


Article

# Literature and Development on the Occasion of the Anthropocene\*

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## ABSTRACT

*The article aims to analyze Antonio Candido's *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento* (1970) out of the reading of Dipesh Chakrabarty's *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021). In his book, Chakrabarty seeks to understand the motivations of mid-20th century anticolonial leaders in their fight for local development. His analysis, according to our reading, consists of a way of bringing the Anthropocene and its problematics close to postcolonial criticism and indicating the limits of Third World desires for modernization in times of climate change. *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*, in this sense, reveals the ambitions of one of the most important Brazilian cultural critics. By claiming literary, political, and economic dependence, Antonio Candido expresses the modernizing aspirations of an entire generation. Our aim is to bring out the modernizing project that the text insinuates with the aid of postcolonial theory and to question its methods in the face of the Anthropocene.*

**Keywords:** Postcolonial, Anthropocene, Antonio Candido, Dipesh Chakrabarty.

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## Brasília

The stories are known. In fact, they mirror each other, as it is constantly noticed. In the first story, a boy happily sets off on a plane trip with his aunt and uncle towards the city under construction. In the second one, he travels alone with his uncle, away from his sick mother.

“As margens da alegria” (The thin edge of happiness<sup>1</sup>), the first of João Guimarães Rosa’s “first stories”, is the narrative of “a trip that had been planned for his pleasure” (ROSA, 1968, p. 3). Thrilled by all the excitement, everything that happened to the boy took a feature of affection, in harmony with his curiosity. However, in “As margens da alegria”, despite the forest, the jungle, the animals, everything that surrounded him and everything that was being emptied out – “indians, wildcats, lions, wolves, hunters?”<sup>2</sup> (ROSA, 1968, p. 5) –, the city that was being built did not arouse much interest in the boy, who looked happier in bonding with the plants, the animals, the dust raised by the jeep.

He learns about new creatures by whispering their names. Nothing from the city being built catches his eye; everything he likes is, in fact, the things the construction cannot destroy. Between the new city, in the heart of the continent to the South of Ecuador, built to colonize the inland and what was already there, between the city and the nature, the boy prefers the latter. Between civilization and barbarism, it is the latter that sweeps his heart away. Indeed, the city serves as little consolation for the death of the bird that had conquered his senses:

(...) unable to respond to what he was shown in the circumsadness: a horizon, men grading the landscape, the gravel trucks, some vague trees, a stream with grayish water, the white-sail just a faded plant, birdless, its enchantment broken, the air full of dust. His fatigue turned from repressed emotion to secret fear: he was discovering the possibility that there might be other misfortunes lurking in the mechanical world, in hostile space, and beginning to see that only a hair’s breadth lies between contentment and disenchantment.<sup>3</sup> (ROSA, 1968, p. 8).

“As margens da alegria” is, of course, the story of a boy who learns to experience disappointments while growing up. Things that do not really affect adults, those who, in a certain way, are already numb by the hardships of living, cause a terrible melancholy to the boy: the death of a turkey (to be cooked), the fall of a tree, the terrible vision of a city that devastates everything. The idea of a story about a boy’s intellectual growth and about the loss of a child’s innocence is not mistaken. Especially because we could say that the tale ends with the discovery of “cruelty” (anthropocentric vision) among animals as well – in the end, a second turkey appears and starts pecking the head of the dead turkey, left behind near the forest when it was killed. On the other hand, however, attributing to the story this truthful but trivial sense hinders

<sup>1</sup>The translation of the passages in Rosa’s “As margens da alegria” are extracted from the English version: “The Thin Edge of Happiness”. *The Third Bank of the River and other stories*. Translation: Barbara Shelby. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968.

<sup>2</sup>“índios, a onça, leões, lobos, caçadores?” (ROSA, 1985, p. 8)

<sup>3</sup>Mal podia com o que agora lhe mostravam, na circuntristeza: o um horizonte, homens no trabalho de terraplenagem, os caminhões de cascalho, as vagas árvores, um ribeirão de águas cinzentas, o velame-do-campo apenas uma planta desbotada, o encantamento morto e sem pássaros, o ar cheio de poeira. Sua fadiga, de impedida emoção, formava um medo secreto: descobria o possível de outras adversidades, no mundo maquinal, no hostil espaço; e que entre o contentamento e a ilusão, na balança infidelíssima, quase nada medeia. (ROSA, 1985, p. 10)

us from grasping the extraordinary sensitivity that the boy repeatedly demonstrates towards the “natural landscape”. It is such empathy, after all, that bitters the vision of what could, in another context, fascinate a boy: the machinery and equipment used for the construction of the city.

Here they were grading the landing field for the big airport. Compressors, dump carts, steamrollers, a pile driver ramming the earth with its pylon teeth. Tar trucks crossed the wide, open field. [...]

They showed her (*his aunt*) another machine, a tractor with a brush cutter in front, a thick blade like a machete. [...]

The thing began to move, deliberately, in a straight line. The tree with its few high branches, fresh-looking, with light-colored bark . . . and then, suddenly, rook! in an instant it fell to one side, all of it, every bit. It struck the ground so beautifully! The eye was not quick enough to capture the very moment—the silent shock the full force of the blow. The boy felt sick. He looked at the sky—astonished and blue—and trembled. The tree had died with such finality<sup>4</sup>. (ROSA, 1968, p. 9)

<sup>4</sup> Ali fabricava-se o grande chão do aeroporto – transitavam no extenso as compressoras, caçambas, cilindros, o carneiro socando com seus dentes de pilões, betumadoras. [...] Mostraram-lhe a derrubadora, que havia também: com à frente uma lâmina espessa, limpa-trilhos, à espécie de machado. [...] A coisa pôs-se em movimento. Reta, até que devagar. A árvore, de poucos galhos no alto, fresca, de casca clara..., e foi só o chofre: uh... sobre o instante ela para lá se caiu, toda, toda. Trapeara tão bela. Sem nem se poder apanhar com os olhos o acerto – o inaudito choque – o pulso da pancada. O menino fez ascas. Olhou o céu – atônito de azul. Ele tremia. A árvore, que morrera tanto. (ROSA, 1985, p. 10-11)

What I would like to argue, thus, is that Rosa’s story is not (only) about the boy’s growth, but that it is, above all, the narrative of a lost landscape. It is as if we could access the hypothetical experience of a boy who had experienced the construction of Brasília in its beginning. And it is as if this boy reveals to us how terrible its birth was, the birth of that which is possibly the greatest exemplar of a modern city in the Western world. In narrating what became a significant chapter of Brazilian modernization – or even the biggest symptom of the Brazilian desire for modernization –, Rosa creates, after all, a narrative as ecology. And if we intend to hold on to the meaning of the story as the edification of the future adult, we will have to consider that memory (of his childhood in Brasília) becomes ecology.

