


Black women's memories: an inventory of the domestic world and things, in Conceição Evaristo's insubmissible tears of women / Memórias de mulheres negras: inventário do mundo doméstico e as coisas, em Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres, de Conceição Evaristo

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ABSTRACT

In the research, we investigate the theme of memory as an important guiding thread for the construction of the narratives of *Insubmissible Tears of Women*, by Conceição Evaristo, because it is through the memorialistic clipping

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that the plots portray stories of black women, affected by their social, ethnic, cultural and gender conditions. Throughout the analysis, we relate memory to the personal condition of the rememberer, pointing out the subjective aspects that manifest themselves in the characters' memorial clippings. In the section, "Memories of Black Women - An Inventory of the Domestic World: The House and Things in Conceição Evaristo's *Insubmissible Tears of Women*," we reflect on the power of the house and the objects that make up the domestic world and shape the literary scenes as struts of memory, highlighting how the relationship of black women with these elements occurs. The symbols present in the narratives are crucial to situate the women as members of a group. In many cases, they determine their bonds with other people, characterizing that space. To do so, we will have to situate the black woman before her historical condition of enslaved person and how her relationship with the house and things are constructed or affected by this reality.

KEYWORDS: *Insubmissible Tears of Women*; Conceição Evaristo; Memories; Black women.

RESUMO

Na pesquisa, investigamos a temática da memória como importante fio condutor para a construção das narrativas de *Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres*, de Conceição Evaristo, pois é por meio do recorte memorialístico que os enredos retratam histórias de mulheres negras, afetadas por suas condições sociais, étnicas, culturais e de gênero. Ao longo da análise, relacionamos a memória à condição pessoal da recordadora, apontando os aspectos subjetivos que se manifestam nos recortes memoriais das personagens. Na seção, "Memórias de mulheres negras - Inventário do mundo doméstico: a casa e as coisas, em *Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres*, de Conceição Evaristo", refletimos acerca da potência da casa e dos objetos que compõem o mundo doméstico e que dão forma às cenas literárias como esteios de memória, ressaltando como se dá a relação das mulheres negras com esses elementos. Os símbolos presentes nas narrativas são determinantes para situarem as mulheres como membros de um grupo. Em muitos casos, determinam seus vínculos com outras pessoas, caracterizando aquele espaço. Para tanto, teremos de situar a mulher negra diante de sua condição histórica de pessoa escravizada e de como sua relação com a casa e as coisas são construídas ou afetadas por essa realidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres*; Conceição Evaristo; Memórias; Mulheres negras.

1 Introduction

Like the myth of Penelope, "which can be read as an attempt, doomed to precariousness, to *preserve the lived* - which for this needs to be destroyed and remade" (RAMOS, 2011, p. 93, our emphasis), the frequent evocations to the past made by the women in *Insubmissible Tears of Women* can be understood as attempts not only to preserve the lived, but to understand how it can affect their present and determine their prospects for the future. Every time these women are willing to narrate past events or every time they dwell on them, they break with outdated interpretations (or interpretations made in the heat of the moment) about these events, remaking them in the present by giving them new senses or meanings, proving that, many times, this distancing is necessary. In other words, the past of these women is reinterpreted based on their current experiences. In this case, Ramos (2011) considers that "memory, classically incorporated in the figure of Mnemosyne, like Penelope's web, writes and erases; preserves and destroys, reworking the past, re-signifying the present, and opening gaps for the future" (IDEM, p. 94).

In the narratives of *Insubmissible Tears of Women*, the weaving of memory occurs through the remnants of the past associated with the impressions of the present. Its threads are constant returns, whether voluntary or involuntary, forming an immense set of intersecting paths. The reader goes through this labyrinth guided by the voices of those who narrate their stories. The characters establish their points of view and are willing to narrate from them. Conceição Evaristo builds these threads with voices that, although independent, complement each other and give coherence to the narrators' discourses, conceiving narrative paths that start from lived experience. Through the voices of the characters, we can see that the "mnemonic subject does not remember one image or another. He evokes, gives voice, makes people speak, says again the content of his experiences. While evoking, he is currently living his experience with a new intensity" (BOSI, 2003, p. 44).

Every individual is endowed with capacities such as memory, thought, and language, which are, in a way, related, especially memory and thought. In our view, memory implies the ability to store experiences in the form of information. Thought, in turn, can mold this information, to ultimately allow man to shape or trigger it according to his needs, interests, and perceptions of the world. According to Michael Pollak, who considers that memory is a constructed phenomenon, "what individual memory records, recalls, excludes, is evidently the result of real organizational work" (POLLAK, 1992, p. 4), that is, "when I speak of construction, at the individual level, I mean that the modes of construction can [...] be conscious" (IDEM, p. 5), allowing individuals a certain autonomy in this process. However, this autonomy happens in a limited way in some aspects, because, just as we can access information that was stored in our memory, we can, on the other hand, lose them, after all, "while knowledge is formless and infinitely progressive, memory involves forgetting" (ASSMANN, 2008, p. 121).

