

MEMORY AS BELONGING: EXISTENTIAL CONCRETIZATION IN THE WORK *THE TRUTH ABOUT ME: A HIJRA LIFE STORY* BY A. REVATHI

A MEMÓRIA COMO PERTENCIMENTO: A ONCRETIZAÇÃO EXISTENCIAL NA OBRA *THE TRUTH ABOUT ME: A HIJRA LIFE STORY* DE A. REVATHI

Natália Galdino de Souza ¹


ROR Universidade Federal do Pará

 nataliagaldinodesouza@hotmail.com



Ana Lilia Carvalho Rocha ²

ROR Universidade Federal do Pará

 liliateacher@gmail.com



ABSTRACT: This work seeks to discuss the concepts of memory, resistance and belonging, through reflections on some authors such as Alfredo Bosi (1996), Augusto Sarmiento-Pantoja (2022), Tânia Sarmiento-Pantoja (2022) with regard to resistance; Maurice Halbwachs (1990), Michael Pollak (1992) on the concepts of memory; Sandra Regina Lesting (2004) and Lucimara Valdambri Moriconi (2014) on belonging, among others who corroborate the development of this work. The aim of this research is to understand relations of resistance as a way of existing and to understand the process of memory for existential realization. The corpus of this research is chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the autobiographical work *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi. To develop this research, we used the method of qualitative bibliographical research based on a theoretical-critical analysis of the selected work. As a result, we witness through Revathi's narrative a resistance based on the need for survival, where we are introduced to her trajectory as a Hijra and how these memories were/are essential for existential fulfillment, in order to be who you have always been.

KEYWORDS: Resistance; Memory; Hijras; Belonging.

RESUMO: Este trabalho busca discutir os conceitos de memória, resistência e pertencimento por meio de reflexões junto a alguns autores como Alfredo Bosi (1996), Augusto Sarmiento-Pantoja (2022), Tânia Sarmiento-Pantoja (2022) no que se refere à resistência; Maurice Halbwachs (1990), Michael Pollak (1992) sobre os conceitos de memória; Sandra Regina Lesting (2004) e Lucimara Valdambri Moriconi (2014) sobre pertencimento, entre outros que corroboram para o desenvolvimento deste trabalho. O objetivo desta pesquisa é compreender as relações de resistência como forma de existir e entender o processo de memória para a realização existencial. O corpus desta pesquisa são os capítulos 1, 2 e 3 da obra autobiográfica *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi. Para o desenvolvimento deste trabalho, usamos o método de pesquisa bibliográfica qualitativa da literatura comparada com base em uma análise teórico-crítica da obra selecionada. Como resultado, testemunhamos por meio da narrativa de Revathi, uma resistência baseada na necessidade de sobrevivência, onde somos apresentados à sua trajetória como Hijra e como essas memórias foram/são essenciais para sua realização existencial, para ser quem você sempre foi.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Resistência; Memória; Hijras; Pertencimento.

Informações sobre as autoras:

1 Discente do curso de Letras - Língua Inglesa pela Universidade Federal do Pará. Bolsista PROEG no Laboratório de Ensino e Formação de Professores (LELIN).

2 Doutora em Estudos Literários pela Universidade Federal do Pará (2018). Mestre em Letras com ênfase em Estudos Literários pela Universidade Federal do Pará (2003). Professora Associada 1 do curso de Licenciatura em Letras - habilitação em Língua Inglesa da Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA).

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INTRODUCTION

In society, from the early years of civilization to the present day, the LGBTIQIA+ community has been fighting for its recognition, respect, place and survival. This fight must be the subject of debate, as it still takes place in a world that, despite being in constant cultural and technological evolution, is violent, disrespectful and prejudiced towards this public. Violence is described as an abusive act that can be exercised through gestures, attitudes and other manifestations that attack the dignity or physical integrity of a person. Based on this assumption, we bring up the need to discuss the violence that is caused to a community, which, for the simple fact of opposing unreasonable norms, is criminalized and pushed to the margins of society. So, this work will show the importance and need to bring to light the voices of these individuals who have been silenced and marginalized since the beginning, with the aim of drawing attention to the struggle of a community that faces disrespect and violence in daily life.

As an initial thought for the reflection of this work, according to the following news, in 2018 the journal British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) published an article with the headline “*India court legalises gay sex in landmark ruling*”. The issue concerns a colonial-era law - Section 377- which classified gay sex as “*an unnatural and offensive practice*” that sentenced those who had sex with members of the same sex to 10 years in prison or even life imprisonment. After 18 years of fighting in the courts, and much opposition from religious and conservative groups, the LGBTQIA+ community in India won the court battle, where the president of the court declared that discrimination based on sexual orientation is a violation of freedom of expression. Along the paper, we discuss the need to highlight the voices of those who have been silenced, erased and marginalized for living, acting and expressing themselves in a way contrary to the so-called socially imposed “normal”. It is necessary that these voices are heard and have the right to live a dignified life, without fear of being who they are and/or loving who they want. There is an urgency to highlight, listen and be listened to. In today’s society we witness an era of struggles, confrontations and resistance. Augusto Sarmiento-Pantoja (2022) emphasizes the need to work on resistance as a way of existing, a resistance that is a theme because it involves individuals whose existence is annihilated, silenced. Therefore, these voices need to be heard in order to value them by giving them their place to speak.