The boy who is accompanied by the narrator in “As margens” is and is not the boy saddened by the mother’s disease in “Os cimos”. The first boy, proud and curious, contrasts with the second one, apprehensive and depressed. If in “As margens” the landscape corroborates a pleasant state of mind, in “Os cimos”, character and narrator assume a more thoughtful way of being, showing the child’s frustration in face of the seriousness of his mother’s disease. What the first and the last stories of *Primeiras estórias* have in common is not, as one can affirm at first, the boy, the trip, Brasília. All of those elements are actually present in both stories and do ensure their specular effect. However, what really *happens* in both stories, and what *both* really expose, is what captures the boy and leads him to transcend his condition, that is, his encounter with a bird. In “As margens da alegria”, he takes delight in the turkey he finds, and whose death makes him suffer. In “Os cimos”, the bird that appears to him is a toucan. It is the bird that gives him hope, amid the sorrow of his mother’s disease: “the flawless”, “the punctual, noisy toucan<sup>5</sup>” (ROSA, 1968, p. 254).

<sup>5</sup> “pelo belo”; “o tucano, gentil, rumoroso” (ROSA, 1985, p. 157).

<sup>6</sup> A tornada do pássaro era emoção enviada, impressão sensível, um transbordamento do coração. O menino o guardava, no fugidir, de memória, em feliz voo, no ar sonoro, até a tarde. O de que podia se servir para consolar-se com, e desdolorir-se, por escapar do aperto de rigor - daqueles dias quadriculados. (ROSA, 1985, p. 158)

The return of the bird was a passion that had been sent to him, an impression of the senses, an overflowing of the heart, until the afternoon. The boy thought of nothing but the toucan in happy flight, in the resounding air. It would console him and ease his sadness so that he could escape the weight of those checkered days.<sup>6</sup> (ROSA, 1968, p. 256)

The bond between the boy and the birds in both stories and the possible meaning that these ties represent remind us of the idea of companionship or of species that keep each other company. If the boy is growing and learning to live, we can surely say that he is doing it with a turkey and a toucan as companions. Donna Haraway, the thinker who best describes “companion species”, makes a humorous statement that, I believe, fits perfectly well to illustrate Rosa’s stories. Commenting on the fact that human genomes can be found in only 10 percent of the cells of our body, while the other 90 percent are filled with bacteria, fungi, protozoa etc., she states, “I am vastly *outnumbered* by my tiny companions; better put, I become an adult human being in company with these tiny *messmates*.” (HARAWAY, 2008, p. 3-4). The boy’s companions are not tiny animals, for the birds also help him become an adult.

The relationship with the birds also gives back to Brasília its lost landscape. Not because the turkey and the toucan have ceased to exist due to the city construction, but because entering the world of relationships, of humans in relation (with another species) and of becoming a human (adult) in relation (to other species), is very specific to the contemporary thought on ecology and its insinuation on all areas of knowledge. That is why I affirmed before that we were dealing with a lost landscape in a narrative that was becoming ecological. The lost landscape made a reference to the factual nature devastation carried out in a wide area of the Brazilian *Cerrado* for the establishment of Brasília. In this sense, the stories showed the affective choice for what there was there *before*, or for “the edges”, to the detriment of the destruction/construction that was taking place. If that was an episode of modernization and a step towards civilization, happiness lays otherwise in the margins, the beauty, on the treetops. Between civilization and barbarism, I would say, our stories are fond of the latter.

### **Ships**

I employ this old dichotomy, long known by Humanities scholars, especially those at Brazilian and Latin American universities. It is one of those intellectual discourse markers created during colonization that remained in the succeeding periods. The overcoming of the colony condition, and later, the political, economic and cultural dependency, should necessarily go through the resolution of antagonisms in favor of civilization.

I also use this common way of thinking about (us) because the oppositions allow me to introduce Dipesh Chakrabarty's latest book, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. With the help of the 2021 publication I will try to elaborate a type of diagnosis – imaginative and not necessarily conclusive – of the relationship that a certain Brazilian literary theory establishes with the ideas of development and modernization, rooted in the traditional binarisms that organized the Western thought. These ideas, currently problematized in the climate crisis scenario, should not be simply discarded, under the risk of missing the motivations that have mobilized a good part of our most important intellectuality throughout the last century. *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, after all, does not simply abandon the dichotomies that have marked both the anticolonial struggles and the postcolonial thought.

Dear to postcolonial thinkers, the opposition between civilization and barbarism has forced them, among those Chakrabarty himself, to understand how the overcoming could happen, but above all, how it was allegedly happening, or how it had been supposedly intended. In other words, which historical actors were/have been carrying out a political, economic and cultural emancipation project in the various postcolonial contexts and in the so called underdeveloped third-world countries? What were these projects? What ideals, which ideologies guide them? Who was and who was not contemplated in the national and political formation projects of old colonies?

All these issues bring to the foreground another dichotomy (neighbor to barbarism/civilization) originated in the encounter between what came to be called colony and Europe. That is, between what previously existed in the “conquered” territory, the archaic, and what has arrived from outside, the modern. Chakrabarty (2021, p. 111) recalls that Bruno Latour defends “provincialize modernity” as an European task, that is, the European intellectual's task of putting modernity back in its proper place, since it was Europe that spread it to the rest of the world. However, Chakrabarty himself, who coined the expression “provincialize Europe”, admits that modernity ultimately becomes a project of the political and cultural elites *in the* old colonies.

The lure is shown in its fullness through the “adoption” of nationalism as an ideology for the organization of the people and the political structures of postcolonial countries, as Partha Chatterjee explains in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (1993). Throughout the decolonization period, nationality, he argues, becomes “inherent” to the people. It begins to determine the main form of identification of those who should become “citizens” in a territory that wanted to modernize. And that reinforced a profound ambiguity in postcolonial countries' relationship with nationalism.

Even before independency, precisely during the anticolonial struggles, nationalism becomes the main strategy of union of the subjugated people. Things get even more complicated when, taken to the limit, the nationalism evoked by countries newly released from the colonial power impels to the rejection of the *other* (immigrants and ethnic minorities, *in addition* to the colonizer) and when it becomes essentially progressive and modern, forcing to marginality those groups considered backward. In fact, Chatterjee (1993) explains that the postcolonial nationalism rejected the intruder while it also rejected the ancestral in the local culture(s), understood as an obstacle to progress.

My reading on Chatterjee (1993), in another text, goes as follows:

Precisely because nationalism requires that nations are “updated” with progress, with the dissemination of science and rationality, with modernization and industrialization, and with democracy and equality, it restrains, Chatterjee states, the autonomy of national self-consciousness, which would have to do with local knowledge and epistemologies, with a story, so to speak, that is prior and “parallel” to colonization. Postcolonial nationalisms would thus live the paradoxical situation of desiring their freedom from European domination at the same time as their projects, when choosing nationalism, reinforced the Western intellectual doctrines. In addition, postcolonial nations would tend to transform precolonial past into a clean slate in the quest for emancipation dictated by modern dogmas.<sup>7</sup> (SANTOS, 2021, p. 624, our translation).

