

MARIA FIRMINA DOS REIS: THE RISKS AND THE BOUNDARIES OF CULTURAL MARKERS IN *ÚRSULA*Isabel Cristina Rodrigues Ferreira¹

ABSTRACT: This article aims to analyze through a crossing approach to the novel *Úrsula* (1859) by Maria Firmina dos Reis because it wants to show how black and female characters negotiate their roles in Brazilian patriarchal and aristocratic society in the nineteenth century to explain the risks that the subdued characters and the author herself face by breaking the boundaries of gender and race imposed in this social context. These relations and representations of gender and race are constructed as cultural markers in time and space and therefore unstable and changeable. Reis questioned certain roles played by female and black characters through the intersection of social factors such as the "other", inclusion and exclusion, i.e., the relationship of female characters (*Úrsula* and her mother, Luísa B.) and the three black, poor and slave characters (*Túlio*, *Susana* and *Antero*) with the male and white characters, respectively.

KEYWORDS: *Úrsula*; Race; Gender; Cultural markers; Role

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INTRODUCTION

Considered one of the first novels written by a Brazilian woman and the first by an afro-descendant, *Úrsula* was published by the mulatto and poor woman writer Maria Firmina dos Reis in 1859, when she was 34 years old, under the pen name “Uma Maranhense”. It became known only after its 1975 edition, prepared by Horácio de Almeida. Despite some articles about it in the following years, Reis was still ignored by some critics, scholars and other writers (Duarte 267-268).

Reis was born in São Luís, capital of the state of Maranhão, in the Northeast of Brazil, on October 11, 1825 of João Pedro Esteves and Leonor Felipe dos Reis. In 1830, she moved to her aunt’s house in São José de Guimarães, in the state of Maranhão, which was crucial to her education. There, she learned much from her mother’s cousin and writer João Sotero dos Reis, who she referred to as her mentor (Duarte 265; Lobo 193): “Maria Firmina parece ter sido autodidata, e sua formação intelectual deve-se principalmente ao próprio empenho” (Pinto-Bailey). When Reis was twenty-two years old, she became a civil servant in Guimarães and taught at a public primary school until her retirement in 1881. At that time she founded the first mixed and free school in Guimarães, and returned to the classroom (Duarte 266; Lobo 193). She died at the age of ninety-two after a life dedicated to education, reading and writing.

É interessante o fato de que a autora tenha se criado num ambiente em que predominavam figuras femininas, como também que não tenha se casado, considerando as restrições que o sistema patriarcal de então impunha às mulheres, principalmente às casadas. (Pinto-Bailey)

She was better known as a teacher than as a writer. Besides teaching many children to read, she published poems, short stories, two novels and other written pieces in newspapers. Reis was a folklorist as she collected and preserved texts of oral literature as well as a composer as she wrote the anthem to the abolition of slavery, *Hino à libertação dos escravos* (Duarte 266). Despite her efforts and achievements, Reis suffered prejudice for being black and a woman and to avoid rejection from the reader, she, strategically, devalued her novel, in her *Prólogo*, to give the impression that she was not fighting against social values and rules:

Sei que pouco vale este romance, porque escrito por uma mulher, e mulher brasileira, de educação acanhada e sem o trato e conversação dos homens ilustrados, [...] com uma instrução missérrima, apenas conhecendo a língua de seus pais, e pouco lida, o seu cabedal intelectual é quase nulo. (Reis 13)

Hence, this article aims to analyze, in Maria Firmina dos Reis’ novel *Úrsula*, how black and female characters, negotiate their roles in Brazilian society of the nineteenth century, to explain the risks these characters face by breaking the social and culturally constructed boundaries of gender and race:

Em suma, realizou uma obra intelectual considerável para uma afro-brasileira pobre

vivendo numa sociedade patriarcal e escravocrata que já impunha suficientes restrições mesmo às mulheres brancas das classes mais altas vivendo em centros mais cosmopolitas como o Rio de Janeiro. (Pinto-Bailey)

To achieve its goal, this article starts briefly explaining the roles of blacks and women in the nineteenth century Brazil. Then, it presents Reis' subdued characters, the "others" in opposition to the white and male ones. Finally, it shows how Reis breaks the boundaries and what the consequences of it are, as the characters had to take the risk of opposing to the strong and well-established cultural markers.

