

The reverse of affection: violated motherhood in the short story Aramides Florença

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the short story Aramides Florença, part of Conceição Evaristo's collection *Insubmissas Lágrimas de Mulheres* (2017), in the light of the Lacanian materialism proposed by Slavoj Žižek, with special attention to the intersections between gender, race and symbolic violence. Based on the category of writing created by Evaristo, the research investigates how the narrative tensions the naturalized discourses on motherhood and romantic love, revealing their oppressive implications for the body and desire of black women. The general objective is to understand how motherhood, idealized as a space of affection, becomes a mechanism of control and violence in the context of a relationship governed by patriarchal structures. The specific objectives include: (1) identifying the forms of violence present in the narrative according to Žižek's categorization (symbolic, objective and subjective); (2) articulating these forms to the instances of the Lacanian triad (Symbolic, Imaginary and Real); and (3) analysing how the experiences of the character Aramides reflect the impositions of gender and race in affective and family relationships. Methodologically, this is a qualitative, interpretative and bibliographical study that combines literary criticism, Lacanian materialism and gender and race studies. The theoretical foundation is based on the writings of Slavoj Žižek (2010, 2014), Judith Butler (2018), Bell Hooks (2018), Pierre Bourdieu (2010). The results indicate that the story shows a transformation of affectivity into oppression, revealing the opposite of motherhood when it is lived outside the logic of male desire. The violence suffered by Aramides - physical, symbolic and emotional - is interpreted as a symptom of a system that marginalizes the autonomous desire of black women, dehumanizing their maternal experience. As a perspective, the article suggests expanding studies on representations of black motherhood in contemporary literature, linking narratives of resistance to criticism of the symbolic structures that shape affections. The relevance of the research lies in the contribution it makes to the fields of literary criticism, psychoanalytical studies and intersectional theories, by promoting a reading that denounces and destabilizes normative discourses on gender, race and affection.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa o conto *Aramides Florença*, integrante da coletânea *Insubmissas Lágrimas de Mulheres* (2017), de Conceição Evaristo, à luz do materialismo laciano proposto por Slavoj Žižek, com especial atenção às interseções entre gênero, raça e violência simbólica. Partindo da categoria de *escrivência*, criada por Evaristo, a pesquisa investiga de que modo a narrativa tensiona os discursos naturalizados sobre a maternidade e o amor romântico, revelando suas implicações opressoras sobre o corpo e o desejo da mulher negra. O objetivo geral é compreender como a maternidade, idealizada como espaço de afeto, torna-se mecanismo de controle e violência no contexto de uma relação regida por estruturas patriarcais. Os objetivos específicos incluem: (1) identificar as formas de violência presentes na narrativa segundo a categorização de Žižek (simbólica, objetiva e subjetiva); (2) articular essas formas às instâncias da tríade laciana (Simbólico, Imaginário e Real); e (3) analisar como as experiências da personagem Aramides refletem as imposições de gênero e raça nas relações afetivas e familiares. Metodologicamente, trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa, de natureza interpretativa e bibliográfica, que articula crítica literária, materialismo laciano e estudos de gênero e raça. A fundamentação teórica baseia-se nos escritos de Slavoj Žižek (2010, 2014), Judith Butler (2018), bell hooks (2018), Pierre Bourdieu (2010). Os resultados indicam que o conto evidencia um percurso de transformação da afetividade em opressão, revelando o avesso da maternidade quando esta é vivida fora da lógica do desejo masculino. A violência sofrida por Aramides – física, simbólica e emocional – é interpretada como sintoma de um sistema que marginaliza o desejo autônomo da mulher negra, desumanizando sua experiência materna. Como perspectiva, o artigo sugere a ampliação dos estudos sobre as representações da maternidade negra na literatura contemporânea, articulando narrativas de resistência à crítica das estruturas simbólicas que moldam os afetos. A relevância da pesquisa reside na contribuição que oferece para os campos da crítica literária, dos estudos psicanalíticos e das teorias interseccionais, ao promover uma leitura que denuncia e desestabiliza discursos normativos sobre gênero, raça e afeto.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Article Process:

Submetido: 07/12/2025

Aprovado: 02/15/2026

Publicação: 03/06/2026



Keywords:

Black literature.
Slavoj Žižek.
Gender.
Motherhood

Palavras-Chave:

Literatura negra
Slavoj Žižek
Gênero
Maternidade

Introduction

Black Brazilian female literature has established itself as an important field of resistance and denunciation of multiple forms of violence that permeate bodies and subjectivity of Black women. In this context, Conceição Evaristo's work occupies a prominent place, combining aesthetics and politics through the concept of *writing-experience*, an expression coined by the author herself to describe a form of writing that emerges from the concrete and collective experience of Black women in their struggle for existence, visibility, and recognition. This writing rejects hegemonic narrative models and proposes new forms of symbolic construction based on pain, memory, and resistance.

The collection "Insubmissas Lágrimas de Mulheres" (2017) constitutes a landmark in this literary movement, presenting female characters who face everyday forms of violence, such as emotional neglect, structural racism, abandonment, and, above all, gender-based violence. The short story "Aramides Florença", in particular, stands out for problematizing motherhood as an ambiguous space: simultaneously a legitimate desire for personal fulfillment and a field of tension in affective relationships marked by patriarchy. The narrative presents a woman who, upon becoming a mother, breaks with the logic of male desire and is therefore subjected to violent symbolic and physical punishment.

This article, entitled *The reverse of affection: violated motherhood in the short story Aramides Florença*, is the result of research developed within the scope of the Research Initiation Project (PIBIC), carried out at Campus IV of the State University of Alagoas (UNEAL), with support from the Research Support Foundation of the State of Alagoas (FAPEAL)¹. The research is based on a commitment to valuing black literature as a critical and formative field, especially with regard to issues of gender, race, and subjectivity.

We thus propose a critical analysis of the short story "Aramides Florença", articulating the foundations of Lacanian materialism, especially the conception of desire as a structuring lack, with Slavoj Žižek's (1992, 2010, 2014) studies on contemporary forms of violence. The discussion is enriched by contributions of feminist authors such as Heleieth Saffioti (2004), Rita Laura Segato (2003), Judith Butler (2018), and bell hooks (2018), who reveal intersections between gender, race, and power.

Methodologically, this is a qualitative study with an interpretive approach and an interdisciplinary theoretical foundation. The objective is to understand how Evaristo's

¹ This research was supported by FAPEAL, through the granting of a scientific initiation scholarship to the student, co-author of this work, Aline Oliveira dos Santos Silva.

narrative exposes symbolic mechanisms that operate violence against Black women, especially when they demand the right to desire and motherhood outside of patriarchal constraints.

Conceição Evaristo's writing: between denunciation and resistance

Conceição Evaristo is one of the most important voices in contemporary Black and female literature in Brazil. Her literary work, marked by political and aesthetic engagement, emerges from the experience of a Black woman who has experienced marks of racial, social, and gender inequality. Evaristo situates her writing within the field of *writing-experience*, a term she coined to describe a literary practice that articulates the personal and collective memory of Black women. According to the author, *writing-experience* "is not an invention; it is, above all, a way of recounting what has been lived, experiences that make up the existence of Black women" (Evaristo, 2005, p. 26). Therefore, it is a form of writing that not only narrates but also denounces and critically elaborates modes of silencing and subordination imposed on the Black population, especially women.

The *writing-experience*, as a critical category, was later appropriated by scholars of literature and cultural studies, being understood as an epistemological instrument for confronting colonial and patriarchal discursive structures. For Carneiro (2011), this type of writing constitutes a strategy of insurgency, claiming the legitimacy of the Black experience as the foundation of knowledge and art. Thus, Evaristo's literature breaks with the traditional literary canon by placing historically marginalized subjects at the center of the narrative, enabling a redefinition of the Brazilian social imaginary.

Within this aesthetic-political project, the collection "*Insubmissas Lágrimas de Mulheres*" (2017) stands out, in which Evaristo presents female characters experiencing multiple forms of violence—physical, symbolic, emotional, and institutional. Short stories that comprise the work function as devices of denunciation and resistance, as they not only expose hardships of Black women's daily lives but also develop subjective solutions to oppressive structures. According to Nunes (2020), Evaristo highlights the complexity of Black women's lived experiences by demonstrating that feelings such as affection, pain, and resistance are interconnected in a context permeated by structural inequalities.

