

SEUL, SÃO PAULO: TENSIONS, OTHERING, AND TRANSCULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE NOVEL BY GABRIEL MAMANI MAGNE

Denis Leandro Francisco

Departamento de Estudos da Linguagem, Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências Humanas, Educação e Letras, Universidade
Federal de Lavras, Lavras, Brazil

Conceptualization, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project
administration, supervision, writing – review & editing

Gabriela Eufrasia Sousa Passos

Departamento de Estudos da Linguagem, Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências Humanas, Educação e Letras, Universidade
Federal de Lavras, Lavras, Brazil

Investigation, writing – original draft

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the novel *Seul, São Paulo* (2024), by Gabriel Mamani Magne, through the representations of migration, othering, and cultural belonging produced through the trajectory of Tayson Pacsi, a Brazilian man born to Bolivian parents and socialised in São Paulo, who moves to Bolivia and begins to navigate competing regimes of identification. The reading proposes a critical — and methodologically circumscribed — engagement between Edward Said's (1978/2007) notion of Orientalism and intra-Latin American cultural hierarchies, without mechanically transposing the West-East axis to the Latin American context. It is argued that the novel exposes a logic of mobile othering through which Tayson is perceived as “Bolivian” in Brazil and “Brazilian” in Bolivia, revealing the instability of the national, racialised, linguistic, and affective boundaries that shape subjects in transit. In dialogue with Said (1978/2007), Foucault (1975/1987, 1978/2018), Bhabha (1994/2018), Rama (1982), Pratt (1992), and Quijano and Ennis (2000), the article examines three dimensions of the novel: the discursive production of the Other, the disciplinary apparatuses regulating migrant bodies, and the symbolic collision between Tunupa, McDonald's, and K-pop as competing forms of cultural imagination. Finally, it is argued that *Seul, São Paulo* constructs a poetics of Latin American transnationality marked by vulnerability, global desire, persistent coloniality, and cultural resistance. The analysis contributes to cultural studies by bringing together migration, ancestry, language, corporeality, and global consumption within a contemporary Latin American framework.

KEYWORDS

transnationality, othering, Latin American literature, Bolivian migration, Gabriel Mamani Magne

SEUL, SÃO PAULO: TENSÕES, ALTERIZAÇÃO E REPRESENTAÇÕES TRANSCULTURAIS NO ROMANCE DE GABRIEL MAMANI MAGNE

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa o romance *Seul, São Paulo* (2024), de Gabriel Mamani Magne, a partir das representações de migração, alterização e pertença cultural produzidas pela trajetória de Tayson Pacsi, brasileiro filho de bolivianos e socializado em São Paulo, que se desloca para a Bolívia e passa a viver entre regimes concorrentes de identificação. A leitura propõe uma aproximação crítica — e metodologicamente delimitada — entre a noção de orientalismo de Edward Said (1978/2007) e formas intra-latino-americanas de hierarquização cultural, sem transpor mecanicamente o eixo Ocidente-Oriente para o contexto latino-americano. Defende-se que o romance expõe uma lógica de alterização móvel, pela qual Tayson é percebido como “boliviano” no Brasil e como “brasileiro” na Bolívia, revelando a instabilidade das fronteiras nacionais, racializadas, linguísticas e afetivas que moldam sujeitos em trânsito. Em diálogo com Said (1978/2007), Foucault (1975/1987, 1978/2018), Bhabha (1994/2018), Rama (1982), Pratt (1992) e Quijano e Ennis (2000), o artigo examina três dimensões do romance: a produção discursiva do Outro, os dispositivos disciplinares que regulam corpos migrantes e a colisão simbólica entre Tunupa, McDonald’s e K-pop como formas concorrentes de imaginação cultural. Argumenta-se, por fim, que *Seul, São Paulo* constrói uma poética da transnacionalidade latino-americana marcada por vulnerabilidade, desejo global, colonialidade persistente e resistência cultural. A análise contribui para os estudos culturais ao aproximar migração, ancestralidade, linguagem, corporalidade e consumo global num quadro latino-americano contemporâneo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

transnacionalidade, alterização, literatura latino-americana, migração boliviana, Gabriel Mamani Magne