There is, however, another plan, the Anthropocene, to which all these oppositions – civilization/barbarism that I have derive from the city/wilderness in Rosa’s stories related to the modern/archaic, whose imbroglío Chatterjee helps us see through nationalism – must submit themselves, suffering the inevitable risk of vanishing. That is because those dichotomies are severely contested in a world in which the “opposition matrix” culture/nature ceases to make sense. Understanding man as a geological force irrevocably throws us into what Chakrabarty (2021) calls “deep time” to the detriment of time determined by human scale. In “deep time”, man, once a cultural agent, becomes a natural agent. It is also in this time that cultural history is only seen as part of a bigger, natural and planetary history; a history whose time seems deep and elusive for us. The advent of the Anthropocene has accelerated and diverted the attention of Humanities scholars to a process that Chakrabarty (2021) had already identified in thinkers such as Bruno Latour. They had already problematized the dichotomies and displaced modern notions of human being. In line with Haraway’s statement mentioned before, Latour affirmed in *The Pasteurization of France*, 1993, as Chakrabarty recalls, that we could not limit society to purely human interactions, for the actions of microbes also had to be taken into account. In claiming the presence of microbes in human narratives, Latour questioned the human modes of being and knowing (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 150).

<sup>7</sup>Exatamente porque a concepção de nacionalismo exige que as nações estejam “em dia” com o progresso, com a disseminação da ciência e a racionalidade, com a modernização e a industrialização e com a democracia e a igualdade, ela coíbe, afirma Chatterjee, a autonomia da autoconsciência nacional, que teria que ver com conhecimentos e epistemologias locais, com uma história, por assim dizer, prévia e “paralela” à colonização. Os nacionalismos pós-coloniais viveriam, assim, a situação paradoxal de almejar sua liberdade da dominação europeia ao mesmo tempo em que seus projetos, ao optar pelo nacionalismo, reforçariam as doutrinas intelectuais ocidentais. Além disso, nações pós-coloniais tenderiam a fazer do passado pré-colonial tábula rasa na busca pela emancipação ditada por dogmas modernos. (SANTOS, 2021, p. 624).

Clearly, it is not simply a matter of extricating ourselves from one of the dichotomies poles. Chakrabarty's own thesis that modernity was taking a new breath in postcolonial contexts (in *Provincializing Europe* and in *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*) would not allow us to try. The wish for emancipation entangled contradictory and problematic desires, whose overcoming today are sensed as impossible. If, on the one hand, it is difficult to simply rule out the civilizational ideal, on the other hand, we must admit that the seductive appeal of "civilization" has been suffering serious setbacks with the findings about climate change and the permanence of structures that sustain inequalities derived precisely from civilization and modernization. It is at this point that concerns traditionally identified with the postcolonial thought meet the Anthropocene.

### Excavators

Chakrabarty has possibly devoted much more time to think about the Anthropocene than any other of the distinguished postcolonial thinkers nowadays. After all, it is his "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (2009), translated and published in Brazil in 2013, that urgently drove our attention to climate change. This seminal essay has been reedited and is considered by Chakrabarty (2021, p. 18) himself a starting point. The 2009 text brought important considerations for Humanities. Chakrabarty described the disjunction that the "human" category was suffering and pointed to our difficulty to see each other, to see all of us, humans, immersed in the deep history of the planet, a history that we could not experience as individuals whose life experience cannot last long. He later affirmed in *The Climate of History*,

As humans, I argued, we have no way of experiencing in unmediated forms these other modes of being human that we know cognitively at an abstract level. Humans in their internally differentiated plurality, humans as a species, and humans as the makers of the Anthropocene constitute three connected but analytically distinct categories. (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 15).

Although the name of this new era is still an object of discussion, the understanding of the geological changes caused by humans on the planet is not contested. It is evident that the name to be chosen is an important thing: the choice alludes, in fact, to a desire of justice. If not all humans benefit from colonialism, industrialization and the consumption of fossil energy, would it not be better to define this new epoch "Capitalocene" (MOORE, 2016), thus referring to the possible *real* cause? Isn't "Capitalocene" more politically committed to justice among humans?

<sup>8</sup>In this sense, Haraway approaches a stance that Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro understand as an impossibility in Chakrabarty and Latour. In *Há mundo por vir?* (Is There Any World to Come?), Danowski and Viveiros de Castro emphasize the authors' difficulty in imagining the Amerindian concept of humanity, "a phenomenological apprehension, as intense as possible, of its own precarious specificity as a block of *affections*, lived corporeality, perspective subjectivity in perpetual cosmopolitical tension with the *other humanities* hidden under the corporeality of other species". (DANOWSKI; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2015, p. 111-our translation).

<sup>9</sup>Human history on the planet and planetary history generate, respectively, human-centered time, that is, the scale of world history, and planet time, operating on geological time scales. Such different times obey interests and are inserted in very different discursivities, which the humanities thinker must now necessarily deal with. For stratigraphy, for instance, it is important to show that the planetary system is admittedly changing, without necessarily worrying about who the author of the change is (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 170). As for the thinkers trained in the modern disciplines of the Humanities, that is a central issue. If the planet changes due to the actions of humans who depend on it, this should concern our humanity. Better yet, what is our ethical commitment to life of and on the planet – ours and that of other species?

Indeed, Jason W. Moore (2016, p. 14) invites us to consider that "Anthropocene" "is neither a useful conceptual maneuver nor an empirical facilitator, but a reflection and a reinforcement of the debatable anthropocentric world vision that has precisely generated 'the Anthropocene'– with all its imminent emergencies". According to Moore (2016, p. 6), "Capitalocene" is the only name that captures "the contemporary historical standard of world history as 'Age of Capital' – and the age of capitalism as a world ecology of power, capital and nature". Donna Haraway (2016), in turn, would like to emphasize the understanding that these are times in which: 1) we can no longer know something through any type of methodological individualism and 2) it is no longer scientifically possible to consider ourselves simply humans, but a kind of "compost" whose result is caused by countless beings living in symbiosis. For her, naming this epoch "Anthropocene" reinforces an old centrality in a time of open transformation. For Haraway, in Moore's words (2016, p. 6), "the problem of the Anthropocene is fundamentally a problem of thinking humanity's place in the web of life."<sup>8</sup>

Chakrabarty (2021, p. 169) argues that the debate about the name, and consequently about the emergence of this new age – whether it happened with the beginning of the colonization of the Americas, with the Industrial Revolution, or in the second half of the 20th century – reflects the concern with the narrative that will prevail in institutions and human's morality. But as unquestionably predatory as human action on the planet is, what unavoidably disturbs the order on which all modern thought was founded is the mismatch of times brought by the Anthropocene, the human plunge into the "deep history"<sup>9</sup>. In this sense, one must begin by assimilating the shock caused by the recognition of the planet's alterity and its processes of long spatial and temporal scales, of which humans are now part. It is in this deeply altered scenario that Chakrabarty seems to try to respond to the need to conciliate the postcolonial thought – used to the struggle for justice among humans, but usually blind to environmental issues and oblivious to the idea of any politics that comprehends the nonhuman – with the challenges in relation to time, to agency and to the very category of human that the new age questions through the notion of the planetary *force* we would have become.

