

OUR NIG, BY HARRIET E. WILSON: Frado and the characterization of oppression

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Resumo

Em sua autobiografia em terceira pessoa *Our Nig*, Harriet E. Wilson conta sua história de opressões que sofreu quando morou na casa de uma família do norte dos Estados Unidos, onde se violenta e denigre a mulata quando criança. Com base nos pressupostos de Crenshaw sobre *intersectionality* e de Joan Scott e Michele Wallace sobre as implicações históricas e de gênero buscamos compreender o contexto e condição da protagonista, além das intenções buscadas com a contação dessa história.

Palavras-chave: Our Nig. Opressão. Intersectionality. Raça. Gênero.

OUR NIG, POR HARRIET E. WILSON: Frado e a caracterização da opressão

Abstract

In her autobiography *Our Nig*, written in the third person, Harriet E. Wilson tells the story of the oppressions she suffers when she lived at a family house in the North of the US, where she undergoes violence and denigration. Based on Crenshaw's accounts on intersectionality and Joan Scott and Michele Wallace's propositions on historical implications and gender, we aim at understanding the context and condition of the protagonist, besides her intentions in telling her story.

Key-words: Our Nig. Oppression. Intersectionality. Race. Gender.

Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the life of a free black, in a two-story white house, North. Showing that slavery's shadows fall even there* (1859) is a work

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Texto recebido em: 29 set. 2015. Texto aprovado em: 10 mar. 2016.

of great historical value in the literature of the 19th Century produced by women in the United States; especially by a Black female writer in this context. It is considered the first novel written by a Black woman in the United States. The autobiographical novel tells the story of a “free” Black who lives and works in the house of a white family. Henry Louis Gates, Afro-American literary critic who rediscovered this novel in 1983, states that this work was “printed for the author, rather than “published” by a commercial house”¹. This fact alone reinforces its historical liability, in that it shows the authors’ interest in registering her life.

It is interesting to consider, though, that Wilson did not want to publish the novel herself, but she somehow knew that the novel would come out some day and that its content and the declared oppression in it would impact people greatly. Wilson had a message to get across: as a free American Black, as a Black writer, as a writer and as a woman. In the preface of *Our nig* she states the necessity of being read by her “brethren”, which makes it clear that her intention in writing this work was not only to let white people get in touch with some of her suffering, but also to have Black people identify with the story of her life, of the Blacks who were, in the past, fighting inequality and injustice. Moreover, Judith Fetterley in her “Introduction” to the anthology *Provisions: A reader from 19th-Century American Women*, discusses the literary work done by women in this period and interestingly, she remarks that “For women, hope lay more in a future that their texts were intended to effect than in a past, either historic or mythic”². We may look at Wilson’s work then, as a story that was aimed at changing the future somehow, at bringing awareness to what many would not assume happened in the North of the United States, even after the emancipation of slaves.

Another compelling aspect of Wilson’s story is that it depicts (through the protagonist Frado) an example of several types of oppressions directed to Black females. Not only the oppression directed to gender, or race, but an oppression directed to different

¹ GATES, Henry Louis. Introduction. In: WILSON, Harriet E. *Our Nig: or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. New York: Random House, 1982, p 12.

² FETTERLEY, Judith. Introduction. In: GUBAR, Susan; HOFF-WILSON, Joan (Org.). *Provisions: a reader from 19th-century American women*. United States: Indiana University Press, 1985, p. 25.

dimensions of Frado's identity; namely age and class, for instance. We know that Black women have stayed at the bottom of the social pyramid of power over history. This socially constructed structure places white males at the top of the other existing categories – white females, Black males and Black females, respectively. The narrator's picture of the household (main setting in the narrative) deconstructs this pyramid in a way (placing the white female, the housewife, in a privileged position of authority), but it maintains Black women at the bottom, where they seemed to belong in the 19th Century, with hardly any hope of assuming positions of power.

The narrator's display of different types of oppression on Frado, illustrates Kimberlé Crenshaw's understanding of *intersectionality*. Crenshaw, in her article "Intersectionality and Identity Politics: Learning from Violence against Women of Color"³ touches on two essential points that are also in Wilson's story: violence (the victims being women of color) and oppression towards them. Crenshaw claims that the oppression against colored women is aimed at several dimensions of their self, therefore affecting various layers of the identity. Similarly, Avtar Brah, in her "Difference, diversity, differentiation", mentions a "racialisation of gender", that is, a tendency of the term *gender* to naturally include race as an "ineradicable marker of social difference"⁴. Brah insists that we should not adopt one-sided views of categories such as gender, class or sexuality. She believes that all categories are influenced by historical and cultural factors. These discussions play an important role in the analysis of Frado, who is, historically, a free Black, but lives in conditions like those of slaves.