NINETEENTH CENTURY SOCIETY

When Reis was born, Brazil was already an Empire, D. Pedro I had declared Independence from Portugal in 1822 and became the emperor. Despite this significant changes were stronger and occurred throughout the nineteenth century. It started when, in 1808, D. João VI arrived in Rio de Janeiro accompanied by his family and court, fleeing the Napoleon invasion to Portugal. The transference of the power to the Colony required some adjustments which promoted development in some areas, including education, culture, publishing, urbanization and infrastructure. One of these changes occurred after a law signed in 1827 that regulated women education in public schools, giving them opportunity to study as, "a educação feminina era bastante restrita e mesmo 'precária'" in rare private schools, convents or home schooling (Mott 61). After the second half of the

nineteenth century, the number of formally educated women increased despite the patriarchal values establishing distinct roles for men and women that set that "De modo geral, ao homem era de praxe se ensinar a ler, escrever e contar, e à mulher, a coser, lavar, a fazer renda e todos os misters femininos, que incluía a reza" (Gotlib 27). Furthermore, the latter should "remain secluded, chaste, faithful, and devout" (Meade 61) because they were incapable of "tratar sobre as questões de fórum público", including political actions, uprisings and wars (Tavares).

Education was, then, the women's first step into their identity and recognition as a social and political being. It was also against the belief that women did not need to learn to read and write. As a result, some of them created their space in the job market as teachers or opening schools, like Maria Firmina dos Reis did. Teaching, however, was not the only activity to which women dedicated their efforts. They started to write, literary and non-literary pieces, including articles to defend women's rights, and founded newspapers.

Desde o seu surgimento, em 1852, a questão da educação feminina foi o carro chefe desses jornais, inicialmente defendida na perspectiva das idéias positivistas da mulher como guardiã da moral familiar, responsável pela formação dos filhos e, por conseguinte, pelo caráter dos homens. Posteriormente, passou a ser defendida em prol de que a educação destinada às mulheres não apenas garantiria a execução e compreensão de seus deveres, mas também de seus direitos.

Paralelamente, outras questões foram sendo tratadas pelos jornais organizados por

mulheres, tais como: crítica ao casamento por interesse, negação do papel de escrava e propriedade do homem, defesa do divórcio e do sufrágio feminino, abolição da escravidão. (Tavares)

Therefore, writing, a conventionally male territory, became their way to break barriers between private and public spheres, to transgress nineteenth century social codes as it allowed women to express their point of view about their universe. For example, women expressed how society oppressed them as most of them was dependent of a male figure, father, brother or husband, to live. Even though male writers created female characters and talked about their universe, they “*pensa[m] e elabora[m] a fala da mulher segundo seu próprio ponto de vista, sendo, portanto, sujeito do discurso na medida que constro[em] a imagem feminina de acordo com a ideologia dominante em cada época, sempre sob a ótica masculina*” as Sylvia Paixão posed (Tavares).

Besides the elaboration of a discourse to expose publically women’s conditions, writers, including Maria Firmina dos Reis, also denounced other victims of oppression like slaves and free blacks. The debates occurring in Europe against slavery did not gain strength in the colony until the 1870s. Castro Alves, a nineteenth century Brazilian poet, on the one hand, inspired by these movements with his poetry that fantasized about freedom and dignity to slaves. On the other hand, Joaquim Manuel de Macedo’s *As Vítimas Algozes* (1869) maintained the idea of blacks being animals. In 1875, Bernardo Guimarães published *A Escrava Isaura*, a famous and successful novel which

portrayed the story of a white, erotic and sensual slave (Telles 75-80). For this reason, there are not many writings about slavery mentioned in Brazilian literary anthologies, blacks were types, not real characters, and women authors were never mentioned. Then, the latter assumed “*um papel ativo nas lutas contra a escravidão assim como escreve[ram] a respeito dela[s], fazendo propaganda abolicionista*” (Telles 75). Their texts enriched our literary tradition.