1. INTRODUCTION

The novel *Seul, São Paulo* (2024), by Gabriel Mamani Magne, addresses identity, diaspora, and cultural subalternisation among Bolivian and Bolivian-Brazilian youths living between Bolivia and Brazil. The narrative follows Tayson Pacsi, a Brazilian-born son of Bolivian parents, socialised in São Paulo, who moves to Bolivia at the age of sixteen after a childhood shaped by migratory experiences in São Paulo’s garment production workshops. Narrated from the perspective of his cousin, identified only by the surname Pacsi, the story alternates between memories of the Brazilian metropolis and the rigid routine of pre-military training in El Alto, Bolivia. Within the novel, this cultural transit is frequently framed as undesirable by those surrounding Tayson: “that he was a pariah, neither Bolivian nor *brazuca* (slang for a Brazilian): that he had gotten off the bus of patriotism halfway through the journey and would never hate the Chileans nor feel entitled to say I am Brazilian, damn it, we are five-time world champions” (Magne, 2024, pp. 37–38).

The narrative strategy employed by Gabriel Mamani Magne warrants emphasis. The narrator-protagonist, while observing his cousin, often adopts the position of the military and familial collective that surveils Tayson. At the same time, the protagonist’s

body becomes the locus of unstable identity boundaries. When Tayson is described as having “small, slanted eyes” and a bodily “fleshiness” (Magne, 2024, p. 46), the novel makes clear that otherness is not solely discursive: it is also read, projected, and inscribed upon the body.

To develop this analysis, the study draws on the classical framework proposed by Edward Said in *Orientalismo: O Oriente Como Invenção do Ocidente (Orientalism)*, originally published in 1978. Said (1978/2007) defines Orientalism as a system of representation through which the West constructed the Orient as an object of knowledge, domination, and authority. This system does not merely describe the Oriental “Other”, but produces a power relation that renders certain cultures intelligible as inferior, exotic, or dependent.

In this article, however, Said (1978/2007) is used with caution: the aim is not to “apply” Orientalism to the Latin American context as if historical regimes were equivalent, but rather to mobilise its critical logic — representation, cultural hierarchies, and discursive authority — to read intra-Latin American forms of othering. In *Seul, São Paulo*, Tayson is repeatedly confronted with cultural stereotypes and hierarchies that shape his identity, allowing for the observation of a logic of Latin American forms of othering, that is, the discursive production of difference and inferiority within Latin America itself.

Gabriel Mamani Magne (La Paz, 1987) is one of the key voices in contemporary Bolivian literature. *Seul, São Paulo* won Bolivia’s National Novel Prize in 2019 and was published in Brazil by Todavia in 2024. The author holds degrees in Sociology and Law, as well as a master’s degree in literature from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and currently lives in Goiânia, where he conducts research in Literary Studies (Montovani, 2024; Todavia, n.d.).

Although the author rejects readings that reduce the novel *Seul, São Paulo* to autobiographical fiction, the narrative is structured through a transcultural gaze associated with the author’s circulation across Bolivian and Brazilian contexts. Ángel Rama’s (1982) notion of narrative transculturation is useful for understanding this process: Latin American literature reworks local traditions, colonial matrices, and global cultural systems, producing new forms of representation. In Gabriel Mamani Magne’s work, this dynamic appears both in the representation of the Bolivian diaspora in São Paulo and in the incorporation of global references such as K-pop, which operates as a vector of desire, performance, and identity reconfiguration.

This process of transculturation is evident in recurring spatial images. La Paz is perceived as an enclosure, where the mountains make the subject feel that “it is impossible to escape” (Magne, 2024, p. 14), while El Alto offers an “entitlement to the horizon” (Magne, 2024, p. 14). The metaphor of the horizon contrasts with the mass of concrete in São Paulo, described as a “colossal block” (Magne, 2024, p. 149). The novel thus constructs a tension between the stony rootedness symbolised by Tunupa and the precarious fluidity of urban life in São Paulo’s garment production workshops.

In representing migrant experience, Gabriel Mamani Magne does not resort to an exoticised Bolivia constructed for an external gaze; rather, he turns to a “popular Bolivia”,

working-class, Indigenous, and diasporic. This perspective challenges established narratives that render peripheral subjects invisible in favour of cultural elites. Language plays a decisive role in this gesture: Spanish, Portuguese, Aymara, youth slang, and migrant vernacular speech combine into a hybridised mode of writing. “Portuñol” (a hybrid of Portuguese and Spanish) and expressions such as “bolibrazuca” (Bolivian-Brazilian; Magne, 2024, p. 20) function as markers of a subjectivity that rejects the illusion of national purity.

