

Gender violence in short stories of “Olhos D’água”, by Conceição

Evaristo /

A violência de gênero em contos de “Olhos D’água”, de

Conceição Evaristo


*Marinês Andrea Kunz**

PhD in Linguistics and Letters from PUC-RS (2004). She was Director of the Institute of Human Sciences, Letters and Arts (2016-2017) and coordinator of the Letters course (2006-2010), at Feevale University, where she is a full professor.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8964-1573>

*Sabrina Susiêlen Corrêa***

Graduated in Languages - Portuguese / English from Feevale University. Currently she is a student of the Lato Sensu postgraduate course in Portuguese, English and Literature teaching methodology at FAVENI. She works as an English and Portuguese teacher in the State Government of Rio Grande do Sul and she is part of a research group as a scholarship holder for improvement in the area of literature.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5610-893X>

*Ernani Mügge****

He holds a PhD in Brazilian, Portuguese and Luso-African Literature from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). He is currently a professor and researcher at the Feevale University, working at PPG in Cultural Processes and Manifestations and in the Professional Master's in Letters.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8243-8759>

Received: January 17th, 2021. **Approved:** January, 26th, 2021.

How to cite this article:

KUNZ, Marinês Andrea; CORRÊA, Sabrina Susiêlen; Mügge, Ernani. Gender violence in short stories of “Olhos D’água”, by Conceição Evaristo. *Revista Letras Raras*, Campina Grande, v. 10, n. 1, p. 10-33, jan. 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10274092>

*

 marinesak5@gmail.com

**

 bina_sapi_rs@yahoo.com.br

 ernani@feevale.br

ABSTRACT

Brazil was constituted as a nation through a violent process of domination of the Other - the indigenous people, the enslaved blacks, the women. Thus, women, in general, throughout history, have always suffered from different types of violence due to male domination, in Brazilian patriarchal society since the beginning of colonization. In particular, enslaved black women suffered all kinds of rape. This violation of women's body and culture perpetuates itself, over the centuries and decades, so that our society is markedly violent, although this violence is naturalized and even denied. Structural violence prevents different social classes and ethnic groups from having a voice and reaching better levels of quality of life. This issue is addressed by the literature, which, through fictionality, exposes and problematizes it. In this perspective, this article aims to analyze a portrait of gender violence in short stories based on the work "Olhos d'Água", by Conceição Evaristo, since the author focuses on black women in her literary productions, aiming to raise awareness and give visibility to these subjects in contemporary society. To achieve this purpose, studies of Pierre Bourdieu (2010), Lilia Schwarcz e Heloísa Starling (2015), Regina Dalcastagnè e Maria Leal (2010), Eloísa Celmer (2010).

KEYWORDS: *Violence; Gender violence; Olhos D'água; Conceição Evaristo.*

RESUMO

O Brasil constituiu-se como nação por meio de um processo violento de dominação do Outro — o povo indígena, o negro escravizado, a mulher. Assim, as mulheres, em geral, ao longo da história, sempre sofreram com distintos tipos de violência por conta da dominação masculina, na sociedade patriarcal brasileira, desde o início da colonização. Em especial, a mulher negra escravizada sofreu todo tipo de violação. Esse passado deita raízes na atualidade, de modo que nossa sociedade é marcadamente violenta, embora essa violência seja naturalizada e, até, negada. A violência estrutural impede que diferentes classes sociais e grupos étnicos tenham voz e alcancem melhores patamares de qualidade de vida. Essa questão é abordada pela literatura, que, pela ficcionalidade, a expõe e problematiza. Nessa perspectiva, este artigo tem como objetivo analisar o retrato da violência de gênero em três contos da obra "Olhos d'Água", de Conceição Evaristo, visto que a autora tematiza a mulher negra em suas produções literárias, buscando dar visibilidade a esses sujeitos na sociedade contemporânea. Para alcançar este propósito, são empregados, entre outros, estudos de Pierre Bourdieu (2010), Lilia Schwarcz e Heloísa Starling (2015), Regina Dalcastagnè e Maria Leal (2010), Eloísa Celmer (2010).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Violência; Violência de gênero; Olhos D'água; Conceição Evaristo*

*In cut open tongue,
I say it all,
I knead the silence
and in the half sound of the rustle
I shout the shout of the scream
and I find the last words,
those not said kept the voice and the
senses in the labyrinths of the
memory.
Conceição Evaristo*

1 Introduction

Gender-based violence has been growing day by day, increasing the statistics of the most perpetrated crimes in Brazil. Being in a familiar or in a social environment, gender-based violence is, most of the time, propelled by the domination of the male gender on the female demonstrating

masculinity and honor through brutal force, torture, psychological pressure, or symbolic violence. About this male domination, Bourdieu states:

I have always seen in male domination and in the way it is imposed and experienced, the example by excellence [...] (of) paradoxical submission, resulting from what I call symbolic violence, mild violence, insensible to their victims, that is carried out essentially through the symbolic forms of communication and knowledge, either, precisely, of ignorance, recognition, or, ultimately, of feeling. (BOURDIEU, 2010, p.7, our translation)

Gender-based violence may occur in different ways, as, for example, through verbal and physical aggression, reaching its severe apex: Femicide. In Brazil, the violence against women is worrying some, because the data are alarming. This violence is not new. It is older than we can imagine, but the criminalization of violence against women is recent, set through laws to protect the victims and punish the perpetrator/aggressor.

The violence against women is also depicted in literature, mainly in contemporary literature of female authorship, that, since the 1970s, with a feminist critic, reports the violation of women rights. In this perspective, this article aims to analyzing the short stories “*Beijo na face*”, “*Quantos filhos Natalina teve?*” and “*Maria*”, from the book “*Olhos D’água*”, by Conceição Evaristo, from the perspective of violence against women. For that purpose, it will resume the studies about Brazilian history and the construction of our society, data about urban violence in contemporaneity, the history of Brazilian Literature and the social role of literature as well.