Joan Scott also tackles issues of gender working on a historical perspective. In her *Gender on the politics of history*⁵, she stresses that gender became a term widely used by feminist academics who study women. She understands that the study of the narratives of the oppressed with a focus on the nature of the oppression they suffer has promoted the

³ CRENSHAW, Kimberlé. Intersectionality and Identity Politics: Learning from Violence against Women of Color. In: KOLMAR, Wendy K; BARTKOWSKI, Frances (Org.). *Feminist theory: a reader*. New York: McGraw-Hill. 2005, p. 533 – 541.

⁴ BRAH, Avtar. Difference, diversity, differentiation. In: *Cartographies of diaspora*. London: Routledge. 1996, p. 95.

⁵ SCOTT, Joan. *Gender on the politics of history*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1988, p. 28 – 50.

understanding that the categories of class, race and gender all represent possible paths for inequalities, therefore, are intrinsically connected to the oppressions women have undergone over time. Scott defends that gender is a category of analysis of history, however, she also sees that there is a difficulty in defining gender as an individual, particular category. Gender, according to Scott cannot only be associated with feminisms or to grammatical usage. It also has roots in history, therefore, it cannot be a-historical. When we observe Frado, then, we are looking at a young woman and at the conditions of gender, age, race and class surrounding her. Not only that, but we are also focusing on a historical moment that adds more meaning to the nature of the oppressions she suffers.

Frado, who was born from a white mother and a Black father who passes away, is described as a mulatto. She is described as being very pretty and exuberant, a six-year-old child full of life and free-spirited. At the beginning of the narrative, we learn that Mag, Frado's mother, is unable to keep the child because her family had expelled her for marrying a Black man and the conditions of her new life with the second husband Seth, are unfit for children as they undergo hunger, financial struggles and she suffers from mental distress. Because of all the hardships, Mag gives in to Seth's suggestions and accepts to give Frado away to the Bellmonts, in spite of knowing about Mrs Bellmont angry and aggressive nature. She takes the girl to the Bellmont's beautiful two-story house and asks Mrs Bellmont to watch Frado while she went to someone's house to wash their clothes. She promises to be back to get the child, but never does.

Frado's journey of suffering and loneliness begins at that moment. She is forced to do housework and punished severely for a number of reasons. She is treated like a slave, although she is a free mulatto. The oppressions she suffers affect her identity in several dimensions, and it comes from several different places and historical misconceptions about people of color. In this paper we will look at Frado and her condition in the household, seeking to understand where her oppression comes from (articulating the concept of *intersectionality*), what the historical implications are (looking at historical aspects of gender in the narrative) and what can our future focus be when we look at a historical, biographical and confessional novel such as *Our nig*.

Mother, daughter and the reinforcement of oppression

Frado is a complex character and undergoes several different phases in the story being told. She is a child at the beginning of the narrative, grows up in Mrs. Bellmont's house, commutes, gets married, has a child, continues a suffering journey and seeks to achieve healing through the reading of books and creative activities – weaving and writing – towards the end. The book ends with a request for sympathy on the part of the reader. She wants the reader to identify with her person and her condition of a “free black” Lois Leveen summarizes the final chapter in the following terms:

The final chapter documents Frado's marriage to a black man, the birth of her child, and her husband's abandonment of her, concluding with an appeal to the reader for support. Together with the preface, this appeal suggests that Frado, the narrator, and the author are one, and that *Our Nig* was produced in a final effort on the part of “Frado” to achieve financial security. (LEEVEN, 2001, p. 561)⁶

The story of Frado, although tragic and traumatic, also represents a breakthrough, as we can see. Leaving the house of her “mistress”, Frado goes on to live her life, where she also finds hardships, but discovers the healing power of writing. In the preface, Wilson confesses that she considers her book a “humble” work, intended to reach her colored brethren and in order for them to become supports and defenders of her story.

