

Social representations of the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the works: “The black doll”, “The girl in the mirror”, “The great scare of Petronila” and “The Mandinga cockroach” of the female writer Mary Grueso Romero

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Graphical Abstract



Abstract. The main objective of this paper is to recognize the social representations built about the afro-Colombian teacher woman (ACTW) in literary works: "The black doll", "The girl in the mirror", "The great scare of Petronila", and "The Mandinga cockroach" by the writer Mary Grueso Romero. For that, a qualitative methodological approach was used whereas the data collection technique was performed by textual analysis. The referred works were characterized in terms of the fundamental aspects of literary creation. In the cited works, mental images, meanings, and valuations, as well as, the main contributions associated with social representations were determined. The above is related to an evocation of memories and childhood experiences for the identification and characterization of the Afro identity. Some aspects highlighted are the individual and collective recognition from a physical, cultural, and social perspective, the construction of community vision determined by values and principles promulgated from the Afro world, and the most relevant problems that Afro-Colombian groups and communities have historically faced, such as discrimination, social exclusion, and racism. Consequently, the role of the teacher and, in a wider sense, education in general, are assumed as areas of action and decision for the knowledge, appreciation, rescue, and exaltation of the Afro-Colombian it.

Keywords: Social representations, Afro-Colombian teacher woman, Literary narrative, Female subject, Afro-Colombian literature.

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Analysis



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1. Introduction

Every literary work or production, that is developed in some specific social context, is not unaffiliated with direct or indirect influences of historical, social, and cultural factors. This becomes important in the so-called Afro-Colombian literature, which, as its name suggests, it is referred to a population or social group of significant prominence in Colombia's historical, social, and cultural construction, such as Afro-descendant people. Among the reference authors in this type of literature, it is important to highlight the case of Mary Grueso Romero, who, from her condition as a writer, mother, teacher, poet, Afro-Colombian woman, and artist has addressed and elaborated on some of the perspectives and conditions in relation to the Afro-Colombian woman teacher; which are not only constituted from identification and understanding of social representations on the subject; but rather, from the vindication of the Afro-Colombian teacher from the narrative.

By the above, three fundamental aspects are taken into account. The first one is the contributions of the writer Mary Grueso Romero to and from Afro-Colombian literature to ethnic education, culture, and the vindication of Afro-Colombian women, in particular, those who play a role or social function as relevant as being a teacher. Second, literary creation itself can contribute to a superior and brilliant understanding by the new generations of schoolchildren and people in general of the implications, meanings, and constructed representations of the Afro-descendant population, more specifically of women in a social, historical, and cultural context, by instance, the Colombian population characterized by diversity, multiculturalism, and multi-ethnicity. The latter is mentioned in the Political Constitution of Colombia in articles 1 and 7, respectively:

“Article 1. *Colombia is a social State of law, organized in the form of a unitary, decentralized Republic, with the autonomy of its territorial entities, democratic, participatory, and pluralistic, founded on respect for human dignity, on the work and solidarity of people who integrate it and in the prevalence of the general interest”* (National Constituent Assembly, 1991).

“Article 7. *The State recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian nation”* (National Constituent Assembly, 1991).

Thirdly, due to the condition of educators in the community and social environments, with the presence of the Afro-Colombian population, especially children and young people, it is necessary and responsible to identify and characterize different sources of resources for advanced pedagogical and didactic work. The mentioned before is not only alternative or different to those traditionally used and based on the dominant culture, traditions, and practices; but also, it strategically allows take advantage of the

significant accumulation, artistic wealth, and knowledge in the field of literature headed by Mary Grueso Romero, who is one of the references in Afro-Colombian's literary narrative in the local, regional, and national context, as mentioned by Castillo (2021) when he states that:

“During the 21st century, the name of Mary Grueso Romero represents one of the most prominent intellectual figures among Afro-Colombian poets and writers. Her voice is part of the country's cultural and political scene and her literature offers a narrative universe about the wanderings of the black people of the South Pacific. Ancestors, extended family, violence, dispossession, passionate love, upbringing, religiosity, childhood, territory, sadness, and nostalgia make up his incredible repertoire, collected in more than fifteen books of poetry and a collection of nine works of children's literature” (Castillo, 2021).

On the other hand, Afro-Colombian literature is a genre that every day acquires more presence and relevance, especially in those social contexts such as the great Colombian diversity and ethnic-cultural richness. Similarly, it is understood as a manifestation of the search for dissemination, knowledge, understanding, and vindication of the great historical, cultural, and social legacy of those peoples and communities that inherited, strengthened, and complemented practices, customs, traditions, and perspectives originating from the African continent conceived as the cradle of humankind. In other words, Afro-Colombian literature refers to a specific context, in the same way, to a meaning, sense, and value that seek to be highlighted by those who have become promoters, inspirers, and pioneers of this kind of literature. Thus, it is in this area that Motta's approach (2004) regarding the process of cultural construction and reconstruction of the black communities of the Colombian Pacific as a heritage received, but also, as an elaboration or own realization, which tends to be recreated and represented by and from Afro-Colombian literature:

“The dynamism that has characterized Afro-Pacific cultural practices has consisted in the fact their traditions have been determined through the interlocutions and interrelationships of their members who weaved with their actions what we see today as the past. Likewise, the relationship with other peoples has taken and assimilated their cultural riches. It has affirmed its own, and this has not been an obstacle, so that, with time, black people see them as 'their own'. There have been redefinitions and reinterpretations of cultural elements in loans or in learning from and with other peoples, which have implied changes in their form and the meaning of their cultural practices, producing a hybridism, but retaining that African legacy. What we see today as the tradition was present at one time and, as such, is formed with potentialities and limitations. At this moment, for example, we are structuring what will be past

and the tradition of the future” (Motta, 2004).