2 Brazil: historical violence

The word violence comes from Latin *violentia* and means “vehemence, impetuosity”, from *violentus*, “what/ who acts through force”, and it is related to *violare*, meaning dishonor, outrage, that is, to offend the dignity of the other. According to Zapater and Almeida,

The term physical violence, which we can describe as a form of cohesion imposed on the body of a person to punish, discipline, or subjugate, was always an expression of power. It is in this context that the body ceases to be the object of power to become a right of an individual - by the way, it is the first civil right, which gives us important leads to think on determined populations (women, blacks, children, prisoners, homosexuals, etc.) who continue to suffer more physical violence than other groups up to the present. But the violence can be symbolic, corresponding to the coercive way imposed by the making of

beliefs in the socialization process (ZAPATER; ALMEIDA, 2013, p. 97, our translation).

Therefore, we understand that, beyond the physical, the violence may be symbolic and is related to structural questions arising from old patterns, according to which the places and social roles are predefined by gender. Thus, women were responsible for household tasks and the children, while men worked outside, managed finances among other required work. During this time, this behavior was considered normal in a familiar environment, since

The social order works as a huge symbolic machine that tends to confirm the male domination on which it is fundamental: it is the social division of work, It is the structure of the space, opposing the place of assembly or market, reserved for men, and the house, reserved for women; or, inside it, between the masculine part, with the hall, and the feminine part, with the stable, the water and the vegetables; it is the structure of the time, the day, the agrarian year, or the life cycle, with moments of rupture, masculine, and long periods of gestation, feminine. (BOURDIEU, 2010, p. 18, our translation).

In this context, gender-based violence is understood as violence when the victim is the sole and exclusive target of sex, in this case, because she is a woman. Thus, women not only suffer from the position of inferiority imposed by men but also carry the weight of discrimination by the patriarchal society characterized by structural violence, which comes from the social construction of Brazil, that occurred in a violent way for the domination of space by colonization and the exploitation of the wealth found here. Regarding the colonization of Brazilian territory, Schwarcz and Starling affirm:

[...] some persistent characteristics of our brief history, at least when dated from the discovery of Brazil - for some, the correct term would be "invasion" - on the round date of 1500. If there are many events, political and cultural contexts that mark these more than five centuries of national existence, some traits stubbornly insist on appearing on the local agenda. One of them is precisely our arduous construction of citizenship (2015, p. 13, our translation).

In the colonization process, it is especially important to approach slavery, characterized by extreme violence over almost four centuries, first over the indigenous peoples, who were victims of genocidal actions, and later over the black people brought from African countries. The violent actions against Blacks by the social system and the inhabitants did not stop with the Abolition, owing to the prejudice established here, which led to profound social exclusion. This reality was created by the lack of a social insertion policy to integrate the freed slaves and manage all this contingent of workers, rejected in the labour market and had nowhere to live, being forced to occupy

the hills, concentrating on the periphery of the cities. Nor was there a school system concerned with the universal supply of education as a form of social insertion. The same historians point out that: "[...] the Lei Áurea¹, despite its great importance, was unambitious in its capacity to insert those in whose jargon citizenship and rights had not existed for so long." (SCHWARCZ; STARLING, 2015, p. 14, our translation).

From this perspective, the violence embedded in the history of Brazil since the arrival of the first navigators has established social disparities of abysmal proportions, deep racial and class prejudice, whose tentacles reach the present days. The legacy of this violence, permeated by ethnic and class issues, prevents the country from developing equitably, since this biased view of Brazilian society and its problems sabotages the creation and effectiveness of social programs focused on repairing historical damage to populations, currently, on the margins. The history of Brazil after the arrival of the Portuguese, therefore, begins with direct violence, physical violence, the extermination of indigenous peoples, and slavery, configuring the DNA of Brazilian society.

With the Abolition, ex-slaves were not seen as citizens. They did not get jobs and suffered prejudice and persecution because of their traditions. Furthermore, the imposition of Catholicism prevented the practice of African religions. For this reason, at that time², the first organizations emerged that began the fight for equal rights and access to health and education. According to Pereira,

In this context of a free society, some stereotypes will consolidate themselves in the imaginary: the former enslaved became the black; the former worker became the idle, the violent, the marginalized. To mitigate the picture of exclusion, in the middle of the old republic, some strategies will be created to crystallize the invisibility of the violence imposed on the black segment. Thus, emerged the fallacious thesis of racial democracy. Everyone became Brazilian, Brazil became the brown country; such situation was created by the supposed kindness of the gentlemen who related sexually with black women "without prejudice", "without discrimination"; such procedure generated a significant mongrel population. A legacy left by the Portuguese, who, according to the defenders of this thesis, practised soft slavery, therefore, had a mild relationship with the enslaved, "especially" with the black women. (PEREIRA, 2010, p. 92, our translation).

¹ Lei Áurea was a law from 1888 that decreed the abolishment of slavery in Brazil.

² "The Black Brazilian Front was an important organization for the black population in the 1930s. In the organization's statutes, the first chapter establishes: It is founded in São Paulo, to spread throughout Brazil, the Black Brazilian Front, political union and social of the National Black People, for the affirmation of its historical rights, due to its material and moral activity in the past and to claim its current social and political rights, in the Brazilian communion." (PEREIRA, 2008, p.33, our translation).

This "mild" relationship with women occurred because of the "[...] rape to which black women were subjected. Also, there is a contradiction when we verify the reluctance of Portugal in ending slavery and Brazil being one of the last countries to abolish slavery." (PEREIRA, 2010, p. 92, our translation). Rape is a naturalized practice in our country and, not infrequently, the woman, instead of a victim, is considered guilty, since the society understands that she provokes the man, especially if she has drunk or worn short clothes — a result of the deeply patriarchal worldview, still persistent in Brazilian lands.