Motherhood, in this set of narratives, assumes an ambiguous role: while on the one hand it can be a space for affirmation and strengthening of bonds, on the other, it reveals itself as a condition often instrumentalized by violence and social control. In stories of "*Insubmissas Lágrimas de Mulheres*", being a mother is not necessarily an experience of fulfillment, but can also represent a form of imprisonment, especially when associated with emotional relationships marked by domination, abandonment, or exploitation. Ribeiro (2020, p. 112)

highlights that "Evaristo deconstructs the myth of sacred motherhood, revealing how it can operate as a trap for Black women, who bear, alone, the weight of the emotional and material responsibility for their children."

In this context, the short story "*Aramides Florença*", the subject of this article, presents a space of tension between affection and violence, revealing fissures of a motherhood marked by pain, loss, and social imposition. Analyzing this narrative will allow us to understand how Evaristo problematizes the romantic ideal of motherhood, revealing the layers of violence hidden beneath the veneer of maternal love.

Symbolic violence and desire: theoretical foundations

The analysis of the short story *Aramides Florença*, by Conceição Evaristo, allows the articulation between categories of Lacanian materialism proposed by Slavoj Žižek (2010) and critical studies of gender and race, since the affective relationships described there are crossed by symbolic structures that operate domination, exclusion and violence.

The psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan (1998) understands the subject as a being constituted by language and structured by lack. This lack is what drives desire, which is never directed toward a fully accessible object, but toward that which is always absent, displaced, or lost. Lacan (1998) states that "desire is the desire of the Other", emphasizing that the subject is formed from the alterity and symbolic demands of the Other—an instance that represents law, culture and normative systems, that regulate the social bond. This symbolic Other is not an empirical subject, but the site of discourse that precedes the individual and determines their position in the field of language and desire.

Slavoj Žižek (2010), revisiting Lacanian theory at the end of the 20th century, proposes a materialist reading of this barred subject, articulating psychoanalytic concepts with the Marxist critique of ideologies. For the Slovenian philosopher, the subject of the unconscious cannot be understood in isolation from the socioeconomic and political structures that constitute it. Žižek (2010) reformulates Lacan's main concepts—such as the Symbolic, the Imaginary, the Real, and desire—from a critical perspective that seeks to highlight how the unconscious is permeated by the ideological contradictions of capitalist reality. From this perspective, subjective constitution is rooted in historical relations of domination, and the desire of the Other becomes mediated by the symbolic formations of ideology, consumer culture and apparatuses of power (Žižek, 2010).

In addition to reformulating the concept of the barred subject based on Marxist critique, Slavoj Žižek reinterprets the Lacanian triad—Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real—to highlight how these entities structure forms of subjectivation and the dynamics of domination in contemporary culture. This triad, fundamental to Lacanian psychoanalysis, not only organizes the subject's psyche but, in Žižek's interpretation, also structures ways in which ideology is inscribed in everyday life and manifests itself in interpersonal relationships.

The Symbolic is the realm of language, law, and social conventions. It represents the place of the Other as a system of meanings that precedes the subject and in which they are inserted. For Žižek (1992), the Symbolic is also the space where ideology becomes naturalized, disguising social conflicts under the appearance of order and normality. It is through the Symbolic that gender norms, family roles, and discourses on motherhood and love are imposed, shaping expectations of women—especially Black women—and limiting their social and emotional agency.

The Imaginary, in its turn, refers to the plane of identification, images of completeness, and the formation of the self. It is in this realm that the subject constructs fantasies of harmony and plenitude, seeking to compensate for their inherent incompleteness. Žižek (2010) states that the Imaginary, when mediated by ideology, sustains social fantasies such as romantic love and ideal motherhood, which operate as mechanisms of subjective control. Such fantasies, when frustrated, can produce violent effects, especially when the subject finds themselves facing the loss of a central position in the other's desire.

