A New Feminist Consciousness in Conceição Evaristo and Gloria Anzaldúa

⊙ Evelyn Amarillas Amaya
Heidelberg University

Abstract: This essay analyzes the Mestizo consciousness in *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*, by Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa, together with the short story "Olhos d'Agua" by the Afro-Brazilian writer Conceição Evaristo. In both works, there is an attempt to return to the indigenous tradition as a way of opposing Western male domination. Both writers, belonging to historically marginalized social groups and finding themselves in the middle of two cultures, take elements from precolonial cultures in their texts to propose a decolonized new way of understanding the world.

Keywords: Gloria Anzaldúa, Conceição Evaristo, Afro-Brazilian literature, Chicana literature, postcolonial feminism, coloniality of power, gender, race

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1. Identity and Violence in Latin American History

It is impossible to talk about female cultural resistance in Latin America without mentioning the violence suffered by subaltern groups in this territory since the conquest, which is based on the idea of racial difference, a biological distinction that justifies the fact that certain types of humans are naturally inferior to others. According to Aníbal Quijano, the idea of race was born with the conquest of America and is the basis of the whole history of domination in colonial times, as well as one of the fundamental axes of capitalist power today. From the conquest of America, according to the author, the European was assumed for the first time as white and created new identities based on skin color to mark the differences: Indians, Blacks, Mestizos …. Therefore, "terms such as Spanish and Portuguese, and much later European, which until then indicated only geographic origin or country of origin, acquired from then on a racial connotation in reference to the new identities" (534).

Since white Europeans were always those at the highest level of social organization, racial differences were associated with a way of classifying the population, giving each group a specific role and establishing a hierarchy that justified the domination of whites over others. In addition, Europe was constituted as an identity after America, and starting with the expansion of European

colonialism, a way of conceiving the world was developed in which Europe was the center from where everything emerged and it was understood that what was not from Europe was primitive and irrational:

> That perspective imagined modernity and rationality as exclusively European products and experiences. From this point of view, intersubjective and cultural relations between Western Europe and the rest of the world were codified in a strong play of new categories: East-West, primitive-civilized, magic/mythic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern—Europe and not Europe. (Quijano 542)

This Eurocentric perspective expanded as European power was imposed on the different populations of the world, and was therefore assumed as the norm by both the colonizers and the colonized, who were taught that their way of understanding the world was not the proper one and that they should adhere to European culture, understood as civilization, insofar as it was convenient to preserve their domination. In this way, the colonized were not only physically dominated, but were also stripped of their patterns of production of meaning, their symbolic universe, their patterns of expression and objectification of subjectivity (541), that is to say, they were stripped of their identity. As Quijano points out, indigenous peoples who previously had their peculiarities and their way of understanding the world (Aztecs, Mayas, Chimús, Aymaras, Incas, etc.), as well as the African Ashantis, Yorubas, Zulus, Congos, Bacongos, among others, were generally labeled as Indians in the first case or Blacks in the second, ignoring each and every one of the singularities of these peoples, and imposing on them a specific role in the Western social organization, a racial, colonial and negative identity (551).

According to Santiago Castro-Gómez, once Europe was consolidated as a world power, the Eurocentric perspective was understood as universal, being the only way to access valid knowledge about the physical and social world. With this premise, the values, beliefs, and knowledge of Indians, Blacks, and Mestizos rendered them incapable of becoming civilized beings and, therefore, they could and should be enslaved (121). Racism and universalism, for Castro-Gómez, justified and reinforced the physical domination and intellectual superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans, and are the basis of the power relations that survive to this day, what Quijano calls the coloniality of power.

Eurocentrism for Quijano proposes a dualistic conception of understanding the world (European/non-European, civilized/primitive, modern/traditional, etc.) associated with a linear and unidirectional evolution that advances from the primitive in nature to the European society as the highest point of civilization, in addition to a logic of human differences based on the idea of race and a vision of history as a timeline in which the non-European belongs to the past (542). According to this linear way of understanding the civilizing process and race as a justification for domination, some races are "closer to nature" and therefore their cultural creations are inferior, and their bodies are more suitable for physical labor and less suitable for intellectual work. Moreover, following the dualistic view as the organization of the world, with Eurocentrism the idea of gender is also introduced, which is supported just like the idea of race by what Oyèronké Oyěwùmí calls the Western bio-logic, that is, the idea that biology provides the basis for the organization of the social world (51).