Some measures were taken, after the Abolition, to reaffirm Brazilian morality, such as the status of capoeira, which ceased to be discriminated and became an important and traditional sport in the culture of the country. Brazil was then mistakenly considered a model in terms of social integration among different racial groups. However, through a set of denunciations, the real facet of this model is revealed in its most brutal perspective of exclusion, prejudice, and total lack of equity among the different social strata, with focus on the black and indigenous population. The color of the skin is, even today, a stigma and a way of placing the subject on the social scale.

Thus, the illusion was created that Brazil was an integrated country in terms of ethnic-racial diversity. Violence against people of colour, and especially against black women, has become something natural and invisible because most of Brazilian society believes, until now, that racism does not exist in our country. However, those who defend this illusion do not see or do not want to see that the black contingent makes up most of Brazilian society. Because of this fact, we must ask ourselves why the rates of exclusion and violence reach this majority precisely (PEREIRA, 2010). It is the result of an extremely racist Brazilian society, a remnant of the slave system.

We can affirm, then, that "[...] these violent relations extend in the form of development policies, or the lack of them, through the 20th century and lead us to contemporaneity, where we live with social inequality, social and police violence, prejudice and authoritarianism of all kinds." (KUNZ, 2020, p. 74, our translation). In this way, we understand that violence and racism are impregnated in national culture, shaping ways of thinking and negatively impacting public policies and economic development, as the most population remains outside the productive sector and thus has little consumption capacity.

Violence against women is one of the most serious forms of human rights violation. In Brazil, the number of cases is alarming, since women are still target of violence of the most diverse types and, most of the time, in their homes. That is why, in 2006, Law 11.340/2006, known as Maria

da Penha Law, was sanctioned to increase the severity of punishments for crimes of violence against women. This Law

creates mechanisms to curb domestic and family violence against women, according to the Article 226 of the Federal Constitution, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish, and Eradicate Violence Against Women; provides for the creation of Domestic and Family Violence Courts against Women; amends the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Criminal Code, and the Law of Criminal Execution; and makes other provisions. (WAISELFISZ, 2015, p. 7, our translation).

And in 2015, Law 13,104/2015, the Law of Femicide, was sanctioned, which classifies it as a heinous crime with aggravations when committed in specific situations, as in the case of the victim being pregnant, underage or, still, if it occurs in the presence of children.

Violence against women involves several issues, mainly affective and emotional. Often victims do not take any action against the aggressor, because, in addition to blaming themselves for the violence they have suffered, they tend to believe that the violent behaviour will not be repeated, so most do not seek help or denounce the aggressor. The victim lives with constant fear and, in some cases, also fights to protect their children, who involuntarily participate in these situations. For a long time,

Violence against women has been socially accepted, which has impregnated the cultural identities of men and women with a high degree of tolerance for such manifestations of aggression. This sociocultural acceptance of violence against women has been so well-grounded over time that, even today, when legislation disapproves of this form of violence, victimized women have difficulty recognizing the aggressions suffered as violence. (CELMER, 2010, p. 74, our translation).

The relationships between social and gender inequality are constant and long-lasting in Brazil, which appears in public and private spheres. Therefore, although they have qualified training, women receive lower salaries than men, that is, there is a devaluation of females, a reality that is neutralized.

This reality is even more severe when it comes to black women, who suffer simultaneously from racism and gender conditions. About this reality, it is relevant to bring statistical data, as Schwarcz does:

According to data from the Violence Map 2015, the murdering of black women increased by 54% in the years 2003 to 2013, while that of white women decreased by 9.8%. Black women between the ages of 15 and 29 are 2.19 times more likely to be murdered in Brazil than white women in the same age group, in line with the 2017 IVJ. (SCHWARCZ, 2019, p. 185-186, our translation).

In light of this, we highlight the need for art as a whole, and literature, in particular, to address the issue of violence against women, as does Conceição Evaristo.

3 Women in Brazilian Literature, Black Writers and the Representation of Black Women

In literature, the black woman, in general, was presented by white writers, who pictured marks of the slave past. Gender violence is presented in literature especially since the 20th century. In the early 1970s, Brazilian literature of female authorship entered a new phase as several writers - for example, Ana Miranda, Adélia Prado, Hilda Hilst, Clarice Lispector, Lygia Fagundes Teles - brought up feminist criticism, occupying their space and repudiating male domination and patriarchal society. In discussing the issue, Leal states:

Behind the fact that a woman's name appears on the cover of a novel, there is a story. This story of women's insertion in the Brazilian literary field cannot be rescued without taking into consideration the feminist movements' performance as a social force. With all its divisions and constant revisions, the feminist fights guaranteed since the simplest right, which is the access to literacy, until the possibility of the existence of published novel writers, passing through the spaces of journalists, literary agents, and women in charge of publishers. (LEAL, 2010, p. 65, our translation).

Thus, with the feminist movements, male dominance was questioned, which caused women to take on other social roles, such as the one of writer. This new space,

More fertile and less narrow, it opens the possibility to which gender issues have entered and, in this way, valuable information can be obtained about the way these problems interact, as a whole, and about how, on one hand, the history of Brazilian women is registered in Brazilian literature and, on the other hand, to what extent Brazilian women have accepted or resisted the conventional way they have incorporated themselves into their country's culture, regarding their myths, their beliefs, their imaginary, their ideology. (SHARPE, 1997, p. 15, our translation).

In Brazil, this is already a reality, but it was not always like this. The condition of women as writers became more considered when renowned authors like Machado de Assis started to approach female issues. And, in the context of Brazilian literature, especially in the chronicle, the

same writer may, according to Sharpe (1997), be considered the first to perceive in a progressive way the feminine as a negative trope, to gradually assume potentially positive facets.