Ultimately, the Real is that which escapes symbolization and imagination: the breaking point, the unassimilable trauma, the excess that cannot be represented. For Žižek (2010), the Real is that which persists and returns as a failure of the symbolic system, destabilizing the ideological order. In the short story "*Aramides Florença*", the act of sexual violence perpetrated by the partner can be understood as an eruption of the Real: it is the moment when the fantasy of a loving relationship based on harmony collapses, revealing the traumatic core of the relationship—the denial of the woman's desire and the re-actualization of patriarchal power over her body.

By reformulating the Lacanian triad from a materialist perspective, Žižek (2010) expands the field of psychoanalysis to the realm of social critique, allowing us to understand how mechanisms of the unconscious are permeated by historical and ideological structures. This approach offers powerful theoretical tools for reading the work of Conceição Evaristo, whose writing exposes the psychic, symbolic, and real effects of racial and gender-based violence on the lives of Black women. In this sense, the Lacanian triad, reread by Žižek, allows

us not only to interpret the short story's affective dynamics but also to reveal the mechanisms of power that sustain violence against female desire.

From this perspective, desire is never directed toward a complete or fully accessible object; rather, it is oriented toward an absence, toward an object that is always displaced or lost—*object a*, in Lacanian terminology. This subjective incompleteness, when rejected, can generate mechanisms of aggression, jealousy, control, and violence, especially in relationships marked by power inequality, as occurs in affective bonds mediated by patriarchy.

Slavoj Žižek, rereading Lacan, within a contemporary philosophical and political project, highlights how symbolic violence operates silently and structurally, legitimizing itself through seemingly neutral or naturalized ideologies. According to Žižek (2014), symbolic violence manifests itself subtly and often imperceptibly, precisely because it is embedded in the structures of meaning that shape our way of understanding and experiencing the world. Thus, it acts in a naturalized manner, operating in the very ways in which reality is organized and perceived. This violence does not manifest itself directly, but rather operates in the normative discourses that define gender roles, romantic love, family, and women's place in society.

In the short story "*Aramides Florença*", the title character experiences this logic: by investing emotionally in her relationship with her newborn son, she displaces her partner from the central position he once occupied in her life. This gesture, which should be read as an expression of a new emotional configuration and of motherhood as a space of care and love, is interpreted by her partner as a loss of control and a threat to his male authority. At this point, the symbolic structure of patriarchy is activated as a mechanism of violent correction, and what was symbolic—jealousy, silence, resentment—overflows into real violence: marital rape, which severs any possibility of affection and reveals the female body as a territory of domination.

Authors, such as Heleieth Saffioti (2004) and Rita Laura Segato (2003), contribute significantly to understanding forms of violence directed at women in the context of a patriarchal and racially structured society. Both highlight that the female body, especially the Black woman's body, has historically been appropriated as an instrument for asserting male power. For Saffioti (2004), gender-based violence is not an isolated phenomenon but is deeply rooted in a system of social relations that naturalizes inequality and racializes oppression. This author highlights:

[...] male supremacy permeates all social classes and is also present in the realm of racial discrimination. Although the supremacy of the rich and white peoples makes the perception of men's domination of

women more complex, it cannot be denied that the last in the “pecking order” is a woman. In Brazilian society, this last position is occupied by poor and black women. (Saffioti, 2004, p. 16, author's emphasis).

This quote expresses a critical and forceful formulation of how gender oppression intertwines with class oppression and racial oppression. Saffioti (2004) assumes that male supremacy—that is, the structural dominance of men over women—is not restricted to the private sphere or certain social classes, but permeates all layers of society. She recognizes, however, that this dominance is expressed differently depending on class and race.

By mentioning that “the supremacy of the rich and white makes the perception of men’s domination of women more complex” Saffioti (2004), it denounces the fact that, often, male power is concealed by other forms of privilege (such as economic capital or racial status). This makes it difficult to make gender oppression visible, especially in contexts where class and racial inequality obscures the relations of domination between men and women.

The expression “pecking order” is a metaphor that refers to the hierarchy of oppression: a kind of social pyramid in which the most vulnerable are at the bottom, exposed to violence and contempt from all levels above. At the “bottom” of this hierarchy, according to Saffioti (2004), are poor Black women, as they simultaneously experience the effects of gender oppression, class exploitation, and structural racism.

