Sarau, and it was, in João's words, literally, a struggle to make it happen. The director was removed from his position after the teachers organized during the election process to vote him out, as he had been difficult to work with in several other ways. When I brought up the case of censored poems reported by a student, João shared that the former director had also censored his own poem, "Devagar, escola[4]!" We discussed the absurdity and irony of censoring what might be the most necessary poem within the school environment. João shared that he is frequently invited to recite it in educational spaces, seminars, and lectures. And yet, it was censored at the very school where he teaches (Field diary, September 5, 2023).

The central question is: who is it that fears discourse? Why would a poem reflecting on the contemporary challenges of public education be censored by school leadership? It seems clear that fear of free expression lies with those who hold power through domination and the enforcement of hegemonic thinking, or those who perpetuate such discourses.

While black populations were prohibited from attending school during slavery, once admission became possible, they faced not only obstacles to remaining in the system (Souza, 2009) but also a model of schooling that endeavored, at all costs, to standardize and discipline them according to the molds of European culture, that is, their colonizer's culture. In other words, as school

4 This well-known poem by João Paiva was one of the works that consolidated his reputation as an international poet and a major voice within the marginal poetry movement. It explores the theme of schooling through the lens of a teacher and former student who reflects on the institution's transformations over time and the effects these changes have had on education and student learning.

education was conceived within a modern/colonial pattern of society, it has been structured around the subordinate representation of the 'others'—category that encompasses the poor populations it continues to serve today." (Ramalho, 2019, pp. 123–124) Vitin speaks about the stigmas associated with him at school and recognizes that the image produced through prejudice does not necessarily correspond to who one truly is or one's lived reality:

> "Why is it that the student in the back is always the one criminalized? Why is the student in the back always regarded as the worst? Sometimes I'm that student in the back, and maybe I don't focus as much as the one in front, but my conversation, my thinking, is much better than theirs." […] Because it's not about how I behave in class; it's about the potential I have inside me!" (Vitin, individual interview, March 13, 2024).

The imposition of a hegemonic (European) culture enforced through various means, including formal education, has unfolded in the making of a country where racism, elitism, and meritocracy serve as founding pillars and strategies of domination. Black, indigenous, and poor people who do not fit, or even approximate, the so-called ideal standards—those fashioned in the image and likeness of the colonizer—have their existences, cultures, customs, and identities subjected to a perpetual subjection to the Other, in ways that render them inferior.

"Domination is a practice of conditioning," said Nêgo Bispo (Santos, 2023). He recounts that he came to understand domination when he started working with cattle.

> "That's how I learned that taming and to colonization are one and the same. Both the trainer and the colonizer start by deterritorializing the being to be subjugated—shattering its identity, severing it from its cosmology, estranging it from what is sacred, imposing new ways of living, and assigning it a new name." The act of denominating functions as an attempt to erase one memory in order and replace it with another (Santos, 2023, p. 2).

The strategies of domination and taming used in colonial processes operate through the imposition of one culture at the expense of another—a process of denominating, as Nêgo Bispo described it (Santos, 2023). If colonial education is among the strategies employed in Brazil, we observe the imposition of a literate culture grounded in the formal language of the colonizing nations. This represents a normalization of the word of indigenous, enslaved, and colonized peoples, whose ancestral cultures are characterized by orality (Souza, 2009). At the same time, "it was in this context (from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century) that education and school writing became central, reaffirming their social and historical function of conferring prestige and authority on those who could make use of them" (Kleiman & Rojo apud Souza, 2009, p. 35).

Thus, the language imposed on enslaved and colonized populations—besides requiring specific rituals in the act of its communication (Foucault, 2014)—also associates its use with social prestige, value, and legitimacy. Enslaved populations and their descendants have been forced to learn a language and culture estranged from their own in order to be socially recognized (Souza, 2009). In seeking this learning through the framework of schooling (Ramalho, 2019), they

encounter barriers and, in the process, endure a perverse logic of "the annihilation of the Other." Within this logic, conformity is demanded, access is denied, and punishment follows—through discriminatory acts—for those who fail to "be like them, speak like them." Reflecting on the logic of the annihilation of the Other, whose key strategy relies on the suppression or normalization of identities within schooling, Vitin remarked:

> "The problem is that we link so much of what school is to something that distorts who we truly are, and that's not the way it should be!" […] "The thing is that, in school, we end up just going through the motions and forgetting who we are. We fall into a pattern— like, when someone goes up front to present, I feel like I have to be just like them. […] It's this model we build in our heads, but that's not how it should be. […] That's something we really need to reflect on: why should I have to pretend I'm not myself just to deliver a presentation? We must keep our identity! And that's what we learn at the sarau! (Vitin, individual interview, March 13, 2024).