The human divided between being an agent of world history *and* the geological agent of the planet's history invites the historian to think about the epistemic consequences of the Anthropocene. Chakrabarty observes that the type of agency implicit in the expression "geological agent" is diametrically opposed to the concept of agency formulated by E.P. Thompson or Ranajit Guha, his professor and leader of Subaltern Studies. For them, we know, it was an autonomous and conscious agency, and not an "impersonal and unconscious geophysical force, the consequence of a collective human activity" (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 3). Such difference is essential to place the postcolonial thought



before the Anthropocene and to intuit the perspectives that can emerge from the encounter.

The debate around the historical agency is, in fact, an important reading key for the postcolonial thought of which Chakrabarty is part. This is because his insertion in postcolonial studies happens because of his participation in the Subaltern Studies. In “Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change”, 2018, Chakrabarty explains that the movement was born out of the anticolonial impetus, claiming for the Indian peasant, therefore, the status of a revolutionary modern subject. The confluence with postcolonial thought (with Gayatri Spivak at first, and later with Homi Bhabha) has challenged what Chakrabarty (2018) understands nowadays as a then innocent practice of the group: the attempt to make the subaltern the “agent” of their own history.

The human in our anticolonial mode of thinking was a figure of sovereignty. We wanted to make the peasant and the subaltern the subject of his or her history, period. And we thought of this subject in the image of the autonomous rights-bearing person with the same access to representation in national and other histories as others from more privileged backgrounds enjoyed. [...] Becoming human was for us a matter of becoming subject. (CHAKRABARTY, 2018, n.p.<sup>10</sup>)

<sup>10</sup> In Ch. Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change, par. 6.

As we have seen, not only does human agency become the possibility of an impossibility, but also the very category of human has come undone. “Human” no longer referred to any type of essentiality, nor could it be thought in terms of identity politics; it was, otherwise, imbricated in a philosophy of difference. If that did not annul the struggle for rights, as Chakrabarty points out, it certainly complicated easy allusions to an empty and normative status of the political.

If agency and humanity, in the convergence of the anticolonial movement with postcolonial thought, had had their conceptions at least duplicated, it seems that, with the advent of the Anthropocene the human and its agency have to be rethought in terms of an even deeper radicalism: the human as a geological agent takes the idea of agency to the limits of (un)consciousness. As we have seen with Chakrabarty (2018), the category of human must be faced considering its multiple layers, of which the “geological agent” is the less ontological one, less conscious, indifferent, argues Chakrabarty, to the issues of justice among humans. According to him, this is the category we cannot experience, thus displacing certainties with which we had been operating. “Geological agent” is a category that belongs to the planet, to the Earth system, and unlike the “globe”, it is not an anthropocentric construction.

Among the displaced convictions, there is a suspicion that the habit of intellectual practice has made legitimate. The postcolonial thought, as we know, belongs to a greater intellectual flow, since it is deeply rooted in poststructuralism. The mistrust in great categories of social, political, and historical analyses is one of the premises of postcolonial thought,

in addition to possibly being one of its best contributions. Universal and universalistic concepts of agency and humanity, and the concept of world, which claimed for unicity, were subjected to the “reality that divided humans and formed the basis for different oppression regimes: colony, race, class, gender, sexuality, ideologies, interests and etc. [...] This unifying trend has always seemed ideologically suspicious and sustained by the interests of power.” (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 17). The conceptual problem, therefore, posed by the Anthropocene is conciliating this perspective – undoubtedly valid, especially when used to think in the terms of climate justice – with the unquestionable reality that the resources of the planet *are* the same for everyone regardless of how much one country or another has benefited from the exploitation of fossil energy sources or of their predatory movement around the planet. In a nutshell, the point is that the world, in the Anthropocene perspective, is actually *one* planet.

How to respond to the challenges posed by postcolonial thought over the last decades of the 20th century? Or, in searching for justice, how to understand the desire or the right to development of third-world nations with colonial pasts? Where to place and how to interpret “the widespread desire for growth, modernization, development, whatever one calls it, in the less developed nations of the world” (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 96)?

To those issues, we also add:

How do we square the reality of these popular aspirations that play out over electoral cycles and institutional politics with what scholarly voices from Earth System Science and from what we gather under the rubric ‘posthumanism’ tell us about an entangled world, distributed agencies, the role of planetary processes, the nonhuman, and so on? (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 99-100)

And what is the current relationship between the modernization projects of newly released nations and climate crisis that have marked the second half of the 20th century? (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 101).<sup>11</sup>

## Himalayas

What I would like to consider at this point is the association between a literary and cultural project that seems to have dominated the Brazilian academic life since the 1950s and the anticolonial and third-world desire for development. I would like to think of this proximity on the account of the overwhelming awareness about the human and the planet’s actual conditions established by the Anthropocene. In other words, I propose a careful reading of Antonio Candido’s *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento* (2017a) considering the issues raised by Chakrabarty’s questions posed on/to the political and cultural leaders of the postcolonial world. Should we assume that the anticolonial leaders who were willing to keep up with the Western pace were simply defending pale copies of their European

<sup>11</sup> For Chakrabarty (2021, p. 101), the problem goes beyond what he calls “third-world desires”, since the domination of nature by technology was / is experienced as masculinity in different parts of the globe. When analyzing how and why visions of modernized futures structured the imaginations of middle classes and other classes of nations that had been colonies of European powers (*idem*), it does not seem possible to ignore that this imagination is indebted to patriarchy, being, therefore, shaped by it. This patriarchy, in turn, constituted/constitutes an ideal of modernization. The topic is much explored by the feminist thought. For an understanding of the relationship between feminism and the theory in *Formação da literatura brasileira* see, for example, “*Fora do eixo: notas feministas sobre a teoria da Formação da literatura brasileira* (Santos, 2020) (Off-Balance: Feminist Notes on Formação da literatura brasileira’s theory)”.

precursors – mimic, second-hand desires doomed by history to repeat the Western foolishness – and that the criticism of the European modernizers should also apply in their case? (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 105) And why has the opposition nature/culture found a new and original articulation in the imagination of the colonized? (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 105-106). In Antonio Candido's essays, possibly better than in any other Brazilian literary critics' work, we have been able to see the modernizing impetus through his repeated defense of a successful national literature (or Latin American literature) articulated around the dialectic between the local matter and universal (European) aesthetics. In fact, Candido's work seems to be part of a number of efforts that aimed at the Brazilian state-formation and its insertion in the "West". Literature (not necessarily independent, as we will see) is a measure of cultural development, in addition to being an instrument of economic and political emancipation.

In *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*, the link between literature and civilizational expansion is so strong that Candido goes so far as to affirm that the comprehension of cultural dependency– understood as inevitable –boosts political action. "So much so that awareness", he says, "of this link coincides with the beginning of an ability to make innovations on the level of expression and with struggle on the level of economic and political development."<sup>12</sup> (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 186). In Candido, cultural maturity and political maturity walk together and are, in their terms, inseparable. The difference is, precisely, in what follows the understanding of cultural and political dependency: whereas in the first case it must be welcomed, in the second one, it must be fought. After all, the essay welcomes the awareness of underdevelopment in the economic and political level through the recognition of dependency in the cultural level. Therefore, Candido's goal is not a simple (nor complex) overcoming of the peripheral condition in the cultural level, but successful interventions on the greater central stage of metropolitan culture. As Alberto Moreiras (2001, p. 203) observed in *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*,

a certain disturbing paradox has to be absorbed: imperialism in the political and economic orders must be rejected, while, on the contrary, imperialism in the cultural order must be radically embraced, so that the thorough appropriation of Eurocentric cultural forms dependency evolves into something other than dependency. (MOREIRAS, 2001, p. 203)

The paradox, which Candido dedramatizes by loosening the expectations in relation to his teleology at the cultural level, emphasizes, however, the desire for economical-political intervention by the literary critic.