Methodologically, this article develops a critical and interpretive reading of *Seul, São Paulo*, combining textual analysis, examination of representations of body, space, and language, and a theoretical framework grounded in Latin American cultural studies. The analysis is organised around three axes: the discursive production of othering, disciplinary apparatuses of regulation and subjectivation, and the symbolic clash between local, national, and global cultural references. In this regard, Bhabha (1994/2018) is mobilised to think through the ambivalence of the in-between space and the instability of cultural belonging, without reducing hybridity to a harmonious synthesis.

2. TAYSON’S TRAJECTORY: CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF OTHERING

Said (1978/2007) argues that the West constructed the Orient as its “Other”: a discursive invention used to legitimise relations of domination. This representation is not neutral; it establishes a dichotomy between the supposedly rational and civilised “self” and the exotic, backward, or threatening “Other”. The usefulness of Said (1978/2007) for this analysis lies less in historical equivalence than in the description of a discursive operation: producing the Other as an object of knowledge, classification, and governance.

In *Seul, São Paulo*, Tayson’s trajectory exemplifies a process analogous to othering. In Brazil, he is reduced to the figure of the “Bolivian”, associated with precarious labour, social invisibility, and suspicion. Upon moving to Bolivia, he encounters another form of exclusion: he comes to be read as “Brazilian”, a foreigner within familiar territory. This hostility manifests itself within the pre-military environment, where Tayson’s ambiguous identity is interpreted as a threat to local nationalism:

that other Pacsi thinks he’s Brazilian, eh? Fucking ignorant idiot. (...) Acting like a *brazuca*, the spineless coward. If I catch him in the street, I’ll teach him to love the national team. And now, with a joint between his lips, he adds: I hope this cowardice does not run in the family. (Magne, 2024, p. 63)

The excerpt demonstrates that Tayson’s exclusion in Bolivia is not merely institutional; it is also interpersonal and linguistic. The accusation that he is “acting like a *brazuca*” reveals the impossibility of the protagonist being fully recognised. His “Brazilianness” becomes an instrument of moral, physical, and national disqualification.

Tayson’s experience is marked by constant displacement. In Brazil, where he was born, he grew up among Bolivian immigrants, and his lighter skin initially allowed him to circulate through spaces from which other Bolivians were excluded. His descent within

the social hierarchy occurs when his ethnic heritage ceases to remain invisible, that is, when “Bolivia begins to emerge in his body” (Magne, 2024, p. 22). Otherness is mediated through the narrator’s memory, which reads present transformations upon the cousin’s body.

I pay attention to Tayson and realise that he looks more Andean with each passing day. I compare his face with the photograph on his Facebook profile, posted in 2011: his features are more pronounced, as if God, over all these years, had taken a long time to shape his face properly. (Magne, 2024, p. 75)

It is precisely this emergence of ancestry upon Tayson’s body that brings certain privileges previously afforded by his lighter skin to an end, returning him to the position of exclusion occupied by his parents and relatives. In Bolivia, he is once again rendered foreign, now in the name of a nationalist Bolivian identity that admits no ambiguity.

Tayson is disciplined by the Bolivian pre-military institution, which attempts to erase traces of other cultures through rituals of humiliation and coercion. The push-ups imposed for forgetting the national anthem (Magne, 2024, p. 29), as well as the insults uttered by Sub-Officer Sucre, reveal the imposition of an essentialised national identity. Even his peers reproduce this logic when they declare: “Peruvians don’t stand a chance here, this is a place for Bolivians by Bolivians” (Magne, 2024, p. 47). Within this dynamic of diasporic subjectivation, K-pop emerges as a decisive element. Tayson finds in South Korean popular culture an attempt to escape the categories that confine him. By identifying with a globalised repertoire, he seeks a mode of expression not defined by national borders or colonial residues. This choice, however, is ambiguous: while it offers him a degree of identity flexibility, it also distances him from the Aymara identification proposed by Dino. Nevertheless, K-pop should not be read merely as alienation; within the novel, it operates simultaneously as global desire, bodily performance, and an attempt at reinvention.

Initially, Tayson rejects the musical genre; later, he discovers within it an unexpected space of expression. This transformation even involves physical modifications and an attempt to approximate the phenotype of South Korean idols: “it is not enough to know how to dance (...). We also need to resemble the [K-pop] singers” (Magne, 2024, p. 112). Make-up, dance, and corporeality become practices of cultural translation. The complexity of this chain of otherness becomes evident in the scene in which Tayson is expelled from a Korean shop in São Paulo by shouts of “No Bolivians allowed” (Magne, 2024, p. 22). The scene suggests a hierarchy among migrant and racialised groups, in which one minority community may reproduce mechanisms of exclusion against another that is even more vulnerable. The rejection does not target an individual action performed by Tayson, but rather the collective identity attributed to him. The subject is rejected as a social mark.