Additionally, Afro-Colombian literature contains characteristic elements and resources such as the relevance given to landscape, place, physical environment, nature, and the struggle for ancestral and legal rights in the countryside.

These elements have been considered by Lewis as one of the most distinctive characteristics of this type of literature (Lewis, 2019). In this way, Lewis also places Afro-Colombian literature as a cultural, artistic, and historical manifestation, with a significance that goes beyond the general knowledge and diffusion of the black world. However, this allows the identification and characterization of the various relationships and interactions that are established between the Afro-Colombian population with the environment both inside and outside their community (Lewis, 2019). In other words, Afro-Colombian literature is a space from which black men and women recognize their reality, appropriate it, analyze it, and seek to transform it from the power and meaning that art, narrative, oral, spoken, and written discursive conference.

In general, it can be concluded that Afro-Colombian literature, beyond referring to the description of a differentiated, devalued, and historically discriminated community in Colombia; presents a content, a reason for being, and a purpose associated with the knowledge and ancestral culture that characterizes the Afro-Colombian literature in the national territory. Thus, both knowledge and culture give it meaning, value, and connotation as a type of literature that portrays life stories, social representations, and conceptions of life, reality, relationships, and the environment; at the same time, it describes continuous processes of a struggle for the recognition and vindication that these communities deserve and claim throughout the national geography.

It is in this context that, literary works of Mary Grueso Romero, such as: "The black doll", "The girl in the mirror", "The great scare of Petronila", and "the Mandinga cockroach" portray the Afro-Colombian teacher woman from their situation and social role. At the same time, her work allows identify and highlight her relevance and prominence in the framework from its ethnic group and its contribution to Colombian society in general. For this reason, this paper aims the analysis the recognition of the social representations built around the Afro-Colombian woman teacher from the previous literary works of the writer Mary Grueso Romero; besides, it identifies and characterizes how literary discourse has contributed to the historical struggle of the so-called differentiated communities. In this case, Afro-descendants have undertaken respect and appreciation of their cultural and social legacy.

2. Background

In the revised background, the social representations that the writer elaborates in relation to the Afro-Colombian population, in general,

have been addressed and emphasized from the pedagogical field, gender (black women), history, categories of descendants, resignification of blackness, and the ethnic and intercultural dialogue. However, no central and sufficient allusion has been made to Afro-Colombian women from one of their fundamental social roles or functions from which they have not only spread, respected, and valued their cultural heritage and traditions, but also contributed to the development and general social transformation such as that of a teacher. This role is embodied precisely in the figure of Mary Grueso Romero and some of her literary productions such as those studied here.

It is worth highlighting the fact that the social representations created about the Afro-Colombian population, in the literary field, have previously been a topic addressed in different studies and research in the international and national order. In the first place, at the international level, the work of Meléndez (2019) stands out. He developed a pedagogical intervention project aimed at promoting the reading practices of a community located in the State of Veracruz, Mexico, and highlighting new ways of representing the Afro within the framework of children's literature. In this way, his work made it possible to configure alternative forms of the cultural construction of discourse that were distant from those dominant and hegemonic approaches, which were associated with a bias that made it impossible to take a comprehensive look at the historical and cultural wealth of these communities or social groups.

The study proposes a qualitative and descriptive approach for the Research-Action-Participation. Based on the above, information collection instruments were used, such as: characterization and diagnosis workshops, logs for recording information, semi-structured surveys, and oral evaluations. The main conclusion obtained from Meléndez's work permitted to promote the creation of reading habits from home; the strengthening of the reading practices of teachers and students; the potentiation of the writing skills of boys, girls, and young people; the increase in motivation towards literary reading; and the construction of positive representations about Afro-descendant communities in and from literary reading and writing based on the understanding that identity and culture are constructs that go beyond any skin tone or physical characteristics of people.

On the other hand, De Sousa, Sena, and Andrade (2020) addressed aspects related to the representation of the Afro-female voice in Afro-Colombian literature. They took as a reference the poem by Mary Grueso Romero entitled: "I am black", highlighting the authorship and the female role in the literary context. The study used a qualitative, descriptive, and documentary approach. In addition, information collection instruments such as bibliographic records, textual and content analysis techniques were used. The most relevant conclusion highlights the conservation of Afro-descendant ethnic-racial history and identity through poetic production as a key means and instrument that gives voice, visibility, and space to these

communities not only from the purely expressive point of view but also from the dissemination of their culture, traditions, and thought. Later, more recently, [Castillo \(2021\)](#) analyzed the ancestral evocation and Afro-Pacific literature from the voice of Mary Grueso Romero, based on some of her literary works such as: "I am black", "The black doll", "Black poverty", "The teacher's pericuetos", and "Tearing apart the silence". The study followed tools based on qualitative, descriptive, documentary, textual, and content analysis. The main conclusion showed that the aforementioned works refer to aspects such as the characterization of blackness; the recreation of black childhood; the questioning of the *status quo* imposed by the school through the discipline exercised in the body and thought; and the allusion to the fear and horror product of the armed conflict presented in one of the areas most affected by it, as it has been in the Pacific region, make Mary Grueso Romero one of the main exponents of the historical, cultural, and social memory of the Colombian Pacific.

