

Tatiana's Return, a Story about Black Motherhood / O retorno de Tatiana, uma história sobre a maternidade negra

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to analyze how the motherhood of black women is represented in the short story *O retorno de Tatiana* [Tatiana's Return], by Miriam Alves, considering the reference to Afro-diasporic matrices and how they bring ancestry to this narrative. The discussion is committed to theories and concepts specific to contemporary Afro-Brazilian literature at the intersection with theoretical paradigms originating from black feminist thought. By engendering a means of freedom and transcendence, Miriam Alves raises reflection on the prohibition of motherhood for black women and the ways in which they can exercise motherhood through matrifocality and motherhood by extension, also thinking the religiosity of Afro-descendant origin as a place of healing for womb-matrix of the main character. The short story can be instituted as a settlement of resistance, with the ancestral force manifested in the way of living, feeling and writing.

KEYWORDS: Miriam Alves; Ancestry; Matrifocality; Orishas; Afro-Brazilian Short Stories

RESUMO

O objetivo desta pesquisa é analisar de que modo está representada a maternidade da mulher negra no conto O retorno de Tatiana, de Miriam Alves, considerando a referência às matrizes afro-diaspóricas e de como estas trazem a ancestralidade nesta narrativa. A discussão está comprometida com teorias e conceitos próprios da literatura afro-brasileira contemporânea na intersecção com paradigmas teóricos oriundos do pensamento feminista negro. Ao engendrar um meio de liberdade e de transcendência, Miriam Alves suscita a reflexão sobre a interdição da maternidade de mulheres negras até os modos como estas podem exercer a maternidade por meio da matrifocalidade e da maternidade por extensão, também pensando a religiosidade de matriz afrodescendente como local de cura para o útero-matriz da personagem principal. O conto pode ser instituído como assentamento de resistência, sendo a força ancestral manifestada no modo de viver, de sentir e de escrever.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Miriam Alves; Matrifocalidade; Orixás; Contos afro-brasileiros

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1 What Does It Make Tatiana Bleed?

In the book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker states that a woman must bring light to another one, and that this is a beautiful moment to be a black woman. The Afro-American author states: “[...] I understand that each woman is capable of truly bringing another into the world” (Walker, 2004, p. 43).¹ And that is what Miriam Alves present us: the story of a black woman taking as basis a great axis – the literature as *settlement of resistance* (Sales, 2020) and constituent of knowledge being woven based in the ancestor accumulation of African matrices, told through stories of regular black women, but which become a way to transformation.

Therefore, when focusing the story on ancestry, Alves exalts the epistemology that confronts the maintenance of a system that keeps black people hostage of social ranking based on their social and ethnic origin. Ancestry is freedom, it is a means to contest and subvert the power of “*images of control*” (Collins, 2008),² which attempts to condition black women.

Ancestry carries living and experiences for black women, from a narrative location, which is not impacted by the structure of the knowledge coloniality. To talk about the importance of art and literature as legitimate creators of thinking, I bring Patricia Hill Collins's voice about the intellectuality and the validity of what black women produce.

An intellectual contribution to feminism is not only the knowledge expressed by women recognized in Academy, but mainly that produced by women who thought about their experiences as mothers, teachers, community leaders, writers, domestic workers, activists for the abolition of slavery and civil rights, singers and composers of popular music (Collins, 2019, p. 11).³

¹ WALKER, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004

² COLLINS, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Consciousness and the Politic Empowerment*. UK: Routledge, 2008.

³ In Portuguese: “É contribuição intelectual ao feminismo não apenas o conhecimento externado por mulheres reconhecidas no mundo acadêmico, mas principalmente aquele produzido por mulheres que pensaram suas experiências como mães, professoras, líderes comunitárias, escritoras, empregadas domésticas, militantes pela abolição da escravidão e pelos direitos civis, cantoras e compositoras de música popular.”

From this point of view, Collins dialogues with the perspective of the *lived-conceived*, by allowing, in a concrete way, the formulation of critical proposals that fracture the academic canon, sustained by positivists, evolutionists and one-dimension theoretical ideologies (Zacarias, 2021).

Therefore, it is the comprehension that allows to *Escrevivencia*⁴ and *Amefricanidade*⁵ the possibility of being a perspective to knowledge production and of aesthetics originated not from the accumulation of the national canon, but “[...] from inside to outside [...],” both as for literary criticism as new ways of aesthetic production, from:

[...] the use of black living to inform the construction of texts, it is the black person putting himself in the position of those who are going to talk about their own history and thus covering a series of gaps in the historical void. It is a way of states his own existence because is a writing contaminated by the subjective of the being (Zacarias, 2021.p. 23).⁶

By the exposed, the choice for *O retorno de Tatiana* [Tatiana’s return] as analysis object comes by the fact of the story elaborates and highlights other kind of black experience, since inside, by means of *Escrevivência*, I understand that the story constrains the silence about the experience of black motherhood, of the black female body and how a network of affection among black women can be developed based on the ancestry accumulation. In this way, when a individual story is told, but with collective resonance, it is possible thinking the importance of self-preservation and the histories of adaptation, “[...] resistance, reinterpretation and creation of new ways” (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 329)⁷ of world, having as main reference the Afro-diasporic America.

