

Two Female Universes and the Borders of Ancestry in Conceição Evaristo and in Ana Paula Tavares / *Dois universos femininos e os limiares das ancestralidades em Conceição Evaristo e Ana Paula Tavares*

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ABSTRACT

This article is part of a master's thesis defended at the Amazonas State University (UEA). Its purpose is to present some of the female characters in the works *Olhos d'água* [Water Eyes], by Conceição Evaristo (2016), and *Um rio preso nas mãos* [A River Caught in the Hands], by Ana Paula Tavares (2019), as well as to show how ancestry, as a philosophical operator of reading, connects the two works. This path of observation demonstrates the confluence of an authorial agency that focuses on elaborating performative nuances in the creation of female characters, underscoring distinct sociocultural contexts with an emphasis on categories such as gender, race, class and geopolitical context, which are associated by the use of elements of ancestry in order to highlight divergent positions from hegemonically imposed cultural norms.

KEYWORDS: *Olhos d'água*; *Um rio preso nas mãos*; Female characters; Ancestry

RESUMO

Este artigo surge como desdobramento de uma pesquisa de mestrado defendida na Universidade do Estado do Amazonas (UEA). Tem como objetivo apresentar algumas das personagens femininas das obras Olhos d'água, de Conceição Evaristo (2016), e Um rio preso nas mãos, de Ana Paula Tavares (2019), bem como evidenciar de que maneira a ancestralidade, enquanto operador filosófico de leitura, coloca as duas obras em diálogo. Este percurso de observação demonstra a confluência de uma agência autoral que se debruça sobre o trabalho de elaborar nuances performativas na criação de personagens femininas. Evidencia contextos socioculturais distintos com foco em categorias como gênero, raça, classe e contexto geopolítico, que dialogam ao fazer uso de elementos de ancestralidades para realçar posições divergentes de normas culturais impostas hegemonicamente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Olhos d'água*; *Um rio preso nas mãos*; *Personagens femininas*; *Ancestralidades*

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The figuration procedures of the feminine and of ancestry in the texts that are part of Conceição Evaristo's and Ana Paula Tavares's literary projects reverberate the female identities and their possible cultural matrices developed in the aesthetics of these writers. Considering the character as one of the elements that compose narrative structure and determine its internal coherence, as stated by Candido (2009), it is pertinent to analyze the constitution of the women personae in *Olhos d'água* (2016) and in *Um rio preso nas mãos* (2019),¹ demonstrating how they contribute to the organicity of literary works and to unexpected negotiations of meaning (Bhabha, 2010 [1994]),² expressed in each book. It is important to observe how gender relations, besides navigating social places within literary systems, manifest themselves, to a certain extent, in modes of figuration in literary fiction.

Antonio Candido (2009), reflecting on the relation between creation and aspects of life in the technique of characterization, indicates the limits of these two poles in the possible origins of a character. The Brazilian critic develops his theory, in a reformulated way, from François Mauriac's ideas in *La Romancier et ses Personnages* [The Novelist and His Characters]. One of Mauriac's statements, resumed herein, is that "there is a strict association between character and author,"³ as "the latter takes the former from himself (whether from his bad zone or from his good zone) as realization of virtualities, which are not projections of features, but modifications always, as novels transfigures life" (Candido, 2009, p. 67).⁴ The critic discusses possible limits to a novelist's creation, considering that he/she can construct personae in a fictional reality from his/her own life repertoire and cultural universe. Such discussion can still be expanded to the scope of short stories or chronicles. Accordingly, it is possible to understand that life and perceptions of reality are raw materials to be cut by an author in fictional writing.

As some tendencies established during the course of the formation of literary systems in Brazil and in Angola still remain in contemporaneity, it is understood that ancestry is manifested in contemporary and postcolonial literary productions as a strategy

¹ T.N. For the purpose of publishing this article, I have translated the literary quotes from *Olhos d'água* [Water Eyes] and *Um rio preso nas mãos* (A River Caught in the Hands), as such novels have not been published in English.

² BHABHA, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2010 [1994].

³ In Portuguese: "há uma relação estreita entre a personagem e o autor."

⁴ In Portuguese: "Este a tira de si (seja da sua zona má, da sua zona boa) como realização de virtualidades, que não são projeção de traços, mas sempre modificação, pois o romance transfigura a vida."

to resume and intensify considerations on national identities. This expresses a continuous revision of thought, or a discontinuity of a thought whose attempt to formulate an ideal national identity obliterated differences such as gender, race, ethnics and social class. Based on such assumption, it is pertinent to elaborate on the role of characters and their forms of construction in the fictional arrangement of the texts chosen for analyses, as a way to demonstrate such dynamics.

Religiosity and cosmovision present in Conceição Evaristo's literature point to an exercise which is committed to reappropriating and to valuing the culture of African descent. From the African-Brazilian perspective, such associations theoretically characterize specific attributions of the category of "ancestry." In Ana Paula Tavares's writing, ancestry is manifested in a way which is more related to the memory of landscapes, habits and behaviors, which are constantly confronted with the violent intervention of the Other.

1 The Female Characters in Conceição Evaristo's *Olhos D'água*

Conceição Evaristo's *Olhos d'água* is composed by fifteen short stories, with black women as protagonists in most of them. It is important to highlight that racial features are not always explicit in the narratives. Such features can many times be inferred when elements of black and African descent cultures are identified. In the texts, there is the systematic violence suffered by this part of the Brazilian population. However, one can also find beauty, sensitivity and a form of writing that returns, to the black subject, a humanizing and complexifying representation.

In the short story that has the same name as the title of the book, the anguish of a narrator/character – at the color of her mother's eyes – is revealed. Her thoughts, directed to the human eye, reflects her intimate contemplation of herself through her ancestor. In the narrative, there are elements that symbolize African religiosity and its syncretism, such as references to orixás and saints. Moreover, the form of writing suggests an animist perception of the elements of nature. A notion of continuity among women is marked, in a kind of continuity of the "line-life" (Evaristo, 2017)⁵ among them. This notion that

⁵ In Portuguese: "linha-vida."

people somehow give one another continuity is also present in other short stories, such as “Duzu Querença” and “Ayoluwa, a alegria do nosso povo” [Ayoluwa, the Joy of Our People]. Besides the construction of images that refer to the African-Brazilian culture, the narrative is displaced from the “literary pattern” due to the work surrounding the black protagonist’s psychological dimension.

In the second story, named “Ana Davenga,” there is a greater exploration of the psychological aspect, regarding the male character Davenga, described by an omniscient narrator. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify traces of Ana’s personality, due to the way she relates to him: joyful and carefree in behaving and in dancing. Ana is authentic in how she is introduced. She stops dancing only when the drums cease to play. She does not hide her desire and demonstrates her interest in Davenga: “On the way back, she passed by him, looked at him and gave him a large smile” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 24).⁶ Uninhibited, she responds to the man’s advances – and she will eventually call him “hers.” That is how Ana gets involved and stays in Davenga’s life, in spite of the tragic end that is in store for her.