Besides forgetfulness, not all experiences are stored in the form of memory, in other words, there are experiences that boil down to the simple act. In this way, we question ourselves about recent events, but which do not even reach our memory, unlike those that escape our memory - these can surface, depending on the way we instigate them; certainly, those, on the other hand, are reduced to simple or mechanical operations, which, by their nature, even unconsciously, we do not attribute as much importance to them and these events are discarded. In relation to this aspect, Correa (2017) defends "the affective character of memory, which works to keep what was significant in the lives of those who report" (Correa, 2017, p. 24). Thus, we would also say that memory is selective. Not everything is recorded. Not everything is registered" (POLLAK, 1992, p.4).

Just like there are filters that guide our postures, we believe that there are also filters that guide our memories. In short, our memories are influenced by contexts and are often determined by our actions or determine them. Our memory would be composed of memories of various categories. In other words, we have memories that concern individual, collective, as well as individual and collective experiences, respectively, which, by the way, can be regrouped by their joyful, sad, or traumatic characteristics, as well as linked to social, historical, or cultural experiences.

However, under no circumstances can memory be dissociated from the past. Therefore, the past interferes greatly in the way we see ourselves and how we experience the world. After all, as we showed before, identity is related to time. Consequently, the experiences that make up our memory can be reassessed from the perspective of the experiences of the present. In Le Goff's words, "memory, as the property of preserving certain information, leads us in first place to a set of psychic functions, thanks to which man can update past impressions or information, or which he represents as past" (LE GOFF, 1990, p. 423).

When we relate memory to past time, we are, even involuntarily, dealing with external and mobile aspects that directly affect the way it materializes. For Bosi (2003), "memory is, yes, a work about time, but about time lived, connoted by culture and by the individual. Time does not flow uniformly, man made time human in each society. Each class lives it differently, as well as each person" (BOSI, 2003, p. 53). In this way, the memory of each person will be influenced by cultural and class aspects, as well as by the ethnic and gender factor and, not less important, by aspects that concern subjectivity, perceptible in *Insubmissible Tears of Women*, for this reason we understand that the memories that emerge in the pages of the book are not only manifestations or perceptions of a past, but portraits of times, classes, and cultures.

The work draws attention by the diversity of themes and the predominance of a black female narrative voice, implying an innovation in the current Brazilian literary aesthetic plan. This innovation is represented in Conceição Evaristo's literary project, which, through fiction, gives voice to black women. The analysis will be divided into two thematic sections, both, however, in correlation with the theme memory.

2 Memories of Black Women - An Inventory of the Domestic World: The House and Things in Conceição Evaristo's *Insubmissible Tears of Women*

In patriarchal societies, women were massively deprived of the public space and subjugated based on social representations convenient to patriarchal cultural values, which served to ratify male domination and its consequent sexist oppression. In this way, the values permeated by patriarchy imposed themselves as paradigms and were determinant to keep women enclosed and under male power.

In the book *The Male Domination*, Pierre Bourdieu confirms this hypothesis, pointing out that the social order functions as a symbolic machine of ratification of male domination and exposes the way in which, even, spaces are structured, that is, "opposing the place of assembly or market, reserved for men, and the house, reserved for women; or, within the latter, between the male part, with the hall, and the female part, with the stable, the water and the vegetables" (BOURDIEU, 2014, p. 18).

However, even living in a situation of "erasure," that is, destined to culturally invisibilized spaces and tasks, women built survival strategies and policies of emancipation and recognition, concretizing themselves "as historical subjects capable of transforming their space and fighting for rights and social achievements" (NOVAES, 2015, p. 52). In other words, women's experiences were shaped in the domestic environment. Thus, as a result of the interference of patriarchy and the consequent sexist culture of domination, guided simply by what differentiates man from woman in the biological sense, the category *home* came to be associated with the female world while the category *street* came to be associated with the male world.

Regarding the cultural fact discussed, Peter Stearns, who has set out to study the *history of gender relations in various societies*, synthesizes this idea, assuring "culturally, patriarchal systems emphasized women's fragility and inferiority. They insisted on domestic duties and sometimes restricted women's rights to appear in public" (STEARNS, 2007, p. 33). Thus, our *modus operandi* was predetermined by patriarchal values. These dispositions were configured, mainly, in the social division of labor. Therefore, the house and things represented meanings beyond those commonly recognized and started to have a greater cultural importance for the conformation of the female subject. Because of this, even today, the negative and sexist symbolism

of the woman as the figure of the *home* and, therefore, responsible for domestic chores, prevails in the collective imagination.