In an environment driven by standardization, educational spaces that affirm and legitimize individual identities are crucial to resisting the homogenizing logic of schooling. Spaces like Sarau da Firmina enable youth singularities to blossom, each unfolding in its own time.

Thus, we recognize the central role that language, discourse, and communication—and the ways in which discourses are produced and disseminated—play in social and historical relations, as they are subjected to the logics of power, authority, and domination. From this perspective, we come even closer to the meanings attributed to the word as a weapon, as we speak of a landscape of enduring and historic struggles in which black, indigenous, and peripheral people remain the main targets.

After observing the strategies of conditioning and denominating imposed by the colonizer, Nêgo Bispo (2023)—a Black quilombola from Northeastern Brazil, whose wisdom emerges from his relationship with the land, the community, and orality—stated:

> Having mastered the practice of taming, I soon realized that, to confront colonial society, there are times when "we must turn the enemy's weapons into defense," as one of my great masters of defense used to say. To transform the art of denominating into an art of resistance, we decided to use denominations as well. […] From there, we began to name gestures and voices as a way of challenging colonialism. This is what we call 'war of names': the act of confronting colonial words to strip them of their power (Santos, 2023, p. 3).

There it is —the word as weapon, also named by the young poets. In this 'war of names' (Santos, 2023), words become weapons, and contradiction, confrontation, refusal, and reinvention manifest as strategies of resistance. How, then, can the colonizing word be confronted? Through the subversion of language itself.

In a related context, hooks (2017) urges us to think of language through the experience of U.S. colonization, in which enslaved peoples were compelled to adopt the colonizer's language, abandoning their mother tongues. Over time, this imposed language was reappropriated by enslaved

Africans and became a sort of "common ground," the shared medium that allowed communication among peoples of different origins who had also been enslaved. In doing so, the black population not only claimed the language that had once functioned as an instrument of domination but subverted it, transforming standard English into a form of expression enriched by black cultural elements—dialects, vocabularies, and distinct modes of speaking and self-expression. The ramifications of this linguistic subversion appear in a range of oral cultural manifestations within Afro-diasporic movements, such as *rap*. Within the settings of the school and the sarau, the word takes on the ambivalence described by bell hooks (2017) and Nêgo Bispo (Santos, 2023): it can function as an instrument of imposition and colonization, but also as a force of transgression and transformation.

Likewise, Lélia Gonzalez (1984) calls for a reflection on Brazilian culture in light of the legacy passed down through the education of the black mother—the teaching of language, of 'pretuguês' (the transformed Portuguese spoken by the black people). Language, as the core medium through which values, learning, and an entire culture are transmitted, is the first bond a mother provides her children, whether born of her womb or raised by her nurturing, and that also applies to the children of white colonizers. The language imposed by the colonizer, Portuguese acquires new meanings when spoken through the voice of the mother, who carries other cultures and ancestries within her that mingle with the colonizer's tongue, giving birth to something new, imbued with the symbols and resonances of black culture: pretuguês (Gonzalez, 1984).

Ana Lúcia Souza (2009, p. 37) also unveils the subversive possibilities of language, showing how the delegitimization of African orality and its confrontation with European language gave rise to ruptures, conflicts, and regulations around the use of spoken and written word, allowing this word to persist, even if in clandestine form. The ruptures, confrontations, and regulations arising from intercultural exchanges and fusions fostered the emergence of *hip-hop* and *rap*.

Within this movement, recognizing its educative power, Souza (2009, p. 37) identifies the *hip-hop* movement as a site of literacy. Within this context, she articulates the concept of "reexistence literacies," showing that the culture of enslaved and marginalized peoples endures, despite historical transformation, and must carry on resisting through the "reinvention of the social uses of language," as exemplified in *hip-hop* manifestations (Souza, 2009, pp. 31–32).

The examples of linguistic subversion demonstrate that orality, although persistently undermined by colonial, and later hegemonic forces, continues to "reexist" in varied forms that emerge from the hybridization and cultural exchanges among different peoples. Within this framework, we situate the poetic words of the young interlocutors in this research —young people who, despite adverse contexts, persist in voicing their marginal words to the world.