Another text to comment on is “Duzu-Querença.” With an omniscient, third person narrator, it exposes a distinguishable feature of the protagonist Duzu. Even though she is in a position of social subalternity in the story, her capacity to react is noticeable. The survival mechanism in her cruel life condition is what triggers her imagination. When she comes across the empty space at the bottom of the cans she rummages through the garbage, she enacts, with her hands, the movement of one who feeds off and devours “dreams.”⁷ Duzu observes her surroundings from the perspective of one who looks at life from below, but she does not stand still before it; she remains active, despite the weakness caused by hunger and, despite her staggering legs, she rambles.

The short story “Maria” is told by an omniscient narrator, who in the very beginning uses free indirect speech: “If it were not so far, she would have walked. She actually needed to get used to walking. The price of the fare was also increasing!” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 39).⁸ Along the narrative, Maria’s loneliness and objectification become evident. The explicit objectification of the character happens not only through

⁶ In Portuguese: “Na volta ela passou por ele, olhou-o e deu-lhe um largo sorriso.”

⁷ In Portuguese: “de sonho.”

⁸ In Portuguese: “Se a distância fosse menor, teria ido a pé. Era preciso mesmo ir se acostumando com a caminhada. O preço da passagem estava aumentando também!”

the abandonment projected in her psychological construction, but also through the way she is treated by strangers who take her life without hesitating. She would be then abandoned twice – in her intimate, private life, and in her social life.

Another interesting persona is the protagonist of the short story “Quantos filhos Natalina teve?” [How Many Children Did Natalina Have?], as her complex feature is reflected in the desire to assume a pregnancy which is the result of a rape, to the detriment of other experiences of gestation. The narrative is begun in *ultima res*:

Natalina fondly petted her belly, the child jumped from it, in response to her touch. She smiled happily. It was her fourth pregnancy and her first child. Only hers. Not any man's, not anyone's. She wanted that child, she didn't want the other children (Evaristo, 2016, p. 43).⁹

The problem of gender, race and class is faced by the character. The theme of maternity is connected with the physical violence suffered by women, deconstructing the romantic idealization of conception.

The next short story, called “Beijo na face” [A kiss on the Cheek], has Salinda as the protagonist. Initially, the third person, omniscient narrator, expresses a scene in which the character is in state of contemplation, reminiscing the love experience she had on the previous day. From such point onwards, she lives a secret love affair: “it had been almost a year since happiness, for her, had been served with a dropper. Small droplets that held the strength and the likeness of infinite reservoir, of dams of whole happiness” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 52).¹⁰

Living under the domination of a marriage in which she stays because of her husband's threats of murder and suicide, Salinda finds ways to circumvent her tormentor's exacerbated control and vigilance. Another female character “guesses” and welcomes her suffering, and makes it possible for her to have stolen moments of freedom and affection. What is incorporated in Salinda's personality is her ability to subvert the pre-established order about her sexuality. She will not be intimidated by the morality of a failed marriage, nor by her husband's aggressiveness. She is true to her desire. Her

⁹ In Portuguese: “Natalina alisou carinhosamente a barriga, o filho pulou lá de dentro respondendo ao carinho. Ela sorriu feliz. Era a sua quarta gravidez, e o seu primeiro filho. Só seu. De homem algum, de pessoa alguma. Aquele filho ela queria, os outros não.”

¹⁰ In Portuguese: “Havia quase um ano que a felicidade lhe era servida em conta-gotas. Pequenas gotículas que guardavam a força e a aparência de reservatórios infindos, de represas de felicidade inteira.”

relationship with another woman confirms this. The passion and the desire aroused by Salinda's relationship with her lover are the driving force that leads her to the self-definition of her sexuality, even if it means she needs to resort to subterfuges.

The short story "Zaíta esqueceu de guardar os brinquedos" [Zaíta Forgot to Put Away the Toys], in turn, is narrated in third person, with a girl named Zaíta as protagonist. This girl has a twin sister who corresponds to her complementary opposite: "Twins. They were equal. The difference was in the way of speaking. Zaíta spoke in a low, slow, voice; Naíta spoke loudly and fast. Zaíta had a certain way of being sweet, with her mysteries and her sufferings" (Evaristo, 2019, p. 72).¹¹

Besides her sister, the narrative reveals the peculiar behavior of her mother Benícia – a thirty-four-year-old woman, mother of four, home financial provider, always described in a state of tiredness. She is the portrait of real-life personas – mothers who run their families and struggle to make ends meet to raise their children. The text reflects the consequences of lack of support, by the State, to these children's healthy development, and the great violence that affects peripheral populations that need to deal with a system of public safety that puts them at risk much more than protects them. The character Zaíta is one of the many girls in Brazilian slums who are victims of social inequalities, racial prejudice and urban violence.

"A gente combinamos de não morrer" [We Agreed to Refuse to Die], the last but one story in the book, presents, apart from an extradiegetic narrator, who prevails in the beginning of the narrative, the emergence of three other voices: that of Dorvi, in charge of a drug sales location; that of Bica, Dorvi's wife and mother of his newborn son; and that of Dona Esterlinda, Bica's mother and Dorvi's mother-in-law. Bica's notion on the black body as the locus of violence has an important dimension in the text. "I touch my body, here I am" (Evaristo, 2016, p. 107).¹² She needs to make sure of her existence, as if her life were also a kind of death. What is interesting in her psychological character is how she copes with such condition – she develops a relationship with writing. She remembers one of the moments when it started to happen: as a child, she would write on the board words whose semantic group related to her reality, in an attempt to shock the

¹¹ In Portuguese: "Gêmeas. Eram iguaizinhas. A diferença estava na maneira de falar. Zaíta falava baixo e lento, Naíta, alto e rápido. Zaíta tinha nos modos um quê de doçura, de mistérios e de sofrimento."

¹² In Portuguese: "Apalpo meu corpo, aqui estou."

teacher. Not only does writing assume the function of a place where the character can purge her pains and dissatisfactions in life, but it is also a way to escape such reality.

Contrasting with the painful stories depicted in *Olhos d'água*, the last text evokes hope and renovation. It has a female protagonist, Ayoluwa, who bears, in her name, the meaning of “our people’s joy” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 111).¹³ The character is born to reverse the evils that haunt a community. The narrative is not limited to denouncing society; it explores the human complexity of black woman as subjects as well.

2 The Presentation of Female Characters in Ana Paula Tavares’s *Um Rio Preso Nas Mãos*

By observing *Um rio preso nas mãos*, by Angolan writer Ana Paula Tavares, it is possible to notice an organization pattern that suggests, to the readers, a construction of meaning that involves women’s condition. Divided into four parts, the work comprises sections – each one with a group of chronicles whose titles appear in the following order: “Ananapalavra,” “Iniciação” [Initiation], “Mulheres” [Women] and “Culpa” [Guilt]. This composition of lexemes, except the proper noun whose use is better understood when each text is read, is connected with the world reference of certain women. For readers who are familiar with Tavares’s literature, the word “initiation” does not come as a surprise, as the author usually refers to rites of such nature in her writings, alluding to moments of transitions, many times typical of ethnic groups in southwest Angola. She does so from the perspective of the feminine, as Carmen Lucia Tindó Ribeiro Secco (2022) pertinently points out.