In this sense, Bourdieu (2014) understands that

the division between the sexes seems to be "in the order of things," as it is sometimes said to speak of what is normal, natural, to the point of being inevitable: it is present, at the same time, in an objectified state in things (in the house, for example, whose parts are all "gendered"), in the whole social world, and, in an embodied state, in the bodies and *habitus* of agents, functioning as systems of schemes of perception, thought, and action (BOURDIEU, 2014, p. 17).

On the other hand, with the rise of the colonial system, slavery implied another reality for the black woman, who had been forced to work outside, precisely in the care of the houses and children of the rich families, in conditions of extreme psychological, moral, physical and, many times, sexual violence. In her *Ain't a woman Black woman and feminism*, Bell Hooks reflects on the condition of the black woman and understands that, compared to the black man, also subjected to the slavery regime, "the black woman was exploited as a laborer in the fields, a domestic chore worker, an animal farmer, and as an object of the sexual assaults of white men" (Hooks, 2018, p. 18), therefore, black women experienced both ethnic and gender violence.

In the colonial period, rural slaves worked in the house or on the farm, and urban slaves worked in the house and in other trades. The former were installed in lodgings, like the *senzalas*. The latter lived in their masters' houses or in tenements. The relationship of black people with the house was predetermined by this period and passed on to other generations through the cultural memory of this group. The reference of the Negro's home was based on the dichotomy *Casa Grande* x *Senzala* and *Sobrado* x *Cortiço*.

Thus, *senzala* and tenement (*cortiço*) are synonymous with housing, despite the precarious conditions. It is mainly in these spaces that the blacks reaffirmed themselves as subjects of their own history, establishing relations among themselves and creating strategies to confront the system, as well as exercising their cultural and religious manifestations, even in situations of supreme surveillance, as is the case of the *senzalas* installed in the mills. This historical reality predetermined the relationship of the black population with the house. In other terms, "home is space, but it has a much broader meaning than that constituted only by a setting" (XAVIER, 2012,

p. 11). Regarding cultural manifestations, in *Sobrados e mucambos*, Gilberto Freyre equates that, frequently, blacks lived "in search of the big mills reputed to be good for slaves; mills with lots of blacks, sometimes plenty of cassava and corn, fragrant *cachaça*, nights of samba until morning" (FREYRE, 2013, p. 98).

The category house implies a duality for the black population. Thus, the house, which may or may not represent an extension of the *senzala*, in the metaphorical sense of imprisonment and its political implications, assumes meanings that go through the history of blacks in colonial societies. However, in *Insubmissible Tears of Women*, it is emphasized by the gender factor and translates the condition of *women* in patriarchal societies.

In *The House and the street: space, citizenship, women and death in Brazil*, Roberto DaMatta thinks about the social meaning of these spaces and understands that when

I say that "house" and "street" are sociological categories for Brazilians, I am saying that, among us, these words do not simply designate geographical spaces or commensurable physical things, but above all moral entities, spheres of social action, ethical provinces endowed with positivity, institutionalized cultural domains and, because of that, capable of arousing emotions, reactions, laws, prayers, songs, and aesthetically framed and inspired images (DAMATTA, 1997, p. 12).

Casa-grande and *senzala*, important categories of representation of the past, are inscribed as dichotomous spaces when we deal with racial relations in Brazil. In view of this recognition, we add that our postures were significantly predetermined by our place in space. This, in a way, is symptomatic of our position in the social fabric. In this way, the divergences between public (street) and private (home) have been assimilated and culturally incorporated. In other words, social structures ratify this antithesis and our actions are based on this dialectic, and can be perceived even beyond common sense, that is, in art, religion, and science.

In turn, "things, within the literary scene or our lives, often need a narrative to continue existing, or even to begin existing" (DALCASTAGNÈ, 2018, p. 464-465), therefore, things are important or not depending on the relationship we establish with them or the value we invest in them. However, in relation to the things that are part of the daily lives of black women, we can

identify that they are pregnant with cultural memory and significant symbolic value. Therefore, when Conceição Evaristo uses certain objects to compose the literary scene, she does so with awareness of the effect she intends to provoke.

Literature, as a social product, translated the feminine reality both in prose and poetry. Conceição Evaristo's writing, in turn, translated the reality of the black woman, through the bias and voice of the black female subject. The narratives analyzed take place in the domestic environment. The meaning of the house and of things in *Insubmissible Tears of Women* is interpreted individually and collectively and, therefore, assumes multiple shades. In other words, houses are spaces of great significance for the narratives studied, because it is from within them that the conflicts of the characters analyzed emerge. The emphasis will be on the domestic confinement of black women and, in some cases, on the presence of black women in public space, highlighting its implications.

In Rose Dusreis, for example, the house materializes the loneliness and pain of black families that are daily dissipated because of their social condition, as well as their historical condition. Meanwhile, by referring to the death of her father and the consequent fragmentation of her family, Rose weaves the threads of her pain.