The autobiographical work *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi (2010) contains in its narrative accounts of experiences that happened in her life. Throughout chapters 1, 2 and 3, the author takes us on a journey of struggle and self-realization. In addition to exposing their fight for survival and resistance in a society where their community and gender identity are constantly violated and marginalized, we

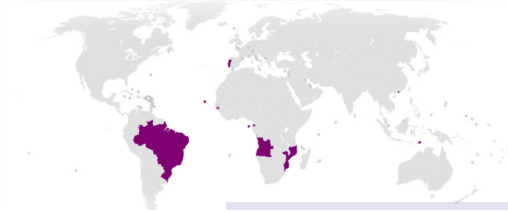
can witness through her memories, from her childhood to the present day, her journey as a Hijra.

We also make reference to the research project Resistance Configurations in Contemporary Anglophone Narratives (CRENAC) where the work was accommodated for us, precisely because of the struggle it represents. It involves the participation of the project coordinator as a guest fellow in the Fulbright program, by SUSI- Studies of the US Institutes, at NYU (New York University). She was in touch with the author and it was revealed that the work had been awarded by Columbia University and as a form of silencing, the Government of India chose not to notify the author.

Initially, we will talk about the work and the author, providing historical data, to show who Hijras are. Secondly, we will bring in the theorists who corroborate this research, correlating, presenting the concepts. Thirdly, we will bring up the critical fortune to which this work is related and will analyze the chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the book and relate how resistance is linked to the concept of survival, and understand how memory is a fundamental part of the realization of the self. At the end, we present our considerations in relation to the corpus selected for the research, enhancing the critical fortune of this theme. To develop this research, we used the method of qualitative bibliographical research of comparative literature based on a theoretical-critical analysis of the selected work, analyzing the theme of memory (Pollak, 1992; Halbwachs, 1990) and how these memorial fragments helped Revathi in her journey of identity as a being belonging to a place. Resistance (Sarmiento-Pantoja, A., 2022; Sarmiento-Pantoja, T., 2022; Bosi, 1996) is thought of as the need to survive. Finally, we mention how the feeling of belonging (Lestingue, 2004; Moriconi, 2014) is intimately connected to an identity of place, to a location or community, “because that environment is part of her life, it is as if it were a continuation of her own” (Moriconi, 2014).

1 A. REVATHI AND HER WORK

A. Revathi was born in the village of Namakkal Taluk, Salem District, in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. As well as being a writer and actress, she is also an activist for the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community in India. As a Hijra, her narrative tells the story of the violence she suffered, and still suffers, for being a trans woman. To understand this properly, Hijras are known in India as the third sex, a name given to their gender identity, and according to Giovanaz (2020 apud Cunha, 2022) the existence of Hijras has been reported for more than four thousand years in the sacred books of Hinduism and it was believed that these women had the power to bless or curse a person. It is important to reiterate that India was a colony of Great Britain and, as a form of silencing, Hijras



were forbidden to perform or give presentations, which was one of the main ways of ensuring their livelihood and because of this many ended up submitting to prostitution. Another form of oppression was the assertion by the British government that “these women were eunuchs, the failed figure of man” Hinchy (2014 apud Cunha, 2022), trying to erase their existence or diminish them. During the colonization period, in addition to being considered criminals because of the way they dressed and carried themselves, Hijras were constantly beaten up and given “cards” during imprisonment that had inscriptions such as criminals and sexually deviant.

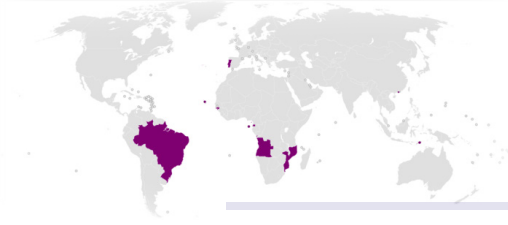
A new literary genre is being born in India, a trans literature (Ramos, 2018) that tries to make people aware that “hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work” (Revathi, 2010). With their autobiographies such as *The Truth About Me* by A. Revathi (2010); *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi (2015) and *I Am Vidya* by Living Smile Vidya (2014), these women seek to show what it is like to be a trans person in the society that surrounds them, and their struggle for the rights of their community and how they are pushed to the margins of society for not identifying with the sex determined at birth. As a complement, we bring authors such as Ramos (2018), Basu (2013) and Cunha (2022) to raise awareness and enrich the critical fortune regarding the Hijras and their community.