⁴ *Escrevivência*: a concept created by Conceição Evaristo de Macedo which means Poetics that contemplates the subjectiviness of black women as social group.

⁵ *Amefricanidade*: concept developed by the Brazilian philosopher and anthropologist Lélia Gonzalez in the 1980s based on the idea that Black people are first and foremost “African” - Concerns on how diasporic people translated, transformed and kept the African matrix of the world through Americas.

⁶ In Portuguese: “utilização da vivência negra para informar a construção de textos, é a pessoa negra se colocando no lugar de quem vai falar sobre sua própria história e assim cobre uma série de lacunas do vazio histórico. É uma forma de afirmar a própria existência por ser uma escrita contagiada pela subjetividade do sujeito.”

⁷ In Portuguese: “adaptação, resistência, reinterpretação e criação de novas formas.”

2 Black Motherhood in Nanã's Lap

O retorno de Tatiana is one of the eleven short stories present in the anthology *Mulher Mat(r)iz* (2011) [Woman Matrix], a book in which the preface Moema Augel announces that “[...] the short stories deal, in a way or another, of women, matrix, source, origin, navel” (Augel, 2011, p. 13)⁸ to what I add: motherhood, basis, beginning, uterus, “Give birth, procreate. Search... Give Birth, Procreate. Keep the pulse of life, uterus of destiny” (Alves, 2011; emphasis added by the author).⁹

Tatiana is a woman that has a safe life, has a home and a good job, from which she guaranteed a privileged social status, and I make this statement to compare it to the representation of black women in other works, belonging to the national canon to exemplify: Aunt Nastácia, by Monteiro Lobato, from *O sítio do pica-pau amarelo* [The Adventures Of Little Nose I - The Yellow Woodpecker Farm], the abdicated domestic worker, there is also the hypersexualized mulatta, Gabriela, from *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon*, by Jorge Amado (1991);¹⁰ Rita Baiana, from *O Cortiço* [The Tenement], by Aluísio de Azevedo as someone who carries the sensuality in a primitive and animal way, simply because she is a black person, to name only a few examples. Therefore, with Tatiana's safe life, it can be noted how much this story already carries, in its pages, the counter-discursive announcement on which a black woman can be in Brazilian literature.

Tatiana is doing well at her job, until she gets pregnant, is abandoned by her boyfriend, has an abortion, and then, goes into a existential crisis/neurosis that follows her during all the story, which we learn about by her own voice, since the narrative is developed from two movements: 1) Tatiana's voice, a flow that emerge through her words, that are digressions presented in the text, marked by italics; 2) the voice of the omniscient narrator. Both voices refer to the abortion experience and what happens after it, the trauma and the vertigo, the fall of sky, in addition to other subjective dimensions, marked by the presence-absence of the child she did not have and that impacts the lived experience. The voice of Tatiana's conscience weaves the sensitive power of the story,

⁸ In Portuguese: “os contos tratam, de uma maneira ou de outra, da mulher, da matriz, fonte, origem, umbigo.”

⁹ In Portuguese: “Parir. Procriar. Buscar... Parir. Procriar. Manter o pulsar da vida, útero do destino.”

¹⁰ AMADO, Jorge. *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon*. Translated from Portuguese by James L. Taylor and William L. Grossman. Greenwich: Crest Book, 1991.

the voice and the letter, the explicit thought through the particular aesthetics in performance that mobilizes the language to shed light on the experience of Tatiana's body of "[...] skin tanned between the olive and the copper being melted."¹¹

Through the divagations written by the protagonist, her sister, Lau, "[...] was able to build a bridge to Tati's inner self [...]" (Alves, 2011, p. 50)¹² and to understand what her sister went through and goes to help her, mobilizing the presence of other women and their ancestral knowledge to restore the weakened lucidity and health of Tatiana. The story is built based on the accumulation of African matrix, since page one, when it announces that Tati "[...] even looked for a *pai de santo*¹³ [Father of Saint] [...]" (p. 47),¹⁴ until the last page, when "[...] the *Mãe de Santo*¹⁵ [Mother of Saint] asked her to return in forty days. Lau was reassured. Tati would return" (p. 55).¹⁶

"I killed it!... I killed my seed... I killed it...! A three-month-old seed... I killed it. I killed my uterus" (Alves, 2011, p. 50; emphasis added by the author).¹⁷ While repeating *I killed it*, Tatiana shows her knowledge of what her destiny and her own faith should be: procreation, to have children, giving birth repeatedly, generating in her "destined uterus," imprisoned by the condition of her own body. Tatiana, a fertile young woman, would have a commitment to motherhood, should be the matrix of life, but she interrupts the pregnancy, therefore, the cycle of life, and this is the trigger to her deep emotional crisis.