One interesting point to observe in the narrative is: the aggressive, abusive figure of the household is the woman. The main white male, Mr. Bellmont, is depicted as not being brave enough to oppose the injustices Mrs. Bellmont enacts and, although he is regarded as good-natured and sensible, his interventions against his wife's wrongdoings are not assertive or strong enough to stop her from harming Frado. He is exposed by his absence of authority in the house in relation to his wife, and he has a number of characteristics that might be considered feminine, such as being loving, calm and affectionate. Mrs. Bellmont, on the other hand, occupies the position of authority in her house. She, a female white woman, makes sure Frado is looked down on and inspires

⁶ LEVEEN, Lois. Dwelling in the house of oppression: the spatial, racial and textual dynamics of Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*. *African American Review*. Vol 35. No. 4.

aggressiveness in Mary, her child, so that she will treat the child the same way she does.

According to Lois Leveen, the house where the Bellmonts live, follows the “imperatives of slavery”⁷. It is Mrs Bellmont, who, once Frado arrives, is willing to make all the necessary arrangements in order for the imperatives of slavery to be maintained. The author challenges the notion of white female authority as just, by showing how unjust and aggressive a white woman in a position of power can be in relation to another female, a Black one. Harriet B. Stowe in her *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, defends, in contrast, the basic premise that white women could be the saviors and that a white female-oriented society would move towards alleviating prejudice and creating a freer society for Blacks. In her work, she presents several female characters helping the slaves and sharing their pain in belonging to their masters and not being able to be their own selves. In Wilson’s account, Leeven adds - “(...) female authority results not in the ideal home promised by the cult of domesticity, or in a proto-feminist space, but in an authoritarian sphere as oppressive as any patriarchal household”⁸. Frado and Mrs Bellmont live the relationship which represents the strongest tension in the household; Mrs. Bellmont is the constant reminder that Frado cannot receive affection, love, that people will not take interest in her. There are several moments in the narrative when Frado experiences a bit of joy, until Mrs. Bellmont comes into the picture and reminds her that her oppression has not and will not come to an end, while she is under their dwelling.

In the preface, we learn that some facts were omitted in the narrative, but it is interesting to observe that we have a clear grasp of the mother and her daughter as abusive figures in the household. This would be interesting to observe as gender plays an important role in the perpetuation of oppression in that setting. Joan Scott poses that gender also informs us of social relations between sexes. She stresses that gender can be a way to raise awareness to social constructions, which sets roles in society for men and women⁹. When we take into account Frado in relation to Mrs Bellmont and her daughter, we understand that those three women live under very different social expectations. Race adds to the dynamics of the women, as well as class. We can draw from this example that, historically,

⁷ Ibidem, p. 562.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 569.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 75.

the social relations between white women and women of color who worked in the household, remained unchanged after the emancipation of slaves.

Mrs Bellmont's daughter, Mary, as the story unfolds, becomes as tough as her mother. She is adored by Mrs Bellmont and is said to be the one among the kids, who resembled her the most¹⁰. In the scene when they are first discussing Frado's coming into the house, she is brusque in saying she does not want to be around a *nigger*. She releases her fury on Frado after she is sent to school with her and has to listen to the children's insults directed at Frado, her companion. That is the moment in the book when Frado's name is replaced by "Nig". It is interesting to observe how Frado's whole identity shifts after her first day at school with Mary. That is a day that marks the beginning of her physical aggressions. With a first excuse to blame Frado, Mrs. Bellmont gets away with beating her for any reason she considers relevant. When they are heading back to the house after the first day at school, Mary tries to push Frado into a stream and fails to do so, falling and almost drowning, but she is helped by nearby scholars. When she comes home and reports the opposite, saying that Nig had pushed her, Frado is beaten for the first time, and Mr Bellmont, who is sympathetic to the black child, instead of calming the women down and preventing the beating of Frado, leaves the house when the women (Frado, Mary and Mrs Bellmont) start arguing.

Jack and James are the two sons in the family who are protective of Frado and against the physical punishment she gets. Jack is positive about sheltering Frado and even poses that "She's real handsome and bright, and not very back either"¹¹. Jack, however, is frequently not home when the assaults happen – normally during his school hours. He does something to distract Frado of her emotional and physical pain, though, giving her a dog as a present: Fido. As to James, he befriends Frado and tries to ease her pain and feelings through religious guidance. He protects Frado when he is in the house, making sure she is not beaten, but he gets married and moves out of the house eventually, leaving her susceptible to Mrs Bellmont's attacks.