2 THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

The Dicio Dictionary (2020) cites resistance as an “action or effect of resisting, of not yielding or succumbing”. In this sense, we can say that resisting is not just being against something, it is a need to fight that represents an essential emotion, because it goes against our state of inertia, the fight for our own existence. According to Alfredo Bosi (1996), resistance is originally an ethical concept, not an aesthetic one, because it comes from the willpower that arises from the need to resist. Reflecting on resistance brings to mind that resistance is to be opposed, contrary to something or someone, averse to everything that hurts the human being in its composure. Bosi (1996) presents us with resistance as an immanent form of writing in the context of ethical resistance, which is described and dated historically, and is rooted in a culture of political resistance, where writers, despite their different opinions, are bothered by moral values declaring a no to the dominant ideology that represses them. Bosi (1996) says that:

[...] Ethical resistance was described within a dated, historically rooted sphere of meaning, in this case within a culture of political resistance. The choices made by each writer, however different they may have been, all stood out from the same axiological background, which can be described as an anti-bourgeois mentality generated dialectically as a refusal to accept the dominant ideology [...] (Bosi, 1996, p. 12, translated by us).

1 [...] A resistência ética foi descrita dentro de uma esfera de significado datada e historicamente enraizada, neste caso dentro de uma cultura de resistência política. As escolhas feitas por cada escritor, por mais diferentes que tenham sido, saíram todas do mesmo fundo axiológico, que pode ser descrito como uma mentalidade antiburguesa gerada dialeticamente como uma recusa em aceitar a ideologia dominante [...]



By opting for resistance writing, the writer presents us with a tension that represents the reality shown in his work, a resistance to anti-values. This tension occurs when literature takes the form of resistance, making the individual understand their singularity and plurality in a society. Resistance literature places them “*inside out*”, to put it another way, being contrary and inverse to value judgments that directly affect their existences, highlighting violence that hurts their body and spirit. On this path, we will also reflect on a resistance that opposes inertia, where the struggle for survival begins. Tânia Sarmento-Pantoja (2022) presents resistance as a detour, a fracture. According to the author, resistance is linked to opposition to the reality that has been historically predetermined, reacting against it when “by not replicating the inheritance, the repetition, the common, the ordinary, the ignorance, there is resistance” (Sarmento-Pantoja, T., 2022). In this sense, this detour happens when the paradigms of life are stressed to the point of causing a rupture in the self-declared immutable.

Augusto Sarmento-Pantoja (2022) presents us with a concept of resistance based on the contributions of Bosi (1996), when there is a need for survival by social groups that are marginalized, historically erased, thought from the plurality of voices and the need to make a literature of particular writing that punctuates the resistance that speaks for itself. Bringing the voices of those who have been silenced for too long, giving them their place of speech, where these voices must be heard. Making them the main character of their story, externalizing moments of their experience in an authentic way, without interference from third parties, so:

[...] therefore, we have room to think about resistance as existence, when at the same time we come into contact with countless literary, artistic and cultural works concerned with giving visibility to existences that have been erased for a long time in our society² (Sarmento-Pantoja, A., 2022, translated by us).

Alfredo Bosi (1996) tells us that memory goes beyond aesthetic theories and it is situated in the formation of feelings that generate resistance values. Memories are fragments of a period in our lives that we have already lived through, creating a jigsaw puzzle of events that were important for the formation of the feeling of resistance. It is important to realize that memory is made up of objects, and that these objects are essential for the formation of memory. Maurice Halbwachs (1990) says that “our memories remain collective, and they are remembered by others”. We can say that memories are a collective whole, because even if we are alone, there will always be objects that have, or have not, become important for the formation of that memory, in other words, even if the event

2 [...] portanto, temos espaço para pensar a resistência como existência, quando ao mesmo tempo entramos em contato com inúmeras obras literárias, artísticas e culturais preocupadas em dar visibilidade a existências há muito apagadas em nossa sociedade (Sarmento-Pantoja, A., 2022).



we are involved in, happens without the presence of another human being, we will never truly be alone, because:

[...] our memories remain collective, and they are remembered by others, even if they involve events that only we were involved in, and objects that only we saw. This is because, in reality, we are never alone. It is not necessary for other people to be there, to be materially distinct from us: because we always have with us and in us a number of people who are not confused³ (Halbwachs, 1990, p. 25, translated by us).

Based on Maurice Halbwachs' (1990) concept of memory, Michael Pollak (1992) presents us with a memory divided into three criteria: Events, Personages, Places; these spheres assume an important role in the formation of a memory. Happenings are events in which a person may or may not have participated. "Secondly, they are events that I would call 'lived by the table', or in other words, events experienced by the group or collectivity the person feels they belong to" (Pollak, 1992, p. 2). In addition, memory is intrinsically linked to the feeling of belonging, since when you evoke a memory, you not only bring the visual of that memory but also the feelings that belong to that memory. In other words, memory serves as the basis for the coherent construction of the individual's trajectory, contributing to the creation of the feeling of identity.

[...] it is the sense of the image of self, for the self and for others, it is the image that a person acquires throughout their life concerning themselves, the image that they construct and present to others and to themselves, to believe in their own representation, but also to be perceived in the way they want to be perceived by others⁴ (Pollak, 1992, p. 5, translated by us).

The formation of a sense of belonging occurs when the individual goes through severe processes of construction and transformation of the self. Moriconi (2014) tells us about an identity to which, throughout life, we add new things until the moment that the individual feels like a complete being. Regardless of the events, happenings, places, people that have passed through our experience "and all the things that have touched us throughout our lives, these will never be forgotten" (Moriconi, 2014, p. 17). We are beings who need to be in touch with other beings, whether affectively or emotionally.