Thus, the coloniality of power not only encompasses the racial classification of society, but also provides the concepts of class and gender, involving the spheres of sexuality and labor, as well as authority and intersubjectivity. In the current pattern of power

> each structure of each sphere of social existence is under the hegemony of an institution produced within the process of formation and development of that same model of power. Thus, in the control of labor and its resources and products, it is the capitalist enterprise; in the control of sex and its resources and products, the bourgeois family; in the control of authority and its resources and products, the nation-state; in the control of intersubjectivity, Eurocentrism. (Quijano 545)

On the other hand, given that all of society is ordered under the colonial pattern of power, in the case of sexual control there is, according to María Lugones, a coloniality of gender in which there is also domination: the binary conception of gender based on biological sex creates the homogeneous categories of "man" and "woman," but the woman and man to which this category refers is the heterosexual white woman and the heterosexual white man, while the category "black" is the one that defines the heterosexual black man (4), making it evident that the categories of gender only include the dominant groups and exclude all others. For the author, this phenomenon highlights the violence and dehumanization that subaltern groups suffer, since, in the case of women of color, they are not considered within the category of women and therefore are not even conceived as human, leading to their animalization and subsequent exploitation:

> Only white bourgeois women have consistently counted as women so described in the West. Females excluded from that description were not just their subordinates. They were also understood to be animals in a sense that went further than the identification of white women with nature, infants, and small animals. They were understood as animals in the deep sense of "without gender," sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity. Women racialized as inferior were turned from animals into various modified versions of "women" as it fit the processes of Eurocentered global capitalism. Thus, heterosexual rape of Indian women, African slave women, coexisted with concubinage, as well as with the imposition of the heterosexual understanding of gender relations among the colonized—when and as it suited Eurocentered, global capitalism, and heterosexual domination of white women. (13)

Both gender and race are fictions used within the colonial logic of power as a way of justifying and legitimizing relations of domination and the superiority of some over others, as part of the cognitive production of modernity (12). Both have been socially constructed as part of the Western hegemonic logic based on rationality, in which it is understood that modernization goes hand in hand with science. As Gloria Anzaldúa points out, "dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture. Culture is made by those in power—men" (38). In this sense, it is the white man who names and controls the world, making this domination pass off as a natural and predetermined fact.

If domination based on the idea of race is already violent, when class and gender are added to

it, oppression becomes dehumanizing: "If you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways" writes Gayatri Spivak (90) on the subalternity of women in the so-called Third World. The woman of color in Latin American countries is thus triple oppressed: her sex, her race and her social class relegate her to the lowest part of the social hierarchy, and therefore her struggle to speak and be heard is deeper and must be more inventive at the same time. As Pierre Bourdieu mentions:

> When the dominated apply to what dominates them schemes that are the product of domination, or, to put it another way, when their thoughts and perceptions are structured in accordance with the very structures of the relation of domination that is imposed on them, their acts of cognition are, inevitably, acts of recognition, submission. (13)

For this reason, it is not useful for Latin American women of color to use Western theories to understand their world: it is necessary to question the concepts that function as the basis of Western thought and create new ways of explaining the world they live in. The model of Western civilization and the forms of physical and symbolic violence that develop within it are not natural, much less eternal; they are part of a way of exercising control over all areas of society in order to preserve the domination of the groups in power. However, not all societies have always followed the rules of the West: there are other ways of understanding the world that are not based on Eurocentrism and the biologic of the coloniality of power, and that serve to rethink, resist and reconstruct the subjectivities of the dominated groups.

2. A New Logic: Unlearning and Overcoming in Gloria Anzaldúa

Oyěwùmí is a Nigerian feminist scholar who works on various topics such as gender sociology and African studies. Aware of the colonial logic followed to this day in the pattern of world power, for Oyěwùmí one of the great problems of African studies is that they attempt to analyze that culture from Western perspectives, for according to her "the foundations of African thought cannot rest on Western intellectual traditions that have as one of their enduring features the projection of Africans as Other and our consequent domination" (23). Furthermore, the author acknowledges that many scholars who deal with Africa assume the manifestations of the Western human condition as the human condition itself (19), thus confusing universalism with Eurocentrism. Therefore, the author proposes a study of Africa from the African point of view, and the example she uses to explain how the particular African version of the world differs completely from the European perspective is the category of gender in the Yoruba culture of West Africa.