Science and medicine cannot find healing for what they do not know, what they cannot name. In the Afro-Brazilian short story of Miriam Alves, the healing for Tatiana is in the return to the tradition of African-based religions. While she repeats *giving birth* and *procreating*, Tatiana reveals her own crisis, a conflict transition that will lead to a personal revolution. However, the conflicts of the character, although existential and indivisible, are issues that are at a crossroad between the individual and society, because motherhood still is a central experience in women's lives (Bairros, 1995). However, for black women this motherhood is forbidden, and Alves brings us this discussion when she

¹¹ In Portuguese: "pele entre o azeitonado e o cobre sendo fundido."

¹² In Portuguese: "construir uma ponte até o interior de Tati."

¹³ A male priest in Candomblé and Umbanda.

¹⁴ In Portuguese: "procurou até pai de santo."

¹⁵ A female priest in Candomblé and Umbanda.

¹⁶ In Portuguese: "a Mãe de Santo pediu-lhe que retornasse dali a quarenta dias. Lau tranquiliza-se. Tati voltaria."

¹⁷ In Portuguese: "Matei!... Matei minha semente... Matei...! Semente de três meses... Matei. Matei meu útero."

presents the character of the black woman who has an abortion and is abandoned by her man, unable to start a family and continue the cycle of life, because her body would be her own condition (Beauvoir, 1975).

Tatiana has this condition-destiny internalized, the persistent and firm thought about motherhood, of being against abortion, as her sister states : “[...] and thinking that Tati was against abortions, she was always criticizing family planning, a name for mass sterilization promoted by the government, she said.”¹⁸ About Tatiana, it can be stated, in consonance with the thinking of Isildinha Baptista Nogueira, that, in allusion to State’s policy, “[...] through the mass sterilization of black women, with the 1980s being the most representative example,”¹⁹

In the current situation, black people can be aware of their condition and the historical and political implications of racism, but this does not prevent them from being affected by the marks that the social-cultural reality of racism has inscribed in their psyche (Nogueira, 2021, p. 34).²⁰

According to the scholar, Tatiana is aware on the oppression she suffered regarded to the intersection between race and gender in her life, as also punctuates the black intellectual Mirian Cristina dos Santos, in an analysis about *O retorno de Tatiana*:

It is noted that abortion appears linked to a lonely woman, without the support of her partner or family. In this sense, in the story in question, this practice appears as emotional and symbolic violence, by demanding that the fertile woman commit to motherhood. In this process, Tatiana is emotionally tortured by the rupture of the cycle of life (Santos, 2018, p. 84).²¹

Thus, it is understood, from the analyses, that Tatiana brings with herself the comprehension of how the intersectionality of “race,” gender and motherhood affect her

¹⁸ In Portuguese: “e pensar que Tati era contra abortos, vivia criticando o planejamento familiar, um nome para esterilização em massa fomentada pelo governo, dizia.”

¹⁹ In Portuguese: “[...] através da esterilização em massa de mulheres negras tendo os anos de 1980, como exemplo, mais representativo.”

²⁰ In Portuguese: “Na situação atual, o negro pode ser consciente de sua condição e das implicações histórico-políticas do racismo, mas isso não impede que ele seja afetado pelas marcas que a realidade sociocultural do racismo deixou inscritas na sua psique.”

²¹ In Portuguese: “Nota-se que o aborto aparece vinculado à mulher solitária, sem apoio do parceiro ou da família. Nesse sentido, no conto em questão, essa prática surge enquanto violência emocional e simbólica, ao cobrar da mulher fértil o compromisso com a maternidade. Nesse processo, Tatiana é torturada emocionalmente pelo rompimento do ciclo da vida.”

life negatively, grounding itself in bad perceptions about the sexuality of black women, as pointed out by her sister, when she says that Tati understood the mass sterilization, promoted by the government, which “[...] she called the castration of the poor. Eliminating the poverty, eliminating the poor” (Alves, 2011, p. 52).²²

It is interesting to note that, from the life and experience of the body of this character, by means of literature and intellectuality of a black women, discussion that are present in daily life of other women are placed and, therefore, literature does not escape the life. In “*Grandes mães, reais senhoras*” [Great Mothers, Real Ladies], an article present in the book *Guerreiras de natureza: mulher negra, religiosidade e ambiente* [Warriors of Nature: Black Women, Religiosity And Environment], Gizêlda Melo Nascimento also problematizes, as the character Tatiana, the lives originated from uterus of black women:

[...] the alley connoting a space of social exclusion where lives and voices seethe and proliferate on the margin of the socially recognized sphere; the alley also connoting a large uterus where black lives are inexhaustibly conceived despite the current against it. The paths and lives diverted, discarded by the sharp and (correct) straight historical linearity. Voices outside the route of Westernized Brazilian society (Nascimento, 2008, p. 48).²³

What can be inferred from this section of the work under study and the social criticism of Nascimento is that there are undesirable and interdicted bodies, as Conceição Evaristo (2009, p. 23) points out: “[...] the black female character does not appear as a muse, romantic heroine or mother. The offspring of black woman is killed in the literary discourse, not giving her any role in which she asserts herself as the center of a lineage.”²⁴ In line to the thinking of Evaristo, Eduardo de Assis Duarte also punctuates on the sterility of black woman in the national literature:

²² In Portuguese: “ela chamava de castração do pobre. Eliminar a pobreza, eliminando o pobre.”

²³ In Portuguese: “o beco conotando espaço de exclusão social onde vidas e vozes fervilham e proliferam à margem da esfera socialmente reconhecida; o beco conotando também um grande útero onde vidas negras são inesgotavelmente concebidas apesar da corrente contra ela. As vias e vidas desviadas, alijadas pela cortante e (cor)reta linearidade histórica. Vozes fora da rota ocidentalizada sociedade brasileira.”

²⁴ In Portuguese: “a personagem feminina negra não aparece como musa, heroína romântica ou mãe. Mata-se no discurso literário a prole da mulher negra, não lhe conferindo nenhum papel no qual ela se afirme como centro de uma descendência.”

In this order, the condition of the available body is going to mark the literary representation of mulatta: an erotic animal par excellence, devoid of reason or sensibility, confined in the empire of senses and and to the tricks and mannerism of seduction. As a rule, torn away from her family, without a father or mother, and destined for pleasure without commitments, the mulatta constructed by Brazilian literature has her configuration marked by the sign of the fornicating woman of the European tradition, a nocturnal and carnal being, an avatar of the prostitute. What is particularly striking is the fact that this representation, so centered on the dark-skinned body sculpted in every detail for carnal pleasure, leaves visible in many of its editions a subtle biological handicap: infertility that, surreptitiously, implies shaking the very idea of Afro-descendant (Duarte, 2009, p. 7).²⁵

Based on these two reflections, both Evaristo's and Duarte's, I raise some questions: in this story, is there yet another life blocked, an interrupted black motherhood? In what way does this erase what is already crystallized in the national canon? It was only when I turned to Gizelda Nascimento more than once that I was able to find clues to the answers, because Miriam Alves's words open up the possibility for the creation of motherhood, yes, and her way of reproducing this image is what signifies the particularity of the matrix, of the mother, of the origin, of the navel: *matrifocality* and the image of the *Great Mother* (Nascimento, 2008), based on the idea of motherhood by extension. When these images begin to emerge in the story, Tatiana's neurosis/psychosis finds possibilities for healing. Therefore, it is interesting to note the mother's role in the story: they are supportive women who can assume this condition through *matrifocality*. For Nascimento,

Matrifocality, in this sense, is not represented for one single person, but concludes a role that can be played for everyone ready to do it in a determined situation, for those who have large arms to offer. The image that comes to us is the one of many beams converging to one focal point: women-beacons (Nascimento, 2008, p. 57).²⁶

²⁵ In Portuguese: “Nessa ordem, a condição de corpo disponível vai marcar a figuração literária da mulata: animal erótico por excelência, desprovida de razão ou sensibilidade mais acuradas, confinada ao império dos sentidos e às artimanhas e trejeitos da sedução. Via de regra desgarrada da família, sem pai nem mãe, e destinada ao prazer isento de compromissos, a mulata construída pela literatura brasileira tem sua configuração marcada pelo signo da mulher fornicaria da tradição europeia, ser noturno e carnal, avatar da meretriz. Chama a atenção, em especial, o fato dessa representação, tão centrada no corpo de pele escura esculpido em cada detalhe para o prazer carnal, deixar visível em muitas de suas edições um sutil aleijão biológico: a infertilidade que, de modo sub-reptício, implica em abalar a própria ideia de afrodescendência.”

²⁶ In Portuguese: “A matrifocalidade, nesse sentido, não vem representada por uma só pessoa, mas conclui um papel que pode ser assumido por quem estiver pronta a desempenhá-lo em determinada situação, por quem tiver braços frondosos a ofertar. A imagem que nos chega é a de vários feixes convergidos para um foco: mulheres-faróis.”