3 [...] nossas memórias permanecem coletivas, e são lembradas por outros, mesmo que envolvam eventos dos quais só nós estivemos envolvidos, e objetos que só nós vimos. Isso porque, na realidade, nunca estamos sozinhos. Não é necessário que outras pessoas estejam ali, que sejam materialmente distintas de nós: porque sempre temos conosco e em nós um número de pessoas que não se confundem (Halbwachs, 1990, p. 25, tradução nossa).

4 [...] é o sentido da imagem de si mesmo, para si e para os outros, é a imagem que uma pessoa adquire ao longo da vida a respeito de si mesma, a imagem que ela constrói e apresenta aos outros e a si mesma, para acreditar na sua própria representação, mas também para ser percebida da maneira como quer ser percebida pelos outros

We need to belong. The need to belong is what shapes us as humans, we have to belong in order to exist, and “it is necessary to take root, because it is a fundamental right of the human being, and the denial of this right has serious consequences for culture and for life in society” Bosi (2017). Moriconi (2014) tells us that belonging is when an individual, independently of the place or community, feels part of that environment and this feeling of belonging characterizes care, wanting good, love and a sense of coherence, because:

Belonging is when a person feels they belong to a place or community, feels they are part of it and consequently identifies with that place, so they will want to do well, they will take care of it, because that environment is part of their life, it's like a continuation of themselves⁵ (Moriconi, 2014, p. 14, translated by us).

Lestingue (2004) presents us with two existing possibilities for the concept of belonging:

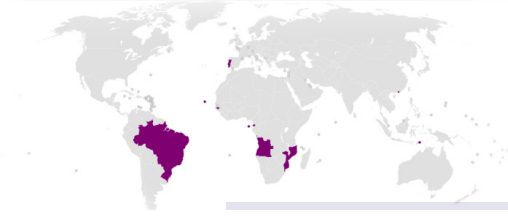
“one linked to the feeling for a territorial space, linked, therefore, to a political, ethnic, social and economic reality, also known as rootedness; and another, understood from the feeling of insertion of the subject feeling integrated into a greater whole, in a dimension that is not only concrete, but also abstract and subjective” (Lestingue, 2004, p. 56).

We think of belonging as rooting, where the being creates bonds with his or her community, weaving his/her identity, so that he/she has a more critical and reflective thought about community, fighting for a more just society.

3 ANALYSIS OF THE WORK

Revathi tells us how difficult her journey of self-discovery as a Hijra was. She exposes all the violence she suffered at home from her family, for not accepting her sexual orientation, and at school where her classmates, and even her teachers, constantly bullied and embarrassed her for not being a “normal” person. In this section we relate her narrative to resistance and the need for survival in order to exist, and how the process of memory occurred to materialize the feeling of belonging.

⁵ Pertencer é quando uma pessoa sente que pertence a um lugar ou comunidade, sente que faz parte dela e consequentemente se identifica com aquele lugar, então ela vai querer fazer bem, ela vai cuidar dele, porque aquele ambiente é parte da sua vida, é como uma continuação dela mesma



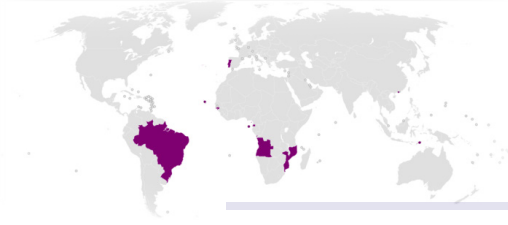
3.1 RESISTANCE OF EXISTENCES

Alfredo Bosi (1996) tells us about the relationship between narrative and resistance thought of from the point of view of ethics, where, within a culture of resistance, the preferences of each artist, regardless of whether they are different or not, are united in the same action of developing critical-reflexive thinking, generated through discussions that express “a rejection of dominant ideologies” (Bosi, 1996, p. 12). In her book, Revathi narrates her journey as a Hijra, writing her testimony as a form of resistance. The author takes us on her life journey and tells us what it is like to live in a society where one of its principles is to erase and silence her community, causing the need for survival. Revathi presents her desires, dreams and the violence that her community suffers on a daily basis, telling us beforehand the purpose of her work.

As a hijra I get pushed to the fringes of society. Yet I have dared to share my innermost life with you—about being a hijra and also about doing sex work. My story is not meant to offend, accuse or hurt anyone’s sentiments. My aim is to introduce to the readers the lives of hijras, their distinct culture, and their dreams and desires. I am proud of the results wrought in the state of Tamil Nadu by my book *Unarvum Uruvum*. I hope now that by publishing my life story, larger changes can be achieved. I hope this book of mine will make people see that hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work. I do not seek sympathy from society or the government. I seek to show that we hijras do have the right to live in this society (Revathi, 2010, p. 7).