On the other hand, in the national order, the work by [Angulo, Rodríguez, and Velandia \(2017\)](#) stands out, who identifying the representations built on Afro themes in the works: "The black doll" by Mary Grueso and "Pretty girl" by Ana María Machado. In this way, from categories such as Afro-descendant and Afro-Colombian in the forms of expression formulated in each of these literary productions. The study was based on qualitative, descriptive, and documentary. Similarly, bibliographic review, textual, and content analysis were used as central data collection and analysis techniques. The most significant conclusion showed that both literary works are aimed at shaping a culture of communities with their own knowledge, customs, and habits; emphasizing the approach to multiculturalism from the early years and experiences of the individual from situations, stories, contexts, characters, places, landscapes, among others.

In addition, the work of [Cuero \(2018\)](#) analyzed the resignification of the black by the writer Mary Grueso Romero, highlighting, in turn, relevant elements of her life and work. The study was framed in qualitative, descriptive, and documentary. Similarly, he used bibliographic review, textual analysis, and content analysis as the main data collection and analysis techniques. The most important conclusion revealed that one of the most significant contributions of the literary work of Mary Grueso Romero is related, on the one hand, to the breaking down of social barriers for recognition, acceptance, and inclusion in and from the multiculturalism that characterizes the Colombian people. On the other hand, with the promotion of the struggle, respect, and dissemination of Afro-Colombian culture.

[Orozco \(2019\)](#) carried out an analysis of the contributions of Mary Grueso Romero to Colombian literature from the constructed representations of Afro-descendants and included in the poems published in the book: "When the ancestors call. Afro-Colombian poetry". The study presented a qualitative approach, descriptive in

nature and based on documentary review and analysis as the main technique implemented. The most significant conclusion indicated that the contributions of the literary work of Mary Grueso Romero are associated with factors such as: the understanding of the identity of the inhabitants of the Colombian Pacific, their lifestyles, and culture; the appreciation of oral traditions in a context such as the current one, where the written code increasingly acquires greater validity and importance; and the highlight and dissemination of the African heritage within the framework of Afro-Colombian culture.

[González \(2019\)](#) addressed what concerns the understanding of the most relevant ethnic aspects present in the poetry of Afro-Colombian women from the Pacific Coast, highlighting within the latter the case of Mary Grueso Romero with her works: "The other that is me" and "When the ancestors call". The study presented a qualitative approach, descriptive in nature and based on narrative analysis and poetic discourse as central applied techniques. The most outstanding conclusion highlighted that Afro-Colombian writers born in the 20th century stand out not only for their works but also for their commitment to education, art, and the culture of their region, which they reflect in various ways in their literary productions and from the enhancement of the ethnic components of their community, highlighting the most beautiful of their race, of their quality as human beings with all their virtues, talents, and knowledge inherited from Africa and fused with the Indian, the white, the territory, and the context.

Finally, [Castillo \(2021\)](#) identified in Afro-Colombian literature the elements that conceptually foster an intercultural dialogue with fourth and fifth-grade students in a school in Bogotá city. The study followed a qualitative-hermeneutical approach and used the documentary analysis and document analysis sheet as the central technique and instrument, respectively. The most outstanding conclusion suggested that the elements that generate an intercultural dialogue in the framework of Afro-Colombian literature are related to factors such as the identification, recognition, appreciation, and respect of cultural differences between people, and work based on identity in a social context such as the Colombian one characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity, but at the same time in which problems related to discrimination and social exclusion persist, especially of the so-called differentiated communities (indigenous, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, among others).

The general question guiding this study is: what are the social representations built with respect to the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the literary works: "The black doll", "The girl in the mirror", "The great scare de Petronila", and "The Mandinga cockroach" by the writer Mary Grueso Romero? To answer this question, it is necessary to formulate a specific question: what are the mental images, meanings, and evaluations built around the Afro-Colombian female teacher in the works cited? The above questions support the objective of the study, which is defined to be: To identify the mental images, meanings, and evaluations built around

the Afro-Colombian female teacher in the works cited.

3. Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature. It was based on the analysis and interpretation of information collected through consultation and documentary review. The descriptive approach of the study is explained due to its affinity with what was mentioned by Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista (2014), who state that this kind of work "seeks to specify the properties, characteristics, and profiles of people, groups, communities, processes, objects, or any other phenomenon that is subject to analysis". For its part, the qualitative orientation is based on the approach suggested by Ramírez and Arbesú (2019), such as accounting for the meanings of human actions from an interpretive, comprehensive, and naturalistic perspective. Besides, a textual analysis was performed through the application of an identification matrix of mental images, meanings, and evaluations of the four literary works under study.

4. Results and Analysis

Next, a look is given to the mental images, meanings, and elaborated evaluations of the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the four works addressed by the writer Mary Grueso Romero ("The black doll", "The girl in the mirror", "The great scare de Petronila", and "The Mandinga cockroach"). The foregoing is because these elements make up the social representations built in relation to this class of women. For this purpose, the study of the literary narrative of the writer in these works is taken as a basis from the different approaches, manifestations, and perspectives issued related, which allow tracking and identifying the profile and characteristics assumed by the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in words of the writer herself addressed.