In synthesis, (1) patriarchal oppression is transversal, but takes on specific and more violent forms when combined with racism and social inequality; (2) poor Black women occupy the most vulnerable position in Brazilian society; (3) an intersectional approach is necessary to understand how these systems of oppression intertwine. This reflection is essential to understanding the character Aramides: as a woman, Black, and poor, she is exposed to the deepest layers of symbolic and material violence. Motherhood, which for her is a space of affection and desire, becomes a factor of punishment within a structure that does not recognize her autonomy—a structure that sees her only as a functional body, not as a subject with emotional rights.

From this perspective, we understand that hierarchical social organization allows for the coexistence of multiple forms of oppression, such as class antagonism, racism, and patriarchy. Saffioti (2004) reveals that, at the base of this pyramid of subordination, we find poor Black women—a profile that strikingly applies to the character Aramides Florença. Her condition is permeated by these social markers that place her in a position of extreme vulnerability and silencing.

In this same field of reflection, anthropologist Rita Laura Segato (2003) offers a compelling reading of gender-based violence, particularly in the domestic sphere. For the author, acts of violence against women are not primarily motivated by sexual desire, but rather by the desire to reestablish a patriarchal order that socially organizes relations among genders, as she states in:

Combating these routine forms of violence is possible, but it is essential to understand this struggle as part of a process of destabilization and erosion of the status order itself, and not as a palliative – a simple correction of excess violence – so that it can continue its self-restoring march. The aim is to build a post-patriarchal society (Segato, 2003, p. 17 – own translation²)

From this thought, we realize that Segato's proposal is not limited to palliative measures or specific corrections; rather, it is a structural struggle to destabilize the foundations of patriarchy. The author proposes the construction of a post-patriarchal society, in which male dominance over females is overcome and acts of violence are no longer treated as deviations, but as symptoms of an order in need of profound transformation.

Relating this perspective to the narrative of *Aramides Florença*, we observe the exercise of patriarchal power by the protagonist's partner, who attempts to reassert his authority through symbolic and physical violence. The aggressor's behavior, in attempting to reestablish his control over Aramides, can be understood in light of Segato's (2003) analysis, since, according to her, rape and other forms of aggression in the domestic space are strategies for reaffirming a gender hierarchy, guided less by sexual desire and more by the logic of dominance and subjugation.

Therefore, by articulating the concepts of Lacan (1992) and Žižek (2010) with intersectional feminist studies, we demonstrate that symbolic violence not only precedes but structures physical and sexual violence. The case of Aramides starkly illustrates the transition between the symbolic and the real in the field of gender-based violence. This dynamic, legitimized by the discourse of love and the idealization of the traditional family, transforms

² Combatir esas formas rutinarias de violencia es posible, pero es imprescindible entender esa lucha como parte de un trabajo de desestabilización y de erosión del propio orden de estatus, y no como un paliativo —una simple corrección de los excesos de violencia— para que éste pueda seguir su marcha autorrestauradora. El objetivo es la construcción de una sociedad [...] postpatriarcal (Segato, 2003, p. 17)

motherhood from a space of affection into a battlefield, where women's desire is punished for challenging the centrality of men's desire.

Between desire and pain: motherhood as a space of symbolic violence

Motherhood, traditionally romanticized by Western culture, is often represented as an expression of unconditional love and a woman's fulfillment. However, when situated within the body and subjectivity of Black women, this experience becomes more complex and reveals fissures that destabilize the normative ideal. In the short story "*Aramides Florença*", Conceição Evaristo challenges this dominant imaginary by presenting a woman whose maternal experience is inscribed in the realm of pain and punishment. By choosing to be a mother outside the conventions imposed by male desire, Aramides transforms her motherhood into a gesture of rupture—and, therefore, is the target of symbolic violence that seeks to interdict her subjectivity and autonomy.

This chapter proposes an analysis of the short story based on the articulation of Lacanian materialism and intersectional feminist studies, understanding desire as a structure of lack (Lacan, 1998) and symbolic violence as a device of domination and silencing (ŽIŽEK, 2010; 2014). Motherhood, in this context, emerges as a space of dispute: between a woman's desire for recognition and the normative control exercised by patriarchal and racist discourse. The punishment imposed on the character is not only physical but above all symbolic, affecting her relationships, her social image, and her place in the world.