In the third part of the book, the noun “Mulheres” denotes the theme of the feminine in its content, whereas the last section, “Culpa,” along with the others, suggests a feeling that usually accompanies women’s condition. The first set of texts, called “Ananapalavra,” corresponds to six narratives. The first one, “Carta a Francisco” [Letter to Francisco], is told in first person by the character Ananapalavra. Such character signs a letter, laden with poetic language, written to her father, an ancestral being. The title and the content with a tone of dissatisfaction establish an intertextual relation with *Letter to His Father* by Kafka. It is interesting to notice that, in this group of texts, Ananapalavra

¹³ In Portuguese: “a alegria do nosso povo.”

appears as the enunciative voice, as a narrator/character, especially in the letters, and as a supporting character of a narrator who assumes a first-person voice which is sometimes collective and other times individual.

In “Carta a Francisco” the narrator states that her father is known for being good and attentive and, even though he preserves the tradition and the past, he wants to learn the truths that exist beyond what is said by subjects in position of authorities, such as princes and men. The affection for the father’s truth makes the narrator reveal that such being articulates metaphysical and material phenomena, which makes her realize that there is, in this ancestral omnipotence, a human sensibility and a divine one, the same all men and women face in their journeys through life. The accounts are intensified because of the narrator’s impressions of her father’s voice, which can resonate truths in the most inaccessible places, such as the desert where she lives: “Older people say that your voice is bigger than the wind, it is a voice from the infinite and it can articulate the things which are the most difficult to say, so that the echo of the echoes lasts in the mountains and in the deserts” (Tavares, 2019, p. 14).¹⁴

From the second story on, “Estórias de Ananapalavra” [Ananapalavra’s Stories], with Anamaria Grande as protagonist, the life of a girl, who was adopted and exploited by a family, is exposed. In this text, Ananapalavra is a storyteller, a supporting character. She does not have the right to use the bathroom of the house and is treated like “an animal,” having to sleep on the floor of the girls’ bedroom. Ananapalavra’s voice is heard through free indirect speech, telling a story, which permits the inference that she is one of the girls who share the bedroom with the protagonist. Besides, there is a parallel relation between the story told at that time by Ananapalavra – within the secondary story – and the one told to the readers at the present moment. Anamaria Grande would be equivalent to Nehepo, a mythical character¹⁵ who is punished with poverty. Such character is mentioned only once in the narrative, but she is the one who takes care of other beings and can summon ghosts through her voice. Anamaria Grande remains quiet;

¹⁴ In Portuguese: “Dizem-me os mais velhos que tua voz é maior que o vento, é uma voz do infinito e consegue articular as coisas mais difíceis de dizer para que perdure eco dos ecos nas montanhas e nos desertos.”

¹⁵ The information given to readers about the character Nehepo is in a glossary note, and it allows us to understand that he is Sihepo’s twin brother. Both of them would have been born after their father’s death and, therefore, they would be “the sons of misery.” These two figures compose a kind of mythical narrative of the Kuanyama people, an ethnic group living in the southern Angola and northern Namíbia. They are mentioned only once in the fictional creation analyzed herein.

she only expresses herself when she sings in the shower, when she can access the “bucket”¹⁶ in a small greenhouse in the big house:¹⁷ “Then she would release songs and words that would give one the goosebumps: *miser miser modo niger...* Other than that, she displayed silence like an accusation, an unbearable silence amidst our noise” (Tavares, 2019, p. 15).¹⁸

In the third text, “Estranhas aparições de Ananapalavra” [Strange Apparitions of Ananapalavra], there is a kind of coming-of-age narrative of the “lyrical subject” of Ananapalavra, who interacts with Odete (a character of a reality imagined by the protagonist). Narrated in the first person, the memories that are evoked oscillate between the individual and the collective. Ananapalavra corresponds to the “lyrical subject” of the narrator – one that elaborates, with her voice and her sounds, another way of being in the world, one that allows her to live in it in a less painful manner. In the middle of melancholic memories of smells, rites of her maturity process, and habits of her godfather and godmother, she recalls her relation with the mirror, which makes her transformation process evident.

Ananapalavra is also the protagonist in the text that follows, despite its name “Josefa de Óbidos.” Told in third person, the story moves around memories in pieces of paper, kept by the character, with images and words of the religious universe. The Book of Hours, the statues of saints, the image of a suffering Christ and a lamb’s head are signs that mark the presence of Christian values and narratives in the character’s cultural repertoire, and that appear in the beginning of such text. Such objects, except the Book of Hours, are carefully stored, along with frayed notes, inside a hand-embroidered envelope made from a piece of cloth. The fact that Ananapalavra maintained such elements motivates the narrator’s anguished thoughts, which philosophically elaborate on the metaphysics of existence.

The last two narratives of this group, in which Ananapalavra is constructed as a character, are letters. By the way, the first text of this group is also a letter, but it is addressed to a father. Now, the character starts writing to a daughter and then to a possible

¹⁶ In Portuguese: “selha.”

¹⁷ T.N. “Big house” is a reference to a slave owners’ residence.

¹⁸ In Portuguese: “Então soltava os cantos e as falas com aquela voz de fazer arrepios: *miser miser modo niger...* De resto, todo o dia ostentava o silêncio como uma acusação, um insuportável silêncio dentro da nossa barulheira.”

female reader. In “A carta secreta de Ananapalavra ou a morte dos poetas” [Ananapalavra’s secret letter or the death of the poets], like in “Carta a Francisco,” one can identify a dialogue with another literary work, evoked in the title – Lucinda Riley’s *The royal secret*. In the novel, a posthumous letter is left. Its secrets render it fearful and it is therefore hidden. Similarly, Ananapalavra’s letter can be understood as posthumous, as the sender mentions the inheritance left to her daughter. The narrative shows the importance of words and of poems to the character. She states that the ones she brings with her were learned from older women and from her own life experiences. She also refers to those that are left by poets when they die. Metalanguage is a resource for resuming oral tradition and for establishing a connection with the modern period, marked by language and literature.

Words occupy a significant space in the text that follows – “Nova carta de Ananapalavra” [Ananapalavra’s new letter]. In such text, the addressee is a female friend, which is understood by the use of the vocative in the beginning to a possible woman reader. The narrative begins with Ananapalavra’s anguish, as she cannot find a word that is adequate to her poem and to the expression “invention of a certain east,”¹⁹ which relates to Milton Hatoum’s novel, developed from memories, too. In Tavares’s chronicle, the poetic voice and the narrator’s ability to express herself are compromised by the pain caused by the historical memory. She is disappointed by the awareness of how false promises in the dispute for wealth corrupted the Angolan people. Therefore, Ananapalavra starts to consider the word “threat”²⁰ as one that corresponds to “border,”²¹ since the human condition devastated by the agents of the exploitation system is considered a hindrance by the dominant group, which demonstrates that the borders would have become threats.