4.1. Approach to the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in "The black doll"

The mental images of the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the work "The black doll" revolve around the need to find a doll that is a sign of the recognition of the corporeity of the former girl, and today a teacher, the toy as an instrument denial of the existence of the Afro-descendant ethnic group and globalization as a devastating and invisible effect of the voice of Afro-descendant women in their multiple expressions, experiences, and social roles. In this framework, the Afro-Colombian female teacher is a member and leading representative of her ethnic group thanks to the social work that she develops is not recognized, identified, and characterized as glimpsed when recalling a sustained dialogue with her mother in her childhood times, because of poverty, desires, and illusions:

"Mom, I want you to give me a real doll, but one that is black"... "Where do you get that, where did you see a black doll?" (Grueso, 2011).



Figure 1. Illustration in "The black doll" that represents the happiness of the girl before the gift made and given by her mother (a black doll). Font: Grueso (2011).

Said recollection reveals or highlights the mental image perspective proposed by Ocanto (2009) where it is assumed from a representative, perceptive point of view, and from the memory of an experience of a real or fictitious nature, which allows generating a result perceptual and sensory thanks to a brain process that triggers a diverse mental representation in terms of shape, colors, or content. In this way, the evocation of a significant childhood experience for the author of the story in question has not only marked her life and traversing, but also her way of facing or approaching the Afro in and from one of the many instruments of both fun and entertainment such as of representation, identification, and recognition of Afro-descendants, as is the case of a black doll made of rags due to the lack of other material to make it.

The central meaning in the scope of the work: "The black doll" is undoubtedly self-identification, expressed at the moment when the girl receives a rag doll made by her mother and exclaims with emotion that she finally has a dark doll like she. This is linked to the search for representation, recognition, identification, and appreciation that Afro-descendant communities have historically undertaken, and in these those women who, in their role as mothers and teachers, have a significant incidence or interference in the achievement of said purpose. In the same way, it is worth highlighting the effort, dedication, and struggle manifested in the way found by the mother to satisfy a need and desire of perhaps the human being that she most loves in her life, such as her daughter. The foregoing highlights an aspect that has been characteristic in the life and daily life of Afro-descendant peoples, such as the tenacity and persistence to move forward and seek both individual and collective progress, with the family and the school being key in this process the social areas in which the individual builds his first experiences, relationships, and practices (see **Figure 1**). A sample of the above is the following fragment of the literary work in question:

"The mother, very worried, opened the trunk where she had kept her few clothes and began to rummage inside, to see what she could use to make a rag doll for her daughter... In the end, she found a

dark brown skirt, which was the most similar to the color black, and looked for thread, needle and scissors, and began to design a rag doll for her daughter... My mother, very worried, took pity on me and made me a doll, dark like me" (Grueso, 2011).

The evaluations elaborated in "The black doll" take as reference the constructed description of the Colombian Pacific from colloquial forms of expression and the phonetic features present in the pronunciation of some words as an integral and fundamental part of the sound universe that is felt in the essence of Afro-Colombians.

In this way, the black is valued, as a synthesizer of a particular way of using language and communication, neither incorrect nor correct, simply its own, characteristic and specific as an aspect derived from historical, cultural, and social processes developed by these communities in which the natural and physical elements of the environment are also exalted as "protagonists" of the stories, experiences, and knowledge presented. In this context, the role played by the Afro-Colombian woman teacher acquires centrality, who in and from her social work cannot and should not leave aside these fundamental distinctive elements of the Afro-descendant communities and groups, if she really wants to promote and develop education in accordance with the specific needs and characteristics of these communities within the framework of ethno-educational processes. In the following fragment of "The black doll" the aforementioned elements are identified:

"Time passed and the girl grew, when she was older, her mother gave her the banana "pachas" to play with, like dolls, since black girls did not have dolls to play with, they had to put the "pacha" to mature, in a corn "jug", to be able to use it... And when I told my father what I was asking for, he told me that God does not rule the black doll from heaven" (Grueso, 2011).

In short, "The black doll" is a story with which boys and girls identify, recognize themselves, and feel proud so that it is they who begin to write their own stories, and men and women emerge who, as Mary Grueso Romero, has had the intention of vindicating, exalting, disseminating, and defending Afro-descendant culture from her role as a teacher without disassociating herself from her role as mother, companion, leader, poetess, and human beings who has lived in her flesh both poverty and needs that this intensifies, such as discrimination and social exclusion in a city, region, and country that are not yet fully consistent with the social, cultural, and geographical situation that characterizes them, marked by multiculturalism, ethnic, and cultural diversity that seeks greater responses and spaces within the framework of a social state of law such as the Colombian one.

4.2. The Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the context of "The girl in the mirror"

The mental images of the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the work "The girl in the mirror" take as a basis the mirror as an element

or instrument of self-recognition of the physical and ancestral being of the girl, of the woman, of the Afro-Colombian teacher woman, and of the communities and groups to which it belongs. This is relevant if one takes into account that the fundamental starting point for the recognition of Afro-descendant communities is precisely their own recognition and identification from the individual-particular that allows transcending the group-community and, to a higher degree, the social-general. It is in this context that the Afro-Colombian woman teacher as a social actor has a fundamental mission and responsibility with the generation or promotion of spaces and experiences of self-recognition of Afro-descendant boys and girls, which allows them to accept, get to know each other, identify similarities and differences not only in physical terms but social, historical, and cultural in relation to other ethnic groups. In this direction, the following fragment of the story "The girl in the mirror" is quite explicit:

"One morning, curious about what people said, she felt like looking in the mirror to find out how beautiful she was... She went into her mother's room, because she wanted to see herself all over, from head to toe, because the largest mirror was there. of the house... He looked at himself very carefully and stopped at his face. She admired her beautiful black eyes and her long curly hair, styled in braids, which ended in transparent beads. She looked at her cinnamon-black skin, her cheeks so rosy, they looked like little apples, with two beautiful dimples in the center of them, and well-lined lips that looked like coral..." (Grueso, 2012).