By examining narrative elements that structure the story, we seek to understand how Evaristo reframes the maternal figure and denounces the mechanisms that historically subjugate the body and affection of Black women. The analysis sheds light on motherhood not as a naturalized destiny, but as a political territory of resistance and vulnerability, in which pain and desire coexist under the sign of symbolic violence.

In the short story "*Aramides Florença*", included in the collection "*Insubmissas Lágrimas de Mulheres*" (Evaristo, 2017), Conceição Evaristo constructs a narrative that tensions the idealization of motherhood and romantic love, revealing how both can operate as devices of control and violence over the female body. Throughout the story, the character Aramides projects motherhood as a possibility of fulfillment and personal fulfillment, as we see in the following excerpts: "This is my child," the mother told me, before any other word, "my beloved. His name is Emildes Florença." (Evaristo, 2017, p. 9). And, later, the narrator

states: "Aramides Florença sought to be her son's nourishment. And, literally, she was. The boy was nourished only by her mother's milk." (p. 10).

These passages attest that her desire to bear and care for a child is associated with the construction of an affective identity that seems legitimate to her, since she believes and acts as if she were born to be a mother. "Florença had had a happy pregnancy. Having a child had been a choice she had made since she was a young girl, but one that she had always postponed." (p. 11) In other words, Aramides waited for the right man, the ideal partner to be the father of her child. "One day, that man really did appear. They were happy in their relationship. And happier when they decided to stay together." (Evaristo, 2017, p. 11) But the happiness was only apparent; it was the opposite of what she believed to be affection; it was, in fact, a violence that had been gradually revealed in the gestures and looks of the man who was her partner.

In the short story "*Aramides Florença*", Conceição Evaristo deconstructs the idealized vision of motherhood and romantic love by showing how these elements, often associated with female fulfillment, can be used as subtle forms of domination. The character Aramides sees motherhood as a legitimate path to building her identity and emotional fulfillment. The excerpts cited demonstrate that the desire to be a mother is authentic and cultivated since youth, experienced by her as a choice and personal fulfillment. However, this experience of affection is strained by the narrative, revealing that, even when part of a woman's desire, motherhood can be permeated by symbolic violence imposed by patriarchy.

Initially, their romantic relationship also seems promising, marked by reciprocity and promises of complicity: "Life continued as expected for both of them. The desired pregnancy soon occurred. (...) From then on, the two pregnant women promised to be happier, to share their happiness with the child to come." (p. 11). However, the pregnancy, rather than solidifying this emotional bond, reveals a relational structure deeply rooted in patriarchal dynamics, when "One day, something painful in Aramides' belly inaugurated a disturbance between them" (p. 13). It was a razor left on the bed, precisely where she usually lay. "The man, the father of Aramides's son Florence, could not explain the presence of that object there." (p. 13). The narrative continues with a series of attempts to understand what had happened. It was a series of "maybe this," "maybe that."

Although Aramides' initial relationship seems to be based on complicity and a mutual desire for motherhood, the narrative subtly reveals how this bond is grounded in patriarchal structures. Pregnancy, which should strengthen the union, becomes the turning point that exposes the fragility of this relationship. The episode of the razor, left in the woman's private space, symbolizes invasion, neglect, and emotional destabilization, marking the beginning of symbolic violence. The man's lack of explanation and the narrative's vagueness ("maybe") indicate not only an emotional betrayal but also the impossibility of sincere dialogue in a

relationship permeated by power hierarchies, in which the woman's body and affection are disregarded.

As the pregnancy progresses, Aramides' partner begins to show signs of discomfort, jealousy, and hostility, expressions of a frustrated desire for centrality and control, as happened three weeks after the episode with the razor. Aramides was getting ready in front of the mirror for bed when she noticed her husband approaching from behind. She expected a hug, and just as she was imagining the pleasure of receiving affection, what she felt was a tearing pain in her stomach.