When *Úrsula* was published, Brazil was ruled by its second emperor, D. Pedro II, who governed the country until 1889 when Republic was proclaimed and slavery had not been abolished, what happened in 1888. Politics and economy, therefore, in the Imperial era did not change much from how it was during the Colonial period. Despite some liberal thoughts, political power remained mainly on the hands of the conservatives who were big landholders, also owners of large amounts of slaves. This setting led to several rebellions, including the one led by slaves which was strongly repressed and its leaders publically punished. They “*occurred all over the country, and involved all socio-economic classes*” as a sign of dissatisfaction to the emperor’s administration and to the maintenance of slavery (Ferreira 32). These landholders also dominated Brazilian economy as it was predominantly agricultural; industries represented a small fraction of the country production.

Economy relied heavily on slavery to maintain the great production of agricultural goods. The sugar

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cane crisis and its decadence after the 1860 opened space to false ideas which, as Flora Sussekind posed, associated blacks to “serpents”, not “faithful dogs” as previously and they should not be trusted and were considered dissembler, threatening and capable of regular betrayals (Pinto-Bailey, Telles 79). Moreover, scientific theories, including Herbert Spencer’s theory of Social Darwinism, reinforced the inferiority of blacks and their descendants as they “perpetuated the distorted image that blacks were biologically fit to work in the fields” (Ferreira 40). So, people should watch slaves or free blacks carefully to repress any ideas that would lead to a rebellion or laziness during working hours. These theories also found echo in the Catholic discourse as priests taught that to escape “their fate of ‘condemned race’”, of uncivilized creatures, slaves should be obedient and subservient to their masters (Ferreira 33).

ÚRSULA AS A ROMANTIC NOVEL AND ITS CHARACTERS

Úrsula is a Brazilian novel that follows Romanticism, i.e., expresses human feelings and sufferings that are the social characteristics of the movement. Oppression is the link of all characters, an opposed discourse of how nineteenth century society is organized, i.e., separated by sex, color and genealogy. It also presents other characteristics such as “o amor de dois jovens, a dor e a separação, cenas no cemitério e morte” (Telles 76). This love had an unhappy, tragic end when a third character,

Comendador, Úrsula’s uncle, killed Tancredo to marry his niece. Besides that, the reader can find some gothic elements, but

Úrsula, a donzela, não está presa em um castelo mas junto à cama da mãe parálitica, numa fazenda que pertence ao vilão, seu tio, Fernando [P.], senhor de terras, dos escravos e das mulheres. As aventuras da jovem não se desenrolam em corredores escuros, labirintos com alçapões e sim na floresta, em meio a árvores frondosas e estreitas sendas, fugindo do vilão. (Telles 76)

Its plot follows the structure of a *folhetim*, a sequel, and tells the love story between Tancredo, a well-educated young man and a lawyer, and Úrsula. It started when the former fell off his horse and was taken to Úrsula’s house and care (Lobo 193). Úrsula lived with her paraplegic mother, Luísa B., and their slaves Túlio, who saved Tancredo, and Susana. When Tancredo was almost well, he declared his love to Úrsula, who had feelings for him, and told her his story of love and betrayal. Before leaving, he promised Luísa B. to marry and take care of her daughter. After that, Úrsula met for the first time her uncle, Fernando P., the Comendador and Luísa B.’s brother, who told her about his love. Fernando P. visited his sister and confessed that he killed Úrsula’s father, Paulo B., because he did not want that marriage and wanted to repair all his faults by marrying his niece, Úrsula. This revelation killed Luísa B., but, before that, she asked her daughter not to marry her uncle. When Tancredo e Túlio returned and learnt about what was about to happen, they decided to take Úrsula to a convent to save her from her uncle and to get