According to Oyěwùmí, Western biological determinism conceives gender as two social categories in opposition and binary hierarchy (31). Within that hierarchy, man is, by nature, on a higher level than woman, which results in humanity in the Eurocentric conception being masculine: the word man, which in the English language supposedly refers to humanity and includes in it both men and women, in reality privileges man, and woman becomes the antithesis of man, or his complement or derivation. In Yoruba society, on the other hand, the word that refers to humanity, ènìyàn, has no gender, and the categories of man and woman are not in opposition nor in hierarchy (33-34).

In precolonial Yoruba society there was no gender system that ordered the world, the basic principle of social organization was seniority, defined by relative age (32), where always older people were conceived as wiser and occupied a position of predominance in the community, and therefore social roles in this culture are not configured according to male or female bodies. Only in terms of the role that bodies play in reproduction are terms used to point out the anatomical differences: ọkùnrin and obìnrin, which according to Oyěwùmí have been misinterpreted as the Western categories of man and woman:

> Unlike "male" and "female" in the West, the categories of obìnrin and ọkùnrin are primarily categories of anatomy, suggesting no underlying assumptions about the personalities or psychologies deriving from such. Because they are not elaborated in relation and opposition to each other, they are not sexually dimorphic and therefore are not gendered. In the Old Oyo, they did not connote social ranking; nor did they express masculinity or femininity, because those categories did not exist in Yoruba life or thought. (34)

From this, the author concludes that it is not possible to consider the Western category of gender as something naturally inherent in all cultures: gender is a social construction and a historical and cultural phenomenon within a system of domination, and it may have been non-existent in some of the dominated cultures. Oyěwùmí thus recognizes that in order to combat female domination rooted in Western biological determinism, it is necessary to turn to non-Western logics and change the Eurocentric dichotomous conception for a logic that does not privilege men over women, nor one race over the other.

A similar proposal is presented by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, where through her memories and experiences she explains the conflict of being a woman living between two cultures, and from this she proposes to transcend the Western and colonial binary logic that originates this conflict in the Chicana. In Anzaldúa's texts the tension of being part of a group historically oppressed both by the culture in which she develops, that is, the American culture, and by the culture to which she supposedly originally belongs, the Mexican culture, is always present. Anzaldúa recognizes that the oppression experienced by Chicanos is part of a system of domination created on the basis of racial hierarchies, because since the white man colonized the lands formerly inhabited by indigenous groups, he considered himself the sole and legitimate owner of them (25-26). The white man, Anzaldúa states, has historically denied and rejected the Chicano, stripping him of his land and his identity, reducing him to something less than human (107-108), and because of this stripping of identity and lack of a sense of dignity, the Chicano man "breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even to brutalize them" (105). Thus, for the author, the system of domination exercised by the white man reoccurs within Chicano culture, oppressing women as well, leaving them unprotected within their own community and placing them at the lowest level of the social hierarchy.

With respect to the machismo present in Chicano culture, Ramón Gutiérrez points out that faced with the lack of power they suffer within the society in which they live, Chicano men seek strength and inspiration in an Aztec heroic past that emphasizes the virility of warriors and the exercise of brute force: "Young Chicano men, a largely powerless group, invested themselves

with images of power—a symbolic inversion commonly found in the fantasies of powerless men worldwide, a gendered vision that rarely extends to women" (45-46).

Likewise, Alma Rosa Alvarez points out that this Chicano machismo can be observed in the treatment given to La Malinche, the historical character supposedly responsible for the fall of the Aztec empire. La Malinche, a woman who served as a translator between the Aztecs and Hernán Cortés and who, according to official history, played a decisive role in the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire, has become the stereotype of betrayal in Mexican culture: to be a Malinche is to betray one's roots. Thus, converted into a stereotype, the image of La Malinche is used as a symbol of the weakness and potential traitorousness of women, and therefore is the naturalization of the inferiority of the female gender in Mexican and Chicano culture, where women are dominated and then marginalized for allowing themselves to be dominated (Alvarez 14).