In *O retorno de Tatiana*, the maternal figure appears in the youngest sister of Tatiana, Laura: “[...] she was Tati’s darling, without further explanation. Perhaps with the fourteen-year age difference, Tati treated Lau as her daughter” (Alves, 2011, p. 49).²⁷ Here is the matrifocality: Lau, younger, is the one who supports her older sister:

Tati complained about her apartment. She didn’t want to go back to her parents’ house. She didn’t know where to go. Lau helped her. Tati’s eyes were sad and empty. [...] Lau was patient with Tati. [...] The things Tati said and wrote were beautiful to her. She saw beauty and lightness. Feelings that transcended pain. Lau wanted to build a bridge to Tati’s inner self. She was getting worried. [...] Lau closed her school enrollment and took Tati to the beach, a small and remote house she had bought with her savings. On holidays and weekends, it served as a place to rest (Alves, 2011, pp. 50-51).²⁸

Matrifocality, as described by Nascimento (2008) is not attributed to only one figure, but to a role that can be played by several women as their capacities and needs at the time. The idea is complemented by Vasconcelos (2014), who has written the thesis entitled *No colo das iabás: maternidade, raça e gênero em escritoras afro-brasileiras contemporâneas* [In the Lap of the Iabás: Motherhood, Race and Gender in Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Writers], highlighting how the motherhood in the Afro-descendant narratives defy the patriarchal logic, rejecting stereotypes and offering new representations based on the female experiences, reclaiming autonomy over these women’s own narrative:

The theme (motherhood) is present in the fiction and in the poetry of Afro-descendant authors, denying the patriarchal logic of domination that sought to construct an image of these women always distant from the maternal figure, as useful products of male sexual fantasy. The new representations brought by the female writers, are building other meanings, distant from the old stereotypes, based on the perspectives that come from the women experience, who has sought since the first

²⁷ In Portuguese: “era o xodó de Tati, sem maiores explicações. Talvez com a diferença de quatorze anos, Tati tratava Lau como filha.”

²⁸ In Portuguese: “Tati desfazia-se do seu apartamento. Não queria voltar para a casa dos pais. Não sabia para onde ir. Lau ajudava-a. Os olhos de Tati estavam tristes e vazios. [...] Lau tinha paciência com Tati. [...] Achava bonitas as coisas que Tati falava e escrevia. Via beleza e leveza. Sentimentos que transcendiam a dor. Lau queria construir uma ponte até o interior de Tati. Estava ficando preocupada. [...] Lau fechou a matrícula na escola, levou Tati para a praia, casinha pequena afastada comprada com economias. Nos feriados e fim de semana, servia como descanso.”

feminist actions, take to appropriate of what is said about themselves (Vasconcelos, 2014, p. 182).²⁹

Two excerpts, one from Alves's short story and the other from Vasconcelos's reflection, show that Alves's work creates a new perspective on motherhood beyond the traditional one based on patriarchy, and here I come to understand the Great Mother, which Giselda Nascimento discusses, and the idea of motherhood, which is given by extension:

The all-encompassing, intimate and welcoming image of a circle, which, in a symbolic reading, is associated with the mother's womb. The image we would infer from this would be that of several women around a single figure – the maternal one – forming a large circle to embrace and protect her countless children: the image of a Great Mother (Nascimento, 2008, p. 60).³⁰

One day Lau takes Tatiana to rest in a beach house. After the first night in the house, Lau wakes up and her sister is not in the house, then she follows the sound of drums that she hears in distance, until she comes in a house, where she is welcomed by a young and an old woman, both women wearing turbans, there were also two men playing the drums. Without naming religions, there is in the story a suggestive image of a house of African-based religion, specially when there is the image of *alguidar*³¹ and the old lady to whom Lau makes a respectful reverence, which leads us to think that it is a *terreiro de Candomblé*,³² because, since has a older woman as a leader, refers to iyalorixá liturgy, according to which the older women

[...] They are great repositories and transmitters of the cult's knowledge, its mysteries, secrets and magic. They know the forces of nature and

²⁹ In Portuguese: "O tema (maternidade) está presente na ficção e na poesia das autoras afrodescendentes, negando a lógica patriarcal de dominação que buscou construir uma imagem dessas mulheres sempre distante da figura materna, como produtos úteis à fantasia sexual masculina. As novas representações, trazidas mais e mais pelas escritoras, vão construindo outros sentidos, distantes dos antigos estereótipos, a partir de perspectivas que partem da experiência de mulheres que tem buscado desde as primeiras ações feministas, apropriarem-se daquilo que se diz sobre elas mesmas."

³⁰ In Portuguese: "A imagem abarcadora, íntima e acolhedora de um círculo, o qual, numa leitura simbólica, vem associado ao ventre materno. A imagem que depreenderíamos daí seria a de várias mulheres em torno de uma só figura – a materna – formando um grande círculo a abraçar e proteger seus inúmeros filhos: a imagem de uma Grande mãe."