> Why do people from the *favelas* speak in slang? Infusing Portuguese with powerful words the colonizer cannot grasp. They stuff the language as one stuffs a sausage. And so, they speak Portuguese in front of the enemy without being understood. The favela has mastered the language, making it magical. We must bringing magic into the language (Santos, 2023, p. 4).

As demonstrated by bell hooks (2017), Ana Lúcia Souza (2009), and Nêgo Bispo (Santos, 2009), cultural expressions such as rap and marginal poetry provide valuable insights into the multiple ways the word can be used—the word that lives in the speech of Black and peripheral youth, the word as expression, as creation, as an act of self-inscription and self-legitimation in the world. Indeed, "while the violence of the oppressors turns the oppressed into beings forbidden to be, their response to that violence is imbued with the yearning to claim the right to be" (Freire, 1987, p. 25).

It is in this quest for the right to be that young poets forge a positive relationship between the sarau and the self-discovery—and affirmation—of the self:

> "I guess the sarau is a space where you can show what you're capable of. […] That's what I've got about it. […] Everyone is born with a call, and I think the sarau gives us a way to figure out what we can do. […] I see the sarau as a space to bring out what's hidden. —there are things inside us we don't even know yet, you feel me?" (Vitin, individual interview, March 13, 2024).

> "The school community knows [that I'm a poet]. "Before I performed at the sarau, no one knew who I was. Now, every time I walk through school and pass by a classroom, people ask if there's going to be a sarau—and I think that's dope. It becomes part of who you are, something that sticks. […] It's really cool when people find out you're a poet, when they dig your writing. They will even sit with you just to hear you speak—happens all the time. […] It's some serious shit, you know? Being recognized for that—it's awesome." (Arthur, individual interview, March 14, 2024).

In a battlefield where language is the object of contention, the word rises as the force of an imperative, it asserts authority, effects transformation, and compels others to obedience, whether through dominant discourses, normalization, or the regulation of speech. A word of command that, when blind to the multiplicity of human ways of being, colonizes, disciplines, and silences. Yet a command issued is not always a command fulfilled. The refusal to speak the colonizer's word as dictated is, in itself, to enact resistance against its power. Many expressions have been used to describe this exercise of disobedience: "reinventing language" (Souza, 2009), "bringing magic into the language" (Santos, 2023), *pretuguês* (Gonzalez, 1984), "reexistence literacies" (Souza, 2009), and marginal poetry with its armed youthful words.

In this sense, the act of speaking becomes a metaphor for existence itself. Paulo Freire (1987) both declared and reaffirmed the urgency for people to speak their own words, trusting in the transformative power that such an act holds over the world. "Existence, because it is human, cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men [and women] transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it." (Freire, 1987, pp. 44–45)

To speak is a prerequisite for existence. Moreover, the spoken word must be heard for existence to be duly recognized. The production of one's own word, whether expressed in writing or orally, reflects a process of seeking and affirming the self. The experiences of the young interlocutors

make this process evident through the articulation of their poetic-words within school and marginal saraus.

> "Like Arthur said, besides that first spark, when you lose the fear of reciting or presenting what you want, you also end up losing the shame, too. You grow more at ease speaking, acting, expressing yourself. Like, you become poetry in your everyday life, 'cause you stop giving a crap about people's opinions. You do what you want—and from that moment on, you understand that life, your happiness… they depend on you. […] It's about self-confidence…" (Marquin, discussion group, December 14, 2023).

> When I walk into the sarau, I let my words out, I let my feelings out—it's like speaking a piece of myself. And when people are there, listening, it's like I'm sharing my secrets with them, like we're carrying the weight of the word together. At the sarau, you feel free […]" (Anna, individual interview, March 7, 2024).

Conceição Evaristo (2020, p. 35) says that her work is an effort "to situate ourselves in the world through our stories and our lives, which the world so often disregards. […] A world I strive to grasp, so that I may inscribe myself within it, while fully understanding that the written word does not belong to me alone." Audre Lorde (2019, p. 45) reminds us that "for women, then, […] it is a vital necessity of our own existence. It shapes the very light through which we cast our hopes and dreams—toward survival, toward change—first made into language, then into idea, then into tangible action." Asking herself why she writes, Gloria Anzaldúa (2000) answers:

> I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories wrongly told about me, about you. To grow closer to myself and to you. To find myself, preserve myself, build myself, claim autonomy. To undo the myths that I'm a mad prophet or a poor soul in distress. To remind myself that I matter and what I have to say is no bullshit. To prove that I can, and that I will, write—despite every warning not to. I will write the unspeakable, no matter the censor's gasp or the audience's outrage. Finallty, I write because I'm afraid to write, but I'm even more afraid of not to." (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 232).

