ENTRE SUPER-HEROÍNÃS E CORPOS NÃO-NORMATIVOS: 
SUBVERTENDO GÊNEROS NO ROMANCE GRÁFICO BRASILEIRO 
GUADALUPE (2012)

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Resumo: Este artigo busca investigar a representação do corpo feminino não-normativo no romance gráfico brasileiro Guadalupe (2012), escrito por Angelica Freitas e ilustrado por Odyr Bernardi. Passado no México, Guadalupe conta a história da super-heroinha trans Muxe Maravilha, da avó lésbica Elvira e da sobrinha/neta Guadalupe—mulheres com histórias diversas, que emblematizam corporificações não hegemônicas. Apropriando-se da narrativa de super-heróis, a história em quadrinhos subverte tanto concepções acerca do gênero textual como do gênero supostamente binário. Baseadas em uma perspectiva interdisciplinar, emprestando de autoras nos campos dos Estudos Queer, Feministas, Pós-Coloniais e de Quadrinhos, analisamos a construção e (re)produção dos diferentes corpos femininos ao longo da história, da muxe que vira heroína trans à neta cuja jornada pauta a narrativa, passando pela morte da avó que catalisa o desenrolar dos acontecimentos. As tensões entre texto e imagem, particularmente em narrativas não tradicionais como Guadalupe, propiciam espaços de rupturas cujo potencial político merece investigação.


This article aims to investigate how the graphic novel, Guadalupe (2012), appropriates aspects of Mexican culture to construct a non-conventional, non-hegemonic superhero. Guadalupe is a Brazilian graphic novel, written by Angelica Freitas and illustrated by Odyr Bernardi, that tells the story of a Mexican superhero who gains her powers with the aid of magical mushrooms. The graphic novel offers a complex relationship between its characters: a lesbian grandmother, Elvira, a transgender aunt, Wonderful Minerva, and a woman protagonist, Guadalupe. Foregoing the traditional superhero narrative, in Guadalupe the caped crusader, Muxe Maravilha (Wonder Trans, in a free translation) is representative of non-normativity, in terms of gender, age, sexuality, and status in a patriarchal society. As such, the character evokes questions about the very nature of superheroism. The main hypothesis is that, by queering the idea of the superhero, the Brazilian graphic novel inevitably also queers the logic of protagonism in superhero tales, one in which characters such as those of Elvira, Guadalupe, and Minerva Maravilha are, more often than not, relegated to subaltern roles.

Guadalupe tells the story, in a humorous way, of a Mexican superhero who gains her powers with the aid of magical mushrooms. Foregoing the traditional superhero narrative, in Guadalupe the caped crusader, Muxe Maravilha (Wonder Trans, in a free translation) is representative of non-normativity, in terms of gender, age, sexuality, and status in a patriarchal society both in terms of geographical production as well as in subject position. As a Mexican story written by Brazilian authors, Guadalupe engages such disruptions of dichotomous loci of enunciation in a series of
ways. It deals with a myriad of Mexican cultural symbols and characters, for example, not from an insider’s perspective, but from a ‘different outside,’ as it were. In this sense, one must question the ethics of such cultural appropriation and at the same time acknowledge the difference between a North/South and a South/South dialogism of cultures.

Guadalupe transgresses the idea of superhero by borrowing the characteristics of the genre, but subverting its construction. According to Lillian Robinson, who discusses the role of Wonder Woman as a feminist superhero,

stories of female superheroes make another, more transgressive use of mythological sources, borrowing from various traditions and creating new ones in order to tell different stories about gender, stories that come closer to the universe of belief than do masculine (and masculinist) adventure comics. (ROBINSON, 2004, p. 06)

In this sense, we argue that stories of a Mexican/Brazilian transgender superhero can construct a non-hegemonic superhero. While the origin of Wonder Woman is constructed from aspects of Greek mythology, Guadalupe brings aspects of Mexican culture in telling the origin of Muxe Maravilha (Wonder Trans, in a free translation).

In the sequence of pages wherein Muxe Maravilha makes her first appearance, for example, Mexican mythologies are juxtaposed to the invocation of the American popular culture icons, the Village People, in a transgressive appropriation of the superhero origin story. In a mock title page of a comic book within the narrative, “La Leyenda Muxe” is explained, in Spanish, as the story of Saint Vicent Ferrer, who, on behalf of God, was carrying a bag of Muxes to distribute to all of Mexico, but, as the bag ripped, all of the muxes were scattered in Oaxaca. Muxes, the tale goes, are men that dress as women. In the frame containing the legend, the Catholic Saint is depicted flying over Oaxaca throwing the tiny figures of the muxes from above into the city. As Muxe Maravilha rises to confront an enemy in the following pages, the character invokes the power of the 1980s group Village People, mimicking the choreography of YMCA with the help of lightning from the sky to spell the letters in the black frames. The group itself then makes an appearance, and each cast member lends the abilities of their costume to help bring the enemy down. In the making of Muxe Maravilha, gay iconography mixes with Mexican syncretism.

The sacred and the camp are conjoined, thus, in an unholy alliance to produce this queer superhero. As Susan Sontag argues, the “essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration,” a self-aware type of aesthetics that does propose to be taken seriously, but not too seriously (2001, p. 275). Muxe Maravilha’s use of camp dislocates the narrative to a space that is and is not American and/or Mexican, Greek and/or Aztec, homage and/or satire, female and/or male, Spanish and/or English and/or Portuguese. The process also underlines the inherent
campiness of that other (supposedly “original”) Wonder Woman, with her lasso of truth and strapless all-American uniform, and, consequently, of the entire genre.