<sup>12</sup> The translations of Candido's work *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento* are extracted from the English version "Literature and underdevelopment: a problem of contemporary Latin America" found in the publication *Latin America's cultural explosion; The UNESCO courier: a window open*. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000078274.locale=en>. Access: May 24, 2022.

In effect, the more he realizes the tragic reality of underdevelopment, the more free and thinking man believes in the need to reject the foreign economic yoke and to modify the internal structures which contribute to the underdeveloped situation. (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 186)

For us, it is interesting to imagine that a statement of this sort can, in fact, refer to the dream of modernization that ultimately flows into the Anthropocene, once it would be very unlikely that Candido was claiming for something different from that which became CEPAL's (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) solution for Latin America's underdevelopment. Their recommendation was precise: let us industrialize, create and strengthen our internal markets, let us develop capitalism. Published in 1970, *Literatura e desenvolvimento* echoed the developmental enthusiasm of the previous decades, rooted in the awareness of underdevelopment, or rather, in the discovery of underdevelopment as historical singularity<sup>13</sup>. "Hence the willingness of combat that is spread throughout the continent, turning the idea of underdevelopment into a force of propulsion, which gives a new imprint to the traditional political commitment of our intellectuals", says Candido (2017a, p. 171). All this reinforces his old idea of engaged intellectual, or of "committed literature", as repeatedly mentioned in *Formação da literatura brasileira*.

Therefore, literature emerges as the very precursor of the underdevelopment awareness.

The underdevelopment consciousness is subsequent to the Second World War and it has been clearly manifested since the 1950s. But since the 1930s there had been a change of orientation, especially in the regionalist fiction, which can be taken as a thermometer, given its generality and persistence [...] the novel has acquired a demystifying force that precedes the economists' and politicians' awareness (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 171-172)

In "The Difficult of Being Modern", in *The Climate of History*, Chakrabarty deepens the issues concerning the anticolonial leaders' desires. According to him, the criticism on modernization that thinkers such as Bruno Latour address to Europe and European leaders cannot be applied to leaders such as Nehru, Leopold Senghor, Nasser and Césaire. It is, as he says, a matter of understanding and measuring the colonized imagination and dream of being modern. Turning to Nehru, for instance, we understand, according to Chakrabarty, that this is not a squalid dream devoid of aspirations and principles. In fact, what arises is a spiritual and idealistic desire, fascinated by "mostly fossil-fuel-driven modernization" (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 106).

Nehru's writings are loaded with ambivalence towards nature and the Himalayas. On one hand, they reinforce the animistic character of

<sup>13</sup> Regarding the underdevelopment awareness in the theory produced by CEPAL, Francisco de Oliveira states: "As a singularity and not as a link in the chain of development, and through 'consciousness', underdevelopment was not exactly a truncated evolution, but a production of dependency that combined Latin American place in the international capitalist division of labor and internal interests" (OLIVEIRA, 2003, p. 127, our translation). According to Oliveira, the term underdevelopment would describe Capitalism as a hierarchized system. The author understands that it was not a matter of stage, but of knowledge about capitalism as a whole, the periphery and its center, and of the consequent place Latin America had in it. I draw attention to this point because we do not want, as Chakrabarty (2021) warns, to understand that defenders of developmental theses believed, or necessarily still believe, in a simple stage process. The point, therefore, is to understand the complexity of the desire for industrialization allied to urbanization that Candido also seems to defend.

his political perspective derived from a romantic view of nature; on the other, they evoke more pragmatic views of the water, the ores and other resources provided by the mountains. “By his own recounting, the first images that came to his mind were not that of industrial progress but of a much gentler picture ‘of the long past of our history, [...] of the early days when perhaps the first canals and irrigation works were constructed and all that flows from them” (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 107-8). The vision of this archaic and primordial past is interrupted by the thought of the future. Its modernizing impetus turns the mountains into an inexhaustible – and exclusively Indian – source of energy (water, the ores). Still, Chakrabarty claims, it is not a simple utilitarian view.

We would misunderstand types such as Nehru or Mao or Nasser or Nyerere if we consider them pragmatic people expressing a simplistic and naive faith in the technocratic solutions for the problem of energy and water supply. Nehru saw the task of making the nation “advance” as nothing less than a spiritual mission, which needed idealism and faith on the part of the technocrat – but a faith that went far beyond faith in technological effectiveness. What Nehru’s vision called for was faith in both people of the country and in the project of modernization in the interest of unleashing popular energies in creating a nation (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 109).

The long citation is worth it because I believe it brings out the similarity in Nehru’s and Antonio Candido’s perspectives, keeping in sight the differences between the positions held by the Indian Prime Minister and that of a Brazilian Literature Critic and Professor. If we, however, take into account that many of Candido’s interventions are not, in fact, restricted to literature or culture, but are intended for politics, economic history and the formation of the nation, as *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento* shows, the affinity between both discourses is intensified. What I would like to highlight here is the permeability of a cultural discourse with a political purpose (Candido’s discourse) through a political discourse with a cultural-literary characteristic (that of Nehru). In other words, I invoke a political literature to bring out the politics of literature.

As mentioned, Candido usually refers to the political and activist vocation of Latin American intellectuals, especially of writers. Suffice for it to recall his statement that “whoever writes, contributes and is inscribed in a historical process of national elaboration” (CANDIDO, 2007, p. 20 – our translation), also present in *Formação de literatura brasileira*. In addition to that, we should also remember his appeal to the spirit that would materialize itself in Brazil: “Read with discernment, [literary] works relive in our experience, offering in return the intelligence and the feeling of the spirit’s adventures. In this case, the Western spirit, looking for a new home in this part of the world.” (CANDIDO, 2007, p. 12). When

mentioning the Western spirit and its possible manifestation in South America and Brazil, we get even closer to an idealistic semantics, common to Nehru's discourse according to Chakrabarty (2021), which combined technical development and issues of the "national spirit".

More specifically, in addition to the faith in modernization and in the spiritual mission that Brazil would also fulfill in modernization, that which brings together Candido and Nehru, or Candido's Brazil and Nehru's India, or, better yet, Brazilian literature according to Candido and the Himalayas according to Chakrabarty's Nehru, is the idealism of the past *versus* "the shock of reality" that the present brings and the future activates, together with the idea of a popular force and will that should be directed towards the formation of the nation. Chakrabarty extensively cites Nehru on the Himalayas and shows, as we have seen, that the imposing nature and the original past should drive India to a great future. Once again, Chakrabarty (2021, p. 108) reproduces Nehru:

When he thought of the future, Nehru said, his attention would be "concentrated on that huge block of massive mountains called the Himalayas which guard our north-eastern frontier." "Look at them. Think of them," he would exhort his listeners. "I know of no other place in the world which has as much tremendous power locked up in it as the Himalayas and the water that comes to the rivers from them. How are we to utilize it?" (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 108).