Augusto Sarmiento-Pantoja (2022) points us to a resistance that “seeks to highlight the existence, survival and struggle for recognition of their lives”, a “resistance as an immanent form of writing” (BOSI, 1996), based on the need to narrate their history or the history of their group, detecting the existence of social groups that were brought to ruin and had their lives annihilated. We realize the importance of bringing to light the voices of those who experience violence in a real way, face-to-face, highlighting a struggle for survival, resisting the most diverse forms of violence, and always opposing everything that silences them. Through her memories, Revathi shows us that from the time she was at school, she suffered the most varied forms of violence, one of which was constant in the school environment was bullying, by her classmates and teachers, where she was constantly provoked and physical, and psychological aggression took place:

Since I wore the same uniform every day to school, frequent washing had worn down the seat of my shorts. My classmates used to stick a bit of rolled paper into the tear, clap their hands loudly and scream ‘Post box!’ I would go all hot and angry and hurl obscenities at them, as I have heard women do. This would set them off even more, and



they would chant, ‘Girl-boy!’ ‘Ali!’ ‘**Number 9!**’ My heart would sink at these words, but I also felt faintly gratified and even happy that these boys actually conceded that I was somehow a woman (Revathi, 2019, p. 10, our highlight).

The term “Number 9” is used pejoratively to humiliate people who do not identify with the sex they were born with, because in the Tamil language the pronunciation of the number, depending on the place, takes on two meanings, with the pejorative form prevailing. The term came from a survey carried out in India by the Tamil Government, when the gender identity questionnaire assigned the numbers 1 and 2 to the categories of male and female, while for trans people the number 9. Faced with this offense, many activists fighting for the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community in India, together with the DMK group, issued a note of repudiation saying that this kind of “categorization” belittles the community’s struggle and incites violence. It is therefore essential to highlight the importance of the struggle for recognition and respect.

One evening, though, two rowdies caught hold of one of my thozhis and marched her off, further up the hill. We could not fight with them, but neither did we want to leave until she was back with us. After about half an hour, and much to our relief, she returned. She looked exhausted. Sweat ran down her face and she could barely walk. I asked her what had happened, and she said that they had done danda on her. ‘Danda? What is that?’ I asked. **She told me that they had forced her to have sex through her mouth and her backside**, ‘near where you shit,’ she explained. I was horrified and wondered if such things were indeed possible. **She looked so wan and tired and was in obvious pain** (REVATHI, 2010, p. 21, our highlight).

In this section we highlight another form of violence, the sex one. Revathi describes this episode as horrible, it was the first time she had heard of such violence, and it left her terrified. In Revathi’s memoirs, we see constant, uninterrupted violence, where her community suffers from physical and psychological attacks, their right to live has been abruptly taken away from them, creating a need to survive. Tânia Sarmiento-Pantoja (2022) tells us that resistance is thought of as a deviation, where an individual who no longer conforms to the pre-established norms of society places themselves in an opposite position, causing a collision with the dogmas and paradigms of the dominant ideology, causing a rupture, a nuisance, and this is where resistance comes in. This is what Revathi does, by bringing this violent incident as part of her memories, confronting and expressing how outrageous this sexual incident is.

3.3 MEMORY

Maurice Halbwachs (1990) talks about a collective memory that contains objects that contribute to forming a memory. These objects are essential because they help to recall those memories. Inside there are elements present at each stage of memory that contribute to its formation. Based on this thought, can we say that memories are all collective, and that even though we are alone at the present moment of memory formation, it would still be a collective memory. When we think of collectivity, what comes to mind is a collection of people, beings, objects, things... But for Maurice Halbwachs (1990), collective memory:

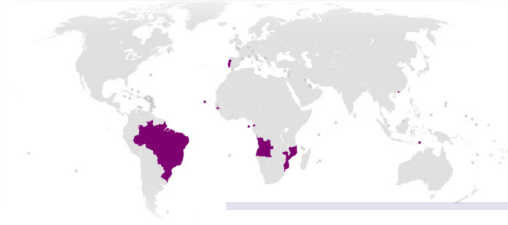
[...] is remembered by others, even if it concerns events in which only we were involved and objects that only we saw. This is because, in reality, we are never alone. It is not necessary for other people to be there, to be materially distinct from us: because we always have with us and in us a number of people who are not confused⁶ (Halbwachs, 1990, p. 25, translated by us).

This means that the objects of memory are those that describe and transform the memory into a living picture, with the participation of elements that contribute to the creation of that memory. Transforming it not only into an image, but exporting all the feelings involved.

In order to analyse Revathi's memoirs, we will refer to Michael Pollak's (1992), *Personages and Places*. We understand that personages are people who have actually been encountered in the course of life, either directly or indirectly, so to speak, becoming almost-known or known people, but who have had their degree of importance for the formation of memory, having a great relevance in the formation of the feeling of belonging. In addition to characters, memory is made up of places, which are mainly linked to a memory and serve as a basis for the development of memories. These can be places that have been visited over a period of time and/or added indirectly, depending on the individual's life experiences. In *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, we see in Revathi's memories such objects which, as well as determining a memory, are essential for the coherence and understanding of the self.