Thus, throughout history, little by little, female writing has become a milestone in Brazilian literature, conquering space with its characteristics, creating a relationship between women and other women. About this, he evaluates that

Feminine writing focuses on the cultural relationship of women in society. It is not writing that simply talks about women, because men have always written about women, without necessarily producing female writing. Feminist writing seeks the smallest, the microscopic, goes through the strange lightness, the tragic delicacy, its politics is that of subjectivity. (SHARPE, 2008, p. 42, our translation).

Women's literature not only addresses contemporary issues but also discusses and reviews history, analyzing women's struggle in various contexts that are still unfavorable. Under this focus, among the innumerable works, we can mention as an example "*Um defeito de cor*", by Ana Maria Gonçalves; "*Desmundo*", by Ana Miranda; "*As meninas*", by Lygia Fagundes Teles; "*Memorial de Maria Moura*", by Rachel de Queiroz.

Therefore, literature gives visibility to the problems of the feminine universe, from the perspective of women themselves, exposing violence and male domination, since, as Bourdieu (2010) states, women are excluded or less valued than men in different sectors of society, such as politics, economics, religion, etc., in the name of a principle of honour for men, which only benefits them.

This exclusion of women in different areas, especially in the world of work and politics, has contributed to topics like the violence against women in several spheres being addressed in literature. Although it cannot promote change in social problems, we understand that literature, as Antonio Candido (2004) advocates, has a transforming power capable of stimulating reflections on several dilemmas, sensitizing and educating for healthier relationships of otherness. From this point of view, women's writing literature fights the fact that

The silence of marginalized groups - understood in a broad sense as all those who experience a collective identity that receives negative appreciation from the dominant culture, whether defined by gender, ethnicity, color, sexual orientation, position in production relations, physical condition, or other criteria - is covered by voices that overlap with it, voices that seek to speak on behalf of these groups, but also, though rarely, can be broken by the literary production of their members. This is the case, in particular, of women who have long since

conquered their own (though still a minority) space in literary production. (DALCASTAGNÈ; LEAL, 2010, p. 42, our translation).

Brazilian literature, from the women's perspective, brings great representativeness. Therefore, the exposure and portrayal of the countless forms of violence suffered by women, both in the private and public spheres, allow us to look at this aspect of the Brazilian reality more clearly and critically, without pejorative approach to the subject, stripping out the meanderings and scope of such violence. In this way, by following a path, although full of misfortunes, with unique characteristics, being in the role of writer, the woman went from being a supporting actor to the protagonist and author, demystifying standards imposed by the social environment.

However, in this process of women exclusion from the literary milieu, we must dispense an especial look at black women. In the current situation, there are more black writers in the literary milieu and, consequently, more black women protagonists. However, this movement is still fragile and needs more visibility. The literary system is, therefore, still very selective, with the prevailing white author, a man, of the middle class and heterosexual. In this sense,

A cultural theory recognizes the existence of important differences between women as writers: class, race, nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nevertheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that links women writers with each other in time and space. (SHOWALTER, 1994, p. 44, our translation).

Black people face racism in several social spaces, mainly concerning intellectual abilities. This prejudice is infinitely stronger against black women, since they are marked by patriarchy and double discrimination, being black and women. The stigma of slavery is perceptible, and black women are still disadvantaged in socioeconomic, educational, and political factors.

Afro-Brazilian literature is still under construction, and black writers seek representations of themselves, giving a new meaning to historically imposed roles and standards:

Black identity is understood here as a social, historical, cultural, and plural construction. It implies the construction of the gaze of an ethnic/racial group or of subjects that belong to the same ethnic/racial group, on themselves, from the relationship with the other. To build a positive black identity in a society that historically teaches Blacks, from an early age, that to be accepted one must deny oneself is a challenge faced by Blacks and black Brazilians. (GOMES, 2005, p. 43, our translation).

To change the negative way in which Brazilian society views people of colour and to understand them as citizens with the right to representation in all sectors, whether in the economy,

culture, or religion, making room for them in literature is of paramount importance, both as an author and as a character. In this context, specifically, Black women's literature seeks differentiated visibility of this part of the historically inferior society in Brazil. Conceição Evaristo (2005, p. 205, our translation) explains this:

Since black women are invisible not only because of the pages of official Brazilian history, but also because of literature, and when they become second-class objects, most of the time they are fictionalized based on various stereotypes there are several precautions to black writers. In their "pen", an object representative of white phallogocentric power, black writers seek to inscribe images of a self-representation in the Brazilian literary corpus. Speech and a body emerge that is not only described but, first, lived.

In this way, the black authors represent the figure of the black woman in the position of protagonists, and no longer as an object under the perspective of the Other, who is dissimilar to her. As an example, we can mention the writer Carolina Maria de Jesus with her emblematic work "*Quarto de Despejo. Diário de uma favelada*".

In view of that, this article focuses on short stories by Maria da Conceição Evaristo de Brito or simply Conceição Evaristo, considered one of the most relevant writers of Afro-Brazilian literature. Being a researcher, Conceição marks literature mainly by highlighting the black woman from her point of view as a black woman. The concept of her literary productions is based on writing, that is, "[...] the writing of a body, a condition, a black experience in Brazil." (OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 622, our translation). Thus, according to the writer, in her creative process, she can not to get rid of her "living black-woman-body", so that it is precisely through this body that she experiences what a non-black body can never experience (EVARISTO, 2009).