³¹ A ceramic bowl, typical of Candomblé.

³² A sacred space where the religious encounters of Candomblé takes place.

know how to manipulate them to solve problems of the concrete and spiritual existence of the individuals under their care (Carneiro, 2008, p. 124).³³

The reverence made by Lau, associated with the *alguidar*, reinforces the idea of respect for the spiritual hierarchy, very common in *terreiros*. In this way, as Carneiro (2008) punctuates, these women are leaders and guardians of secrets and mysteries of the cults, connecting the community to the forces of nature and offering spiritual and material support for those under their care. The way how Tatiana is cared by her sister and by women of the *terreiro*; from a interrupted pregnancy to being welcomed by her sister and by the *Mãe de Santo*, until she reaches the perspective of become fertile again, represents a great importance to Brazilian literature written by black women, leading to the comprehension that this short story by Miriam Alves constitutes in a settlement of resistance, according to the thesis of Cristian Souza Sales:

The settlement, therefore, is closely related to black African ancestry and ancestral female knowledge. In the liturgy of the *terreiro*, the settlements are direct channels with the orishas and ancestors. In another interpretation, they are transformed into energy that circulates through the word-ritual in black Brazilian poetry and in black female writing to revere Osun. It is the ancestral force that manifests itself in the ways of feeling, living and writing (Sales, 2020, p. 4).³⁴

The Sales's thesis points to literature as a way of marking the African origin in the world, therefore, a matrix – inscribed in the bodies of the Afro-descendants, and that, also is part of the national history. This became my choice of view the work: the settlement of resistance exulted in words-delirious of Tatiana evoking Nanã, and, thus, her ancestry through which she is going to find the heal by the hands of woman and their knowledge, who came before her, but who become present through the African cosmoview:

³³ In Portuguese: “são grandes depositárias e transmissoras dos conhecimentos do culto, de seus mistérios e segredos, de sua magia. Elas conhecem as forças da natureza e sabem manipulá-las para a solução de problemas da existência concreta e espiritual dos indivíduos que estão sob sua guarda.”

³⁴ In Portuguese: “O assentamento, portanto, relaciona-se intimamente com a ancestralidade negro-africana e os saberes ancestrais femininos. Na liturgia do terreiro, os assentamentos são canais diretos com os orixás e os ancestrais. Em outra leitura, transformam-se em energia que circula através da palavra-ritual na poesia negra brasileira e na escrita feminina negra para reverenciar Osun. É a força ancestral que se manifesta nas formas de sentir, viver e escrever.”

[...] *returning to the motherland... returning... to the motherland... return...* In the night storm, the wind had brought the sounds of drums. Drums and the singing of the *terreiro*: *Nanã, Nanã Naburoke, Nanã ê. Nanã Naburoke, Nanã ê!* Lau has paid attention to the song, for a moment Tati has slept smiling, with a peaceful expression (Alves, 2011, p. 53; emphasis added by the author).³⁵

Note that literature presents itself as a tool to make visible other experiences, knowledge, religion and singular ways of life, as example, when Tatiana pays reverence to orishas:

I stumble. I stumble and then I stumble again. I am short of breath, but I fill myself with courage and I go. I am a being. I am of all the orishas. I felt Shangô in the wind, who called Iansã and they left... I am of all the orishas. Oxum in grace, beauty, diplomacy and trickery, all covered in cowrie shells and gold, called Ogum there in the battles. With joy, they made another being appear in the star constellation to walk the path of the world. I am a being. I felt the wind. I felt the stars. Yemanjá raised the waves of the sea so high that I could see the foam smile, to make me happy (Alves, 2011, p. 54; emphasis added by author).³⁶

As Tatiana become closer to her ancestry of African matrix, expressed in the rituals and by evoking Nanã, she becomes stronger, she becomes greater and starts to be calmed and healed. Then, this story written by Miriam Alves makes her a guardian of African matrix and its knowledge told through literature, as Cristian Sales states:

Black women who echo the speech of their community, of their people with their specific demands. In this regard, they collaborate to “strengthen our existence, which allows resistance, re-existence” and also establish other epistemologies. As a space for the expression of the ancestral sacred, [...] they are knowledge woven and established, fundamentally, “by black women who embroider their collective, united, ancestral and enchanted experiences” (Sales, 2020, p. 7).³⁷

³⁵ In Portuguese: “retornar à terra mãe... retornar... à terra mãe... retornar... Na tempestade da noite, o vento havia trazido sons de atabaques. Atabaques e cantoria de terreiro: Nanã, Nanã Naburoke, Nanã ê. Nanã Naburoke, Nanã ê! Lau prestou atenção à cantiga, por um instante Tati dormia sorrindo, semblante tranquilo.”