One evening, I decided to climb up to the fort. Halfway up the hill, I sat down to enjoy the view. I could see the town and the outlying villages, including my own. I could even spot the rocks that formed a ring around it. It was peaceful there and I was hardly aware of time passing. It must have been around 7 in the evening, when the twilight

⁶ [...] é lembrado pelos outros, mesmo que se trate de eventos em que somente nós estivemos envolvidos e objetos que somente nós vimos. Isso porque, na realidade, nunca estamos sozinhos. Não é necessário que outras pessoas estejam ali, que sejam materialmente distintas de nós: porque sempre temos conosco e em nós um número de pessoas que não se confundem (Halbwachs, 1990, p. 25)

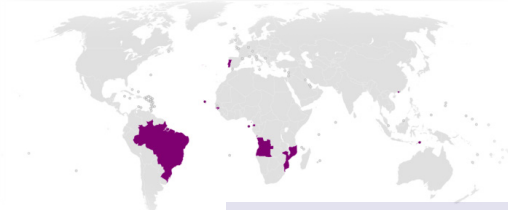


hour gives way to the gathering dark. **I saw four men dressed in lungis climbing up.** I noticed that they swung their hands as they walked and that one of them had grown his hair long. They stopped at a point below where I was sitting and I could hear them address each other as girls do. After some time, they began to dance a women's dance. The man with long hair had spotted me and began to climb up. I was wondering whether these men were perhaps like me, female inside and male outside, when the man arrived and sat down beside me. 'Where're you from, lad?' I mentioned the name of my village and asked him where he was from. He gave his name and so we began to talk. **It appeared to me that we were similar, that our voices and gestures were not very different. And as I continued to speak, I felt close to him, even affectionate, and my heart grew calm.** After I met these men, I started attending tuition classes only three times a week. On other evenings, I would go up the hill and spend time with my new friends. We talked, sang, danced. The oldest of them, he was probably thirty years old, knew Bharatanatyam and even taught me a few steps. From them, I learnt that there were people like us (Revathi, 2010, p. 20, our highlight).

In this passage we see the construction of a memory that is important for the coherence of the self, and the elements that form a working memory, when Revathi, on another common day sitting in the fort, saw four men coming towards her and noticed something different about them, and when she talked to one of them, for the first time in her life, she could feel that she was not alone. According to Pollak (1992), individual and collective memories are essential for building an individual's sense of belonging. Michael Pollak (1992) speaks of a memory that is indispensable for the formation of the elements that make up identity, when he says that "at all levels, memory is a socially and individually constructed phenomenon, [...] we can also say that there is a very close phenomenological link between memory and the feeling of identity. (Pollak, 1992, p. 5)". What kind of identity would that be? The identity of belonging somewhere, in this case, the feeling that perpetuates is that of coherence, feeling part of something, because despite the different elements that make up an individual, we are all unified in such a way that one does not exist without the other.

I did know that I behaved like a girl, it felt natural for me to do so. I did not know how to be like a boy. It was like eating for me—just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat, I felt I could not stop being a girl, because others told me I ought not to be so (Revathi, 2010, p. 12)

In her narrative, Revathi tells us about her journey to the moment when she was finally able to feel that she belonged to a place, in her case a community. During



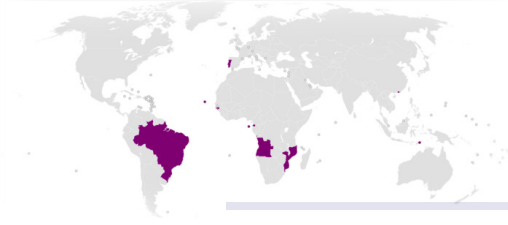
her childhood and adolescence, she was questioned about who she was. She did not understand why she suffered so much violence and why her gestures, posture and speech were always so reprimanded by her family, friends and teachers. For her, acting the way she did was natural, it was something that was linked to her understanding of the self. Since this is the feeling that perpetuates her writing, it is through this restlessness that we witness a resistance that, in addition to remembering, is an important part of building a sense of identity, given that, “we can therefore say that memory is a constituent element of the feeling of identity, both individual and collective, insofar as it is also an extremely important factor in the feeling of continuity and coherence of a person or a group in its reconstruction of itself” (Pollak, 1992, p. 5).

3.3 BELONGING: CONCRETIZATION OF THE SELF

In her narrative, Revathi brings back memories of resistance and her journey of self-knowledge, in which we identify objects, people and places that were essential to her formation as a belonging individual. Moriconi (2014) tells us that we need to captivate the feeling of belonging and identity, because they awaken in human beings the critical and the reflective, thus awakening our good side, developing feelings such as love, respect, responsibility, care and protection. In order for this to happen, it is essential that the individual participates in a community, because “as we live and change our identity, we add new things until we form the whole being, the individual, and that the human essence that we have in us, and all the things that have touched us throughout our lives, these will never be forgotten” (Moriconi, 2014, p. 15).