Another subdivision of the book, which is important to verify the materialization of female enactments is “Mulheres.” There are seven texts, whose reflections surround themes that address women’s condition. “A manta” [The Blanket] is presented in verses, in the form of a poem:

¹⁹ In Portuguese: “invenção de um certo oriente.”

²⁰ In Portuguese: “ameaça.”

²¹ In Portuguese: “fronteira.”

The blanket that fits you is small
Small girl big person
To keep your tears and hide
the tiny hands
In a silk cloth represented.
It is a folding of the world that expands
For your growth and care
on our lap around time
(Tavares, 2019, p. 41) ²²

The reading allows for the interpretation that the blanket metaphorically represents “the folding of the world,”²³ which protects and embraces the girl’s fragility. Although the child is small, she is considered as a person by the poetic voice, hence the blanket is seen as small in light of what she deserves. The object symbolizes the caretaking by the community over the time of the girl’s development process. It is interesting to notice that the act of taking care of others is generally attributed to women. This is manifested in the text as well, as the noun corresponding to the word regarding the girl’s protection is female.

This relation between caretaking and gender introduces the theme of sacrifice implied in such theme, which is evident in the next text, “As mães” [The mothers]. Structured in one paragraph, the chronicle begins with a discussion that refers to the non-idealization of life, when a figurative meaning related to a flower is rejected. This absence of idealization is also projected onto the maternal figure. Although it is placed on the center of the “world”²⁴ by discourse, the association of maternity to a “wooden beam which is attacked by winds, but continues to stand” (Tavares, 2019, p. 42)²⁵ implies that it corresponds to strength amidst difficulties. This beam metaphorically represents the bodies of the mothers who rise against tyranny; these bodies are also marked by those who had been mothers before them. The “older women”²⁶ established these mothers’ legacy of persistence and insubordination, as they were the ones who “held the wake of the fire through their perseverance” (Tavares, 2019, p. 42).²⁷

²² In Portuguese: “É pequena a manta que te cabe/ Pequena menina grande pessoa/ Para guardar teu choro e esconder/ as minúsculas mãos/ Em pano de seda representado./ É uma dobra do mundo que se estende/ Para teu crescimento cuidado/ no colo da gente nas voltas do tempo.”

²³ In Portuguese: “a dobra do mundo.”

²⁴ In Portuguese: “do mundo.”

²⁵ In Portuguese: “viga de pé corrida pelos ventos.”

²⁶ In Portuguese: “antigas.”

²⁷ In Portuguese: “velaram pelo fogo na sua teimosia.”

Likewise, maternity from the African perspective constitutes “Mães da Nigéria” [Mothers of Nigeria]. In “A carta secreta de Ananapalavra ou a morte dos poetas,” there is a call directed to the daughter; in this other text there is a call directed to the mothers. These mothers are summoned to listen to the songs of their children, who no longer sing; they are summoned to mourn their deaths. In the literary discourse, the appreciation of words and their power to intervene in the world are shown, as, by means of artistic creation, through words it is possible to question and break silences imposed on cultural manifestations:

I have called you so that the repeated word, which heals and clothes us, does not stop any longer, and so that it can break this silence that descended upon our lives like a rock, a single rock that broke our dream and then the lives of those who still looked for fish in the market (Tavares, 2019, p. 44).²⁸

In the culture of the Yorubá, one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, tradition is fundamentally important, like in several cultures of Angola. One of the bases of tradition is the spoken word. In order to reestablish a bond with such tradition and with a way of life in which it is circumscribed, the narrator invokes these mothers. Again, maternity is used as a reference to caretaking, protection and reversion of evils. The positive meaning assigned to it in the text stems from another cultural logic, which moves away from a western perception, in which it would be devalued and connected with domestication.

The last part of the book, “Culpa,” has 21 texts. In this group, “Ana de Amsterdã” is an example of how Ana Paula Tavares’s poetics addresses the feminine. Ana de Amsterdã appears as an alias of Ananapalavra. It is the poetic, inner voice, referred to in “Estranhas aparições de Ananapalavra.” From what the narrator describes, Ana is conceived as a kind of spiritual entity that allows the association of the group with the divine. The narrator’s memory in relation to Ana unfolds in a stage of life that marks the passage from childhood to adulthood: menarche. The scare of her first menstruation causes the character to seek shelter in Ana, who welcomes her and gives her a sense of safety. In the context and in the sequence of the story, the bond between the narrator and

²⁸ In Portuguese: “Chamei-vos para que a palavra repetida, a que cura e veste, não pare mais e consiga rasgar este silêncio que agora desceu sobre nossas vidas como uma pedra, uma única pedra que rompeu o nosso sonho e de seguida a vida de todos aqueles que, no mercado, ainda buscavam peixes.”

Ana is described during *efiko*, a rite of initiation for women. When she is in contact with Ana, she can access another place in the memory, about that moment of discovering a cycle of life and death when becoming a woman. At the end of the text, the narrator reveals that “Ananapalavra for some was actually our voice and it was hard to lose it. We are left with the curse of Kalahari and some doors to go through” (Tavares, 2019, p. 69).²⁹ Therefore, she demonstrates that her destiny is shared.

3 Ancestry at the Intersections of Writings by Conceição Evaristo and by Ana Paula Tavares

Leda Maria Martins (2002) considers the notion of intersection as a theoretical operator, a methodological key to a conscious expression that the intersection usually represents “a sacred place of intermediations among systems and instances of several types of knowledge” (Martins, 2002, p. 73).³⁰ Some nagô/yorubá philosophies indicate the possibility to use the term as a theoretical premise. The idea of intersection predisposes the analysis of hybrid forms and of transit processes through which cosmovisions, performances and epistemologies of different cultures intersect (Martins, 2002). This is what we intend to observe in relation to the place ancestry occupies in Conceição Evaristo’s and in Ana Paula Tavares’s writings.

According to Frantz Fanon (2004 [1961], p. 206),³¹ “Each Generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it.”³² The author reflects that “preceding generations have both resisted the work or erosion carried by colonialism and also helped on the maturing of the struggles of today” (Fanon, 2004 [1961], p. 206).³³ From such perspective, in the texts by Conceição Evaristo and by Ana Paula Tavares it is possible to acknowledge a concern about reconstituting memories that had been at risk because of colonial violence. Each writer conducts this in a distinct, particular way, due to sociocultural differences in which their world is circumscribed.

²⁹ In Portuguese: “Ananapalavra para alguns, era na verdade a nossa voz e foi difícil perdê-la. Resta-nos a maldição do Kalahari e algumas portas por atravessar.”

³⁰ In Portuguese: “um lugar sagrado das intermediações entre sistemas e instâncias de conhecimentos diversos.”

³¹ FANON, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961].

³² For reference, see footnote 31.