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married. Fernando P. returned to the house on the following day with a priest and learnt that his beloved was with Tancredo and Túlio, on their way to the convent. Túlio fell on a trap and was taken to Fernando P.'s presence who asked the former to betray Tancredo. After running away, Túlio warned Tancredo, but the latter was killed. Before witnessing her husband's death, Úrsula offered herself in sacrifice, but Fernando P. did not listen. Úrsula became mad and died: "O seu [Úrsula's] sofrimento era horrível, e profundo, e o que se passava de amargo e pungent naquela alma cândida e meiga foi bastante para perturbar-lhe a razão" (Reis 216). The villain tormented by his guilt and for causing so many deaths, went to a monastery, became a priest and died mad (Telles 76-77).

The reader may think it is an exaggerated, shallow or naïve story, but *Úrsula* is a well-elaborated plot, written in third person and with embedded narratives. Through her characters, Reis discussed issues that mattered to the Brazilian society or, at least, to the marginalized and oppressed elements: slavery and women conditions. According to Norma Telles, "Ela não fal[ou] do escravo em geral, ou da escravidão como conceito abstrato, mas individualiz[ou] [...] em duas personagens centrais, [Túlio e Susana]" (77). Each character had the right to tell his/her own story: "Produziu a autora um discurso que possibilitava aos marginalizados o direito a contar sua história, buscando a empatia com seu público leitor" (Tavares). Furthermore, Reis exposed "as crueldades e injustiças do sistema escravocrata

mostrando como este afet[ou] personagens individualizados" and her black characters "não se limita[vam] a tipos, mas [eram], ao contrário, personagens relativamente bem desenvolvidos e apresentados em sua dimensão humana" (Pinto-Bailey). Consequently, Úrsula had a double function, i.e., it was a production of a literary and artistic piece, easily accepted by the reader as well as a political act, because it established a dialogue between the author and the nineteenth century society, "atitude política de denúncia de injustiças há séculos arraigadas na sociedade patriarcal brasileira e que tinham no escravo e na mulher suas principais vítimas" (Duarte 268).

BLACKS AND WOMEN: RISKS AND BOUNDARIES

Blacks and women are the characters who took the risk of breaking the boundaries of race and gender roles in Brazilian patriarchal and aristocratic society in the nineteenth century in Maria Firmina dos Reis' *Úrsula* (1859). These characters, the "others", did not accept the socio-culturally constructed roles as previously explained as their own and confronted them. The cultural marker which the female characters (Úrsula, the protagonist, and her mother, Luísa B.) fought to change was tyranny and possession, even though they felt helpless and cried many times. In the case of the three black, poor and slave characters (Túlio, Susana and Antero), their confrontation to the *status quo* was in relation to slavery, Africa and the misconception of what blacks' behavior were.

Nineteenth century socio-cultural roles and values gave white men the power to behave as tyrants and owners not only of their lands but also of people, and women, specifically white ones, were one of men's possession as they depended on them social and financially. In some situations, Úrsula even envied Túlio because he, as a free man, could travel with Tancredo while she had to stay at home (Telles 78). In the novel, these roles are played by Fernando P., who took Luísa B. and Úrsula as his possession after Paulo B.'s death, and Tancredo's father, who maintained his wife under his domain: "Meu pai [de Tancredo] era para com ela [mãe de Tancredo] um homem desapiadoso e orgulhoso — minha mãe era uma santa e humilde mulher" (Reis 60). Tancredo, however, was an exception as he was a traditional romantic hero. He was a victim of his father's tyranny and his life was full of loves, deceptions, betrayals, and familiar problems. The white female roles were played by Tancredo's mother, Adelaide, Luísa B. and Úrsula.