After I met these men, I started attending tuition classes only three times a week. On other evenings, I would go up the hill and spend time with my new friends. We talked, sang, danced. The oldest of them, he was probably thirty years old, knew Bharatanatyam and even taught me a few steps. From them, I learnt that there were people like us— who wore saris and had had an ‘operation’, and that they lived in Erode and Dindigul. I learnt too that some of them even went as far as Delhi and Mumbai. But here, in Namakkal, we could be women only on the hill. We could fold up our lungis and address each other as women. I guess these men were more my female comrades than mere friends; my thozhis, in fact (Revathi, 2010, p. 20, 21).

Throughout the narrative, we witness an individual in constant construction, who tells us how arduous this journey was and how it was constituted. We understand that to belong is to be part of something, to be aware of who you are. Guimarães And Santos (2020) say that belonging is the reunion with what is natural, where the feelings that make



us up completely are intensified, such as dialogue, solidarity, love and collectivity itself, and many others that strengthen the connection between different relationships and the construction of identity. Lestinge (2004) puts forward two conceptions for the feeling of belonging, one linked to the territorial feeling connected to a political and social reality, which she calls rootedness, and the other understood from the feeling of inclusion, not only in a concrete way, but also in an abstract and subjective way. The feeling of belonging is strictly linked to a connective that binds us to the whole and is capable of empowering emancipation and the collective. But in order to belong, you need to identify with the community you feel you belong to. With regard to rootedness, “linked to the feeling for a territorial space, linked, therefore, to a political, ethnic, social and economic reality” Lestinge (2004, p. 56).

The sari-clad women asked us who we were, where we were from and what was it that we felt. We answered all their questions. An elder asked me my name. When I gave my name as Doraisamy, she said, ‘I meant your female name.’ I explained that I did not have one yet. We then asked if we could wear the saris we had brought with us and make ourselves up as women. They said yes, and so we changed into saris, wore wigs and also the jewels we had brought along. Thus arrayed, we came out and stood in front of the elders. One of them said to me, **‘You look like the actress Revathi.’ And in my heart, I imagined that was my name— Revathi.** I looked at myself in the mirror and felt a glow of pride. I did look like a woman. It was at that moment that I was convinced I was indeed one (Revathi, 2010, p. 23, our highlight).

We understand that belonging is “recognizing and feeling recognized within the group you are part of, so that the group also recognizes you” (Moriconi, 2014, p. 29). In other words, belonging, seen from an abstract point of view, are the attitudes that make a person think more critically about their reality, awakening euphoria and sensations that are born from the bond with the collective, looking for elements that make each person proud of who they are, and that the feeling for a bigger world comes from the collectivity to which they belong. In the excerpt highlighted, we can see in Revathi’s memories the feeling of coherence taking shape and thus creating a being that recognizes and identifies with its collectivity, when, upon accepting the name given to her, she instinctively felt connected not only in her material form, but she felt in her heart that she had found her place in the world and that she was no longer alone.

4 ANALYSIS

Regiane Ramos (2017) in her work *“The Voice Of An Indian Trans Woman: A Hijra Autobiography”* shows us how the Hijra community has been fighting for its space over the years within a society that discriminates against them and violates their human rights, as well as introducing us to a new literary genre, Hijra literature. Through their writing, their autobiographical works, these women seek to narrate their life story, showing what it is like to be a trans woman in Indian society, showing that these women are much more than just for sex work, they are people who deserve to have their lives valued. In India, Hijras are considered “divergent”, people who do not fit into the context of a certain social group, and because they do not “fit in” with the norms imposed by society, these women are discriminated against and marginalized.

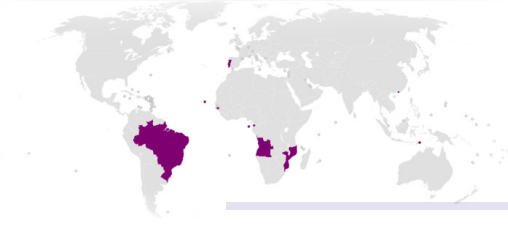
Basu (2013) in *“Memoirs of Two Marginalized Women: A Comparative Study of A Life Less Ordinary and The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story”* compares two autobiographical works by trans women in which the author seeks to show how these women are marginalized and the search for their identities, when she tells us that

“marginalized women and their stories form an interesting counter-discourse within the predominant literary discourse of Indian literature. The memoirs chosen for analysis in this paper are narratives of women whose reality places them in an unenviable position where they have to struggle against their own families and community as well as the larger society in order to create their own identities” (Basu, 2013).

Maria Clara Cunha (2022) in the article *“The Third Gender In India: The hijra social paradox and the consequences of the British colonization”* aims to trace a timeline showing the process of colonization of India, as well as exposing how these colonizers tried to erase and silence these women who struggle to survive in a society that tirelessly seeks to silence and erase them.

Walking between the past and the present, Revathi takes us on a journey of self-knowledge, struggles and acceptance, as she tells us what it is like to be a trans woman in India. In the first chapter of the book we are introduced to her childhood memories, in which she mentions that from an early age she always had an affinity for what she called “girl things”, liked girl games, helped her mother with the chores, and drawing the *kolam*, a service that was only given to the women of the house.