The most relevant meaning in the framework of the work "The girl in the mirror" is related to the poetic construction that takes as a reference or foundation the marine landscape, the fauna, and the flora of the Colombian Pacific. The foregoing is not only with the intention of extolling its own wonders, but also the role or function that it can fulfill in the educational and training process from the relationship and interaction of the individual with reality and the closest social context. It is precisely here where the Afro-Colombian woman teacher acquires presence and centrality in two essential areas: as a generator of spaces and experiences of teaching and learning from the experiential and significant; and as a promoter of relations and interactions of the Afro-descendant subject with his environment that enables him to identify, know, characterize, and become aware of the natural, cultural, and social wealth of the ethnic group to which he belongs. The aforementioned is reflected in a certain way in the following fragment of the story "The girl in the mirror":

"Alba Rocío, Doña Soffy told her one day, since you are the best student in the school, today I am going to take you to see the seagulls, the plovers and the butterflies that arrive in the Pacific at this time of the year from South America and that known as migratory birds and insects" (Grueso, 2012).

It is noteworthy that here one of the characteristics, distinctive, and

fundamental features of Afro-Colombian literature highlighted by Lewis (2019) is clearly identified, such as the constant reference to the landscape, the place, the environment, the physical and natural environment, the interactions and relationships that Afro-descendant peoples have historically developed with their geographic space and with those around them. A situation that reveals the great impact and interference that the physical and natural environment has had in the construction, development, and historical, cultural, and social consolidation of Afro-descendant communities, in this case, the so-called Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific region of the country. In other words, black men and women tend to understand, interpret, and appropriate their various experiences in direct communion with the specific context in which they occur.

For its part, the evaluations elaborated in "The girl in the mirror" take black beauty as a reference as a type of beauty to recognize and identify differently from the traditional or hegemonic beauty promoted by the dominant culture. In this way, although the tendency has been presented above all from homogenizing, discriminatory, excluding, and racist discourses and practices that black is "bad", "ugly", "lack of aesthetics", and "inappropriate"; in "The girl in the mirror" said paradigm is overcome by generating an assessment of the girl, of women and blacks in general as beautiful, different from the traditional, conventional, and the determined standards of beauty imposed by a superfluous and materialistic society, where white prevails (see Figure 2). The expression generated by the black girl when carefully observing herself in the mirror to corroborate some of the comments made by people close to her in her community who highlighted her beauty is clear:

"... Yes! -She said- I'm a very pretty girl! ..." (Grueso, 2012).

In this framework, the figure of the Afro-Colombian female teacher emerges as a promoter of critical and reflective views in and from education to understand, interpret, and analyze that beauty is not something unique, exclusive, predetermined, or pre-established, and does not depend on or is subject to absolutely to skin color or physical characteristics of people. In the same way, the aesthetic and the external are only a part of the human being regardless of the ethnic group to which he belongs, and the most important thing is the being, the values cultivated, built, and the attitude developed towards oneself, to those around, and reality. It is useless to have an "external beauty" if it lacks the true beauty that prevails until the last day of life and does not deteriorate over the years as is the "internal beauty". The latter emerges precisely from self-acceptance, self-recognition, and self-worth, and from how these are expressed from the actions, the attitudinal, and the behavioral.

In accordance with what previously stated, it can be said that in "The girl in the mirror" a process of discovery and recognition of ethnic identity is carried out from the particular case of a girl who feels joy, looks beautiful, and black like her mother, which is opposed to the dominant view of black as something "ugly" and "outside the standards" established by the hegemonic culture. In this direction, the recognition, appreciation, and respect as slogans for which Afro-



Figure 2. Illustration in "The girl in the mirror" that represents the moment in which Alba Rocío looks in the mirror to recognize herself and identify her particular and unique type of beauty. Font: Grueso (2012).

descendant peoples have historically fought in Colombia, especially in the Pacific region, has its starting point and foundation in self-recognition as a necessary and essential condition prior to the recognition given or bestowed by others.

In this individual and particular process with collective and general implications, the school, and the Afro-Colombian woman teacher are assumed as key social protagonists. Without ceasing to warn, as was hinted at in the first chapter of this work, that the identity construction of the black communities of the Colombian Pacific has been characterized both by its own and by that of others, by the combination of what has been elaborated in parallel with what has been granted, by the fusion of practices, customs, and traditions, taking into account both the ancestors of these populations and their relationship and permanent and direct interaction with the dominant culture permeated by other ethnic groups, where the communicative and expressive from its different forms (oral and written) has fulfilled an essential task.

Motta (2004) explains it well when stating that:

"The Afro-Pacific identity has been built based on other people's molds, their own and the creation of others, in the way that when a trammel net, a net or a cast net is woven, it is an appropriate construction of the world, they have woven their own history and have been articulated through local, regional and national life and dynamics, and in this, verbal art has been decisive for the construction of thoughts and ideas, elaborating linguistic turns in the parental plot, chanting rituals and expressing solidarities".