On the one hand there were Adelaide and Tancredo's mother who did not confront patriarchal power as the former was very ambitious, witty and selfish and the latter did not have the strength or means to fight against it. Tancredo expressed his disappointment in relation to Adelaide, the woman he loved, as follows: "Não podia imaginar que sob as aparências de um anjo essa pérfida [Adelaide] ocultava um coração traidor como o do assassino dos sertões" (Reis 83). On the other hand, there were Luísa B. and Úrsula who tried to alter their condition and escape

oppression. Mother and daughter established a strong bond since they had no one else to take care of them, but each other. Luísa B. faced some painful moments in life: first, she dealt with her husband's death and debts that left her with nothing and dependent on her brother's generosity. Fernando P., then, took advantage of the situation by exercising his oppressive power. After that, she became paraplegic and ill, not being able to take care of her daughter. Úrsula, with her kindness and unconditional love, took care of her mother until the latter's death. Finally, she was shocked with the news of having her daughter married to her brother, especially because it was against Úrsula's will. Úrsula loved Tancredo and they were already engaged. Úrsula's first pains corresponded to her mother's, i.e., her father's death, her mother's illnesses, and her mother's death. She, however, had her own when after marrying Tancredo she witnessed his death and was taken as hostage by her uncle. The latter warned her about what he could do if betrayed: "(...) rogai ao céu para que vos possa esquecer; porque se o meu amor prosseguir assim, extremoso, indomável, apaixonado, haveis de ser minha; porque ninguém me desdenha impunemente. Ouvis?" (Reis 133) and "Mulher altiva, há de pertencer-me, ou então o inferno, a desesperação, a morte serão o resultado da intensa paixão que ateaste em meu peito" (Reis 134). This trauma led her to madness and death. Since both women died after a traumatic experience, they escaped Fernando P.'s power, and consequently patriarchy representation and

his anger. Their death, therefore, symbolized their way to freedom (Telles 78).

Before achieving freedom in another world, both mother and daughter also took the risk of breaking the boundaries as they did not accept what Fernando P. imposed upon them without fighting. Luísa disobeyed her brother when she married Paulo B., who Fernando P. did not think should have his sister's hand for socio-economic reasons: "(...) um amor irresistível levou-me a desposar um homem que meu irmão no seu orgulho julgou inferior a nós pelo nascimento e pela fortuna" (Reis 102). This attitude made Luísa B.'s brother very angry and resentful, as Luísa observed when she told Úrsula he was her uncle: "Amou-me, amou-me muito; mas quando tive a infelicidade de incorrer no seu desagrado, todo esse amor tornou-se em ódio, implacável, terrível e vingativo" (Reis 101). Úrsula assumed the risk when she and her mother decided that she needed to run from her uncle who proposed and left to get a priest for the ceremony:

– Oh! não... nunca, nunca! – bradou a donzela fora de si.

– Sim, nunca – replicou a pobre moribunda aproveitando suas últimas forças (...).

(...)

Foge... minha... fi...lha!... fo...ge!...

Foram suas [de Luísa B.] últimas palavras, a custo arrancadas e entrecortadas pela morte. (Reis 151)

Tancredo and Túlio returned and learned about Luísa B.'s death. Úrsula asked Tancredo to save

her and to flee with her to the convent. There she thought they were safe and they could get married. After her abduction and imprisonment, Úrsula did not accept her situation and became mad. Fernando P., for the first time, felt guilty about his selfish and arbitrary actions:

A presença dessa menina era um remorso vivo para o seu coração; seus olhos cerrados, seus lábios entreabertos, sua respiração curta e anelante pareciam repetir-lhe:

– Assassino!

O comendador tentou espancar do espírito essa ideia, que lhe voltava incessante, e ele caiu em dolorosa prostração, que excitaria dó em quem não soubesse os seus nefandos crimes. (Reis 219)

Fernando P., then, freed his slaves and spent his last days in a monastery.