³³ For reference, see footnote 31.

The distinction lies in the way the authors deal with ancestral memories. Although they share an ethical attention that exposes the colonial trauma of their places of origins, their projection mechanisms are different, and this is seen in their aesthetic projects. In Brazil, for example, the notion of ancestry is based on the culture of black peoples who were forced to cross the Atlantic. Therefore, this notion is rooted in the history of those who were enslaved and saw their blood shed in floggings perpetrated by white masters.

As a means of resistance, religiosity played a major role in the communities of African descent in Brazil. That is why the African-Brazilian philosophy today understands ancestry as a concept whose dynamics is due to the African myth and to the African body. Eduardo Oliveira (2021, p. 26) points out that this analytical category was transformed by the discourse of “organic intellectuals of African tradition, reinvented in Brazil.”³⁴ This is relevant information, as it helps understand the syncretism and the complex connections of cultures that constitute the African-Brazilian one, as well as the African-Brazilian literary expression. Such information also incites us to pay attention to the notion of reinvention of tradition made possible as a means to confront the attempt to erase the collective memories. As stated by the theorist, besides consanguinity relations, “ancestry is the movement of culture” (Oliveira, 2021, p. 26).³⁵

The aspects related to ancestry are found in *Olhos d'água* because of the following elements, according to theoretical contributions by Eduardo Oliveira (2021): African cosmovision and appreciation of myths; perception of the corporeal dimension from the African experience in Brazilian land; principle of collectiveness and principle of seniority. The appreciation of myths is seen in the first short story, which has the same name as the book. It is noticeable that there is a preference for female entities, invoked to compose the narrative, such as the Yabás. The female orixá Oxum and Saint Barbara are mentioned, indicating the reference to religious syncretism of African-Brazilian traditions. The allusion to Oxum in the text is about the archetypal dimension pointed out by José Jorge Zacharias (1998, p. 178):

[...] perceiving the importance of the feminine as element of fertility and continuity of life. This fact associates Oxum to maternity and to

³⁴ In Portuguese: “intelectuais orgânicos da tradição africana, reinventada no Brasil.”

³⁵ In Portuguese: “a ancestralidade é o movimento da cultura.”

gestation, and it also conveys the connection of several Our Ladies related to water as a symbol of birth – the amniotic fluid.³⁶

The references to waters and rivers in the narrative are part of the cosmovision of African heritage, considering the relations among human, divine and nature, in an integrated system. Black corporality appears as an element in “Olhos d’água” through the playful and affective performance of the mother with the daughters, the presence of music and dance, and by the African feature in the curly hair. Such elements point to the return of a memory kept in the body. The memory of the narrator/protagonist about older women in her family is also made present in the text as an element of seniority.

In the second narrative, “Ana Davenga,” the relation of the character Ana with music and dancing, and with her knowledge of religiosity of African origin, is identified as an element of African descent culture, and so is the manifestation of the affirmation of such ancestry. This appears in the beginning of the story, when the knocks on the door are narrated, from the perspective of the character indicated by the free indirect speech, as similar to a “prelude of samba or of macumba” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 21),³⁷ which was a code to announce a good sign. In the narrative, we notice the presence of two cultural dimensions of the resistance of black African descent people in Brazil, by the use of the syntagms “samba” and “macumba,” in a reference to music and to drumming, typical of African religious practices.

It is also in a samba group that Davenga meets Ana, who has dancing skills. She moves her body, especially her hips and her butt, in a carefree way. When he contemplates Ana in this encounter, Davenga associates her to a “a naked ballerina, like the one he had seen one day on television. The ballerina danced, freely, loosely, in a party at an African village” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 25).³⁸ Moreover, dancing is an element which is present in a moment of suspense in the narrative. Supporting characters dance around Ana without speaking, causing distress in her, who wants to know where her husband is. After the revelation that this movement is part of a celebration for Ana’s birthday, which had been

³⁶ In Portuguese: “[...] perceber a importância que tem o feminino, como elemento de fertilidade e continuidade da vida. Este fato associa Oxum à maternidade e à gestação, e também traz a associação das Várias Nossas Senhoras ligadas à água, enquanto símbolo de nascimento – o líquido amniótico.”

³⁷ In Portuguese: “um prenúncio de samba ou de macumba.”

³⁸ In Portuguese: “uma bailarina nua, tal qual ele vira um dia na televisão. A bailarina dançava livre, solta, na festa de uma aldeia africana.”

planned by Davenga, we can infer that dancing has a celebratory aspect, integrating a corporeal dimension to the event.

Another short story that presents some of the characteristics analyzed is “Duzu-Querença.” In this text, part of the setting is in the slums, which is mostly inhabited by black people in Brazil. Similar to the last narrative, there is dancing as a component of an ancestral character. The protagonist, Duzu, who lives on the streets, goes mad as a way to escape, to free herself from her reality. However, in her reveries, she dances. This happens too when she participates in the parades during Carnival, in the group of *baianas*. Her preference for such group and the appreciation she has for this festival show another form of resistance of the African descent community, when facing the pains of life – they nourish their spirit with the joy of music and dancing. The body is portrayed as a receptor of sensations that change the character’s state of mind.

In this story, similar to the first one, there is explicit allusion to ancestry. It happens when the character refers to her granddaughter Querença as a kind of realization of the ancestors’ destination: “Querença, who resumed dreams and desires of so many others who had gone...” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 34).³⁹ It happens too when the protagonist wants her granddaughter to have “good housing, blessed *ayê*, where ancestors and vital dreams would flourish and come true” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 36).⁴⁰ The discourse that is equivalent to her thought reiterates the idea that the granddaughter is destined to make her ancestors’ dreams come true. The word *ayê* is also an explicit element of the African descent culture. In *candomblé* it means “the land of humans,” complementing *Orum*, “the heaven of *orixás*” (Prandi, 2001, p. 526).⁴¹

In “Duzu-Querença,” the principle of collectiveness can also be observed through the idea of lineage, inferred in the vision that predicts Duzu’s death:

Faces of the absent ones returned. Vó Alafaia, Vô Kiliã, Tia Bambene, her father, her mother, her children and grandchildren. Menina Querença advanced more and more. Her image grew, grew. Duzu was

³⁹ In Portuguese: “Querença que retomava sonhos e desejos de tantos outros que já tinham ido...”

⁴⁰ In Portuguese: “boa moradia, bendito *ayê*, onde ancestrais e vitais sonhos haveriam de florescer e acontecer.”

⁴¹ In Portuguese: “O céu dos *orixás*.”

sliding across visions and dreams through a mysterious path...
(Evaristo, 2016, p. 36).⁴²

The affective memory of people in her family, from the deceased to the younger ones, culminates in Querença's memory, demonstrating the sense of unity among all of them and the strong connection between the grandmother and the granddaughter, which justifies the compound noun used in the title of the story: Duzu-Querença.