I played only girls’ games. I loved to sweep the frontyard clean and draw the kolam every morning. I even helped my mother in the kitchen, sweeping and swabbing, washing vessels. My work was certainly not tidy, not like that of grown-up women. But all the same, I would do

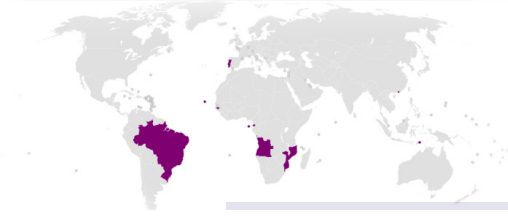


it with confidence. As soon as I got home from school, I would wear my sister's long skirt and blouse, twist a long towel around my head and let it trail down my back like a braid. I would then walk as if I was a shy bride, my eyes to the ground, and everyone would laugh. No one thought much of it then, for I was little. They reasoned, 'He'll outgrow all this when he grows older,' and did not say much else. But boys at school, as well as men and women who saw me outside the house, would call out 'Hey, Number 9!', 'female thing,' and 'female boy'. Some even teased me, saying, 'Aren't you a boy? Why do you walk like a girl? Why do you wear girls' clothes?' I understood that I was indeed like that. In fact, I wanted to be so (Revathi, 2010, p. 9).

And for doing these "girlie things" Revathi suffered from constant violence at school, boys her age constantly nicknamed her and embarrassed her by saying mean and pejorative things. When she heard these nicknames she felt an absurd pain in her heart, because she did not understand why she had to suffer such violence. For her, it was natural to behave and act like a girl, but despite all this she felt grateful because somehow they saw her as a woman and that comforted her. We realize in this first chapter that Revathi's childhood was not a peaceful one. We realize the importance of highlighting the lives of these individuals who have long been marginalized, highlighting the struggle of the trans society that seeks recognition, respect and, above all, to be able to live a dignified life without fear of being who they are.

In my kurathi's garb, I could express all those female feelings that I usually have to suppress and so felt happy for days afterwards. But I felt troubled by the feelings that men incited in me. I felt terribly shy, and whenever I saw young men, I automatically lowered my head. I felt drawn to them, but wondered if I should not be drawn to women instead, since I was a man. Why did I love men? Was I mad? Was I the only one who felt this way? Or were there others like me, elsewhere in the world? Would I find them, if indeed they were there? I lived with these questions and doubts, which lay buried deep inside me. Days passed and I wondered when and if I would find answers, and if indeed I would find someone who understood what I felt (Revathi, 2010, p. 17).

During the passage from her childhood to adolescence, Revathi presents us with several of her questions about her feelings towards herself and others. These questions caused her great distress and anguish, not knowing who she was, not feeling like she belonged, the feelings she had for other boys her age, why she liked doing girly things, violence was the big impact on her life here, because of the attacks, name-calling and humiliation Revathi chose to close herself off from the world, she felt she did not belong there, in that society.



At this, the others showed their appreciation by shouting and clapping. I was to address my guru as I would my mother—I would have to call her Amma. My guru in turn announced that I was her daughter, and my name was Revathi and asked me to do paampaduthi to all the elders. I did so and after that my guru hugged and kissed me, and ran her fingers through my hair.

[...]

I began to cry. I had known her only for a day, but I felt towards her as I did towards my birth mother; in fact, I felt even more torn about her, so natural did all of it seem to me. I could not bear being parted from her, **she who had understood my feelings, respected me, sought to guide me.** I had to leave her now and return to my family and who knows what lay in store for me there. I felt anxiety, dread and a great sadness, and kept crying. ‘Look daughter, don’t cry, I’ll return soon and take you with me. Till then, make sure you keep your hair long.’ With these comforting words, my guru left for Delhi (Revathi, 2010, p. 26, our highlight).

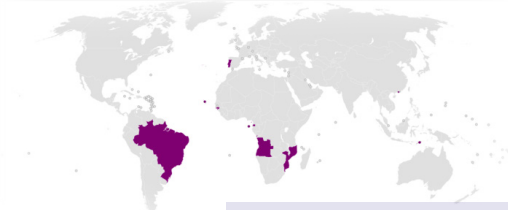
In the third chapter we confirm Revathi’s existential realization, after going through an arduous journey that asserts belonging is much more than just being part of a material way, it is finding in that place or community a place of welcome, a warm embrace, it is being connected both physically and emotionally. In Revathi’s autobiography we notice how important it is for an individual to be connected in some way to something or someone. Revathi has shown us how difficult this journey has been, suffering the most varied types of violence, being humiliated and silenced, both inside and outside home. We then understand that the feeling of belonging happens when the individual feels part of a whole, that they are no longer alone, but now belong to a collective, a community.

CONCLUSION

We therefore conclude that in order to belong, it is primarily necessary to identify with the community you feel you belong to. We can say that memory is like a box where we store feelings, memories and sensations. In her work, Revathi shows us relevant information about her past and present, where we are introduced to people, places and events that have been important in her life up until the present moment, when she can then feel like a complete person, can finally put down roots. On the other hand, we see in her memoirs her struggle for recognition and appreciation of her life as a Trans woman in India, where her community struggles day by day to survive in a society that seeks to erase them on a daily basis.

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