In a way, it is as if Nehru concentrated on his vision of the Himalayas Candido's perspective on the Brazilian writers since romanticism until the second half of the 20th century, or since Brazilian literature is formed up to superregionalism, an expression coined by the critic. What links Nehru and the Himalayas, on one side, to Candido and the Brazilian literature on the other, is precisely the *modern* concept of nation-state and the development of the nation, the state and their economy. That is, it is the desire for modernization and the construction of the modern future that guided Candido's cultural and political diagnosis of Brazil as well as Nehru's leadership and Indian politics. And if, in the beginning, development was linked to a sumptuous nature that justified the expectations - "It is certain that the idea of a 'new land' gives rise to certain fundamental attitudes in literature, attitudes derived from the admiration and interest aroused by the exotic, from a certain respect for grandeur and from hope in its possibilities." (CANDIDO 2017a, p. 169) -, it would soon be proven insufficient (and a fallacy?) to raise the country to the modern condition:

the effects that the change of perspective that went with awareness of underdevelopment would have in bringing to the fore the reality of unproductive soil, technical backwardness, the overwhelming poverty of the people, their paralyzing lack of culture. This view was pessimistic with regard to the present and problematic in relation to the future. [...]

<sup>14</sup> Next, the list of cultural weakness manifestations, “the scarcity, or the wide dispersion and the small size of the public for literature[...];the impossibility for writers to specialize in their literary work which was usually pursued as a marginal activity or simply out of sheer passion for the craft;” (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 172), from which another common tendency in Candido’s texts can be inferred, that is, his option for the formation of an internal and national literary tradition. The discussion is of no less interest since *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento* aims to create a dialog between works that go beyond national borders, feeding back national literatures. Even so, it seems inevitable, and at this point, quite “candidian”, another statement in the same title: “A fundamental stage in the overcoming of dependence is the ability to produce first-rate works, influenced not by foreign models but by previous national works.” (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 184). At the end of the paragraph, we find the example of “internal causality”, citing generations of Brazilian writers influenced by previous generation, but who were unable to thrive beyond national borders. The following paragraph introduces the figure of Jorge Luís Borges, the first to become an influence for the metropolis countries. What is interesting, however, is that despite being quite identifiable, Borges’ work, based, to a great extent, on Argentinian motif at the thematic level, very rarely arises from any “internal causality”, given the recognized influence of English-language literature in his work.

The precedent landscape grandeur appears, then, in its true essence – as an ideological construction transformed into a compensating illusion. (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 171)

If, initially, “the idea of nationhood was closely linked to that of nature and to some extent derived its reason for existence from this” (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 170), what happens later is the transition from an overrated nature to a devaluing culture. (It will be culture, however, that, in a later moment, will reactivate nature, but in a sophisticated way, through superregionalism. In our comparison, Nehru would propose “the equivalent” to superregionalism, that is, the liberation of the tremendous force contained in that national space, the Himalayas.) Is it possible to affirm that the exaltation of underdevelopment awareness to the detriment of the hope generated by nature, which becomes misleading, strengthens the idea of nature being dominated by human technique and technologies? Could we also abusively imagine that if Candido were the hypothetical Prime Minister of a parliamentary Brazil, we would read hypothetical discourses in defense of exploitation and the use of natural resources as a way of overcoming underdevelopment?

Perhaps we could try a response by observing that urbanization appears as something inevitable in *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*. The essay does not clearly defend urbanization as a stage of development, but is loaded with indications that urbanization, industrialization, and development are, in fact, analogous and contiguous processes. Indeed, in the developmental context of the 1960s and 1970s, it may have been impossible to think of development without cities nor industries. That is why we read that the Ibero-American metropolis Spain and Portugal still have, according to Candido (2017a, p. 173), “underdeveloped areas”: they can be reasonably argued to be the extensive rural areas both countries have. The developmental context and the expectations it generated would also explain the comparison between Spain and Portugal and the “fully developed countries” (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 173) articulated around literature as a good of restricted consumption in the Iberian countries and – we suppose – not restricted in the case of the advanced countries (France?, England?, Germany?).

The situation described is not absurd though a little imprecise and refers to the “material conditions for the existence of literature” (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 172). These are, firstly, the eradication of illiteracy, but also the combat of other “manifestations of cultural weakness”, such as the “lack of means of communication and distribution (publishing houses, libraries, magazines, newspapers)” (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 172). It would, thus, be possible to affirm that, on the contrary, *the cultural vitality* of “a people” seems to depend, to some extent, on urban culture. Not necessarily that of a big city, but urban clusters where newsstands,

<sup>15</sup> In *Além da literatura* "Beyond Literature" (2006), by Marcos Natali, and in *A função da literatura nos trópicos: notas sobre as premissas evolucionistas de Antonio Candido* "The role of literature in the tropics: notes on the evolutionist premises of Antonio Candido" (2018), by Anita Martins Rodrigues de Moraes. The latter performs, in a way, a reconstruction of Candido's defense of "erudite literature" throughout his texts.

<sup>16</sup> On the other side of the spectrum (not the opposite side), Gayatri Spivak (2003) also defends the education of rural populations in India. That is what his fieldwork consists of. In *Death of a Discipline*, she articulates the isolation of rural communities with the need for education to access cultural systems. Unlike what is exposed in *Literature and underdevelopment*, Spivak's work develops its defense of education to welcome its relationship with nature and the land, or the Earth, as a way out of the city-nation scheme.

<sup>17</sup> Moreiras' observation on the paradox of *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento* needs, therefore, an adjustment to become even clearer. There is one type of cultural imperialism that must be embraced. By the same token, there is another that must be rejected, along with economic and political imperialism. Candido does not intend to give up the Eurocentric cultural forms, instead, he would rather use them against the ascendant forms of that period. The text, thus, also shows its conservative bias, or, simply, "enlightenment".

bookstores, and libraries can be found. All of them, in turn, are consequences of the print industry. Let us say, then, that at least *some* urbanization is desirable and that its absence causes problems of cultural fragility and looseness.<sup>14</sup>

The essay goes on to affirm that "framework of this weakness is complemented by economic and political factors, [...] articulated with inept or criminally uncommitted educational policies" (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 172). Since Candido considers literature the main cultural element of a civilization and the measure of a country's degree of development, formal education, literacy and the introduction to high literature as a state policy become strictly necessary. High literature becomes the condition without which the masses are abandoned to their own fate, becoming easy prey for "mass culture". Resuming the comparison with Nehru, without education focused on high literature, the energy of the people is either kept trapped or, as it seems to be inevitable, is released in the wrong direction.

In most of our countries, there are considerable masses of people who have still not reached the higher level of literature and are still submerged in the folklore stage of oral communication when, having become literate, they are caught up in the process of urbanization and fall under the influence of radio, television, comic strips and popular magazines which form the basis of mass culture. (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 174).