³⁶ In Portuguese: “Vou num tropeço. Vou num tropeço e novamente vou. Falta-me o ar, porém encho-me de valentia e vou. Sou um ser. Sou de todos os orixás. Senti no vento Shangô, que chamou Iansã e se foram... eu sou de todos os orixás. Oxum em graça, beleza, diplomacia e artimanhas, toda coberta com búzios e ouro, chamou Ogum lá nas batalhas. Com alegria, fizeram na constelação estrelar mais um ser para trilhar o caminho do mundo. Sou um ser. Senti o vento. Senti as estrelas. Yemanjá levantou as ondas do mar tão alto que pude ver as espumas sorrir, para alegrarem-me.”

³⁷ In Portuguese: “Mulheres negras que ecoam o falar de sua comunidade, de seu povo com as suas demandas específicas. A esse respeito, colaboram para o ‘fortalecimento da nossa existência, que permite

Tatiana, in her writing-daydreams, evokes orishas: Ossain, Ossalá, Yemanjá, and, because she understands that each orisha represents a force or an element of nature and that they are associated to emotional attributes, temperaments, vicissitudes, sexual and moral issues, and also related to motherhood are also represented by these, motherhood here is conjured when the drums are played evoking Nanã, “*Nanã Nabaruke, Nanã é Nanã, Nanã Naburuke, Nanã é*” (Alves, 2011, p. 54), which, according to Sueli Carneiro (2008, p. 71), is the “[...] lagoon where all the deep mystery of the world is, Nanã is the oldest female orisha and the oldest divinity of the waters. Nanã is the mystery of life and death, and because of this, she protects the women’s reproductive organs.”³⁸ Nanã is the orisha that keeps the uterus safe, the reproducer of life. Thus, when the *Mãe de Santo* declares to Lau that “Tati would come back,”³⁹ because she would be healed, it also can be interpreted that her womb will generate life again.

Telling the story of a woman through the reproduction of Orishas images, thus, bringing the African matrix to literature, is a way of resistance and enchantment, of enrichment of Brazilian literature, which needs to celebrate the aesthetic in the songs and stories, in the beats of Candomblé drum and in the secrets kept in the *terreiros*, which are maintained by:

Real and/or symbolic mothers, as the ones from Casa de Axé, were them and are them, often alone, the great responsible not only by the subsistence of the group, as well as by the maintenance of cultural memory within it (Evaristo, 2005, p. 3).⁴⁰

In consonance with the Evaristo’s analysis, there is the Alice Walker’s text, in the book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens. A Womanist Prose*,⁴¹ in which she writes:

a resistência, a reexistência’ e ainda assentam outras epistemologias. Sendo espaço de expressão do sagrado ancestral, [...] são saberes tecidos e assentados, fundamentalmente, ‘por mulheres negras que bordam suas experiências coletivas, irmanadas, ancestrais e encantadas’”

³⁸ In Portuguese: “lagoa onde está todo o profundo mistério do mundo, Nanã é o orixá feminino mais antigo e a divindade mais antiga das águas. Nanã é o mistério da vida e da morte, por isso protege os órgãos reprodutores da mulher.”

³⁹ In Portuguese: “Tati voltaria.”

⁴⁰ In Portuguese: “Mães reais e/ou simbólicas, como as das Casas de Axé, foram e são elas, muitas vezes sozinhas, as grandes responsáveis não só pela subsistência do grupo, assim como pela manutenção da memória cultural no interior do mesmo.”

⁴¹ See footnote 1.

How do you teach earnest but educationally crippled middle-aged and older women the significance of their past? How do you get them to understand the pathos and beauty of a heritage they have been taught to regard with shame? How do you make them appreciate their own endurance, creativity, incredible loveliness of spirit? [...] Try to tell a sixty-year-old delta woman that black men invented anything, black women wrote sonnets, that black people long ago were every bit the human beings they are today. Try to tell her that kinky hair is delightful. Chances are she will begin to talk “Bible” to you, and you will discover to your dismay that the lady still believes in the curse of Ham (Walker, 2004, p. 34).⁴²

The celebration of the writing of this story, of the healing possibility, of salvation within blackness, it is the expression of life, of a word that is being claimed, and, in assumption, being celebrated:

In this sense, the title of the story, *O retorno de Tatiana*, is emblematic for suggesting some possibilities, among them, the return to black ancestry, based on the African-based religion, by reclaiming reason, as previously mentioned; or even the return to her gender condition, since it is possible to infer that Tatiana, after going through this process of (re)balancing herself and nature, will become fertile again (Santos, 2018, p. 66).⁴³

Literature that can express real experiences, makes subjective movements, opens itself to the creation of other types of motherhood, of raising, giving the possibility of other symbolic ways beyond the impositions of the European canon. It is necessary to do an exercise of imagination that goes beyond the imaginary limited by racism. The situation experienced by Tatiana, the abortion, denotes scenes of a black life and refers to reality, because her story is place before daily scenes: the imperative role of mother, to which women are impelled; the fragility in face of an abortion and the trauma due to the process experienced after the pregnancy interruption. However, not to mention the only bond among black women is the pain, maybe the great beauty of the book is how the ancestry and the connection among black women are overwhelming.