4.3. Approach to the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in "The great scare of Petronila"

The mental images of the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the work "The great scare of Petronila" are based on the concept of extended family that the communities of the Pacific apply in their daily lives, ties that go beyond the blood bond, where a communion determined by solidarity, fraternity, and godfather-like actions are

built. In this sense, the school as a space or environment in which the subject develops their secondary socialization process plays a key role in and from the formation and education of values for the strengthening and empowerment of attitudes, behaviors, and actions that favor aspects such as solidarity, cooperation, collaboration, teamwork, the search for the collective good, among other key elements for community life. In Petronila's exclamation and request for help when she sees the snake on her way, the recurrence to the other is identified as a means of support and help (see **Figure 3**):

"Help me, help me, Juan! Cousin Tomás, blessed souls! This beast going to sting!" (Grueso, 2017a).

The concept of the extended family identified and recreated in the literary work in question, reveals what [Moscovici \(1979\)](#), referring to social representation, calls a particular form of knowledge from which behaviors and communicative processes are developed between people to the understanding of the set of situations presented, where the physical, social, relational, and creative fulfill a key task. In this direction, the particular form of knowledge is given at the moment when Petronila's mother realizes her delay and that something happened to her; the behaviors and communicative processes are configured from the mother's concern for the whereabouts of her daughter and the request for collaboration from the community to go look for her, which allows the group to identify the situation or problem presented; the physical is manifested in the setting and atmosphere in which the story unfolds and in the non-corporeal presence of Petronila in a specific place and time; the social and relational is given in the set of interactions established by Petronila's mother with the other members of the community and among them to identify what to do; and the creative is associated with the organization of search groups that were beginning to form as a strategy for locating the minor just when the latter appeared.

In a similar way to the cases presented in the previous literary works, the main meaning constructed in the field of the story "Petronila's great scare" is associated with the recreation of an environment that is "transmitted to the readers through epithets, metaphors and personifications" ([Jaramillo, 2007](#)). As is revealed when alluding to the environment and specific situation presented after the scare received by Petronila after seeing the snake:

"Everything was in darkness, the songs of the predatory chontaduros were no longer heard, they had flown to their nests, the song of the crickets and the light of the fireflies, were the only sign of living beings..." (Grueso, 2017a).

This highlights the already mentioned value and importance that Afro-descendant communities give to the environment and surrounding in attention to the role that this has played in their development and historical, social, and cultural evolution, but also the need for constant reference to a context, space, and specific social environment to better explain and understand the set of experiences, problems, and situations faced. The latter is key to the



Figure 3. Illustration in "The great scare of Petronila" that represents the moment in which Petronila is frightened by the snake and asks for help. Font: [Grueso \(2017a\)](#).

development of educational and training processes for Afro-descendant communities.

What is exposed is, in turn, one of the several examples in the work: "The great scare of Petronila" are identified, related to what [Gómez \(2017\)](#) calls the role of literary narrative in the transmission of experiences and events presented through resources such as stories, fables, myths, legends, poems, among others, where events with their respective time frame, a specific location, established order, and the participation of real or fictional characters stand out. In this sense, in the story in question, the temporal margin is given in Petronila's early departure to collect chontaduros and her return after 7 p.m.; the specific location is the Corregimiento of Córdoba, Buenaventura; the established order starts from Petronila's trip to collect chontaduros, the scare that the snake gave her, the help received from her cousin Tomás, the way back home, and her meeting with her loved ones of her worried about her for her delay; and the participation of recreated characters such as Petronila, cousin Tomás, and Doña Matilde (Petronila's mother).

For their part, the evaluations elaborated in "The great scare of Petronila" take as a reference a double perspective concerning the environment in which Afro-descendant communities develop and participate. On the one hand, there is the environment is a fundamental element because it provides the necessary resources for life and socioeconomic subsistence. On the other hand, there is the environment as a space of fun and admiration with which these population groups have interacted for many years and have learned to know and characterize. This is denoted in the following excerpt from the aforementioned story:

"The black woman Petronila was harvesting chontaduros in Córdoba, she had already felled several clusters... and the smell of rain was already felt, which is characteristic of the Pacific, and precedes the downpour" (Grueso, 2017a).

It is noteworthy that this double look given to the environment is

central to understanding in and from school that just as nature provides human beings with different kinds of resources for their livelihood, it is also the responsibility of men, women, boys, and girls to ensuring the protection and care of the natural environment. This is opposed to a purely capitalist and economic view of the human-nature relationship where the satisfaction of needs and interests predominates, leaving in the background the affectation caused to the environment, and the surroundings due to anthropic activities without control, proper handling, and care.

According to what is expressed in this numeral, it can be affirmed that in "The great scare of Petronila" it becomes evident what Orozco (2019) highlights, such as the pride that Mary Grueso Romero feels of her region not only in terms of the exaltation of the marine landscape and its related elements (beaches, rivers, plants, animals, among others) that acquire a magical meaning but also in relation to all the practices and customs that have developed in this region over time. In this sense, the Afro culture in which she was born, grew up, and developed, allows her to feel identified with belonging and participation in a specific social group and community in and from her role as mother, teacher, poet, artist, and social leader.