Anzaldúa is aware of the machismo that exists in her culture, and although she understands its origin and the constant oppression suffered by Chicano men, she points out that Mestizas do not have to put up with male domination any longer, nor do they have to endure the traditions that place them on a lower level within their culture:

> Though I'll defend my race and culture when they are attacked by non-*mexicanos, conosco el malestar de mi cultura*. I abhor some of my culture's ways, how it cripples its women […] No, I do not buy all the myths of the tribe into which I was born. I can understand why the more tinged with Anglo blood, the more adamantly my colored and colorless sisters glorify their colored culture's values –to offset the extreme devaluation of it by the white culture. It's a legitimate reaction. But I will not glorify those aspects of my culture which have injured me and which have injured me in the name of protecting me. (21-22)

In this way, Anzaldúa rejects the machismo present in her culture and turns to the indigenous past as an alternative to patterns of male dominance. In doing so, the writer points out that the gender hierarchies of the white male domination system were also imposed on pre-colonial indigenous Mexican culture, as the Aztecs conceived of gender as a balance and not as a hierarchy:

> My Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman's history of resistance. The Aztec female rites of mourning were rites of defiance protesting the cultural changes which disrupted the equality and balance between female and male, and protesting their demotion to a lesser status, their denigration. (43)

The binary logic of Europeans imposed on indigenous peoples, according to Anzaldúa, had a great impact on the way in which the latter conceived of their gods. In European culture, the mind has been perceived as sacred and elevated in opposition to the body, linked to the earthly and therefore to the mundane. This division between mind and body can be seen both in Christianity, expanded by Europeans in the colonies, and also in philosophy, with the so-called Cartesian dualism, and constitutes one of the bases of Western binary thinking, which divides, opposes and hierarchizes every aspect of human existence. From this separation between mind and body arises the idea that man is the rational being par excellence and woman, naturally inferior, is the "woman

of the body" (Oyěwùmí 6), weak and prone to bodily passions, thus establishing a system of social control over women: "According to Christianity and most other major religions, woman is carnal, animal, and closer to the undivine, she must be protected. Protected from herself. Woman is the stranger, the other" (Anzaldúa 39). Because of her weakness, then, woman must be protected, and if she should fail in the submission of the flesh, in the submission of herself, she is considered a bad woman, while the woman who ignores the passionate impulses of the body and submits to the protection of man and Christian culture is considered in society as a good woman. This Manichean idea of woman as good or bad creates a dichotomy in which a woman can only be a whore or a virgin, a dichotomy that Anzaldúa believes must be unlearned through the rejection of the system of binary oppositions of Western logic and reconciliation with indigenous thought (106).

According to Anzaldúa, pre-Columbian indigenous cultures were aware of the dualities that existed in the world, but in their imagination these dualities were not opposites, but coexisted in balance: "before the Aztecs became a militaristic, bureaucratic state where male predatory warfare and conquest were based on patrilineal nobility, the principle of balanced opposition between the sexes existed" (53). The change came about when the Aztecs, one of the twenty Toltec tribes, made their last pilgrimage from Aztlan to centralize in the region of what is now Mexico and ally themselves with the Mexica. The Mexica god Huitzilopochtli assigned the Aztec-Mexica the task of preserving the life of the human race through the unification of all peoples, a task they took on as a justification for war. Thus, the Aztecs modified their mythology to make the war principle valid, went from being a tribe ordered in clans to create a system of social classes and became a military state that demanded tribute and captives from neighboring tribes (54). The abuse of power towards the other tribes and the transformation of myths and the ancestral dual order, argues Anzaldúa, was the cause of the fall of the Aztecs:

> The conquered tribes hated the Aztecs because of the rape of their women and the heavy taxes levied on them. The *Tlaxcalans* were the Aztec's bitter enemies and it was they who helped the Spanish defeat the Aztec rulers, who were by this time so unpopular with their own common people that they could not even mobilize the populace to defend the city. Thus the Aztec nation fell not because Matinali (*la Chingada*) [La Malinche] interpreted for and slept with Cortes, but because the ruling elite had subverted the solidarity between men and women and between noble and commoner. (56)

Women, then, went from occupying high positions and even exercising supreme power within a society characterized by matrilineal descent (55), to being considered as spoils of war. The feminine deities were replaced by masculine deities of war, creating a hierarchical division and the loss of the balance symbolized by the deities: "[they] drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes […] thus splitting the female Self and the female deities. They divided her who had been complete, who possessed both upper (light) and underworld (dark) aspects" (48).

The indigenous deities were a combination of the carnal and spiritual elements, of body and soul, and could contain in them both life and death, light and darkness. There were no hierarchical oppositions in them, but harmony. As an example of this, Anzaldúa uses the case of Coatlicue, in Nahuatl "the one with the skirt of serpents" (48), who in Mexica mythology is the goddess of

fertility and the creator of all the gods. The serpent in pre-Columbian cultures symbolized sexuality and life, and creation and death at the same time; therefore Coatlicue was the sum of the elements of life and also symbolized the feminine and the masculine. However, with the later domination of the masculine deities over the feminine, the cult of the serpent and all that it symbolized also changed. Alvarez points out that this change towards a system of male dominance is represented in the figure of the eagle devouring the serpent, emblem of the Mexican flag (56).