The contribution of *Seul, São Paulo* to this discussion lies in its displacement of othering from the abstract plane to the concrete realm of everyday relations. Identity boundaries are constructed through gestures, words, bodily policing, and spatial practices. The

way Tayson moves through the streets of El Alto allows identity to be read as a “choreography of survival”.

What saves him from being a soulless black ball is the way he turns corners or quickens his pace when we cross the street while the traffic light is still green: he does so with the delicacy of a dance step, as if the Korean music he listens to all the time had descended from his ears into his body, endowing him with a cadence that, despite his furrowed brow, softens his body and smooths his features. (Magne, 2024, p. 84)

The music that “descends from the ears into the body” demonstrates how Tayson uses global signs to reconfigure his physical presence within public space. He is not simply “Bolivian” or “Brazilian”; rather, he is a subject who performs his otherness, rejecting the rigidity of national borders. It constitutes an everyday strategy of survival and cultural negotiation.

3. APPARATUSES OF POWER, DISCIPLINE AND SUBJECTIVATION

Said (1978/2007) argues that Orientalism is not merely an academic field, but an ideological practice that legitimises colonial domination by constructing the “Orient” as an inferior space. Influenced by Foucault, he shows that knowledge and power are inseparable: the way a group is represented determines its position in the social hierarchy and legitimises forms of control and exclusion. Foucault (1975/1987, 1978/2018), in turn, enables an understanding of how discourses and institutions produce subjects, norms, and disciplined bodies. The novel by Gabriel Mamani Magne reveals how colonial hierarchies and intra-Latin American forms of othering are reproduced in migrant identities. In the scene where Tayson is the target of mockery by Brazilian friends, nationality functions as an apparatus of symbolic exclusion.

You’re getting more Bolivian every day, his Brazilian friends would tease him. Tayson did not care. Reality, however, made sure to rub his Bolivian-ness in his face: uncle Waldo downgraded him to selling shorts in downtown São Paulo; women — Black women, tanned women, fat women, thin women, Congolese women, all of them — looked at him differently, or simply no longer looked at him at all. (Magne, 2024, p. 27)

The passage reveals how power operates diffusely, shaping Tayson’s subjectivity through gazes, insults, expectations, and occupational downgrading. “Bolivian-ness” becomes a stigma: on the one hand, it pushes the protagonist into precarious labour; on the other, it deprives him of social and erotic recognition. Nationality, when transformed into an insult, produces a micro-hierarchy in which being “more Bolivian” signifies occupying an inferior position.

The Bolivian pre-military institution represents a particularly explicit disciplinary apparatus. The barracks function as a mechanism of national and bodily normalisation,

seeking to fix identities in diasporic bodies. In the scene where Tayson is subjected to humiliating rituals before the battalion, a set of practices aimed at shaping obedient subjects is observed:

Tayson is doing push-ups in front of the entire battalion. Sucre counts out loud: seven, eight... fifteen. When he reaches thirty, he orders him to stand up. Then I understand: Sucre had noticed that a button was missing from Tayson's shirt and grew furious. (...) Invent a button, damn it! (Magne, 2024, pp. 25–26)

Punitive and humiliating practices become recurrent, as when Tayson forgets the national anthem and is insulted: “Sucre insults my cousin with the same words he used when he made him do push-ups for having forgotten the lyrics of the anthem of the sea. Faggot. Little queer. Go back to your country, Black man” (Magne, 2024, p. 29).

The insult articulates nationality, ancestry, sexuality, and masculinity. Military discipline does not merely correct behaviour; it seeks to produce a legible, virile, and obedient national body. At this point, Foucault (1975/1987, 1978/2018) helps to illuminate the disciplining of bodies, while Said (1978/2007) enables an analysis of the discursive effects of the cultural production of inferiority.