It was even then that I discovered that longing is also a physical pain. At night, the absence of my sister's body, who slept with me in the same bed, left a void on our thin grass mattress, which hurt all over me, mistaking it for a feeling of cold (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 111).

The domestic spaces gradually become empty of human warmth and full of memories of life, which are symptomatic of how family relationships of populations in vulnerable conditions are determined by various factors. In *Insubmissible Tears of Women*, the memories of these insubmissible women are based on their losses, or rather, on the loss of the male figure (either the father or the partner) and imply a portrait of the black population's family structure. That is, in the experiences of black women,

the split between public and private that shapes the composition of households varies across social and class groupings, how racial or ethnic family members are integrated in different ways into wage labor, and how families alter household structures in response to changing political economy (e.g., formation

of clustered households, fragmentation of the family and female headship, migration in search of better opportunities) (COLLINS, 2016, p. 24).

The meaning given to the domestic spaces is based on this physical emptying, which has direct implications on the psychological aspects of these women, resulting in the consequent materialization of the loneliness of black women, who try to remake themselves in the face of the departure of their loved ones and gather from the emptiness of the house enough memories to recompose their stories. Things, like the bed of grass, therefore, are being assimilated as struts of memory, as well as symbols that denounce the social and class condition of the families.

Rose remembers her story exactly from a traumatic event, that is, the moment in which her family base is broken. It occurs precisely when

my father died and my mother was left alone to take care of her five daughters, who ranged in age from eleven to three. It was one of the most painful moments I have ever experienced. [...] With the death of my father, all that remained was my mother's work, whose earnings became insufficient. One of her bosses suggested that we girls could be shared, starting with my older sister, at the age of eleven she could work as a nanny. I remember vividly the image of my sister going with this girl. Mom and all of us cried profusely, even with the promise that from time to time Adiná would come home to visit us. [...] Months later, I would be the stray from the family. A congregation of Catholic nuns would take me away, under the responsibility of the local parish; they were the founders of a network of schools committed to the education of girls from wealthy families. All the pain in me at that moment became confused. The death of my father, the forced departure of my sister, my already scheduled departure to college, the lack that my mother made of me. At home, two girls, one seven and the other five years old, Penha and Fatima, were left alone with the precarious help of the neighbors. My mother, meanwhile, with the youngest of three, would get up every day and go to the city, where she worked at the house of the Fontes dos Reis Menezes family, my father's rich and distant relatives [...] So my mother worked for them, carrying the little one, Nininha, on her lap. My older sister, Adiná, taking care of children at other rich people's homes. Penha and Fatima, small, but already at home, alone (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 111-112).

These are memories in a melancholy tone and depict how family structures are modified as a result of the political economy and that "black women's family experiences represent a clear case of the operating mechanisms of race, gender, and class oppressions that shape family life" (COLLINS, 2016, p. 24).

It is through the telling of memories that we get to know the stories of these women, therefore, "oral memory also becomes an indispensable element in the articulation of this narrative of black-Brazilian experiences, which, in fact, constitute counter-narratives of the nation" (SANTOS, 2017, p. 107). These memorial fragments give account of a fact arising from the reality of black women: they often have to renounce their own family for the sake of someone else's family, to ensure their subsistence. Their relations with home and things are influenced by this absence from home. In light of this, women begin to identify with things outside their domestic world in order to cling to their own personal and/or family memories or to strategically escape from a complex reality. In any case, these memories "represent the collective consciousness of entire groups (families, villages) or individuals (personal memories and experiences)" (LE GOFF, 1990, p. 411).

The strategies launched by these women in facing such difficult realities determine their subjectivities, see the example of Maria do Rosário, with her radio set and her dog *Jesuszinho* (sic), as a way to mitigate her loneliness or to feel, in a way, "at home," after all, "[her] objects speak of her class, her gender, perhaps even her race, the places she has walked, her affections and her loneliness" (DALCASTAGNE, 2018, p. 466).

Regarding the theme, Le Goff (1990) considers that "memory is an essential element of what is usually called *identity*, individual or collective, whose search is one of the fundamental activities of individuals and societies today" (LE GOFF, 1990, p. 410). The name of her pet, *Jesuszinho* (sic), is part of her family's culture of giving its members names that refer to the Christian faith, precisely to Catholicism. Even Maria do Rosário states that her "saint name was an invention of the exaggerated Catholicism of my family" (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 43). She reproduces a typical behavior of her family group. Again, the radio set is a low-cost acquisition, although it was a gift, it characterizes her class and her circumstances, in other words, it portrayed the character's poverty. On the other hand, it may symbolize an attempt to establish communication with the outside world, considering that the character lived almost in an enclosed situation.