¹⁰ WILSON, Harriet E. "Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black". New York: Random House. 1983, p. 25.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 25.

Jane, one of the daughters, is portrayed as very loving and gentle, and although being an invalid, is not despised the way Frado is. She is rather strong-willed and challenges her mother's opinion of who she should marry. Jane's reaction to Frado's presence in the house is not clear. She seems to be neutral, and does not befriend Frado because she is afraid of Mrs. Belmont's rage¹².

The house, main space in the narrative, is not a shelter for Frado, who is exposed to physical abuse, but it is for Mrs Belmont and her daughter Mary, who are hidden from the public eye, and "free" to punish Frado for any reason they consider necessary. Frado is beaten so frequently in her time at the Bellmonts, that when she leaves, she is physically unable to work and support herself and her child. Brah poses that the markers of differentiation are responsible for different kinds of racisms. According to her, there is a "problematic of subjectivity and identity in understanding the power dynamics of social differentiation"¹³. The social differentiation between the three most active female characters in the narrative determines their relationship and the power dynamics in the house. Not belonging to that family and not having enough support, Frado becomes unable to escape the beatings and verbal aggressions. The dynamics in the house are marked by the social differentiation between the females, which renders Frado in a position she is unable to overcome in that space. It is in leaving the space that Frado overcomes the injustice, her loneliness, and the lack of empathy in her experience in a "family".

Michele Wallace defines slavery as a "dehumanizing experience for everyone involved". The oppressed became less than human in a process where their voice and their identity was taken from them, the masters became inhuman by their practices of domination which required a great deal of intolerance and cold blood. Wallace states that:

Both black men and women were forced to labor without compensation, to live in an environment totally controlled by their owners (...). In addition, many blacks, male and female, were underfed, overworked, and physically abused (WALLACE, 1999, p. 17)¹⁴.

¹² Ibidem, p. 37.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 96.

¹⁴ WALLACE, Michele. *Black macho and the myth of the superwoman*. New York: Verso, 1999, p. 17

It is interesting to look at this description of slavery, as it approaches greatly Frado's experience in the North (the freer part of the country), as a free Black, and into a family that never purchased her as a slave. She worked without a compensation, slept in the L chamber connected to the house by a dark passage, had to feed the hens right or else she would be whipped, had to do loads of dish-washing, having her work multiplied to become indispensable in the house by the age of seven. She was indeed, overworked, mentally and physically abused. Abandoned by her mother, she enters a family where they possess her as a commodity. Even language-wise she experiences becoming someone's object of labor: becoming "our" (their) Nig.

Modalities of oppression experienced by frado

The several layers that compose Frado's identity as a character / human being are affected by the oppression she suffers in the Bellmont's house, mainly performed by the mother, Mrs Bellmont. The woman opposes to her going to school, thinks sleeping in the L chamber is good enough for a "nigger" and verbally harasses the child every moment she is around.

One particular way in which Frado is oppressed, which marks the beginning of her hard times at the Bellmonts', is being called "Nig". She shifts from being "our nig"¹⁵ to becoming one, capitalized "Nig"¹⁶. This is a word used to undermine her as a human being in relation to the family, assigning her a place in the house that is less privileged than others. Not only does Mrs. Bellmont call her that way, but also people who befriend her, like Jack. Her color becomes determining of her place in the house. Another important aspect of the capitalized word Nig is her losing of her own name. Frado has her own identity taken from her and becomes what others name her. Nig, short for the word "nigger", also is a term that would apply both to a man or a woman. In that sense, when Frado's gender is not even acknowledged in the language used, we can see how much of a "dehumanizing" process takes place at that beautiful house. Joan Scott mentions that post-structuralists emphasize the central role of language in communication, understanding words as systems of signification, or coming from a greater (and we may

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 26.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 33.

add, cultural) scope before it reaches language and usage¹⁷. The cultural, subjective understanding of that Northern family reproduces the “imperatives of slavery”, even by the characters who defend Frado.

Frado also suffers prejudice because of her class position. There are affirmations on the book that assert her lower class, particularly when referring to the clothes she would wear: “Her winter over-dress was a cast-off overcoat, once worn by Jack and a sun-bonnet”¹⁸. She wore used clothes, which already is an indicator of “not as worthy” a position as Mary’s position in school. The clothes are the excuse for kids to call her names and she is remembered in school too, that she does not belong in that place, and is not as welcome as the upper class kids there.