The case of Coatlicue is essential for Anzaldúa to explain the loss of balance between the dualities of the world, but it also helps to understand the subsequent domination exercised over women with the indigenous conversion to Christianity during the Spanish conquest. The human figure of Coatlicue is Coatlalopeuh, where coatl means "serpent" and lopeuh is "she who has dominion over serpents." When the Spaniards tried to impose Christianity on the conquered peoples, they incorporated some elements of the indigenous culture to make the religious conversion more effective. Therefore, in the case of the deities they phonetically associated the name Coatlalopeuh with Guadalupe, identifying the indigenous figure with the Spanish virgin (Anzaldúa 50). Given that in the Christian belief the serpent has a negative connotation, since it is associated with Satan and sin, everything related to the serpent was eliminated from the figure of Coatlalopeuh (56).

In addition, Coatlalopeuh, as well as Coatlicue, represented the balance between soul and body, spirituality and sexuality. As the Spaniards imposed a dichotomous vision of the world, it became impossible to maintain a figure that represented duality in balance, which resulted in a division between the female deities. Guadalupe was the virgin, good and protective, while Coatlalopeuh, the indigenous deity, came to represent only the fearsome and sexual, which gave this characterization not only a sexual nuance, but also a racial one:

> The sexual, untransformable element of Coatlalopeuh was given a character opposite of the Virgin, that of a whore. This dichotomy was also constructed on racial lines so that the Indian was the whore and the Spanish was the Virgin. This dichotomy where the Indian is whore also fit well with the nationalist Malinche paradigm, where the Indian woman, through her orality and sexuality is traitor. Through the transformation of Coatlalopeuh, women's earlier spirituality and sexuality were controlled. (Alvarez 56)

Through the case of Coatlalopeuh, Anzaldúa exemplifies the division of female deities as a form of Western male domination. By breaking the balance between dualities, by attempting to condemn the body and privilege the soul, parts of the being are killed, leaving it incomplete: "The Catholic and Protestant religions encourage fear and distrust of life and of the body; they encourage a split between the body and the spirit and totally ignore the soul; they encourage us to kill off parts of ourselves" (59). However, when the body and soul are accepted as equally fundamental parts, it is possible to reach fullness, to be in complete harmony. And for this very purpose, Anzaldúa uses Coatlicue, the serpent, as an example of the balance between the supposedly opposing and contradictory elements, for a reconciliation with all the parts of herself: "Forty years it's taken me to enter into the Serpent, to acknowledge that I have a body, that I am a body and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul" (48).

In the figure of Coatlicue, Anzaldúa finds a way to resist the Western binary logic that divides her essence as a woman, a way to survive an oppressive system that tries to categorize everything according to dualities. Anzaldúa's "*Coatlicue* State" is a way to survive this system through the idea of a fusion of supposedly opposing elements, a way to create something new and positive from the negative (41).

The division of the elements of life and the system of hierarchies violently imposed on the indigenous worldview is seen by Anzaldúa as a wound, a crack. She uses the idea of the wound not only to refer to the imposed division between soul and body, but also in terms of culture. As a Chicana, she finds herself divided between two cultures, between two regions of the world marked by a border: "The U.S.- México border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture—" (Anzaldúa 25). Anzaldúa takes the border as a wound that at the same time generates an opening: the Rio Bravo that marks the division between south Texas and northern Mexico, separating two regions and two cultures, also becomes a place of connection that gives birth to a new way of thinking and being, to a new consciousness. Here again, the Coatlicue state applies: to make something positive arise out of the wounds, out of the divisions.

Anzaldúa recognizes that the binary oppositions imposed by patriarchal Western culture—from the idea of gender, which involves the separation of soul and body, to the idea of race, which establishes hierarchies and defines beings and elements as better or naturally superior over others—oppress and are the origin of all violence:

> The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us the end of rape, of violence, of war. (102)

In order to put an end to the oppression of man over woman, of White over Black, of body over soul, of one culture over another, Anzaldúa considers it necessary to overcome imposed dichotomous thinking, transcend dualities and create a new inclusive consciousness that overcomes hierarchies. Like Oyěwùmí, who returns to the Yoruba past to advocate an eradication of the idea of gender as the basis of social order, Anzaldúa takes the idea of indigenous duality to propose the eradication of dichotomies, in favor of a balanced and harmonious system. Moreover, for Anzaldúa, the physical and symbolic wound in the Mestizo culture, present in women of color, can be healed through the emergence of a new way of thinking that sees precisely in that wound an opening, the opportunity to create and to include.