To better understand the function of things in these narratives, we resume the theoretical considerations present in the text *Memory: Individual, Social, and Cultural*, by Jan Assmann. In it, the author states:

Things do not "have" a memory of their own, but they can remind us, they can trigger our memory, because they carry the memories we invest them with, things such as dishes, feasts, rites, images, stories and other texts, landscapes and other "*lieux de mémoire*" (ASSMANN, 2008, p. 119).

In Rose Dusreis, the empty grass bed provokes the memory of a time when the sisters lived under the protection of their parents and their family ties were solid. This family fragmentation is often marked in *Insubmissible Tears of Women* and always occurs from the absence of the male figure - either by his death or by his departure, in this sense, "even loneliness is structured by the representation of absent others" (SPIVAK, 2010, p. 188). The thirteen characters that give name to the tales are the maintainers of the family, that is, mothers and/or solo women, responsible for the maintenance of the house and care of the children. The houses represent a *lieux de mémoire*, as they function as a kind of collection of family memories, keeping the past alive.

In the story Mirtes Aparecida da Luz, the object that serves for the rememberers to connect with the past is the photograph of the dead father/husband in the living room of the house. This photograph functions as a memory resource, as it refers to the affectionate memories of the father, from the discursive representation of the mother, with an image that conjugates in itself past and future, precisely in the scene in which Gaia Luz is "contemplating the photo of the father, whom she did not know, seeking to discover, in every trace of his face, the indecipherable mystery that he left us" (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 85).

As for the role of the photographic portrait in the story, we agree that photography "works, in our minds, as a kind of preserved past, where the scene is frozen, bringing to the present time memories of the past" (MONEGO and GUARNIERI, 2012, p. 72). That photograph holds the physical traits of the departed father and reinforces the daughter's desire to interpret them in order to understand his anguish and pain, as well as what motivations drove him to commit suicide, besides serving to strengthen ties with the one who died.

Again, photography appears in the literary scene, in the short story Isaltina Campo Belo, in which the main character clings to the portrait of her daughter, to remember and share painful aspects of the post-rape pregnancy, but also to vibrate for her achievement as a mother and talk

about how the mother-daughter relationship was established. The daughter, even though generated under a situation of violence, enjoys maternal love. For Erick Fromm, "maternal love is [exactly] an unconditional affirmation in the life of the child and of its needs" (FROMM, 1976, p. 75), justifying all the welcome on Isaltina's part towards her daughter Walquíria. Her little girl

was presented to me by means of a photo, proudly displayed by her mother. I could observe that, despite the resemblance between the two, the daughter did not hide her age, like Campo Belo. Throughout the narration of the story, Walquíria's photo never left us, sometimes in Isaltina's hands, sometimes in mine. When it was with me, I was always accepting the mother's offer, but it could also be the result of an involuntary gesture of mine, who, without realizing it, almost took Walquíria's picture. And when the girl's portrait, it was not in our hands, it was on the table contemplating us (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 56).

Thus, Walquíria's photograph plays such an important role in the narrated scene that, at times, it is as if Walquíria herself were physically present in that round of conversation. Thus, both the photo of the deceased father and the photo of the daughter serve to confirm that, "since the thirties and forties, with the advancement of cameras, which allowed a quick and instant fixation of scenes experienced by social groups and individuals themselves, photography started to record images that could serve as memory" (MONEGO and GUARNIERI, 2012, p. 73, our emphasis). Moreover, they work as links that allow people to maintain relationships among themselves, even physically or spiritually absent, after all, "it is the essence of culture the power to make present the beings that were absent from our daily lives" (BOSI, 2003, p. 161).

In association with the function of memory, Bosi (2003), in *O tempo vivo da memória: ensaios de psicologia social*, understands that "memory starts from the present, from a present eager for the past, whose perception 'is the vehement appropriation of what we know no longer belongs to us'" (IDEM, p. 20). The author recognizes that "the photo of the relative who has already died [and why not of the relatives who are far away] can be contemplated by the owner of the house as a heartfelt homage to his memory, that is why they are arranged in the living room, a space of socialization. We are, therefore, in the middle of "the realm of privacy, *tout court*, which interests and affects the personal, intimate relationship of the remembered and the rememberer" (IBIDEM, p. 28).

On one side, we have a daughter eager for answers and trying to keep the memory of a loved one; on the other, we have a proud mother trying to exude her happiness. In both cases, we are in the realm of affection. Fromm (1976), reflecting on maternal love, considers that this feeling is of a benevolent nature and "it is because of this selfless, self-sacrificing character that a mother's love has been considered the highest kind of love, the most sacred of all emotional bonds" (FROMM, 1976, p. 76). However, maternal love is not compulsory. In other terms, "love is an action, the practice of a human power, which can only be exercised in freedom and never as a result of compulsion. Love is an activity, not a passive affection; it is a "rising" and not a "falling" (IDEM, p. 44).