"Ayoluwa, a alegria do nosso povo" also reveals some of the elements mentioned by Oliveira (2021). The principle of collectiveness is the most evident, initially, evoked by a narrative voice similar to one of a griot telling the story of a community: "When the girl Ayoluwa, the joy of our people, was born, it was a good time for everyone. For a long time, we had been in the dire straits" (Evaristo, 2016, p. 111).⁴³ The collective experience of the group's suffering is only reversed when the girl Ayoluwa is born.

In the story, the state of sadness is shared by the entire social group:

And us, we were weakened, without any substance to straighten our bodies. I repeat: we had been in the dire straits. Everything was scarce. Even nature perished and confused us. Sometimes a slow sun appeared but it looked more like a withered ball [...] (Evaristo, 2016, p. 111).⁴⁴

The principle of collectiveness is reflected in the aspect of nature, which leads us to infer the presence of an African cosmovision that contemplates the integration of living beings. Another characteristic of ancestry observed in the text is the corporeal dimension from the African experience. This is noticeable when the body and the voice are valued by those who needed words in their mouths, and needed the singing and the dancing. In another moment, ancestry is revealed through the sickness of the body and the soul, mentioned when the narrator describes the state of *banzo*⁴⁵ in the community. From such

⁴² In Portuguese: "Fases dos ausentes retornavam. Vó Alafáia, Vô Kiliã, Tia Bambene, seu pai, sua mãe, seus filhos e netos. Menina Querença adiantava-se mais e mais. Sua imagem crescia, crescia. Duzu deslizava em visões e sonhos por um misterioso caminho...."

⁴³ In Portuguese: "Quando a menina Ayoluwa, a alegria do nosso povo nasceu, foi em boa hora para todos. Há muito que em nossa vida tudo pitimbava."

⁴⁴ In Portuguese: "E nós ali amolecidos, sem sustância alguma para apumar nosso corpo. Repito: tudo era uma pitimba só. Escassez de tudo. Até a natureza minguava e nos confundia. Ora aparecia um sol desenrolado e que mais se assemelhava a uma bola murcha [...]."

⁴⁵ T.N. "Banzo" refers to "the deadly melancholy that afflicted some African slaves on arriving in Brazil, and to sharp stones symbolising Afro-Brazilian suffering and making hearts bleed for generations after the abolition of slavery." Reference: CHAMPAGNAT, Pauline. Representing Afro-Brazilians in the Works of

perspective, it is important to point out that such physical and mental state, of extreme melancholy and nostalgia, affected enslaved men and women arriving in Brazil. The principle of seniority is manifested in the narrative with the appreciation of older people. When the bodies face scarcity, the spirit of death falls upon them, and the narrator mourns.

Considering ancestry expressed in some stories of *Olhos d'água*, there is the presence of what Oliveira (2021, p. 17) names as an experience of “recreating an Africa among us.”⁴⁶ The author affirms that the history of Africa prior to colonization is valued and incorporated by the African descent people in Brazil, in a symbolic process of reappropriation, as an attempt to understand the memories of African diaspora in Brazilian lands.

Such symbolic reappropriation strategy is shaped in Evaristo's literary project. With the identified elements, along with the writer's position and authorial awareness of the degrading effects the Transatlantic slave trade had on black people, we confirm that the use of resources referring to African ancestry is intentional. Furthermore, the attempt to resume an ancestral past evoked by Tavares is intentional. However, it is necessary to briefly discuss the way to think ancestry in Tavares's historical and social reality, in light of Donna Haraway's *situated knowledge* (1988).⁴⁷ Laura Cavalcante Padilha (1995, p. 10) explains the term ancestry:

Just like, aesthetically, orality is one of the distinctive features of the Angolan narrative discourse, the vital force constitutes the essence of a view which is called, by theorists of African cultures, as a Black-African worldview. Such force makes the living, the dead, the natural, the supernatural, the cosmic and social elements interact, forming the links in the same and indissoluble chain [...].⁴⁸

Conceição Evaristo and Eliana Alves Cruz and Contemporary Brazilian Media. *Hybrid Revue des Arts et Médiations Humaines*, n. 11, 2024.

⁴⁶ In Portuguese: “re-criação de uma África entre nós.”

⁴⁷ HARAWAY, Donna. *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*. *Feminist Studies*, v. 14, n. 3, 1988. pp. 575-599.

⁴⁸ In Portuguese: “Assim como, esteticamente, a oralidade é um dos traços distintivos do discurso narrativo angolano, também a força vital constitui a essência de uma visão que os teóricos das culturas africanas chamam de visão negra-africana do mundo. Tal força faz com que os vivos, os mortos, o natural e o sobrenatural, os elementos cósmicos e os sociais interajam, formando os elos de uma mesma e indissolúvel cadeia [...].”

This idea of ancestry is reinforced when one bases it on the definition of “Vital Force,”⁴⁹ by Nei Lopes and Luiz Antônio Simas (2021), who address the word from the perspective of African philosophies. The authors state that

According to ancient African concepts, all beings, in light of the quality of their Vital Force, are integrated in a hierarchy. Above all is the Supreme, Uncreated, Preexisting Being. This Being is the Force itself and the origin of all vital energy. Then, there are the earlier ancestors of human beings, the founders of different clans, who are the closest intermediaries between humans and the Supreme Being. After these founders, there are the distinguished dead of each group, in the order of primogeniture. They are the links in the chain that transmits to the living the Vital Force of the earlier ancestors. The living, in turn, are in a hierarchy organized by greater or lesser proximity, in kinship, to ancestors and, consequently, according to their Vital Force (Lopes; Simas, 2021, p. 28).⁵⁰

Both concepts addressed by the authors suggest the idea of interrelation among all beings, aligned with the notion of animism and with the very thought of cosmovision referred to by Eduardo Oliveira (2021). Nevertheless, besides the importance seniority has in the hierarchal relation of such cosmos, the role of the dead – in this structure of perceiving how life functions – is explained.

The appreciation of the dead is observed in some narratives of *Um rio preso nas mãos*, in the way texts are presented, such as “Carta secreta de Ananapalavra ou a morte dos poetas,” in which the narrator/addresser of the letter mentions dead poets, stating that “the dead do not need us (as Rilke used to say) but we need them and their senseless words, worked in verses to disturb us” (Tavares, 2019, p. 24);⁵¹ moreover, in “Nova carta de Ananapalavra,” the narrator mourns those who died because of the frantic diamond mining and of the war. In “Ana de Amsterdã” [Ana from Amsterdam] it is also possible to notice the connection between the living and the dead, when, in the rite of initiation

⁴⁹ In Portuguese: “Força Vital.”

⁵⁰ In Portuguese: “Segundo concepções imemoriais africanas, todos os seres, segundo a qualidade de sua Força Vital, integram-se em uma hierarquia. Acima de tudo está o Ser Supremo, Incriado e Preexistente. Ele é a Força por si mesma e a origem de toda a energia vital. Depois, vêm os primeiros ancestrais dos seres humanos, os fundadores dos diferentes clãs, que são os mais próximos intermediários entre os humanos e o Ser Supremo. Após esses fundadores, estão os mortos ilustres de cada grupo, por ordem de primogenitura. Eles são os elos da cadeia que transmite a Força Vital dos primeiros antepassados para os viventes. E estes, por sua vez, estão hierarquizados, de acordo com sua maior ou menor proximidade, em parentesco, com os antepassados e, consequentemente, segundo sua Força Vital.”