Let us be clear: urbanization and literacy are not enough, at the risk of massive culture influx and its possible political effects. Candido's fear seems so grave that he goes as far as defending colonial catechesis (in opposition to the "inverted catechesis" [CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 175] that occurred contemporaneously with *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*):

During the catechesis, the colonial missionaries would write dramatic plays and poems, in an indigenous language or in a vernacular language, to make it accessible to the catechumen the principles of religion and metropolitan civilization, through consecrated literary forms, equivalent to those destined for the cultured man of the time (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 174)

Compliments to high literature frequently appear in Antonio Candido's essays. Perhaps the best example is "O direito à literatura" (The Right to Literature, 2017b), whose ambivalence in the treatment of literature has already been fully noticed<sup>15</sup>. The difficulty in diverging from Candido when he defends literacy<sup>16</sup> and State's responsibility to provide education is inevitable. We cannot get rid of these demands without paying a high price for it. On the other hand, issues over what should be comprised in formal education are in the order of the day, and they tend towards respecting the cultural diversity that inevitably constitute the population of a State. Such diversity, however, does not



seem to be within Candido's range of observation, who, as a rule, praises the acquisition of high literature *in the place of* popular folk manifestations. The mention of the catechesis of the indigenous people only reinforces my perception. In *O direito à literatura*, high literature replaces, at a later stage, popular literature, characterized in the book as folklore, legends, jokes (CANDIDO, 2017b, p. 176). In *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*, published 18 years earlier, the enemy is the urban folklore of mass culture and its interference in an unwary population<sup>17</sup>. Education assumes, thus, the greatest of the tasks in the realization of Brazilian modernity. That is why Candido (2017a, p. 177) remembers that "The Emperor Pedro II of Brazil declared that he would rather have been a teacher, an attitude similar to that of the Argentinean, Sarmiento, who believed that the triumph of civilization over barbarism would have as its premise potential urbanization based on education". The mention of Sarmiento, its purpose of urbanization and its "mote", civilization and barbarism, is not negligible. It is him, along with D. Pedro, two figures of the nineteenth century evoked as models, that illustrate a better past because it was more concerned with education, which in this case is the transformation of the native (barbarian) into an urban citizen, a reader, and an educated according to the best civilizational or Eurocentric practices.

20th century Brazil and its accumulated heaps of "barbarians" killed in all kinds of civil wars make a pure and simple defense of civilization more complicated, but Candido cannot untangle himself from the faith in modernity that guides his writings. Therefore, when Candido dedicates himself to the awareness of underdevelopment as a propeller of Latin American modernization, his considerations about education do not allow us to dodge its modernizing strategy, remembering that, as well as for Nehru, modernization was the path towards unleashing popular energies (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 109). On this well-trodden ground of taking the underdeveloped nation to the levels of urbanization, education, and industrialization of the "fully developed" countries, we can once again wonder, when considering Candido's writings, if we are dealing with an example, in the cultural plane, of those who Naipaul called *mimic men*, as Chakrabarty (2021, p. 112) recalls.

When approaching this issue, concerning the Indian Prime Minister, Chakrabarty (2021, p. 112) again invokes Nehru's own words: "We have to find some way of combining the two—a synthesis between what we consider of value in the old and what we consider of value in the new. Mere attempt to copy other countries is not good enough". Comparing these to so much of what Antonio Candido employed in *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento* to qualify the creative work of Brazilian/Latin American authors— such as, for example, "there is neither imitation nor mechanical reproduction. There is a sharing of resources which have

<sup>18</sup> The dichotomy nature/culture is, thus indicated also in the dichotomy animal/human. The animal has been explored by philosophy and provides us with important insights into the self-understanding of the human (and into the self-understanding of philosophy as well). Derrida (2002, p. 83) provides a good summary of the problem: "we are devoting ourselves here, will allow us to see appear in every discourse concerning the animal, and notably in the Western philosophical discourse, the same dominant, the same recurrence of a schema that is in truth invariable. What is that? The following: what is proper to man, his superiority over and subjugation of the animal, his very becoming-subject, his historicity, his emergence out of nature, his sociality, his access to knowledge and technics, all that, everything (in a nonfinite number of predicates) that is proper to man would derive from this originary fault, indeed from this default in propriety, what is proper to man as default in propriety..."

<sup>19</sup> The discussion would lead us to take up Donna Haraway's remarks in favor of a very ill-defined, profoundly unstable, and delightfully precarious human status. It would also lead us to feminism and its notorious critique of man as the subject of modernity. None of this sounds unreasonable because this text has already mentioned Chakrabarty's allusion to the theme (2021, p.101), "Technological domination of nature was experienced as masculinity far beyond the boundaries of the so-called West." Antonio Candido too could be read from a feminist perspective.

become common property through the situation of dependence, thus contributing to making this a situation of interdependence" (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 187) – we get the impression that we could try Chakrabarty's same response (2021): "This was not the self-image of a *mimic man*". (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 112)

Chakrabarty's objective is to understand India's current politics and its appeal to the notion of globe (of globalization) and not of planet, as indicated by the Anthropocene. According to him, we must deepen our studies up to "the secular ethic of care for the well-being of fellow citizens that the twentieth-century anticolonial drive toward modernization embodied." (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 112). Antonio Candido surely enunciates part of this ethics, and understanding it helps us, along with Chakrabarty's work, better locate our contemporary desires.

On the other hand, the idea that Candido was not an anticolonial leader still haunts us, whether in the political or cultural plane, in which he is fully inserted. As far as I am concerned, Antonio Candido's personality and importance to Brazilian studies are much more related to the establishment of paradigms, modes and themes of study of Brazilian literature, including the formation of its canon, than to any anticolonial idea (in a non-ontological sense; for example, as the gathering of strategies for the emergence of subaltern subjectivities erased by the "official history" or for the construction of an antihegemonic culture). His essays, such like *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*, are determined by unwavering trust in modernization as the desired goal for Brazil, in such a way that his most common claim in favor of "the people" has more to do with access to high literature as a passport to modernity (of course, there is also his rhetoric against misery and social inequalities, which is no small feat, but does not actually seem much before what Candido represents for Brazilian literature and culture) than with the recovery of silenced voices or an uprising against a political, economic and *cultural* colonialist elite. Perhaps, then, to resume the question about Naipaul's *mimic men*, we could try an answer that affirms the mimicry at a certain level. We want to be what we see in some other nations, but we will do this through a unique and original path (the Himalayas there, *sertão* here).

### *Cerrado*

Let us return to the familiar territory of the dialectic between the particular and the universal that organizes so much of what has been written about Brazilian and Latin American literatures. That is, we can now go back to the dichotomy nature/culture and to the attachment to this idea present in Antonio Candido's works over the years, and also in *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*. This dichotomy can show us a little of what modernization represented and thus indicate the "human fixation by 'thin descriptions' of nature and thus to modernization" (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 113). It demonstrates that the ways of thinking

<sup>20</sup> Chakrabarty (2021, p. 100) cites Bennet: "Theories of democracy that assume a world of active subjects and passive objects being to appear as thin descriptions at a time when the interactions between human, viral, animal, and technological bodies are becoming more and more intense."

about the development of one country (and its culture) considered, as a rule, the inertia of "disposed objects" – forests, animals, rivers etc. – for the (possibly good) use by humans, thus the active subject in the relationship.