Saura, unlike Isaltina, was incapable of loving her daughter, giving her to her father's family as soon as the child was born. When asked if she feels remorse for having despised her daughter, Saura says that "no, I don't. And I can't invent a feeling in myself, just to save myself from others' judgments (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 123), undermining the myth of maternal instinct and mothers' compulsory love for their children.

Regarding the potency of things as capable of awakening memories, Regina Dalcastagnè (2018) recognizes that

An object can tell many stories, it can reconnect us with people and the past, it can be sad or happy, it can hold warmth and fragrance. In its scratches and fraying, in the frayed or small stain that remains, even in the simple wear and tear of the material we reconnect with the lives that have bumped into it, or that have wielded it (DALCASTAGNÈ, 2018, p. 464).

This confrontation takes place not only in relation to the remembered, but, mainly, with herself. Gaia Luz, from her father's photograph, finds herself again, because she bumps into her life story, as well as Isaltina, who bumps into her maternal condition. Thus, for Gaia Luz, the photograph serves as a thread that reconnects the character to her past, carrying the memories of her father, and therefore speaks not only of her, but of him, of her mother, and therefore of the family.

When we talk about memory objects, we are relating to the following contribution by Jan Assmann (2008), that is, that

External objects as memory carriers already play a role on the level of personal memory. Our memory, which we possess as beings endowed with a human mind, exists only in constant interaction, not only with other human memories, but also with "things," external symbols. With respect to things, such as Marcel Proust's famous *Madeleine*, or artifacts, objects, birthdays, holidays, icons, symbols, or landscapes, the term "memory" is not a metaphor, but a metonymy based on the material contact between a remembering mind and a remembering object (ASSMANN, 2008, p. 118-119).

These objects, as well as the house that surrounds them, assume an agent role in the narratives under study and perform the function of sustaining the personal memory of these characters. They "speak" for themselves. In relation to the memories that these objects and the house evoke, painful memories stand out. In this case, the house and the things are symptomatic of unwanted memories, and each empty room brings back memories of a sad past and "speaks" of those who live or lived in that space, defining their fears, but also their triumphs.

It is in this context that the main character of the short story Lia Gabriel declares:

At that time [...], the father had been gone for almost two years. He had left home after a fight in which, to protect myself, I took the children and went to my mother's house to nurse our body and soul wounds. When I returned with the children, all the rooms were empty. Not even a bed had he left. For revenge he had taken everything, including our clothes. I covered the floor with the few that were left, the ones I had taken, and we spent the night. An *oppressive memory of his image circulated through the empty rooms, while a feeling of nakedness haunted me and I knew why*. That night, I tucked the children in my lap until they fell asleep (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 97-98, our emphasis).

From this fragment, we understand that the house materializes violence and emotional abandonment, therefore it is symptomatic of the vulnerability of the black woman, who needs to put the "pieces" of her life together and recompose herself in the midst of chaos, besides making explicit an asymmetrical power relationship: where the oppressed (black man) becomes the oppressor (of the black woman). Moreover, it portrays the character's relationship with things: the feeling of nakedness occurs because the objects that made up that space "complemented" the character, representing a kind of clothing, classifying themselves as *biographical objects* (BOSI,

2003, p. 18), by incorporating themselves in such a way to her life, to the point of giving meaning to her trajectory.

This character's discourse is representative of his consciousness as an oppressed subject. According to Vasconcelos (2014),

Black women have always occupied a specific place in Brazilian society with regard to the possibility of perceiving the mechanisms of gender, class, and race oppression, because they have almost always been in invisible social places, in direct contact with the conflicts that involved the tensions related to these differences, both in domestic and public environments (VASCONCELOS, 2014, p. 113).

The awareness regarding the race criterion stands out in the passage where Lia says: "The children cried in a daze. I heard their screams and imagined their fear. Then he threw me into the maid's room and, with the belt in his hand, ordered me to take off my clothes, *whipping me several times*" (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 102, our emphasis). The use of the expression *whipping* refers to the time of slavery, as it was one of the main objects of representation of symbolic violence in the colonial period. The whip was the instrument used to "correct" blacks who, in any way, affronted the system or simply claimed their enslaved condition. With this, it instituted a form of silencing, representative of the relationship between masters and slaves.

In that period,

Rape was not the only method used to terrorize and dehumanize black women. Sadistic whippings on naked black women were another method employed [sic] to strip slave women of dignity. [...] The sadistic whippings of naked black women were socially sanctioned because they were seen as racial abuse, an owner punishing a rebellious slave, but they were also expressions of man's contempt and hatred for women (Hooks, 2018, p. 28)

Thus, the scene described above is representative of the misogynistic behavior of Lia's partner. The whippings occurred as a way to punish her, taking away her humanity, due to the brutality employed. Evidently, it was applied so that Lia could assimilate her condition in the household. However, the violent husband is not aware that the oppressors' violence takes away his own humanity.