3. Back to the Origin in Conceição Evaristo

Conceição Evaristo is another attempt to recover the voice of historically oppressed women, as the Afro-Brazilian writer presents in her texts the different realities of Black Brazilian women living in poverty and marginalization. In her story "Olhos d'água" ("Eyes of water"; my trans.)

written from the experiences of her own childhood with her mother and her six sisters in Minas Gerais, the author starts from a question about the color of her mother's eyes to make a journey to her origins and reconnect with the Yoruba tradition from West Africa.

The story "Olhos d'água" begins with the question of the color of the narrator's mother's eyes, a question that appeared some years ago, one night, hammering in her head until it caused pain, and which she tried to answer through childhood memories. When reminiscing, the narrator recalled the way her mother, who was dedicated to washing other people's clothes, used games and stories to distract her daughters from hunger and economic hardship: "E era justamente nos días de parco ou nenhum alimento que ela mais brincava com as filhas" ("And it was precisely on days of little or no food that she played the most with her daughters"; Evaristo 24).[1] She also highlights that during those games the mother laughed until she cried or laughed in a sad way "e um sorriso molhado" ("and a wet smile"; 24), and when there were heavy rains, the mother would cry and pray for fear that the rain would destroy her home: "Os olhos de mina mãe se confundiam com os olhos da natureza. Chovia, chorava! Chorava, chovia!" ("My mother's eyes were confused with nature's eyes. It rained, she cried! She cried, it rained!"; 24).

After recalling childhood games and moments in her hometown, the narrator acknowledges that on that night she could not remember the color of her mother's eyes.The question, tormenting her, led her to experience a kind of guilt, which she tried to appease by acknowledging the importance of her mother and all the women of her family in her life. Finally, out of desperation to remember the color of her mother's eyes, the narrator decided to travel to her hometown, where she was finally able to see her mother's face and recognize that her eyes were the color of water:

> Vi só lágrimas e lágrimas. Entretanto, ela sorria feliz. Mas, eram tantas lágrimas, que eu me perguntei se mina mãe tinha olhos ou rios caudalosos sobre a face. E só então compreendi. Minha mãe trazia, serenamente em si, águas correntezas […] A cor dos olhos de minha mãe era cor de olhos d'água. Águas de Mamãe Oxum! Rios calmos, mas profundos e enganosos para quem contempla a vida apenas pela superfície. Sim, águas de Mamãe Oxum. (25)

> I saw only tears and tears. Meanwhile, she was smiling happily. But, there were so many tears, that I wondered if my mother had eyes or rivers flowing over her face. And only then did I understand. My mother carried serenely flowing waters within her […] The color of my mother's eyes was the color of watery eyes. Waters of Mamma Oxum! Calm rivers, but deep and deceptive to those who contemplate life only from the surface. Yes, the waters of Mamma Oxum.

The narrator notes that as she made the trip back to her hometown to see her mother's eyes, she felt she was fulfilling a ritual "em que a ofrenda aos Orixás deveria ser descoberta da cor dos olhos de mina mãe" ("in which the offering to the Orixás should be discovered from the color of my mother's eyes"; 25). The guilt that the narrator feels at not being able to remember, and the fact that the question appears in a violent and accusatory tone, speak of the narrator's need to reconnect with her past, with her identity, after having left her place of origin. Although some memories of her childhood phase are perceptible to the narrative voice, the forgotten color of her mother's

eyes makes it possible to reflect on her fragmented identity (da Silva et al. 428). In addition, the narrator mentions that at the time the question arose, she was singing songs of praise to her African ancestors, the women "que desde África vinham arando a terra da vida com as suas próprias mãos, palabras e sangue" ("who from Africa had been plowing the land of life with their own hands, words and blood"; Evaristo 25). Thus, the memory of the women who came from Africa to America and the deities they brought with them is essential for the narrator to understand her reality, because through her African heritage she can connect her past and her present, her cultures: memory is a form of reconciliation and resistance.