To my understanding, the difficulty of breaking with the oppositions that organize third-world desires of development and modernization (not entirely misconceived) has to do with the reluctance to understand the human as a being in relation *to* others. Dethroning humans from their position of "the boss" of the planet seems to imply depriving them of strength, power and, who knows, even freedom. The question, I think, goes beyond the legitimate struggle for justice and for climate justice, allocating itself in fear of abandoning a rooted concept of human beings as members of a privileged species.<sup>18,19</sup>

The oppositions also seem to organize Candido's laudatory criticism of "superregionalism". After the awareness of underdevelopment has been acquired, the reference to local themes that authors would privilege, according to Candido, would overcome any elaboration previously attempted, raising those specific geographical regions and the "vision of the human" (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 195) to universality. In other words, the superregionalist writers would have managed to perform that synthesis between universal and local that Candido had already defended in his *Formação da literatura brasileira*.

Superregionalism constitutes the last stage described in *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento* of what we would dare call a relationship between human and nature, were it not for the fact that an actual relationship modifies the two related terms. As presented, superregionalism becomes the most refined Latin American literary aesthetic form of *human apprehension* and *fabrication* of nature.

Laying aside sentimentalism and rhetoric, drawing on non-realistic elements such as surrealism, the absurd, magic situations, anti-naturalist techniques such as the stream of consciousness, simultaneous viewpoints, distortions, ellipsis, the contemporary novel still uses what was, previously, the very substance of nativism, exoticism and social documentation. We are thus led to suggest a third phase which might be called supra-regionalism. It corresponds to the painful awareness of underdevelopment and represents a transcendence of the type of naturalism based on an empirical vision of the world; naturalism that was the peculiar aesthetic tendency in a period where the bourgeois mentality triumphed and corresponded to the consolidation of our literatures. (CANDIDO, 2017a, p. 195)

The understanding that nature had reached the point in which it was not simply documented but elaborated and combined with elements contrary to a realistic representation is not in itself problematic. On the contrary. It could not be seen as the sign of the awareness of underdevelopment (since we now write more than 50 years after

<sup>21</sup> For Moreiras (2001), “in Candido’s story [...] the regional singularity is, once again, subalternized by the literary apparatus itself, which cannot proceed with its appropriation and tendential erasure while it claims to do so from the perspective of a supposed theoretical universality.” (MOREIRAS, 2001, p. 205).

the publication of *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*), but as a sign of the exhaustion of what Chakrabarty calls following Jane Bennet, “‘thin description’ of nature”<sup>20</sup>. However, the declared teleology of Candido’s analysis, demonstrated through evolutionary stages of literature, does not allow us to imagine another end for his narrative but modernization. The evolutionary story towards modernity, modernization and the universal, does not allow us to recognize in Candido a shift towards a world of more complicated categories. Such a “thicker” world, the one which Bennet, Haraway and Latour allude – to name some of the thinkers mentioned in *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*– is never the author’s or the critic’s world or nature. For Candido, the author works *on* nature, which therefore remains the object of an epistemologically active dichotomy. And it is the human capacity that, ultimately, manages to elaborate something different (and better) from that *same material*. Nature, or the local landscape, remains inert. It is man, or culture, who, acting on it (victory of technique), generates something new.<sup>21</sup>

At this point, we can return to the stories, imagining them as narratives of a post-utopian, post-human, post and alter-modern world, the planet. By taking on the boy’s perspective, Rosa’s stories displace the man and offer us, contrary to what one might think, a much thicker, more complex and mixed world– as repeated in *Grande sertão: veredas* (*The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*). In this world, the child grows because of his relationship with the animals and together with the melancholy of a landscape that is being lost while the city, a symbol of the third-world desire for modernization, is born. However, we know that we cannot naïvely affirm that the machines and the devastation that enable the existence of Brasília are not related to the boy-turning-into-man perspective. The plane, the jeep, the excavator truck.

In *The Climate of History*, Chakrabarty inserts two pictures of a child, the only pictures in the book. In the first, the two-year-old young Theo is next to a loader shovel in a park. In the second, Theo, in a sand pit, is mindlessly playing with his toys: miniatures of a digger and an excavator truck filled with sand. In a way, the two scenes summarize his intention in the book and offer us a description of the problem’s complexity:

[...] when I see in a neighborhood park a child unselfconsciously walking around an *earth moving machine* and then see the same child moving sand in a sand pit with the help of miniature versions of the same machinery— Anthropocene toys! — I see how much our geomorphological agency has been “naturalized”. There is no question of artificially separating the time of the Anthropocene from the human time of our lives and history. In many ways, our capacity to act as a geophysical force is connected to many modern forms of enjoyment. (CHAKRABARTY, 2021, p. 11).

<sup>22</sup> “O vò do pássaro habitava-o mais” (ROSA, 1985, p. 158)

But, in “Os cimos”, the work that counts and whose name is used as the title of one of the story’s part is “O trabalho do pássaro” [“The Bird’s Task”] (ROSA, 1985, p. 156) – and not the work of the human or the man on the machine. It is the bird’s work that rescues the boy from the world saddened by the loss (of the mother, of course, but of the forest?) and it is the toucan’s flight, more important than the plane flight, that brings the good news: “The bird’s flight filled his whole being<sup>22</sup>” (ROSA, 1968, p. 236). If we turn our attention to this type of reading, a criticism under the Anthropocene sign, we do so also because the prerogatives of literature – literature as the forefront of social, political and economic changes – and superregionalism present in *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento* have fallen to the ground, and because development understood teleologically *hasn’t been achieved*. A finalized modernization becomes impossible and undesirable in the planetary era. Between Brasília’s architecture and the *Cerrado* forest, it is the maintenance of the latter that concerns us the most.

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## RESUMO

### **Literatura e desenvolvimento, por ocasião do Antropoceno**

O artigo busca analisar “Literatura e subdesenvolvimento” (1970), de Antonio Candido, a partir da leitura de *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021), de Dipesh Chakrabarty. Nesse livro, Chakrabarty procura averiguar as motivações dos líderes anticoloniais de meados do século XX em suas buscas pelo desenvolvimento de seus países. Esse gesto analítico, segundo nossa leitura, consiste em um modo de aproximar o conhecimento sobre o Antropoceno do pensamento pós-colonial e de indicar os limites dos desejos de modernização terceiro-mundistas em tempos de crise climática. “Literatura e subdesenvolvimento”, nesse sentido, se torna um texto revelador das ambições de um dos mais importantes críticos de cultura do Brasil. Ao reivindicar a dependência nos planos literário, político e econômico, Antonio Candido expõe os anseios modernizantes de toda uma geração. Nosso intuito é fazer emergir, por meio da teoria pós-colonial, o projeto modernizador que o texto insinua, problematizando seus métodos diante do Antropoceno.

**Palavras-chave:** Pós-colonial, Antropoceno, Antonio Candido, Dipesh Chakrabarty.

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