Writing, therefore, is an act of self-inscription.. Speaking is an act of self-affirmation. And being heard is being acknowledged. When the historical context in which one is embedded gives rise to mechanisms of deterritorialization and invisibilization, the strength of words resides in their persistent demand to being heard. Thus, young black and peripheral poets who carry their poetic-words as weapons engage in a process of "reterritorialization of the self," in analogy to Nêgo Bispo's notion of deterritorialization (Santos, 2023). It is a strategy of self-defense, ensuring that the authentic word is not lost amid the tangle of copy-words so common in everyday school life. To speak one's own word (Freire, 1987) is to make one's stories resonate, even when the world attempts to silence them.

3 Final Considerations

This article examined how the word, in a world marked by struggles over narratives and histories built within a tug-of-war between the imposition of hegemonic discourses and the resistance of counter-hegemonic ones, goes far beyond the mere combination of letters and syllables. When apprehended in its full complexity, the word emerges as the connective thread of processes that shape the organization of human life in the world, maintaining an intrinsic relation to the power structures that sustain different societies.

From this analysis, we understand the importance of engaging with narratives that dare to defy the historical logic of hegemonic discourse, since these narratives continually teach us how to preserve authenticity and affirm existences that hegemonic systems seek to erase. The forms through which these narratives are disseminated and manifested are as diverse as the human condition itself. In this light, marginal poetry—voiced proudly and powerfully by black and peripheral youth—constitutes one such practice, signaling possibilities for existence even in the most hostile and restrictive spaces.

Within a context in which the educational trajectories of black and peripheral youth are frequently diminished or stigmatized (Gomes, 2002)—as are many of their experiences outside the school setting—the creation of poetic-words by these young people carries the potential to disrupt generational silences, a process which begins as an individual affirmation of the self and expands outward toward the collective and the world, interweaving with other poetic-words to build a powerful alliance against the normalization of authentic expression.

In the expression of black and peripheral youth culture within schools—embodied in the saraus of marginal poetry—we see a living practice of what Ana Lúcia Souza (2009) calls "literacies of reexistence." It confronts the stigmatizing views cast upon these cultural expressions, reaffirming their discourses in their authenticity and critical strength.

From these reflections, we conclude that the poetic-word produced by black and peripheral youth carries profound effects on their lives which reach beyond the boundaries of reading, writing, and speaking, whether in the saraus of marginal poetry or within the school walls. The effects further encompass the production of meaning and self-affirmation, constituting a social practice that allows these young people to inscribe themselves within a society structured by hegemonic discursive logics which continue to regulate and constrain the speech of marginalized populations both in Brazil and globally.

References

ANZALDÚA, Gloria. Falando em línguas: uma carta para as mulheres escritoras do terceiro mundo. *Estudos feministas*, Florianópolis, n. 8, 2000. Disponível em: https://periodicos.ufsc.br/index.php/ref/article/view/9880/9106 . Acesso em: 14 out. 2025.

CERQUEIRA, Daniel; BUENO, Samira (coord.). *Atlas da violência 2024*. Brasília: Ipea/FBSP, 2024. Disponível em: https://repositorio.ipea.gov.br/entities/publication/6554d2f4-fd60-411a-ac4c-997f39034914 . Acesso em: 14 out. 2025.

EVARISTO, Conceição. A Escrevivência e seus subtextos. *In*: DUARTE, Constância Lima; NUNES, Isabella Rosado. *Escrevivência:* a escrita de nós - reflexões sobre a obra de Conceição Evaristo. Ilustrações Goya Lopes. 1. ed., Rio de Janeiro: Mina Comunicação e Arte, 2020.

FELIX, Camila. *Atlas dos Saraus da RMBH*. Belo Horizonte: Crivo Editorial, 2018.

FOCAULT, Michel. *A ordem do Discurso*: Aula inaugural no Collège de France, pronunciada em 2 de dezembro de 1970. 24 ed. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2014.

FREIRE, Paulo. *A pedagogia do oprimido*. 17a. ed. Paz e Terra: Rio de Janeiro, 1987.