In the case of Reis' black characters, she characterized Túlio and Susana as people who had unique and different values and feelings from the general portrayal of blacks, and to avoid idealizations the author created Antero, a person with vices: "Antero cumpre na trama o contraponto dramático ao caráter elevado de Túlio. Além disso, ao ressaltar o vício do personagem, o texto escapa à idealização pela qual todo negro seria perfeito e todo branco ruim" (Duarte 277-8). They suffered injustices systematically as slavery was horrible, but the first two kept loyal to their values as well as appreciated and recognized the ones who were kind to them. These characters together with Reis' white ones created an environment where people are good or bad, with virtues or vices

without any racial distinction. The author wanted to pose that it is part of human nature, not racially related. At the same time that she showed diversity on how characters behaved, she decided that all characters, including blacks, would speak flawless Portuguese, including the correct use of the “you” formal. This improbable situation was criticized by Norma Telles, who could only explain it as Reis’ way to make her characters, whites or blacks, equal, if not in all socio-cultural aspects, at least, linguistically speaking (78).

Túlio was a true romantic hero, an example of genuine feelings of dignity, solidarity and friendship, and high moral values:

E o mísero sofria; porque era escravo, e a escravidão não lhe embrutecera a alma; porque os sentimentos generosos, que Deus lhe implantou no coração, permaneciam intactos, e puros como sua alma. Era infeliz; mas era virtuoso; e por isso seu coração enterneceu-se em presença da dolorosa cena, que se lhe ofereceu à vista. (Reis 23)

Afterwards, the reader will find out that he was also loyal and interested in Tancredo and Úrsula’s well-being. Slave since birth, he got his freedom from Tancredo’s hands as a form the latter found to thank the former for saving his life in the beginning of the novel. They also became friends, an impossible in the representations of the period. Túlio died because of his loyalty, but before he warned his friend about Fernando P.’s trap to get Tancredo and Úrsula. Despite having suffered all his life as a slave, Túlio’s heart was not filled with anger; he did not represent the voice of the working force or of the fugitive community,

quilombo, who were rebellious and violent against their masters. Besides that he also did not let his mind be enslaved: “ele permanece[u] sempre apaixonado pela liberdade” (Telles 77). Reis’ strategy to fight against slavery was not frontal combat. She called attention to Christian values which emphasize the equality among men and love to all without distinction of any kind:

Senhor Deus! quando calará no peito do homem a tua sublime máxima — ama a teu próximo como a ti mesmo —, e deixará de oprimir com tão repreensível injustiça ao seu semelhante!... a aquele que também era livre no seu país... aquele que é seu irmão?! (Reis 23)

Susana took care of Túlio after he was separated from his mother at Fernando P.’s slave quarters. He was very young at the time. Susana knew very well about separation as she was separated from her family (mother, husband and daughter) in Africa, her homeland, her free childhood. There, she lived happily and had a solid familiar structure. One day, a day she could not forget for the great sadness it promoted, she was captured by surprise while getting corn from their crop, not very far from their hut, by two men. When she realized what happened, it was already late, but she

(...) supli[co]u em nome de [sua] filha, que [lhe] restituíssem a liberdade: os bárbaros sorriam-se de [suas] lágrimas, e olhavam-[na] sem compaixão. (...)

Meteram-[na] a [ela] e a mais trezentos companheiros de infortúnio e de cativoiro no estreito e infecto porão de um navio [túmulo]. Trinta dias de cruéis tormentos, e de falta absoluta de tudo quanto é necessário à vida passa[ram] nessa sepultura até que

aborda[ram] as praias brasileiras. Para caber a *mercadoria humana* no porão fo[ram] amarrados em pé para que não houvesse receio de revolta, acorrentados como animais ferozes das nossas matas, que se levam para recreio dos potentados da Europa. Davam-nos água imunda, podre e dada com mesquinhez, a comida má e ainda mais porca: vimos morrer ao nosso lado muitos companheiros à falta de ar, alimento e de água. É horrível lembrar que criaturas humanas tratem a seus semelhantes assim e que não lhes doa a consciência de levá-los à sepultura asfixiados e famintos! (Reis 116-117, grifos da autora)