Being a girl is another trait of Frado’s identity that is used against her in the constant tyrannical attacks she suffers in the house where she lives. The fact that she is female, the same gender as the mother (the female authority in that context) already anticipates socially constructed roles for her; namely, being feminine, being submissive and taking on household chores. John points that Frado, despite of being a child, works as hard as a woman. He is questioned by his Aunt, Abby about expressing that he hoped Nig would not come back into the house, because he feels bad for her punishments. When his sister asks “Why do you have it so, John?”, he replies “How am I to help it? Women rule the earth, and all in it”¹⁹. The irony in that construction stands out. Not only for the fact that the statement is not true in cultural and political terms, and was not true back in the 19th century, but because in those unusual conditions one woman (his mother, who he could question and try to stop) *was* ruling the house, and she was using her power to practice exploitation and denigration.

Frado’s oppression also takes place on the religious level. James, one of her good friends in the house and one who seems to deeply care about her well-being, is unable to answer her inquiries in relation to their faith in a logical way. Their conversations about religion leave Frado confused and insecure about God’s love for her. She gets to a point

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 81.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 37.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 44.

when she affirms she does not like God and justifies it in relation to her mistress: “Because he made her white, and me black. Why didn’t he make us *both* white?”²⁰. Frado continues fighting over and over against her own feelings in order to find relief through religion. She eventually finds other ways of resting her heart and keeping her mind occupied, when, at the end of the story, she reveals her identity of a writer and finds herself to be useful for writing and asks for her brethren support in buying her novel.

Frado’s age is another factor that brings abuse on her. Being a child naturally puts her in a position to be lowered by Mrs. Bellmont’s authority. It is decided that, when she turns 9 years old, the benefit of studying and being away from the house and from her mistress should be taken away from her. The fact that her mistress can control her because of her age, as well as she could control any of her kids, and the fact that Frado utterly depends on her abuser for food and shelter play a significant role in the continuity of those severe attacks her.

In addition to all the layers of Frado’s identity mentioned above, there is race which is also a very important part of her being and one of the main determiners of the unjust treatment she gets. Her skin color is an indicative of her deserving to be oppressed. The difference of this oppression in relation to oppression by religion or by being called Nig, for instance, is that skin color is permanent and it lies in the oppressed. There would be no way she could get away from being Black, as she could abandon religion or hide and not hear hurtful words. Frado’s abuser, at one point, decides to punish her because of her blackness too. Frado was not allowed to protect from the sun. “Mrs. Bellmont was determined the sun should have full power to darken the shade which nature had first bestowed upon her as best befitting”²¹. It is mentioned in the beginning of the book, that Frado is a mullato girl, coming from an interracial relationship. Mrs. Bellmont’s strategy to make her look blacker is not an accident. Mullatoes, after the emancipation of slaves, had more prestige in society and were more likely to be initiated in school and in arts, such as music, than darker people. The woman, however, wanted the girl’s color to catch people’s attention leaving no doubt of her inferiority, so not only in the house, but outside

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 51.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 39.

of the house, she would get the treatment that she deserved for being a “nigger”. According to Cynthia Davis, there is a statement in the book underlying Mrs. Bellmont and Frado’s relationship: one that asserts that the Black body is more tolerant of pain, but it is the recurrence of the pain, and the realization of injustice that makes Frado stand up for herself and break away with her own pain through discourse²². Davis defends that this turning point determines the beginning of Frado’s healing, although the healing process in Frado is never fully accomplished: she even talks about how certain abolitionists did not want to give her shelter and protection when she needed, and at the end of the book, the whole conflict remains unresolved.

Intersectionality and the characterization of Frado’s oppression

Kimberlé Crenshaw poses that women of color suffer physical violence (which is the case with Frado as well) for a number of reasons.

In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference is problematic because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race, class and sexual orientation (CRENSHAW, 2005, p. 533).