Conceição Evaristo was born in a slum in Belo Horizonte in 1946 and attended primary school and high school while working as a maid. In the 1970s, she moved to Rio de Janeiro, where worked as a professor in Niterói for 10 years. She graduated in Literature from UFRJ, has a Master's degree in Brazilian Literature from PUC-RJ, and a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from UFF. Member of several movements, she supports the valorization of black culture in Brazil. In 1990, she began publishing in literature in the series "*Cadernos Negros*", created in 1978 by the militants and writers Luiz Silva, Cuti, and Hugo Ferreira, to give visibility to short stories and poems by Afro-Brazilian authors.

Conceição Evaristo has been gaining more and more space in contemporary Brazilian literature, and her publications have been the object of academic studies in Brazil and abroad. In 2003 she published the novel "*Ponciá Vivência*"; in 2006, "*Becos da memória*"; in 2011,

“Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres”. In 2014 she published *“Olhos D’água”* and in 2017, *“Histórias de Leves Enganos e Parecenças”*. In 2018, she was awarded with the Minas Gerais Government Literature Award for her entire work. Still in 2018, she applied for chair number 7 of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, however, she was not elected.

With her writing style, she approaches different forms of violence and emphasizes racial, gender, and class prejudice in her short stories. She points out that her condition as a black woman is reflected in her writing, even unconsciously, which reveals her condition as a citizen and a writer (EVARISTO apud NASSIF, 2016, p.1, our translation).

From this point of view, the writer approaches in her short stories the hard battles of people of colour and black women in Brazil, giving visibility to the characters, exposing cultural aspects and ways of seeing the world, also highlighting the social exclusion of which they are victims. From this perspective, three short stories from *“Olhos d’Água”* will be studied, focusing on violence.

4 Watered Eyes: the voice of the silenced

The work *“Olhos d’Água”* is composed of fifteen short stories that address violence in urban space with a focus on violence against women. It brings together female protagonists, poor and victims of violence, who also represent the daily life of inequality, social and sexual dilemmas, and countless life experiences, reconstituting the tough battles faced in the slums scenarios. Regarding *“Olhos D’água”*, Gomes states:

Without facilitating sentimentalism, but always incorporating poetic tessitura into fiction, the short stories of Conceição Evaristo present a significant gallery of women: Ana Davenga, the beggar Duzu-Querença, Natalina, Luamanda, Cida, the girl Zaíta. Or are they all the same woman, captured and recreated in the kaleidoscope of literature in various snapshots of life? They differ in age and conjunctures of experiences, but they share the same iron life, balancing themselves in the "fragile rod" that, we read in the short story "O cooper de Cida", is the "tightrope of time". This woman of many faces is emblematic of millions of Brazilians in the society of exclusion that is ours. (GOMES, 2011, p. 9-10, our translation).

Among the short stories *“Beijo na face”*, *“Quanto filhos Natalina teve?”* and *“Maria”* will be analyzed. The protagonists go through daily difficulties, being victims of different forms of violence. The main characters are, respectively, Salinda, Natalina, and Maria.

Salinda lives in an environment of oppression, due to a worn-out marriage, which has become an abusive relationship. Submissive, she cannot break up the relationship, because her

partner does not allow it. For fear of losing her children, she lives between her passion for another woman and the fear of her husband, who watches over her, imposing psychological violence on her, as follows:

Among the threats made by her husband, the most diverse and cruel were emerging. Taking the children, killing her, or committing suicide leaving a letter blaming her. Salinda, for this reason, had been postponing a definitive break with him for years. She was afraid, she felt afraid, although sometimes she thought he would never do anything if she left him for good. Since then, she had learned certain tricks, probed the ground, looked for ways out. (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 53, our translation).

The encounter with the truth of adultery would be cruel, and the separation of the couple was being postponed for years through the fear of the protagonist, who feels constantly watched over, a situation experienced by many women, since men impose on them a tutelage that reduces their autonomy, placing them in a subordinate position as if their behaviour lacked male approval. Beauvoir speaks on this: "The burden that society imposes on women is considered as a service to the husband: as a consequence, he owes his wife a gift or an inheritance and undertakes to support her". (BEAUVOIR, 2016, p. 186, our translation). In this way, the woman is at the mercy of the will of the man, who, in turn, conceives her as his property.

Sexism and mistrust make the spouse watch her every step, as can be seen in the following passage:

At first, as soon as she started being watched, she thought she was suffering from persecution mania. However, she confirmed that she was being followed when, one night, her husband, thinking she was sleeping, was talking loudly in the next room, and she unwittingly listened to the whole conversation. He asked for news of all her steps. Then the confirmation came from the news he brought. She had been seen in this and that a place. Salinda understood her husband's behaviour. He was watching her, but instead of acting in silence, he was alerting her in his voice. It was as if he was trying to delay an encounter with the truth. (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 53, our translation)

Little by little, Salinda experiences the domestic prison, through the oppression of her companion, blinded by jealousy, as the passage of the short story proves:

From the evil questions aggressively asked came a severe and constant vigilance that turned into a near house arrest. She responded with a passive game. She pretended to ignore it. It was just a survival strategy. She tried ways to defend herself by waiting for the children to grow up a little more. (EVARISTO, 2016, p.55, our translation).

Here we perceive the need of the protagonist, surreptitiously, to develop tactics to endure the violence suffered. As it happens when there are small children involved, she submits herself to the regime of oppression, hoping that when they are older, she can get rid of the abusive relationship.

To aggravate her condition of subordination and guilt, Salinda maintains a homoaffective relationship, which not only confronts the patriarchal universe but also the whole society that has in heteronormativity the pattern for affective relationships. Vandu, her aunt, helped her keep this relationship unknown by her partner, and one of the secret meetings took place when the protagonist and her children spent a few days in the house of this relative.