The microphysics of power is also manifested in the working conditions of Tayson's family. In the garment production workshops of São Paulo, migration is converted into labour exploitation, fear, and confinement. The trajectory of Uncle Yojan illustrates this dimension of the Bolivian diaspora:

his story seems taken from a report on exploited migrants that occasionally appear on Brazilian television: during his first six months in São Paulo, he only saw daylight five times. The man who had taken him there (...) told him that the police would arrest him if they discovered he was working without the necessary documentation. (Magne, 2024, p. 109)

The excerpt shows how labour precarity is sustained through fear, misinformation, and surveillance. The migrant worker is deprived of daylight, reduced to a productive function, and rendered invisible as a subject. Migration, under these conditions, is not only geographical displacement, but also symbolic, labour-related, and cultural dispossession.

Faced with these pressures, Dino emerges as a figure of resistance. A young book-seller, formerly employed in garment production workshops in Buenos Aires and a sociology student, he proposes an identification that disregards the colonial borders of the nation-state: “so, given all this, Dino says, do you consider yourself Brazilian or Bolivian? (...) Neither of the two, he replies. Neither Bolivian nor Brazilian. You, Taysinho, are like us: Aymara” (Magne, 2024, pp. 53–54).

Dino's statement suggests a decolonisation of identity, pointing to an Indigenous ancestry predating modern geopolitical demarcations. However, Tayson's hesitant response — “I don't know. That's my problem” (Magne, 2024, p. 53) — reveals the

internalisation of colonial symbolic structures. Aymara belonging does not yet appear as a settled possibility, but as a category under dispute. Dino's proposal disrupts fixed national categories and allows the novel to be situated within debates on coloniality. As Quijano and Ennis (2000) observe, the coloniality of power reorganises social, racial, and epistemic hierarchies beyond formal colonialism. In *Seul, São Paulo*, Aymara identity functions as an attempt to displace Tayson from the national categories that confine him. However, it does not eliminate the violence of classificatory regimes that continue to operate upon his body.

4. TUNUPA AND McDONALD'S: SYMBOLS IN COLLISION IN TAYSON'S IMAGINATIVE GEOGRAPHY

Tayson's displacement to La Paz presents two fundamental symbolic markers:

Tayson arrived in La Paz in the winter of 2013. He was sixteen years old. Besides the three degrees below zero of the Andean dawns, two things marked him forever: 1. Tunupa and his expression of serenity. 2. The absence of a McDonald's. (Magne, 2024, p. 27)

The passage establishes a tense dialogue between systems of cultural signification. The absence of McDonald's, mentioned with the same narrative weight as Tunupa, reveals Tayson's transnational condition. Tunupa is not merely an abstract symbol; it is a physical presence that organises the home and memory.

In the living room, there is a monolith. It has always been there. It arrived before my grandmother was born and will probably outlive us all. It is embedded in the floor. It is one and a half metres tall. It is the colour of damp cement. At times, one feels like praying to it. (Magne, 2024, p. 11)

The description reveals a domestic space haunted by ancestry. The "colour of damp cement" visually aligns the monolith with the "mass of cement" of São Paulo (Magne, 2024, p. 149), merging Andean tradition and urban modernity. Tunupa can be read as an ambivalent sign, simultaneously an ancestral presence and a quasi-fossilised object, incapable of offering Tayson immediate belonging. The return to origin proves impossible, as origin appears as a mute and undecipherable presence.

Other signs of global consumption traverse the novel. The episode in which Tayson develops a compulsive relationship with food, after being forced by his father to work as a popcorn seller, shows the inscription of global desire onto the body. The protagonist steals money from his mother to buy "ten *salchipapas* (fried sausages and chips) and three two-litre bottles of Coca-Cola" (Magne, 2024, p. 41), and the narrator observes his weight gain:

Tayson is putting on a lot of weight. I look at his bulldog cheeks and compare them with those of the thin boy who arrived at my house one Sunday afternoon (...) between that Tayson and the one who wipes his face with

the sleeves of his sweatshirt, there is a difference of at least ten kilos.
(Magne, 2024, pp. 40–41)