According to Fernando Ortiz, when Africans were taken to America as slaves, they lived a much more violent experience than the Indians, because while the latter suffered in their native land, with the comfort of their family and their temples, the Africans were uprooted from their land and taken into the unknown (96). The slaves brought their bodies and their spirits (95), and the violent uprooting they experienced led them to seek refuge in their culture, in their religion, where they would find a way to resist the domination and dehumanization to which they were subjected. Thus, it is no coincidence that in "Olhos d'água" the narrator refuses to forget her mother's eye color and African ancestors: the journey she undertakes is both physical and spiritual, for she is returning to her mother's home and, by recognizing in her eyes the waters of Oshun (Oxum), she is also returning to her African roots, resisting the forgetting of her culture.

In the Yoruba religion, Oshun is the Orishá (Orixá) goddess of the fresh waters, of the rivers, and also symbolizes love and fertility, which is why she is considered a mother, Mamma Oxum. The figure of the mother, then, is constantly introduced in the tale, not only through the question about the color of the eyes of the physical mother of the narrator, but also through the recognition of the waters of Oshun, who is mother and represents the African origin, the root. Moreover, at the end of the story the narrator also shows herself to be a mother and mentions that, as a game, she imagines that her daughter's eyes are a reflection of her own. The story ends when the daughter also discovers the water in her mother's eyes: "Mae, qual é a cor tao úmida de seus olhos?" ("Mom, what is the so moist color of your eyes?"; 25). A cycle is established with this ending, like the flow of a river, in which the mother leaves as an inheritance to the daughter the moisture of the eyes, the water that represents the return to the origin, to the African ancestors.

Furthermore, in the African tradition, Oshun reveals herself to be against male domination. According to the story, when the gods, the Orishás, arrived on Earth they organized groups to decide the activities to be done.However, in these groups women were not considered, which provoked the wrath of Oshun, who in response made women sterile and dried up the rivers, making the land unproductive. With this action the Orishás recognized the importance of women and gave them their rightful place in the organization of activities, and thus the land became productive again (da Silva et al. 428-429). Oshun, then, represents the importance of women as creators and transformers, and her story shows the change from a patriarchal social structure to an organization in which women occupy an equally important place as men in the world, and the important role of water in life.

In the story the narrator's memories are related to water or liquid elements: the saliva of the hungry daughters; the boiling water in the frying pan without food; the rain; the mother's tears. This makes the power of Oshun even more important in the story through the symbolism of water, which

in the imaginary of the Black community is where the diasporic experience begins, with the ship crossing the ocean, transporting Africans to the new world (Glissant, *Introducción a una poética de lo diverso* 37). The ocean carries the weight of the ships that transported the slaves, it carries their pain, because for Édouard Glissant the stories of black terror are inscribed in the ocean: in its depths lie the corroded chains of the Africans (*Poetics of Relation* 6). For Ortiz, the Blacks crossed the sea in agony, believing that even after death they had to go over it to rejoin their lost parents in Africa (96), so that the sea also for him represents the division between the lost home and the new unknown world, the rupture with the origin.

In Evaristo's story, water means life and creation. Oshun, who is a river and also a mother, is used by the writer to give another meaning to water, to see in her a creative figure with the capacity for transformation: the waters of Mamma Oshun are mighty but calm rivers, as are the mother's eyes, which can shed tears of sadness as well as tears of laughter: water admits both the positive and the negative. The mother's eyes, containing deep rivers, allow for renewal: "Evaristo representa, ao mesmo tempo, o sofrimento e a força da sua mãe na volumosa água que rege o conto e vincula-se aos olhos da mãe […] As mesmas águas que simbolizam o pranto e a tristeza indicam, também, a renovação e o constante devir" ("Evaristo represents, at the same time, the suffering and the strength of her mother in the voluminous water that rules the tale and binds itself to the mother's eyes […] The same waters that symbolize weeping and sadness also indicate renewal and constant becoming"; Pereira and Lisboa 165). Like the water of the river, the memory of African ancestors is also a kind of renewal for the woman: only when she can recognize Oshun in her mother's eyes, overcoming the question of their color, can the narrator remember and connect African past with Brazilian present.

A cycle is also established by the fact that in saying goodbye to her mother the narrator feels her tears mingle, as if to imply that women are connected through water, or that they all share the same waters. Thus, the female generational connection with the ancestors, the Yabás, is established, and the author acknowledges the suffering shared by the Black women brought from Africa and the importance of remembering and honoring it through songs, through rituals of memory. Brought across the ocean, living the experience of uprooting and suffering, Black women are connected to the water and are part of the same river, of the same pain. The woman, like the goddess Oshun, is fertile; she has the possibility to create and also to transmit through her body. That is why the waters of African history pass from mother to daughter, when the tears of one mingle with the other, establishing a cycle that transmits from generation to generation, from mother to daughter, the cultural heritage.