Crenshaw’s point here alludes to all we have previously referred to in terms of the modalities of oppression the character suffers, or what motivates those forms of oppression. Although the author writes from a very different point in history, we can see that violence against women of color has had many of the same reasons. We may consider sexual orientation a more recent one, however, race and class were instances that greatly “justified” the physical abuse of enslaved women. Crenshaw here means that racism (a heritage from slavery) is often not just determined by race, but also by other features of one’s identity; and the same happens with sexism. Drawing from this understanding, we ought to look at each individual not as a unity, but rather a multiplicity. Frado is a good example of multiplicity to understand these dynamics. The conditions of her identity accumulate and result in a number of abuses: her blackness leads to a limitation that

²² DAVIS, Cynthia J. Speaking the Body’s Pain: Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig*. In: *African American Review*, 1993 Fall 27 (3) 391-404. Journal Article, p.105.

determines her class, her class limitation is worsened by her age, her age and the fact that she is a woman aggravate her maltreatment. Crenshaw explains:

Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, anti-racism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms²³.

This quote shows a distinction in the different kinds of racism and sexism that may be experienced by women of color. Crenshaw proposes that the difficulty in eliminating the bias is that when we analyze instances such as class, gender, race, we are dealing with power in its core and in order to overthrow racism and sexism, power would have to be democratized and possibly re-defined. Her point is that the understanding of multiplicity alone would ease the necessity for separate groups and make us approach the category of humans all at once, and re-defining identity would be a result of that process.

Conclusion

A very brave aspect of this autobiographical novel is its character of denouncement and the style which differs from sentimental and domestic novels written by women in the US in the 19th century. Judith Fetterley reminds us that “Although mid-nineteenth-century American women writers could choose to write about their lives, they could not apparently choose to write about the injustices of those lives”²⁴. By reading *Our Nig*, we learn that Wilson’s narrator does the exact opposite. The novel tackles the injustices, denounces the domestic settings which reinforced the standards of slavery in the North and passes a responsibility on to the reader in asking for the public’s support and recognition from the brothers and sisters.

Michele Wallace poses that *Our Nig*’s “‘realistic’ features broke with the sentimental conventions of women’s fiction in the nineteenth century”²⁵, and that might be the reason why it was not commercially successful at the time of release. Joyce W. Warren, in

²³ Ibidem, p. 536.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 13.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. xxxvi.

“Introduction: canons and canon fodder”, goes further in stating that “Wilson’s novel implicitly challenges all of the principal traditions of American society”²⁶. We may consider a combination of both factors (the unconventional style and the provoking tone to tradition) contributed for the little attention given to this novel for a long period of time. Warren also stresses that “Wilson, who was a free black woman living in the North, incorporated much of her own life into her novel. Very different from the traditional slave narrative, *Our Nig* is not a success story.” For Warren, American citizens were not interested in discussing matters like the ones presented in the book: interracial marriage, unglorified motherhood, slave standards reproduced in “hidden” households.

Not only is *Our Nig* a work of great literary value, it is also of great historic value. It speaks of problems neglected by society in the 19th century and it tells a true account, in an exercise of freedom: of speaking openly about one’s story.

About the exercise of writing autobiographical accounts, Michele Wallace, who has taught autobiographical writing, tells us about her experience with female students:

Their struggle to write their own stories is, invariably, the struggle between their mothers, and sometimes their fathers, and themselves. (...) They find it difficult to even remember having feelings of their own as children. (...) Autobiographical writing may partly be about reclaiming that childhood self; acknowledging her blamelessness.²⁷

Wilson shows she honors the responsibility of reclaiming the child who she was not allowed to be. Not only on a personal level, she also shows she recognized the need to tell her story and let people know about true facts that are often hidden from the public sphere.

The narration brings us in touch with Frado, and understanding Frado’s identity and all the implications in it helps us self-analyze our own layers, our own ways and the kinds of oppression we still want to break free from. Not only the last lines of this book, but all of it is a request for sympathy, a request for a more thorough look into the reality

²⁶ WARREN, Joyce W. Introduction: Canons and canon fodder. In: *The (other) American traditions: nineteenth-century women writers*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993, p.13.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. xxix.

and history of Black women. By looking at these things from the perspective of a Black woman, we have a very different picture. We see a picture that came as a result of her oppression, seeks to end oppression and wants to reach out to oppressors, and make them, too, evaluate and work on their own identity issues, so they can be more open to other people, therefore, to other identities. *Our Nig* is a work that, as Fetterley suggests, looks into the future, and hopes for a world where Black women are given space, respect and opportunities.

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