During the visit, she "[...] had gone to the circus with the children in one of the days she had stayed at her aunt's house. She was more excited than them. Early in the morning, during daybreak, she enjoyed in advance the sweet affliction she would feel in the afternoon when she met the tightrope artist." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 55, our translation). The experience of observing the tightrope walker is a metaphor for her life, for her steps, like those of the artist, must also be delicate and precise, for any carelessness can be fatal. She knew that "[...] any false step, the woman would be asking for death. For a moment she asked for everything to be broken. And, as a tightrope performer, she felt a taste of death in her mouth, but soon recovered, biting the taste of life again." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 56, our translation). Salinda lives on the tightrope and fears death, however, even knowing the dangers of her relationship with another woman, she does not give up this passion, even under the constant obsessive gaze of her husband. Upon returning home, she does not find him and despairs:

But why was the husband taking so long? She was beginning to torment herself. What was behind that silent absence? What had happened? What was about to happen? And her secret life? Had the secret been discovered in some way? Salinda had traveled with the children. Going out with the children did not arouse any suspicion. (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 55, our translation).

Since her husband was not absent regularly, she panics. Finally, she receives a call from her husband, who had discovered her extramarital relationship. She feels lost, as he announces a war to dispute the children: "He still said that he did not want to see her ever again, but she had better be prepared for a war. He was not going to kill her. He was not going to commit suicide either. But he was going to fight hard for the children. He wanted his children, all of them. Ah, he did!..." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 57, our translation).

The deprivation of the relationship with the children is a cruel way to punish the mother for her involvement with another woman, the biggest outrage. The betrayed husband experiences the outrage and intends to impose the penalty on the mother, like a Medea inside out, not with the death of the children, but with the deprivation of the coexistence, denying her, therefore, the exercise of motherhood. If you cannot hurt her as a woman, hurt her as a mother. By denying her the exercise of motherhood as a punishment for adultery, the husband glimpses parental alienation, which is to deprive the other spouse of the relationship with the children.

The psychological violence of male domination suffered by Salinda is reflected in her homoaffective relationship, because having a relationship with another woman releases her from the oppression and makes her feel in a situation of equality. In this perspective, Beauvoir points out that "[...] a woman who commits herself to singular projects or who claims her freedom, generally refuses to give up the benefit of another human being; she recognizes herself in her actions." (BEAUVOIR, 2016, p. 167, our translation). The relationship with one's equals is not based on the domination of the other, nor the idea of possession, but on a form of freedom, which, however, still shocks society.

The complementarity, complicity, and equality made possible by the new relationship are expressed in the protagonist's self-contemplation before the mirror:

Trying to balance herself on pain and fright, Salinda contemplated herself in the mirror. She knew that there she would find her equal, the contemplative gesture of herself was enough. Instead of her face, she saw the other's. On the other side, as if it were true, the clear face of her friend appeared to affirm the strength of love between two equals. Women, both looked alike. Tall, black, and with dozens of dreads decorating their heads. Both female birds, daring divers in their own depths. And every time that one dived into the other, the gentle encounter of their female fissures made them both pregnant with pleasure. And what seemed little, became much. What was finite, became eternal. And light and fleeting kiss on the cheek, a torn shadow of a yellow butterfly wing, became a certainty, a presence encrusted in the pores of the skin and memory. (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 57, our translation).

We understand here the mirror as a symbol of truth, like the tale "Snow White". In parallel, the object gives you back the inverted vision of yourself and, simultaneously, of your equal, since it is also a lunar symbol, therefore, of the feminine.

The mirror also symbolizes, in this perspective, the harmony of the couple (CHEVALIER; GHEERBRANT, 1998). Here, the feminine is self-completed, in clear confrontation with male domination and, from a feminine/feminist perspective, the short story uncovers and questions the

violence of the sexist and patriarchal society, in which men feel the need of taking care of their honour, considering themselves as the owners of the woman.

Finally, to better understand the narrative, we can associate the name Salinda, metaphorically, to the sense of transmutation, of cleanness, as the salt itself has it, used to purify and eliminate negative energies. In this sense, the character is not corrupted in the face of aggression but transmuted and released.

The short story "*Quantos filhos Natalina teve?*" is about rape, abortion, and maternity. The protagonist is a black resident of a slum and has had countless pregnancies - the first at age 14. For Natalina, whose onomastic meaning refers to the idea of birth - natality - contrary to what society expects from a woman, motherhood is not something good, so she refers to her pregnancies with contempt, except for the last one, as we can see in this passage: "That child she wanted, the others she did not. [...] The other bellies she hated. She could not stand to see herself stuffed, heavy, swollen, and that stretch, that thing moving inside her. Her heart was full of hate." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 43, our translation).

For fear of her father, Natalina asked her mother to forgive her during her first pregnancy, not to hit her nor tell her father anything, but she starts suffering psychological violence from her mother, because she induces her to have an abortion with abortive teas and plants,

I took the teas, and it did not work out. One day her mother asked her how everything was going. She did not answer. The mother understood her daughter's silent answer. Now she was going to prepare the teas. How would she raise another child? What to do when the girl's son was born? There were already so many people in the house! She, her husband, and seven children. And now she would have the daughter's son? She would try a little more drinking, if it did not work out, she would take the girl to Sá Praxedes. (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 43, our translation)

Natalina is horrified of the old midwife, as you can see in the following passage: "Sá Praxedes, no! She was scared to death of the old woman. They said she ate boys. Some of them, when they left, carried their children in their arms, others came with empty stomachs, arms, and hands. (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 43, our translation). Natalina runs away from home because of despair, insecurity, and fear of the midwife and goes to another city, where she gives birth to her first child. The narrator informs that she "[...] didn't want the boy, but she didn't want him to be eaten by the old woman either." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 45). Still in the hospital, she abandons her son, who stays

with a nurse, while "[...] the girl - mother - left the hospital with a light soul!" (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 45, our translation).

In her second pregnancy, also unwanted, Natalina finds herself in a delicate situation, because Tonho, her partner, wants to build a family with her, but she does not have the same plan, since she wants to be free, unlike him, her happiness lies not in the constitution of a family, "she did not want to be with anyone".