On the other hand, the fact that the mother's eyes are claimed to be the color of water, assigning them a color that does not fall within the traditional color scheme, is also a form of resistance. Western rational logic and the categories imposed on the world are thus rejected, and in this act the whole ideological subjugation of non-Western cultures, which are accused of being irrational and superstitious for holding different beliefs and ways of seeing the world, is rejected. In the story, then, the water in the mother's eyes is not a fictional element, but the representation of a tradition, of a different way of seeing life, far from the supposed Western rationality. Thus, Evaristo connects with Anzaldúa because both African and indigenous cultures are considered primitive by Western logic, which categorizes everything that does not fit within the rational as something magical:

> White anthropologists claim that Indians have "primitive" and therefore deficient minds, that we cannot think in the higher mode of consciousness—rationality. They are fascinated by what they call the "magical" mind, the "savage" mind, the *participation mystique* of the mind that says the world of the imagination –the world of the soul– and of the spirit is just as real as physical reality. (Anzaldúa 59)

For the narrator in "Olhos d'Agua", the revelation that her mother's eyes are the color of water is also the vindication of her culture, of her conception of the world. Her mother's eyes can only be the color of water because they hold within them the heritage of African women, mothers and their tears, but also life and creation, renewal. Water is the connection with the past, the look is the recognition of that past.

4. Conclusion

Memory is a constant in both Anzaldúa and Evaristo. To return to indigenous traditions is to resist forgetting and to resist the loss of an essential part of identity, so remembering is also a way of healing, and knowing history is a fundamental step to understand the present and change the future. Anzaldúa is aware that there are elements of her culture that betray and oppress her, so she decides to select those that she believes are more fitting and use them to propose a new way of thinking. Evaristo, for her part, uses the African past to explain her present, to define the things she sees. In her story, by explaining that the mother has eyes of water, she is defining a way of understanding existence that recovers indigenous myths and puts them on the same level as the dominant culture that rejects them. Thus, she decides and creates her own way of seeing the world, freeing herself and reconciling the parts that were divided within her.

The figure of the mother is also of great importance for Evaristo and Anzaldúa. However, it is not a benevolent and submissive mother, but rather a suffering and oppressed mother who resists adversity and is honored through memory. Whether it is the physical mother or the symbolic mother, the maternal figure implies creation and life, which is why the figure is related to the birth of a new cultureand a new consciousness.The material figure implies that culture is an inheritance that is transmitted from generation to generation, from woman to woman.

In the case of Evaristo, the representation of Oshun as water and as life allows the recognition of the importance of women in the world and the importance of creation. Woman, like water, is the element that makes the Earth productive, and is also a river that flows through generations: in this sense, the indigenous feminine experience allows for the reconciliation of past and present, of sadness with happiness, of the rational and the supposedly irrational or magical. The water that divided the origin with the unknown and that separated the slaves from their roots also connects them with their roots.That is why it is the path and the bridge between cultures, between different worldviews.

In Anzaldúa, the figure of the serpent Coatlicue serves as a representation of a world in balance, a world that accepts the contradictions of supposedly opposing elements. To return to the indigenous through Coatlicue is to reject the religious and macho vision imposed by the dominant groups and to embrace the idea of light and darkness, of good and bad as fundamental parts of

existence. Furthermore, Anzaldúa sees in the rupture, in the physical and mental wounds, the opportunity for the emergence of the new: it is not enough to privilege one idea over another, as has been done from the dominant Western culture, but to create a way of seeing the world where hierarchies disappear, and all the elements of life are included.

Both Anzaldúa and Evaristo, being women of color who belong to socially marginalized groups, use their writings as resistance and a way of surviving a world where they are oppressed because of their gender, race and social class. This is not to assume that the experiences of these women are similar, as each has dealt with her cultural past differently and has her own way of understanding life. What is intended is to demonstrate that, in the face of the conflict generated by the encounter of two cultures and the pressure to position one as superior to the other, both writers propose a return to the indigenous past through a female figure, the transcendence of Eurocentric binary logic, and the creation of a new way of understanding the world. The trauma of racial and gender violence can be healed for both writers through a new consciousness that goes beyond categorical dualities and allows the elements of life to exist in balance, without hierarchies and without violence.

Note

1. The translations from Portuguese to English are all mine.

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