The weight gain and the pursuit of foods that mimic global consumption inscribe diasporic frustration onto the body. In this scenario, the absent McDonald's functions as a ghost of globalisation: it is not merely a fast-food chain, but a sign of belonging to a global order that Tayson recognises and desires, even without full access to it. If Tunupa is a monolith and McDonald's an absence, what space remains for an identity that this opposition cannot define? The answer lies in Tayson's discomfort, in his refusal to fit entirely within essentialised tradition or homogenising globalisation. This in-between space brings the novel closer to the notion of "contact zones", formulated by Pratt (1992), as social spaces in which cultures encounter one another, collide, and transform under asymmetrical relations of power. Tayson does not recognise his identity in Tunupa or McDonald's, but in the unstable space that opens between them.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of *Seul, São Paulo* allows for the identification of mechanisms of othering and cultural hierarchies that dialogue with the logic described by Edward Said (1978/2007), albeit in a context distinct from the classical West-East axis. The novel shows that the discursive production of the Other also occurs within Latin America, among subjects and groups marked by different degrees of subalternisation. For this reason, rather than speaking generically of a "Latin American Orientalism", it is proposed that these dynamics be understood as intra-Latin American forms of othering, in which nationality, ancestry, class, language, and colonial memory are articulated in the production of hierarchies and in the symbolic management of migrant bodies.

Tayson's experience shows that othering is not static. It is constantly updated according to territory and power relations: "Bolivian" in Brazil, "Brazilian" in Bolivia, Aymara as a contested identity, incomplete global consumer, K-pop fan in search of another form of corporeality. The confrontation between Tunupa and McDonald's and the adoption of K-pop reveal how imaginative geographies overlap, compete, and fail as forms of identity shelter. At an aesthetic level, Gabriel Mamani Magne intensifies the novel's symbolic force by inscribing the linguistic and cultural hybridity of diasporic subjects into the narrative. The work rejects both the idealisation and the invisibilisation of the migrant experience. By mobilising Portuguese, Spanish, Aymara, youth slang, insults, global brands, and pop references, *Seul, São Paulo* constructs a poetics of the contemporary Latin American borderland. The novel allows for a rethinking of Latin America's place within the global cultural system and of the new modulations of coloniality that traverse the Brazil-Bolivia axis. The experiences of displacement and transnational mobility represented in the work are conflictual and generate vulnerability, but they also enable resistance, bodily invention, cultural translation, and struggles for recognition.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Denis Leandro Francisco is a professor of Brazilian Literature and Portuguese Literature in the Department of Language Studies at the Federal University of Lavras, where he is a permanent member of the Graduate Program in Language and Literature and coordinator of the project *A Ásia Não É Longe Daqui: Imagens de Orientes na Literatura Brasileira* (Asia Is Not Far From Here: Images of the East in Brazilian Literature, PIDE181–2024). He completed postdoctoral research in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies with funding from the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel). He holds a Ph.D.

in Comparative Literature (with an emphasis on Portuguese Literature), a master's degree in Brazilian Literature, and a bachelor's degree in Language and Literature (full teaching certification in the Portuguese language and its literatures), all obtained from the Federal University of Minas Gerais. He was an assistant professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea, from 2017 to 2019, where he taught Portuguese as a Foreign Language, Brazilian Literature, and Brazilian Culture. Author of the children's and young adult fiction books *Zola e Ana Raio* (FNLIJ Award, from the Fundação Nacional do Livro Infantil e Juvenil), *O Sapo (Des) Encantado* (PNLD Award, from the Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material Didático do Ministério da Educação do Brasil), and *Para Ler Literaturas Contemporâneas de Língua Portuguesa* (Editora UFLA, 2024).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5947-8832>

Email: denisfrancisco@ufla.br

Address: Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências Humanas, Educação e Letras, Universidade Federal de Lavras, Trevo Rotatório Professor Edmir Sá Santos, s/n, Caixa Postal 3037 – CEP 37203–202, Lavras, Minas Gerais, Brasil

Gabriela Eufrasia Sousa Passos is an undergraduate student in the Department of Language Studies at the Federal University of Lavras (UFLA). She served as a research assistant on the project *A Ásia Não É Longe Daqui: Imagens de Orientes na Literatura Brasileira* (Asia Is Not Far From Here: Images of the Orient in Brazilian Literature, PIDE81–2024) funded by the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq). She received the award Destaque na Iniciação Científica – Área: Ciências Humanas e Sociais – Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Iniciação Científica/CNPq (Outstanding Student Research Award – Category: Humanities and Social Sciences) for the research she conducted and presented at the “XXXVIII Congresso de Iniciação Científica da UFLA” (UFLA Student Research Conference) in 2025.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6776-1265>

Email: gabriela.passos@estudante.ufla.br

Address: Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências Humanas, Educação e Letras, Universidade Federal de Lavras, Trevo Rotatório Professor Edmir Sá Santos, s/n, Caixa Postal 3037 – CEP 37203–202, Lavras, Minas Gerais, Brasil

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