4.4. The Afro-Colombian woman teacher in the field of "The Mandinga cockroach"

The mental images of the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the work "The Mandinga cockroach" are based on discrimination, singling out, racism, and social exclusion of which black communities have historically been victims and some of the responses and attitudes adopted against this situation. In this framework, ethnic difference and diversity are highlighted not as inferiority or superiority but above all as particularity, specificity, and opportunity for knowledge and exploration from the social, cultural, and historical point of view of the world and black reality that is rich in thoughts, emotions, perspectives, and practices. In this direction, it is worth mentioning that fragment in the work where a different or alternative position towards difference and diversity is identified in a school environment where exclusion, singling out, and discrimination predominates:

"Carlos said: don't do anything to him, don't hit him, he was just learning to read dad and mom, mom and dad" (Grueso, 2017b).

In this way, the role played by the school and by the Afro-Colombian teacher woman is revealed from her speeches and practices to overcome this situation.

Unlike the cases presented in the preceding literary works, the main meaning elaborated in the context of the story "The Mandinga cockroach" is not built so much from natural and environmental aspects, but fundamentally social because the cockroach was discriminated against in the classroom because he spoke "strange". When they found her, they asked for a broom to get her out of it and



Figure 4. Illustration in "The Mandinga cockroach" that recreates the two antagonistic positions in the face of difference and diversity represented in the main character of the story. Font: Grueso (2017b).

she didn't want them to get her out. This is a metaphor that leads Afro-descendants to "feel like a cockroach" in a world characterized by misunderstanding, distrust, intolerance, and disrespect for ethnic and cultural differences, and diversity. In the following expression and antagonistic fragment to the one presented above, the discriminatory and excluding act to which the central character of the story was subjected is revealed:

"Look for the broom, we are going to take it out, we will sweep it, so that it does not bother us again. Say a little cockroach, who wants to study!" (Grueso, 2017b).

In this way, another of the possible unfortunate actions and attitudes towards ethnic difference and diversity developed in the school context is denoted, which generates various challenges in the work carried out by Afro-Colombian female teachers and ethno-educators in general (see Figure 4).

On the other hand, the assessments made in "The Mandinga cockroach" are closely linked to what was stated in the two previous paragraphs because they are based on the consideration that the school is one of the areas or social spaces of discrimination. In this sense, the cockroach was excluded and discriminated against, despite the fact that her intention was only to learn to read and write, a possibility that the others (students in the class) did have. In the following fragment of the story "The Mandinga cockroach", the distance is identified not only in spatial but also in social terms between those who have access to knowledge through education and those who do not have said possibility:

"The children ran to the window seeing this, they yelled at him, 'come here, little cockroach! ¡Come on, we'll teach you to read, dad and mom!'" (Grueso, 2017b).

This, in turn, reveals one of the long-standing structural social problems in Colombia, such as access and guarantees for differentiated communities of public service and a fundamental right such as education, paradoxically in a nation that is

constitutionally defined as a social State of law. A situation that makes even more arduous and complex the work carried out by the Afro-Colombian teacher woman and the ethno-educators in general in their purpose of vindicating what is Afro. In addition to what is expressed in this numeral, it can be said that in "The Mandinga cockroach" it is highlighted that the people of the Colombian Pacific have the peculiarity of omitting the "d", the "r", and the "s" at the end of the words, changing them from low to high. This aspect should be considered especially by teachers and ethnic educators. It should be noted that it is not that they speak badly in the Pacific, each region has its specific way of speaking and the other is identified by their speech and general way of expressing themselves in a defined historical, social, and cultural context. This, which from the dominant culture can be described as an error in speech and established communication, represents above all a differentiating feature or characteristic in the field of great cultural, social, and historical wealth of the Afro-descendant peoples of the Colombian Pacific.

In the same way, it evidences the functionality or role played by the literary narrative in the framework of a certain work or production in said field, which places it in the so-called functionalist paradigm that, according to Vich and Zavala (2004), emphasizes aspects such as the use made of the language, the purposes pursued by such use, the relationship and interaction between language, and the sociocultural context, the expressive, social, and cultural meanings constructed according to a given space or social environment, among others.

In this way, both the omission of letters, the intonation performed, and the use of expressions, phrases, or particular words both in the oral discourse and in the written discourse of Afro-descendants, in particular, Afro-Colombians, which is highlighted in the work in question is a sample and clear representation of the profile and communicative characteristics of these people, and in turn, a recreation of their speech and particular way of expressing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

In addition to the above, it is pertinent to highlight that the work in general of Mary Grueso Romero as a writer, poet, teacher, and leader, is closely related to the initiatives, emphasis, and social struggles that, especially from the decade of the seventies in Colombia, they have been undertaken in pursuit of the claim, visibility, voice, vote, participation, and presence of black communities in and from the educational processes in the country. In this context, it is worth highlighting a referent of this process such as Manuel Zapata Olivella who was in charge of directing the First Congress of Black Culture of the Americas held in the city of Cali in 1977. In said event, it was established what can be considered the starting point or fundamental bases for what is now known as the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies and Ethnoeducation, the latter promoted with greater emphasis thanks to their declaration as cultural policies within the scope of the Political Constitution of Colombia of 1991 (Castillo, 2011). In this direction, Zapata's words are clear and categorical in stating:

"Within the framework of the complaints and recommendations, the

Congress of Black Culture will be emphatic in demanding from the governments of America and especially those of the Center, Antilles and South America, the urgent inclusion of the study of black culture in educational curricula, in those countries where the national ethnic group has the African contribution as one of its three most important roots. The Colombian delegation will present a proposal to officially incorporate the teaching of the History of Africa in primary and secondary schools, at the same time as demanding from teachers a greater analysis of the meaning of the black presence in our community through the historical process since its arrival and integration in the economic, social and cultural life" (Zapata, 1977).