Based on the memorial clippings discussed throughout this analysis and present in *Insubmissible Tears of Women*, one realizes that

memory is knowledge endowed with an identity index, it is knowledge about oneself, that is, one's own diachronic identity, either as an individual or as a member of a family, a generation, a community, a nation or a cultural and religious tradition. [...] These "affective ties" lend special intensity to memories. Remembering is a realization of belonging, even a social obligation (ASSMANN, 2008, p. 122).

Therefore, the memories of the characters in the work are not random or unconscious, but are affected (or maybe even determined!) by their conditions, as well as representative of their individualities, perceptible in their speeches, precisely in the terms they use to denounce their realities and in the point of view assumed in the enunciation. In this way, these memories also reflect the situation of class vulnerability that these characters represent, consequently, they portray their experiences from this social *locus*.

Identities are not fixed, but are in constant process, as Stuart Hall (2014), when discussing culture, and Judith Butler (2017), when discussing gender, point out. In the literary representation of the black women who make up the narratives of *Insubmissible Tears of Women*, we can see this proposition. Troçoléia, who later became Natalina Soledad, found that "affection lived in the kitchen" (EVARISTO, 2016, p. 23), that is, it came from the person with whom she was unrelated, it came from the invisible hands that performed all the laborious tasks of the house, probably a black woman, who also recognized in the girl her support network in that hostile environment. The kitchen represents shelter: it is in that space of the house that Troçoléia found shelter. Again, we return to the discussion of the theme of paternal and maternal love and its non-fulfillment, which implied different meanings to the kitchen of the home. Troçoléia did not find shelter in her mother's lap, who, rejected by her husband, began to reject her daughter as well, as a way to mitigate the guilt that her husband attributed to her, resulting in a harmful and oppressive vicious circle.

Another character who experienced contempt from a different angle was Maria do Rosário. In the house where she lived, she spent days and days in her room, dreaming of finding her loved ones again, and "because I had no one of my own around, I had grown fond of her. The girl who worked with the couple was called Berta Calazans" (IDEM, p. 50). The domestic space in this tale is filled with a scarcity of family members, consequently, of love.

In the collection, besides the house and its representation turned to its interior, as well as to the interior of its inhabitants, we have another angle of representation of this place. In the short story Regina Anastácia, precisely, the house is defined, first of all, by its spatial location in relation to the city, which, in turn, is divided into two poles. In this way, the author differentiates the profile of the residents of the *closed city* from the profile of the residents of the *open city*. The terms closed city and open city indicate, respectively, that in the former, the residents are the same, and in the latter, the residents are others.

Regina Anastacia exemplifies the family's routine, as well as their relationships with those on the opposite side, by relating that their

aunts, who until then had lived with us on the same land, began to sleep at work in the D'Antanhos' house. They would stay weeks and weeks without being able to come home, even though the distance between the closed city (the part where all Dantanhenses lived) and the open city (the part where the people who worked for the Dantanhenses lived, the unemployed people, and also the growing portion that arrived, night and day, from all over the state) (IBIDEM, 2016, p. 131).

In the excerpt, Conceição Evaristo writes about the disparities between the residents of the asphalt (closed city) and the residents of the hill (open city), establishing how their relationships took place. The residents of the closed city were the ones who held economic power and who exploited the labor of the residents of the open city, black and poor people who worked for them. However, the focus of the narrative is different from what is commonly represented in literature. This time, the view from the slum over the asphalt prevails, consequently, we have blacks and poor people conquering their spaces, becoming independent from them. Moreover, in the tale, we have black women dominating the decision-making positions.

In general, the life of these black women is marked by absences: be it of financial resources, affection, or freedom. However, even poor, unloved, and enclosed, sometimes circulating inside their homes, but in limited and limiting spaces (mainly bedroom and kitchen), the characters in *Insubmissible Tears of Women* break with stereotypes, contest imposed social roles, and empower themselves with their own discourses and destinies.

Final considerations

Conceição Evaristo comes from a marginalized social, cultural and economic context; however, from an early age, the author's awareness of the forms of oppression and exploitation she experienced due to her condition as a peripheral and marginalized subject emerged. Meanwhile, even in the face of few possibilities for advancement, Conceição Evaristo outlined strategies for confrontation and liberation. To overcome these limitations, as well as their implications in the most diverse aspects, Conceição Evaristo needed to be resilient and reinvent herself every day, as the black women in *Insubmissible Tears of Women* also do with mastery. It is life inscribed in fiction, it is writing and autofiction.

Thus, through literary making, Conceição Evaristo propagates the feelings and complaints of people who were and are constantly silenced. Precisely because of this, the author's writing provokes a careful look, due to the displacement of the gaze that she performs on the literary level, precisely with regard to the construction of black female characters, as well as other peripheral individuals. In this sense, the speeches of the black female characters are representative of the agendas of people who experience the intersectionality of discrimination, domination, and oppression of race, class, and gender.