She did not want any family. She didn't want a son" (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 46, our translation). Natalina then allowed Tonho to return to his hometown taking their son, without feeling guilt or remorse because she did not want to practice motherhood. Unlike the imposed standards, Natalina needs freedom. The idea of an ideal family

Is part of the cultural standards of our society because it involves values, norms, and practices that manifest themselves through objectives and ways of acting and thinking, which are transmitted from generation to generation. And as a cultural standard, it makes people enforce the established norms, and those who do not fit the norms are punished by disciplinary mechanisms (malicious comments, gossip, and others) that attack the individuality, respect, honor, and dignity of people. (FILHO, 1998, p. 37, our translation).

The character breaks with the pattern, because she does not want to depend on anyone but herself and wants a child only her own, without marks, without obligations, without a partner. The third pregnancy was also not planned by her, but by her bosses. The boss, desperate for not getting pregnant, asks Natalina to become pregnant from her husband, and "Natalina heard and understood everything. The woman wanted to have a child, but could not. She was desperate and ashamed of it. She and her husband had already talked. It was just the maid making a child with the boss". (EVARISTO, 2006, p. 47, our translation). Subordinate, her position of inferiority is evident in the short story since she accepts the bosses' request: "All right. She would go to bed with her boss, without paying any money, as often as it was necessary." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 47, our translation), Without delay, she gets pregnant. For Natalina, motherhood was felt with contempt and repudiation, so that the days and months took longer to go by. She did not like her belly and the transformation of her body: "Everything passed slowly, the nine months of eternity, nausea. The inconvenience she carried in her belly would make the man pleased and the woman would have a child coming out of her. She was ashamed of herself and them." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 48, our translation).

On the one hand, as a maid, Natalina repeats the fate of many women throughout the history of Brazil, since colonial times, who became pregnant with their boss. Although pregnancy is a nuisance, she subserviently accepts the request without wanting anything in return. On the other hand, we can look at Natalina as the woman who does not want children, does not expect to be connected to a man, which puts her on a level outside normality, that is, she breaks with what would be the most obvious path especially for girls who do not have access to the means necessary to change their socio-cultural condition, since, as Souza explains (2011, p. 99, our translation): "Children are born to parents (only mothers, almost always) miserable not only economically, but lacking in self-confidence, self-esteem and without having internalized the psychosocial preconditions to earn a living in a competitive society".

She, unlike the majority, gets rid of the burden that represents a child, giving up on them, in a revolutionary attitude, since

The social and natural place of the woman was linked to the experience of maternity, which was directly related to married life and the maintenance of marriage, and kept women away from the world of work and public life. Those who, both in history and today, sought to flee or rebel against the naturalized norms about their paths, were and still are viewed with suspicion, characterized as incomplete, sad, lonely, and less feminine women. (EMIDIO; GIGEK, 2019, s.p., our translation)

However, the fourth pregnancy "[...] did not leave her in debt to any person. She didn't owe the pleasure of discovery when she became a woman, as she had done in her meetings with Bilico. She owed nothing." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 48, our translation). Mistaken for another person, she is kidnapped, tortured, and raped. Taken away from her shack, Natalina, certain that she was not the person the men were looking for, could not defend herself, "[...] because she was blindfolded by the men who came suddenly to her shack and overpowered her with force." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 49, our translation). She is tortured and raped, not knowing where she is or why for "[...] the man got out of the car, pulled her violently and threw her to the ground; then he untied his hands and commanded her to be tender. Natalina, between hate and fear, obeyed everything." (EVARISTO, 2006, p. 50, our translation). When she removed the blindfold from her eyes, she could not see the face of the rapist, who "[...] ejaculated like an angry horse on her. Then he fell asleep next to her". (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 50, our translation). She then realizes the possibility of revenge, takes his gun, and kills him.

After suffering physical and moral violence, she is released from the situation due to the death of the aggressor but carries the fruit of the violation of her body, her last pregnancy. This would be her child, without the father's mark. Unlike at other times, the expectation of the child allows Natalina to feel something distinct, and that child would paradoxically be well received, "[...] a child that had been conceived on the fragile limits of life and death." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 50, our translation). The brutality of rape and the fact that the father is dead change Natalina's perspective on this pregnancy since she finally accepts the birth. The protagonist, owner of her desires, weaves her destiny deciding with which child she wishes to stay and chooses the moment to experience motherhood.

The last character to be analyzed is Maria, who has the most used name in the world. Maria, an ordinary woman, strong, resistant, and able to withstand all suffering, as the song "*Maria, Maria*", by Milton Nascimento states: "Maria, Maria/ Is the sound, is the color, is the sweat/ Is the strongest and slowest dose/ Of a people who laugh when they must cry/ And doesn't live, just endures/ But it is necessary to have strength/ It is necessary embrace race/ It is always necessary to have determination/ Who bears the mark on the body/ Maria, Maria/ Mixes pain and joy" (our translation). In other words, the name Maria symbolizes strength, struggle, and persistence, constituting a brand, a stigma.

Maria, a black woman, a girl from the favela, and housekeeper³, raises her children alone in poverty, as can be seen in the following passage: "Maria was stopped for more than half an hour at the bus stop. She was tired of waiting. If the distance were shorter, she would have walked. The price of the ticket was increasing so much!" (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 39, our translation). Rich, the bosses "presented" her with leftover food, so "the bag was heavy. The day before, on Sunday, there had been a party at the bosses' house. She took the leftovers home. The ham bone and the fruit that had adorned the table." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 39, our translation). Always thinking about her children, Maria remembers that they have never eaten melon and wonders if they will like it. On the bus, on the way home, Maria recognizes a passenger, her ex-partner, father of her first child. "She recognized the man. How long! Long time no see him! How difficult it was to continue life without him." (EVARSTO, 2016, p. 40, our translation). When he sits next to her, they both remember the moments when they were happy in the shack. Mary represents the reality of many

³ "In Brazil, domestic work is one of the oldest professions, with 467 years of existence marked by institutional violence. Of this total, 343 years were slave labour; the end of partial slavery (Lei Áurea) forced black people to work for another 48 years in exchange for food or for a change [...]." (SOUZA, 2013, p. 67, our translation).