⁵¹ In Portuguese: “os mortos não precisam de nós (como dizia Rilke) mas nós precisamos deles e das insensatas palavras que trabalharam em verso para nos perturbar.”

efiko, Ananapalavra invokes “Melulo, the one with braids, a chief’s daughter, a chief’s sister, Nehova, the one of the spirits, of premature death, hovering through time with her face of eternal youth [...]” (Tavares, 2019, p. 69),⁵² as well as “Beatriz, the closest grandmother.”⁵³

It is important to observe that in the last narrative there is reference to the tradition of peoples from southern Angola: *efiko*. It is a rite of passage traditionally conducted by girls from the communities Nhaneca, Humbi, Mucubais and Kwanyamas when they reach puberty (Chicoca, 2017). In the ceremony, fictionalized in Tavares’s text, female spirits are invoked by Ananapalavra. What is interesting in this excerpt is the allusion to Melulo, a figure that is present in traditional oral poetry in Angola. Such character appears in a Kwanyama poem, which would have been directed to the last independent soba, according to Angolan poet Mário António de Oliveira (Freudenthal, 1994). This is the poem:

You, Cuanhamas, are stupid!
You cowardly abandoned the chief,
He, a mother’s only child,
The incomparable knight,
With his handsome weapon Mauser!
The soba before whom leather carpets were laid,
Poor brother of Melulo
And of princess Ndilokelwa.
I shall not give water to the white,
I shall not give them from my calabash.
They killed our king,
Savaged the sovereign!
The soba before whom leather carpets were laid,
Poor brother of Melulo
(Freudenthal, 1994, p. 32)⁵⁴

Instead of the male protagonist in the popular oral Angolan poetry, Tavares presents women in her narratives. The invoked spirit is not Melulo’s brother, and not even Melulo is presented as a man. Melulo, in the Angolan writer’s text, is a woman and

⁵² In Portuguese: “Melulo, a das tranças, filha e irmã de chefe, Nehova a dos espíritos, morta antes da hora, pairando entre os tempos com a sua cara de jovem eterna [...]”

⁵³ In Portuguese: “Beatriz a avó mais próxima.”

⁵⁴ In Portuguese: “Vós, Cuanhamas, sois estúpidos!/ Abandonastes cobardemente o chefe,/ Ele, filho único de sua mãe,/ O cavaleiro incomparável,/ Com a sua bela arma Mauser!/ O soba a que se estendiam tapetes de couro,/ O andrajoso irmão de Melulo,/ E da princesa Ndilokelwa./ Aos brancos não darei água,/ Não lhes darei na minha cabacinha./ Eles mataram o nosso rei,/ Trucidaram o soberano!/ O soba a quem se estendiam tapetes de couro,/ O andrajoso irmão de Melulo.”

belongs to the clan of braids; she is a chief's daughter and a chief's sister. Nehova, also invoked, is presented as a member of the clan of spirits. They are spirits that somehow relate to the history of the Angolan oral narrative, and that exercise the Vital Force, referred to by Lopes and Simas. The "closest grandmother,"⁵⁵ Beatriz, configures, in our reading, a place of kinship which is integrated in this connection with a sacred force.

This text is associated with the characteristic of ancestry presented by Padilha (1995), in relation to the "interaction between cosmic and social elements." Cultural traits, tradition and history are evidently present, as resources of fictional elaboration by the author, who makes them part of a greater universe. The Kwanyama culture also appears as reference in the second text of the book, when the Ananapalavra, as a storyteller, presents a narrative of the ethnic group, mentioning the twins Nehepo and Sihepo, considered "the children of misery" (Tavares, 2019, p. 102)⁵⁶ by the Kwanyama people.

The chronicle "Josefa de Óbidos" is another text that allows for inferring the correlation between the mythical and symbolic references as reflections of ancestry in the literary work mentioned. In such text, the questionings, by the narrator/character, about the comprehension of the dynamics of existence, "the being and the nothing" (Tavares, 2019, p. 21),⁵⁷ are produced from the confusion caused by the different religious signs. Trinity, which is invented and presented by Ananapalavra, "Suku and god and kalunga,"⁵⁸ relates to the culture of the ethnic group Suku, who speak Bantu and are from the southwest of Congo, a country that borders Angola.

About this matrilineal-based society, Igor Kopytoff (2012, p. 235), in reference to South-African anthropologist Meyer Fortes, addresses what can be considered ancestry for the group: "The Suku do not have a word that may be translated as 'ancestors'. The dead members of the lineage are called by them as *bambuta*. Literally, *bambuta* means 'great', the 'old ones', those who acquired maturity [...]."⁵⁹

The importance assigned to the worship of the dead is equivalent to ancestry in African cultures. Therefore, it can be inferred that the mention to the term "Suku" in

⁵⁵ In Portuguese: "avó mais próxima."

⁵⁶ In Portuguese: "os filhos da miséria."

⁵⁷ In Portuguese: "o ser e o nada."

⁵⁸ In Portuguese: "Suku e deus e kalunga."

⁵⁹ In Portuguese: "Os Suku não têm um termo que pode ser traduzido como 'ancestrais'. Esses membros mortos da linhagem são chamados por eles de *bambuta*. Literalmente, *bambuta* significa os 'grandes', os 'velhos', aqueles que adquiriram maturidade [...]."

Tavares's text corresponds to some dead person in the lineage. The reference to "god" indicates the hybridity of this cultural perception, the border where the character is inserted, amidst the confusion caused to her by different religious and cultural signs. The word "kalunga," in turn, is associated with the conception of cosmic energy by the ethnic group Bakongo, who also speak Bantu, today situated in the Democratic Republic of Congo, north of Angola and south of Gabon (Martínez-Ruiz, 2012). Furthermore, kimbundo means "eminent, distinguished, great, immeasurable, infinite; a liquid mass that surrounds the continents, ocean; misfortune, calamity; immensity, the void, the abyss" (Epalanga, 2020, n.p.).⁶⁰

With the examples aforementioned, a cultural richness is evident, which can be noticed by the predominance of references, in Tavares's writings, to different traditional peoples. In *Um rio preso nas mãos*, the communities Cokwe, Lunda, Lumba and others are mentioned. This choice reveals an objective which is close to Evaristo's, in restoring the value of native cultures of certain peoples who suffered colonial intervention. Moreover, the creative process shows traditions, but models them in its own way, with the implications of its own time.