GOMES, Nilma Lino. Educação e identidade negra. *Aletria*: Revista de Estudos de Literatura, Belo Horizonte, v. 9, 2002, p. 38–47. Disponível em: https://periodicos.ufmg.br/index.php/aletria/article/view/17912. Acesso em: 14 out. 2025.

GONZALEZ, Lélia. Racismo e Sexismo na Cultura Brasileira. *Revista Ciências Sociais Hoje*, Anpocs, São Paulo, 1984, p. 223-244. Disponível em: https://patriciamagno.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/GONZAL1.pdf. Acesso em: 14 out. 2025.

hooks, bell. A língua: Ensinando novos mundos/novas palavras. *In*: hooks, bell. *Ensinando a transgredir*: a educação como prática da liberdade. Tradução de Marcelo Brandão Cipolla. São Paulo: Editora Martins Fontes, 2017. 283p.

IBGE - Diretoria de Pesquisas, Coordenação de Pesquisas por Amostra de Domicílio. *PNAD - Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua*. Rio de Janeiro: Educação 2023 / IBGE, Coordenação de Pesquisas por Amostra de Domicílios, 2023. Disponível em: https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/index.php/biblioteca-catalogo?view=detalhes&id=2102068. Acesso em: 14 out. 2025.

LORDE, Audre. Poesia não é um luxo. *In*: LORDE, Audre. *Irmã outsider*: ensaios e conferências. 1 ed. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2019.

OLIVEIRA, Lucas Amaral. Sociogênese possível dos saraus: uma história de rupturas na cultura brasileira. *Revista Sociedade e Cultura*, Goiânia, 2020, v. 23. Disponível em: https://revistas.ufg.br/fcs/article/view/62830. Acesso em: 14 out. 2025.

QUIJANO, Aníbal. Notas sobre el concepto de marginalidad social. *CEPAL*: Estudios e Investigaciones, Santiago, [196-?] . Disponível em: https://hdl.handle.net/11362/33553 . Acesso em: 14 out. 2025.

RAMALHO, Bárbara Bruna Moreira. *A escola dos que (não) são*: concepções e práticas de uma educação (anti)colonial. 2019. Tese (Doutorado em Educação) - Faculdade de Educação, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2019. Disponível em: http://hdl.handle.net/1843/32782. Acesso em: 14 out. 2025.

SANTOS, Antônio Bispo dos. Semear as palavras. *In*: SANTOS, Antônio Bispo dos. *A terra dá, a terra quer*. São Paulo: Ubu; Piseagrama , 2023.

SEPÚLVEDA, Lucas Oliveira. *A PALAVRA É SUA!* Os Jovens e os Saraus Marginais em Belo

Horizonte. Dissertação (Mestrado em educação) - Faculdade de Educação, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2017. Disponível em: http://hdl.handle.net/1843/BUOS-AQQK7A. Acesso em: 14 out. 2025.

SOUZA, Ana Lúcia Silva. *Letramentos de Reexistência*: culturas e identidades no movimento hip-hop. Tese (Doutorado em Linguística Aplicada) - Instituto de Estudos da Linguagem, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2009. Disponível em: https://repositorio.unicamp.br/acervo/detalhe/769115. Acesso em: 14 out. 2025.

Academic Biography
Natana Coelho - Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais (PUC-MG)
Has a degree in psychology at Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais. Master's degree at the Programa de Pós-graduação em Educação at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil.
E-mail: psicologia.natana@gmail.com.

Funding
Not applicable

Ethics Committee Approval
The article is the result of master's research approved by the Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa (CEP) of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG)

Competing interests
No declared conflict of interest

Research Context
This article derives from the master thesis: COELHO, Natana Ester Silva. "A POESIA É UM VERTER QUE MOVE O CAMINHAR": experiências de jovens estudantes com a poesia marginal no sarau e na escola. 2024. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) - Programa de Pós-Graduação: Conhecimento e Inclusão Social, Faculdade de Educação, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, 2024. Disponível em: https://repositorio.ufmg.br/items/8d1307e9-dd13-49f6-896e-865b31d8bb28 . Acesso em: 06 out. 2025.

Contribution of authorship (CRediT)
Not applicable

Evaluation Method
Double-Blind Peer Review

Editors
Altemar Di Monteiro
Anderson Feliciano

Peer Review History
Submission date: 09 July 2025