In this direction, the work and literary production of Mary Grueso Romero constitutes an essential means or path for the achievement of the aforementioned purposes because it is not only about the exaltation, diffusion, and defense of an ethnic group, community, or population group in particular in the face of discrimination, stigmatization, social exclusion, and racism that it has faced over time, but rather the identification of its role and specific contributions in the historical, social, cultural, economic, and the identity construction of Colombian society in general, where blacks from their practices, conceptions, ways of life, established relationships and interactions, experiences, and knowledge have played a key role.

5. Conclusions

The constructed social representations of the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the literary works of the writer Mary Grueso Romero analyzed in this work, show in a general sense an approach in and from the woman in her role as a teacher from elements such as: the evocation of childhood memories of great impact and meaning, especially in the elaboration of identifications and personifications for the remembrance of Afro-descendants and their characterization; the individual and collective recognition processes about what it implies and the general meaning of being Afro-Colombian; the community perspective that transcends or goes beyond simple family or blood ties; and the main problems that Afro-descendant communities have faced, and in particular, Afro-Colombian communities in the Pacific region, that have marked their lives, their history, and their social and cultural evolution as a differentiated social group.

In these elements, Mary Grueso Romero preserves or maintains, directly and indirectly, an educational perspective, considering this area as key in the search for change or social transformation towards larger and better spaces, practices, experiences, and discourses that enhance, respect, value, spread, and recognize the Afro-Colombian, especially in a country and society such as Colombia that, although it shines for its diversity, multiculturalism, and multi-ethnicity characteristic of its population throughout the national geography, is still far from really being constitutionally designated as a social State of the law at least in all sense, precision, and meaning of the term.

The mental images built around the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the analyzed literary works are based on corporeality as a form of recognition of the Afro from a toy or instrument such as a black doll made of rags that despite its simplicity or if you want simplicity, it allows the identification of the poor black girl of yesterday and the teacher and adult of today; the physical and ancestral self-recognition also from an element such as the mirror that allows to visualize and identify distinctive specific characteristics of the Afro, which are key to address from educational and ethno-educational processes; the extended family and its associated values (education in values) as a projection and transcendence of established social ties and relationships, based on problems or individual situations that impact the collective-general, such as the disappearance of a member of the community; and the discrimination, singling out, racism, and social exclusion that Afro-descendant communities have experienced over time, emphasizing the possible responses, attitudes, and behaviors generated from school in the face of it.

The meanings elaborated about the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the literary works addressed here are based on self-identification as a process that must be promoted from education in the new generations of Afro-Colombian boys and girls; the poetic construction about the marine landscape, the fauna, the flora, and other related elements in the Colombian Pacific, not only from the point of view of its identification, exaltation, and recreation; but as a strategy for the promotion of a contextualized, experiential, and significant education of Afro-Colombian communities; as well as the recognition of speeches and practices that promote social discrimination of black communities, and above all the position of the school and teachers towards it. That is to say, if it continues to contribute from the pedagogical task to the reproduction or maintenance of dominant paradigms and imaginaries, or if on the contrary, it contributes to a change or transformation in this regard at the head of the work carried out, especially with those students in their early life and formative years.

The assessments made of the Afro-Colombian teacher woman in the four literary works studied in this work start, on the one hand, from factors such as the recreation and description of the Colombian Pacific from the colloquial, expressive, phonetic, natural, and envi-

ronmental aspects, both to underline the characteristic sound universe of this part of the country as to reaffirm the relevance of the surroundings and environment in this area from the socioeconomic, emotional, and perceptive. Key aspects to take into account in educational and training processes with black communities. On the other hand, the consideration of beauty as a diverse, particular, and subjective aspect, which means that it should not be predetermined, standardized, and imposed as promoted by the dominant culture from pre-established criteria that exclude blackness.

In addition, the school as a social space that has historically contributed to the reproduction and consolidation of discrimination and social exclusion of differentiated groups and communities, such as Afro-descendants. The recognition of these situations constitutes an essential starting point both to structure and develop educational processes situated in accordance with the particular needs of black populations in a specific context, as well as to identify the challenges that in a country and society as the Colombian confront educational institutions that are concerned with combating ethnic-racial and cultural discrimination and exclusion.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the study carried out here allowed to corroborate that Mary Grueso Romero from her literary production at the head of the four children's stories addressed and many other works by this writer; it is made possible the articulation of culture, history, society, education, art, and gender from the approach or look given to the Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific zone. This is from the emphasis on accessible and adapted oral, written, and illustrated discursive elaborations, especially for Afro-descendant boys and girls in their first years of life, relationships, and experiences in the different social spheres in which they interact. This is perhaps from the point of view of the authors of this study in their capacity as teachers, the main legacy that the literary work of Mary Grueso Romero has given not only to Afro-Colombian communities but to Colombian society in general, which allows identifying this writer as a builder of social representations of the Afro-Colombian teacher woman, whose fundamental and common features or characteristics of said representations, refer to the capacity of women in and from their role as teacher for the adequate development, the active participation, and the significant incidence in the different social spheres.



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