The black women in *Insubmissible Tears of Women* are complex and intriguing characters. Their representations demonstrate Conceição Evaristo's commitment to create them in a way that counteracts the traditional ways in which they are underrepresented in literature, so we refute any simplistic conclusions or those based on a comfortable empiricism about these characters and their experiences. In other words, Conceição Evaristo's black women are authentic and resistant. Even in the face of oppressive realities that affect them equally because they are black women, their reactions are divergent. Their stances are based on what differentiates them from each other, that is, on their subjectivities.

In this way, even sharing common experiences, the black women in *Insubmissible Tears of Women* experience the world from what is proper of the subject, that is, their ideas and emotions, tied to their particular pretensions and interests, reacting to their realities from these differences. These black women are women who project themselves from their realities. Thus, through fiction, Conceição Evaristo allows silenced and marginalized subjects to break the silences and the invisibilized places to which they were submitted, establishing new discourses in literary narrative, causing abrupt changes in the portrait of literature.

The representation of this marginalized subject, due to her social, economic, class, and gender condition, comes mainly from the author's personal trajectory and her engagement with political issues, essential aspects to read and understand her writings, since they significantly affect her literary project. In this way, her texts represent, above all, counter-discourses, since they contest the hegemonic discourses, without abstaining from poetic language. Therefore, we emphasize that Conceição Evaristo's writing is classified by this literary project of counter-discourse.

In this way, her writing differs from the writings commonly found in canonical literature. In this sense, besides the peculiarities that permeate the fictional work of the literary text, we have a writing being produced as a form of resistance against the white and male domination of the Brazilian literary field. As we pointed out at the beginning, in the writings of this author themes of the female universe emerge and are constructed from the perspective of a female and subaltern subject.

Therefore, these are different approaches that undermine the negative symbolisms inherited by culture about black women and their experiences portrayed through literature. In this sense, the literary production of black authors through the insertion of their voices in the text, implies, in other terms, representativeness. With this, experiences and conceptions of the world are often misrepresented and disregarded, mediating the literary text. In relation to Conceição Evaristo, precisely, the experiences of this author permeate her narratives, which is why they contest hegemonic places and representations, besides pointing out segregationist behaviors and attitudes.

By taking hold of speech, the black women in *Insubmissible Tears of Women* mark their places and use their discourses to counter hegemonic ideological forces. In this case, gender issues come on top of other issues. In it, Conceição Evaristo portrays, in an empathetic way, the violence suffered daily by black women, however, in her writing, the women assume their place of speech to denounce the violence to which they have been historically subjected, pointing, therefore, how racism determines postures.

In this way, the black women represented in the narratives of *Insubmissible Tears of Women* have made their social and political condition places of reflection and transgression of norms. They belong to diverse social segments and undermine the traditional images of black

women in literature. They take possession of speech, as well as their destinies, they are agents of their own histories, thus transforming their lives.

Therefore, we would like to highlight how Conceição Evaristo conquered her space in Brazilian Literature. Her trajectory began in elementary school, when she dared to enroll in a writing contest held at school. At the time, her text was well evaluated, but, according to the evaluators, her behavior was inadequate. Conceição Evaristo almost lost the prize. Certainly, this attack was crucial for the writer to become aware of her creative capacity, as well as of the limitations she would face through an act that she herself classifies as revolutionary.

Subsequently, like her predecessors, Conceição Evaristo needed to create strategies to confront sexism and racism in the Brazilian literary field. Thus, we highlight how the peculiarities of her literary project, especially with regard to the point of view assumed by the author in the narrative and the representation of black people as an aesthetic element, determined her rejection by publishers, in other words, the phallogentric and macho context of the literary field added to ethnic and class conditions implied the usurpation of her right. Nevertheless, because of this, Conceição Evaristo found alternative ways to publish her texts.

In relation to the theme analyzed, we consider that these women's memories are affected by their individual experiences, but, on the other hand, influenced by their collective experiences. Their memories, therefore, are symptomatic of the class, gender, and race oppression that they experience on a daily basis. In relation to the various identities assumed by these women, there is a point in which they are similar, which concerns, precisely, the racism that affects them, determined by their social relations, but, especially, their relations with their peers. These relations are largely constructed asymmetrically, with men silencing and oppressing women. On the other hand, their relations with the house and things are also permeated by their individual and collective experiences, inscribing, in the private environment, daily lives marked by violence.

In light of all that we have exposed throughout this discussion, especially with regard to the structural racism of the literary field and the publishing market, we reiterate the importance of, as teachers, readers, and researchers who are sensitive and aware of the dominations inscribed in the power relations permeated through the literary text, to project the literary productions of marginalized authors, who start from their conceptions of the world as emerging social subjects, in order to provide them with spaces for representation and legitimation, taking them into the classrooms and the academies.

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