Dating back from pre-Columbian times, the “muxe” is itself a concept that challenges assumptions about originality and artifice, boundaries and categories. Sometimes described as a third gender, the Zapotec word is said to be derived from the Spanish for “women” and is used to characterize men who dress or who choose to identify as women in the southern state of Oaxaca (Moreno, 2012, online). There are accounts of the acceptance of this third gender throughout the history of Mexico, from the Aztec and Mayan societies, to contemporary Zapotec communities (Lacey, 2008, online). The concept of the “muxe” does not evoke campiness per se, but the obvious relation to Wonder Woman and the superhero genre do raise the issues of drag, performance and performativity of gender in relation to camp.

In terms of gender, Judith Butler argues, drag can be seen as a performance of the sign of gender, an allegory of (compulsory) heterosexual performativity (1990, p. 257). Such hyperbolic performances can reveal the inherent performativity of gender itself, Butler states, as a reiteration of norms bound to inefficacy but that, nevertheless, must be continually reproduced. Muxe Maravilha evidences the failings of the reiteration of gender not only as a character that does not fall within the binary sex system, as a muxe, but also and especially because of its association with an icon of femaleness, a super female, in a camp performance that both underscores the performativity of gender and as well as its implications on the genre of the superhero. Rather than by a hyperbolic performance of drag alone, the camp aesthetics in Guadalupe arises out of a distinct combination of gender and genre—out of the evocation of a queer gender in a queered genre.

This queering of gender and genre goes against the grain of the hegemonic perspective of superheroes, which reinforces relations of power that homogenize and oversimplify categories and dichotomies. In a clear-cut definition of the genre and its tropes, Peter Coogan, for example, argues that, in order to be considered part of a superhero category, a story must fit three characteristics, which he called MPI: Mission, Powers, Identity (2009, p. 82). In his words, “[t]he superhero’s mission is pro-social and selfless, which means that his fight against evil must fit with the existing, professed mores of society” (Coogan, 2009, p. 77), while “[s]uperpowers are one of the most identifiable elements of the superhero genre” (Coogan, 2009, p.78), and the identity must be related to a codename and costume (Coogan, 2009, p.78). In a Freudian slip characteristic of the gender imbalance of the genre, the fact that Coogan assumes a superhero to be male is just one of the problematic issues in this categorization.
Coogan also argues that the costume and the codename should be symbolic of the characters’ personality, bringing the example of one of the quintessential superheroes: Superman “is a super man who represents the best humanity can hope to achieve; his codename expresses his inner character” (Coogan, 2009, p.79). Perhaps for those who think the best humanity can achieve is to be white, strong, male, able-bodied, and American his line of reasoning may be acceptable. Incidentally, Superman is not technically an American, but throughout his history and despite his alien background the character has maintained firm nationalistic roots that are emblematic of the entire history of the superhero genre, perhaps even more so than other more obvious references such as Captain America. Rather than being a champion for humankind in general, Superman stands as a symbol of American power, portraying the colors of the star-spangled banner in his uniform, posing as a defender of “American values” and, consequently, as an embodied metaphor for Western hegemonic discourses present in the figure of the superhero.

However, it is possible to say that the very categories Superman reinforces can be subverted through the construction of a superhero that is not the epitome of all things normative. Guadalupe, in this sense, appropriates the superhero genre, with its superhero character involved in private mission while evoking the group Village People in the larger fight against evil. Rather than embodying a selfless pro-social calling as a superhero, such as critics like Coogan suggest, Muxe Maravilha’s personal quest is more akin to feminism’s motto of “the personal is political” in its social role. In relation to the codename, the superhero character transgresses it when her name is already, to a certain extent, a codename: she takes on Minerva Maravilha (Wonder Minerva) as her main name and Muxe Maravilha as her codename, and the graphic novel never reveals her birth name—which, in the context of a trans character, is indeed very political. The boundaries between “regular” persona and superhero are blurred, therefore, as the character evidences that there is no clear line dividing the two and one cannot have the former without the latter, and vice-versa.

Thus, Guadalupe, from within the superhero genre of comics, brings to the fore some of the problematic issues of a hegemonic discourse by not fitting some fixed categories. By these means, graphic novels like this one can work in new epistemologies giving voice to people – and superheroes – who are not contemplated in discussions like the one made by Coogan. It is important to point out, though, that the act of giving voice, in this situation, is not done by a hegemonic group, in an act of kindness, giving the floor to minority groups to express themselves. In the context of Guadalupe, both the production and the audience can be considered from the Global South: this is a product of and is intended to a group that is not usually depicted in the hegemonic production of

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superheroes. The narrative does employ hegemonic and fixed categories, it makes use of references to the hegemonic genre, but it does so in a way that highlights the problematic issues hereby discussed.

Referências


Between Superheroines and Non-Normative Bodies: Subverting Gender and Genre in the Brazilian Graphic Novel Guadalupe (2012)

Abstract: This article aims to investigate the representation of the female non-normative bodies in the Brazilian graphic novel Guadalupe (2012), written by Angelica Freitas and illustrated by Odyr Bernardi. Set in Mexico, Guadalupe tells the story of the trans superheroine Muxe Maravilha, of the lesbian grandmother Elvira, and the niece/granddaughter Guadalupe—women with diverse stories, that emblematize non-hegemonic embodiments. Appropriating the superhero narrative, the graphic novel subverts both the conceptions about genre and gender. Based in an interdisciplinary perspective, borrowing from authors in the fields of Queer Studies, Feminism, Post-Colonial Studies, and Comics Studies, we analyze the construction and (re)production of different female bodies throughout the story, from the muxe that becomes the trans heroine, to the granddaughter whose journey paces the narrative, to the grandmother’s death, which sets the plot in motion. The tensions between text and image, specifically in non-traditional narratives such as Guadalupe, provide room for rupture, which brings a political potential that warrants investigation.

Keywords: Comics. Gender. Female body. Muxe. Queer.