"Marias", because, divorced or merely abandoned, she took on the three children alone, fruits of different relationships.

The protagonist then realizes that the former companion and his comrade are robbers. He "[...] got up fast and drew his gun. Another in the back shouted that it was a robbery. Maria was frightened." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 41, our translation). Without understanding, she does not have her objects stolen, being spared by the thieves. The other passengers, after the robbery, find out that she was not robbed and start to assault her: "That bitch out front knew the robbers." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 42, our translation). The trials and insults are intensified: "Dirty nigger, you'll see that she was with both of them." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 42, our translation). Very frightened, she denies knowing them, but the verbal humiliations do not cease, as follows: "That bitch, that naughty nigger was with the thieves." (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 42, our translation). From then on, the passengers, in anger, start to physically attack her by screaming: Lynch! Lynch! Lynch!... Some passengers went down and others flew towards Maria" (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 42, our translation). The character is brutally beaten to death. She cannot, therefore, give the message of the thieving father to her son nor the fruit to the boys, and "The bag had torn and the fruit rolled on the ground. Would the boys like the melon?" (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 42, our translation).

Maria is the target of different forms of violence. First, as a domestic worker, she suffers deprivation due to poverty, since her job does not guarantee her better conditions to adequately feed her children. Another, as a woman, she is abandoned by her children's parents, so she is solely responsible for their subsistence and education. Finally, social violence on the part of those in a similar social condition, who, through their exploits of hatred and prejudice, show racism and contempt for the woman Mary, the supposed accomplice of thieves. To offend a woman, in general, we appeal to her honour, accusing her of being promiscuous, in a clear sexist conception, which puts her in a position that does not require any respect. And, as a black woman, Maria is also offended, after all, it is not rare in Brazil that a black person is perceived a priori as a bandit, unlike a white one.

The tragic outcome exposes the absurdity of violence impregnated in social relations, in which death is trivialized. Without the right to defense, Maria is summarily condemned to death by her equals in condition, who, moved by passion and tired of daily exploitation and violence of all kinds, kill her, as in a social outbreak of those who can no longer stand the society in which she lives. When analyzing the lynching in Brazil, Martins (1996, p. 15, our translation) explains that collective behaviour "expresses as the irreducible dimension of self-defensive human conduct that

even conflicts with the conquests of civilization. In it, the social contract is not recomposed and is broken even more than in the rupture caused by the violence that first gave rise to it".

Thus, lynching is the opposite of civility, built through social and legal rules, an order broken by the first violence that generates a convulsive and even more exacerbated passionate reaction. The central character, Maria, synthesizes the fragility of the citizen on the margins of society, who does not have access to the means necessary for social mobility; fragility as a single mother, abandoned by her companions; fragility as a black woman, a victim of collective violence and structural racism that puts the afro-descendant a priori in the place of the bandit. Like so many Marias, she holds onto the cry and laughs as she fights against social stigma, against the suffering that marks her body and her destiny.

Final remarks

In literature, women, in general, have been presented from the point of view of men, which makes it difficult to express their essence: "[...] it is possible to say that when written by men, they are mostly young (42.3%) and adult (50%) [...] are less educated, dominate less the cultured norm, occupy fewer intellectual positions." (DALCASTAGNÈ; LEAL, 2010, p. 40, our translation). From the female perspective, the female characters assume several roles, with descriptions of the body, sexuality, and desires that highlight their particular characteristics.

In this sense, from a denunciative perspective, Conceição Evaristo exposes violations suffered by women, especially black, poor, and suburban women. It depicts the interiorization and harsh conditions of the black subject in Brazil, breaking many stereotypes, especially of black women, linked to the slave past. About the writer's literature, Duarte states:

Thus, the short stories of Conceição Evaristo seem to bring the expression of a new paradigm. Written from within (and outside) the marginalized space, the work is contaminated with collective anguish, witnesses to the trivialization of evil, death, class, gender, and ethnic oppression, and is a spokeswoman for the hope of new times. In this triad - class, gender, and ethnicity - probably reside the basis for the reading of the "second story" that underlies each short story, recalling here Piglia's theoretical formulation of the modern short story, which would hold the key to its meaning. The literature of assumedly black authorship - like this one, signed by Conceição Evaristo - at the same time social-political project, testimony, and fiction, is being inscribed definitively. (DUARTE, 2010, p. 5, our translation).

The work "*Olhos d'Água*" makes it possible to dive into the female universe of black women in different situations of vulnerability, which allows an understanding of the condition of black women, but also, to a certain extent, that of poor women in general. Violence knocks at the door of both, revealing a portion of society at the mercy of men and their physical strength, driven by sexist and patriarchal conceptions that undermines women and authorize them for the most ignoble acts.

Like the forerunners Maria Firmina dos Reis and Carolina Maria de Jesus, Conceição Evaristo, as well as Anas, Myriam's, Paulas, and other authors that write stories about women — and men — and society. She reveals her universes, her anguishes, her desires. The unheard and the forbidden. She presents the reader with a new palette of colours, paintings that sometimes shock but whose visualization is distressing. Paintings that our society needs to look inside, inside the house, the work, and the soul. If we look at ourselves, we may have, in the future, less tragic paintings, with happier colours, with harmonious textures that give us back the image of the woman as the protagonist and owner of her life, her desires, respected in her rights and individualities.

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