Despite these unbearable conditions, which were narrated from the slaves' perspective, some uprisings occurred and they were fiercely repressed causing some deaths. That was their way to intimidate and avoid other attempts during the middle passage and afterwards, when they were in slave quarters. Susana resisted to all of this and arrived in Brazil: "a dor da perda da pátria, dos entes caros, da liberdade, foram sufocadas nessa viagem pelo horror ao aspecto de meus irmãos" (Reis 117). Later, she was tortured, fettered in a humid dungeon, and killed by the villain, the Comendador, when he could not find Úrsula because he thought she was protecting her and her lover, Tancredo. Susana's behavior exemplified a different kind of slaves' discourse. Reis wanted to invert values usually associated with blacks, i.e., in her novel, barbarism was practiced by the Europeans who enslaved and tortured other human beings.

According to her experience in Africa, what Túlio received from Tancredo was not freedom because it was not possible to live it fully as an ex-slave in a racist country (Muzart 266): "— Tu! tu livre? Ah

não me iludas! — exclamou a velha africana abrindo uns grandes olhos. Meu filho, tu és já livre?...” (Reis 114). Reis, through Susana's voice, put Túlio's freedom in a different perspective, the perspective of the "other". Susana used irony and a pessimist tone to explain to Túlio the true meaning of freedom. This account "(...) é a tentativa de dar cores próprias à terra natal dos escravos, assim como descrever costumes diferentes e que são apresentados como ideais, idílicos até" (Telles 77).

Besides these two strong black characters, Reis created their counterpart, Antero, to show that not all blacks were good, that there were some bad ones, just like what happened to whites, breaking any kind of idealization of behavior. He was also born in Africa, good hearted, but did not have the strength to keep his self-esteem up and to resist to the vice, alcoholism. He was Fernando P.'s slave and found in alcoholism a way to escape his reality as he explained:

É o único vício que tenho; e ainda por conservá-lo não prejudiquei a ninguém. Que te importa que beba, — acrescentou com voz que queria dizer: não tens coração — porventura pedi-te algum dinheiro para fumo ou cachaça? — e dizendo afagava a cabaça vazia com um desvelo todo paternal, como que arrependido de tê-la desprezado, a ela, a sua companheira constante.

(...)

— Pois bem, — continuou o velho — no meu tempo bebia muitas vezes, embriagava-me, e ninguém me lançava isso em rosto; porque para sustentar meu vício não me faltavam meios. Trabalhava, e trabalhava muito, o dinheiro era meu, não o esmolei. Entendes? (Reis 207)

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He was proud for not depending on anyone to maintain his vice, he worked to pay for it and that symbolized his dignity, and consequently, his freedom. Reis attributed his fall to his longing to his homeland customs and to the African rituals. In one of them, people would drink some kind of alcoholic beverage to symbolize their weekly rest day, to celebrate it. As a slave, Africans were not allowed to rest. Hence, it was Antero's way to rebel against the system.

Finally, similarly to what happened to Luísa B. and Úrsula, Túlio and Susana who after exposing, debating, commenting on moral values, and representing the voice of the excluded, died as their way to redemption. This was not the end of Antero. He got his freedom when Fernando P., because of his guilt, decided to free all his slaves. Then, their risk of breaking the boundaries to Fernando P.'s oppression was to help his niece and his sister. In the case of Túlio, he also became friends with a white man.

CONCLUSION

Úrsula marked nineteenth century Brazilian literature as a novel that broke several constructed cultural markers which ruled the lives of women and blacks. Firstly, women in the characters of Luísa B. and Úrsula did not accept their fate without fighting to be heard and respected. Then, blacks in the characters of Túlio and Susana showed their kindness and loyalty towards helping others in danger; in the character of Antero, reinforced the importance of one's culture to keep self-esteem up. Even though they

were very strong and risked their lives to break some boundaries and overcome oppression and power, they were not able to fully experience freedom. So, in order to achieve that, almost all characters had to die.

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