She closed eyes and enjoyed in advance the caress of her partner's hands on her belly. But at that moment, she cried out in pain. He, who rarely smoked, especially when he was in her presence, had just embraced her with a lit cigarette among his fingers. It was a gesture so quick and so violent that the cigarette was crushed in Aramides's belly. A faint odor of burnt flesh permeated the air. For a fleeting moment, she had the feeling his gesture had been voluntary (Evaristo, 2017, p. 14).

As the pregnancy progresses, Aramides' partner reveals discomfort and hostility toward the central role their son assumes in her life. The violent act of burning her belly with a cigarette symbolizes the desire to punish and regain control over the woman's body, manifesting the patriarchal dynamic that does not tolerate female autonomy or the shifting of the emotional focus to motherhood.

The change in behavior highlights what Bourdieu (2010) calls symbolic violence—that which is exercised with the complicity of the dominated, through incorporated schemes of perception and valorization. Initially veiled and concealed by everyday gestures, this violence intensifies with the birth of the baby, a time when Aramides directs his affection almost exclusively to the child. His partner's decentralization in the family dynamic threatens the status of virility and authority he believes he possesses. This feeling of symbolic exclusion then triggers an act of real violence: marital rape, reported by Aramides, as shown in the following excerpt:

I was breastfeeding my son – Aramides told me, emphasizing the meaning of the sentence, pronouncing each word slowly – when the

father of Emildes arrived. He suddenly snatched the boy from my arms, placing him carelessly in the crib. He almost threw the child. I had the impression that had been his intention. Instantly, I was on my feet, grabbing him from behind and screaming helplessly. No one was around to help me and my son. In a succession of violent gestures, he threw me into our bed, tearing my clothes and violently touching one of my breasts, which was already covered, with his mouth, as I was breastfeeding my son. And thus, the father of Emildes raped. And within me, what still ached a little from the passing of my son, I suffered a deep pain, feeling the blood gush. (Evaristo, 2017, p. 17).

This episode marks a turning point in the narrative and highlights Evaristo's structural critique of the model of affectivity sustained by patriarchal logic. As Butler (2018) states, the female body, especially that of a Black woman, is often transformed into a field of symbolic and political disputes, shaped and constrained by gender norms that regulate her expression, her affections, and her desires. Aramides, by embracing motherhood as an expression of her desire, challenges the norm that subordinates women to the function of serving the desire of the masculine Other. Her affective autonomy is, therefore, punished.

The symbolic exclusion felt by the man culminates in a violent act, permeated by the logic of domination and possession of the woman's body. The sexual assault committed against Aramides is not only an act of physical violence, but also an attempt to restore lost male power. The story, therefore, reveals the reverse side of affection: a space where romantic love serves as a disguise for oppression and where motherhood, instead of being welcomed, is punished with violence.

Sexual assault is not limited to an act of physical violence, but rather an attempt to reinscribe male authority onto a woman's body. Žižek (2014) points out that subjective violence, the kind we perceive directly, always has behind it an objective and symbolic violence that structures our relationships. Rape, in this sense, is the extreme symptom of a relational structure that was already violent from the outset, even if camouflaged under the rhetoric of affection.

Slavoj Žižek, reflecting on contemporary forms of violence, distinguishes three main types: subjective, objective, and symbolic violence. Subjective violence is the most visible, manifesting itself in physical or verbal acts of aggression. Objective violence refers to the social and economic structures that perpetuate inequalities and injustices, often invisibly. Symbolic

violence operates through language and systems of signification, imposing norms and values that naturalize domination (Žižek, 2014).

In the story, symbolic violence manifests itself in social expectations about motherhood and the role of women. Aramides is led to believe that her personal fulfillment is intrinsically linked to motherhood and caring for her child, internalizing norms that place her in a position of subordination. Objective violence is present in the patriarchal structures that sustain the inequality of power between men and women, allowing Aramides' partner to exert control over her. Subjective violence is materialized in the act of rape, which is the final and most visible expression of others forms of violence that precede it.

These forms of violence can be associated with the Lacanian triad: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. The Symbolic corresponds to the norms and laws that structure society, including expectations about gender and motherhood. The Imaginary refers to the images and fantasies that the subject constructs about themselves and others, such as the idealization of romantic love and motherhood. The Real is that which escapes symbolization and manifests as trauma or rupture, such as the rape suffered by Aramides, which destabilizes her reality and reveals the latent violence within social structures (Žižek, 2010).