The fact that the elements mentioned appear in the writings of both authors refers to mechanisms of resistance towards the impact of colonial violence on subjects and on civilizations. This can be related to reflections by Fanon (2004 [1961])⁶¹ about the production of knowledge mobilized by colonized intellectuals. For the theorist,

[...] colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any form or substance. With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it. This effort to demean history prior to colonization today takes on a dialectical significance (Fanon, 2004 [1961], p. 210).⁶²

The elaboration of this "dialectical significance" about the past is in consonance with the idea manifested in both authors' texts. By pointing to cultural heritage and by resuming elements and perceptions about the reality from the organization forms of pre-

⁶⁰ In Portuguese: "eminente, insigne, grande, incomensurável, infinito; uma massa líquida que circunda os continentes, oceano; infortúnio, calamidade; a imensidão, o vácuo, o abismo."

⁶¹ For reference, see footnote 31.

⁶² For reference, see footnote 31.

colonial period in African territory, or of cultures of this continent that were left on the margins of legitimacy according to Eurocentric standards, Conceição Evaristo and Ana Paula Tavares conduct a process of restoring the value of identities, reaffirming what the particularities of such identities were before the violent intervention of the Other. Thus, it is revealed that in their literary projects there is an interstitial feature that places them at the intersection of historical and cultural dialectics in their respective production spaces.

Final Considerations

The weaving in the network of symbols involved the fictional worlds of Conceição Evaristo and of Ana Paula Tavares allows for assessing the importance of pointing out their differences, aesthetic particularities and themes. By demonstrating the historical and social contexts of the writers' literature, it is possible to observe that factors – which are external to the literary texts and which relate to historical oppression of women – are often configured as internal elements of fictional productions and of value judgments by literary criticism of male tradition.

In Evaristo's literature, the protagonism of black women is present and it stands out. However, the writer also works the complexity of the characters, whether they be protagonists or supporting. Her effort to elaborate the particular behavior, the contradictions and the anguishes of many personas, composes the human and complex nature of these women. This is made possible especially because of the psychological attributions assigned to such characters.

In Tavares's production, there is preference for the feminine as well, especially by personas that have a degree of kinship, like mother, daughter, grandmother, aunt. There is a specific character, however, that stands out in the book – she is called Ananapalavra and corresponds to the writer's fictional alter ego. From such perspective, the character expresses a transposition of a real model from the writer's inner experience – in this case, her own relation to writing, to poetic and literary work, and to the creation of narratives, as well as to the manipulation of the knowledge of oral societies from her continent of origin. Accordingly, the creation of this character firstly triggers the idea of

autofiction, when the narrator reveals that she projects the voice of “us.” However, it becomes evident that she also configures a collective instance of *escrevivência*.⁶³

The purpose of reading *Olhos d’água* (2016) and *Um rio preso nas mãos* (2019), was to understand the particularities of ancestries as categories of alterities. Addressing ancestry as a category is not limited to the idea of ancestors. It includes complex systems of thoughts, which would certainly have cultural distinctions. The main distinction about ancestry for African Brazilian cultures is what they worship. In the African Brazilian ancestry, the myth of orixás and the nagô tradition prevail, as they are intrinsically articulated with the heritage of African ancestry. In African cultures, worshipping the dead is valued, and so is the interaction among cosmic elements and ancient societies.

Evaristo’s and Tavares’s literary texts reaffirm such prospections about the term ancestry. The stories in *Olhos d’água* show characteristics of black and African descent cultures. This can be noticed in the setting, when the narratives take place in the slums, when there are allusions to corporeal dimensions as performative actions, or even in the suggestions of forms of social organizations in lineages or communities. The most expressive element in African heritage – the mention to orixás and to religious syncretism – immediately stands out in the story that has the same name as the title of the book. The orixás are also invoked in other stories of such book, in characters’ religious practices.

In *Um rio preso nas mãos*, ancestry as category becomes visible in texts from several ethnic and cultural references by the author, when she is constructing her writings. Different societies, their beliefs and histories inferred in the contexts of the narratives, demonstrate the historical and anthropological richness of ancient civilizations of Angola and of other places in Africa, which prefigure cosmic and social relations of African ancestral perceptions. The connections of kinship and the worship of the dead are also shown as common elements in the category of ancestry.

Despite the differences of meaning between the “ancestries” underlying each book, it is possible to state that both works suggest restoring the value of pre-colonial cultures and histories. Hence, the relations of lineage and kinship, appreciated by the forms of organization of the societies referred to in the works, can be the key to a comparative reading. Such common mechanism to seek elements from the past, denied by colonialism, places *Olhos d’água* and *Um rio presos nas mãos* in a certain kinship.

⁶³ T.N. “Escrevivência,” a term coined by Conceição Evaristo, a combination of the words writing/living.

The writings by Evaristo and by Tavares operate in a movement that makes use of the colonizers' legitimizing way, in order to invert history: written record and its performative attributions. The books discussed herein demonstrate how writing and other symbolic productions provide peoples from peripheral countries in the south of the Equator with the possibility to recount their own stories, so they no longer reproduce what was said and created by the north.

From the perspective of solidarity in comparative literature, the texts by Evaristo and by Tavares teach us that African Brazilian literature and African literature have the potential to reveal countless cultural repertoires. Such comparison forces the facing of the mestizo character of several sociocultural realities, so that similarities can be perceived through differences, contrary to the culturally imposed hegemonic universality. Writing, for Conceição Evaristo and Ana Paula Tavares, is to overcome social oppressions of gender, race, class and geopolitical space. It is to place one's voice proudly, even though it is unwanted or even though there is a project by the nation or by the society that aims to invalidate it.

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Received May 15, 2024

Accepted May 02, 2025

Statement of Author's Contribution

The authors state their responsibility for the article. The text appears as part of a master's degree research, by author Lethicia Bernardino, defended at the State University of

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 20 (3): e66684e, July/Sept. 2025

Amazonas (UEA), and supervised by Professor Renata Rolon. As for the text, it is important to point out that the analyses, comprehending the figurations of the feminine and of ancestries, in the selected works, were elaborated by Lethicia Bernardino and supervised by Renata Rolon. Both authors wrote the article and revised the theoretical references and intellectual content. They are both responsible for all aspects of the paper in ensuring accuracy and integrity of any part thereof.

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 paper is well written and effectively fulfills its purpose to establish a comparison between Evaristo's and Tavares's works. For that, the arguments are solid and the bibliography is relevant. The analyses follow a "tour" of the books, presenting an overview of several short stories, without deepening in the narratives (most of the time, there is a single paragraph for each one). Such type of literary criticism is risky as it can generate a perception of superficiality in addressing the texts. Nevertheless, the authors can reverse such perception when they use theoretical references and establish connections among the fictional stories. I consider the publication valid and I suggest four specific adjustments indicated in the attached file. APPROVED

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Reviewed on September 12, 2024.

Review II

The paper addresses a theme which is relevant and very important for the area. The title is pertinent, in relation to the content dealt with in the text. The literary analysis is well founded by the theoretical discussion on ancestry. I suggest the authors should observe the spelling of Homi Bhabha's last name, as the last "h" is missing in the text and in the list of references. APPROVED

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Reviewed on September 27, 2024.

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