⁴² For reference, see footnote 1

⁴³ In Portuguese: “Nesse sentido, o título do conto, *O retorno de Tatiana*, é emblemático por sugerir algumas possibilidades, dentre elas, o retorno à ancestralidade negra, a partir da religião de matriz africana, por retomar a razão, conforme mencionado anteriormente; ou até mesmo o retorno à sua condição de gênero, uma vez que é possível inferir que Tatiana, após passar por esse processo de (re)equilíbrio entre si e a natureza, voltará a ser fértil.”

The writing style of Miriam Alves reinforces, renews, is vigorous, prolific and contemporary, bringing up current themes. She uses ancestral elements, crossing one century to the next. This is reason enough to celebrate the wonderful moment to be woman, as argued by Walker:

But it is a great time to be a woman. A wonderful time to be a black woman, for the world, I have found, is not simply rich because from day to day our lives are touched with new possibilities, but because the past is studded with sisters who, in their time, shone like gold. They give us hope, they have proved the splendor of our past, which should free us to lay just claim to the fullness of the future (Walker, 2004, p. 42).⁴⁴

For decades, Miriam Alves has been a vigorous interpreter of stories whose Afro-descendant memory, orality and ancestry are components of their aesthetic creation, making her an interpreter of Brazil. To Alice Walker (2004),⁴⁵ this is also the work of black artist: to create, to preserve and care for the wisdom and the stories of our elders, to “love the humanity of their words” (Walker, 2004, p. 137).⁴⁶

Writers such as Miriam Alves, Conceição Evaristo, Cristiane Sobral, Eliane Alves Cruz give us back the glance over our ancestral heritage, which lays in its watch careful and beautiful, telling us that we can appreciate each day and leave, from the past to future, the right to affirmation of black women existence who shine like gold celebrating their African roots, giving light to the horizon to other black women and for Brazilian literature.

Miriam Alves’ writing has been anti-racist, because appreciates the aesthetics that comes from Africa, the diaspora, of adaptations and historical translations impregnated with ancestry. The writer is influential in discussions about Afro-Brazilian literature of female authorship, as well as all of her work contemplates the black-female perspective, which seeks to exalt the stories of black people from our own ancestral accumulation and our blackness. Her literary enchantment, the ancestors brought to her work, as in *O retorno de Tatiana* mark her voice in a singular way in the Brazilian literary scene, by

⁴⁴ For reference, see footnote 1.

⁴⁵ For reference, see footnote 1.

⁴⁶ For reference, see footnote 1.

exploring roots, the matrices, which feed her works and because of them make us proud from where we came from – there are a lot of trails and paths to the future.

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Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

The text in question proposes the representation of black motherhood in the short story “O retorno de Tatiana,” by Miriam Alves. The text is well written, offering a pertinent discussion for criticism. however, it needs a grammatical revision, especially regarding in compliance with ABNT standards, some passages are unclear, need to be rewritten. Pay attention to the passages I marked in yellow. APPROVED WITH RESTRICTIONS [Revised]

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Review II

As one of the first and remarkable virtues of the article submitted, is important to highlight its richness of criticism constituted by current Amefrican references, in a set of contemporary investigators who thinks about Brazil, on themes related to the submitted proposal. The analysis undertaken on the literary texts, in itself, proves relevant in its dialogue with a problem, today, considered a model in the scientific community of Literary Studies, particularly in the Amefrican scientific community dedicated to Amefrican literatures: the model problem of “matrifocality and motherhood.” This approach to a relevant model problem, in light of contemporary Amefrican research (in the form of recent articles, theses and dissertations) constitutes the merit of the text now submitted. As an auxiliary piece of information, supplementing the previous notes, the centrality of the notion of settlement of resistance (Sales, 2020) gives tone to the literary analyses undertaken, in addition to pointing out the significant scientific production circulating in our scientific community. As only suggestion to improve the text - and understanding the writing style of the author’s that weaves the citations of Amefrican

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researchers, throughout its development - some of the citations, between pages 7 and 11, deserve more development of the author, before the transition to new direct quotes. This suggestion prepares the reader for the following citation: each quote sufficiently introduced, cited and subsequently appropriated, before the thread of the text presents new ones. This is appropriate since, in the final third of the text, the author's voice sometimes is presented with only two or three lines between quotations, even though they are interconnected. APPROVED

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