Conceição Evaristo's writing, in addressing sexual violence within domestic intimacy, exposes the limits of traditional affective discourse. The author deconstructs the ideal of romantic love as a space of safety and fulfillment, showing it instead as a stage for the re-actualization of power structures. At the same time, she questions motherhood as a naturalized destiny for women, revealing their conflicts and ambivalences. As Hooks (2018, p. 37) points out, "Black women have historically been represented as naturally maternal, but this representation has served more to justify the exploitation of their bodies and affections than to value their experiences."

This quote can be understood as a turning point in the critique of traditional gender constructs and the naturalization of female roles, especially within the family and emotional relationships. In the context of analyzing Conceição Evaristo's writing, hooks's (2018) quote gains strength by illuminating how the Brazilian author, through her fiction, participates in this movement of denunciation and reconfiguration. By addressing sexual violence in the domestic space—a place culturally associated with safety, love, and care—Evaristo destabilizes precisely these idealized discourses. Her work exposes how the emotional environment, far from being neutral or protective, can be a space for the reproduction of patriarchal violence and domination.

Hooks's critique of motherhood also resonates in Evaristo's writing, which often portrays motherhood not as a sacred or fulfilling destiny, but as an experience marked by

tensions, burdens, and, at times, impositions. Both authors challenge the idea that motherhood and romantic love are natural and universally desired achievements for women. In doing so, they contribute to a redefinition of affective and familial relationships, shifting the focus from fulfilling traditional roles to female autonomy and agency.

Therefore, Hooks's quote not only engages with the themes addressed by Evaristo, but also provides a theoretical framework for understanding how literature can participate in processes of cultural transformation, denaturalizing discourses and proposing new possibilities of existence for women.

In *Aramides Florence*, motherhood is not denied, but problematized. Aramides' desire to be a mother is legitimate and powerful, but it is stifled by a social structure that denies women the right to autonomous desire. The violence suffered by Aramides thus symbolizes the punishment imposed on those who dare to love otherwise—not according to the logic of possession, but of maternal surrender. The story forcefully exposes the perverse face of affection when shaped by oppressive structures, revealing that, in certain contexts, love can be violence's cruelest disguise.

Thus, Evaristo's narrative exposes how symbolic violence, by naturalizing gender roles and social expectations, paves the way for objective violence and culminates in subjective violence. Motherhood, far from being a space of fulfillment, becomes a field of dispute and control, where a woman's desire is repressed and punished. Through writing, Evaristo denounces these power dynamics and gives voice to the silenced experiences of Black women, revealing the multiple layers of violence that permeate their lives.

Conclusion

An analysis of the short story "*Aramides Florença*" highlights how Conceição Evaristo's literature constitutes a space for confronting the naturalized forms of oppression that affect the bodies and emotions of Black women. Through writing, Evaristo reframes the Black female experience, rejecting the romanticization of motherhood and love as universal and unquestionable. The character Aramides, by desiring to be a mother and investing emotionally in her child, breaks with the logic that subordinates female desire to the centrality of men, thereby becoming the target of violence that shifts from the symbolic to the physical.

Based on foundations of Lacanian materialism and critical contributions of Slavoj Žižek, it is understood that the violence committed against Aramides is not an isolated act, but the unfolding of a symbolic structure sustained by patriarchal ideologies that legitimize the

control of the female body. Motherhood, in this context, is captured by a thought of domination, being punished when it does not serve interests of male power. Evaristo's critique is not limited to denouncing explicit violence, but also focuses on the discourses that sustain and conceal it, revealing the reverse of affection as a site of oppression.

Thus, Conceição Evaristo's work serves as an instrument of denunciation and transformation, expanding the critical repertoire on motherhood, desire, and violence in literary narratives. By giving voice to women like Aramides, the author proposes an epistemological and political shift that challenges prevailing paradigms of affectivity and feminine identity. This article, by shedding light on these aspects, contributes to the debate on literature, subjectivity, and social justice in the Brazilian context.

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