


BODY WRITINGS IN CONCEIÇÃO EVARISTO AND HELOISA MARQUES: TEXTILE ART AND WRITING AS AN INSURGENCY OF THE FEMININE <https://doi.org/10.63330/aurumpub.008-006>**Nincia Cecilia Ribas Borges Teixeira¹****ABSTRACT**

The research proposes a dialogue between the poetics of Conceição Evaristo and the textile art of Heloisa Marques, based on the symbolic relationship between body, memory and resistance. Starting from the image embroidered with the phrase “As the birds know, I know: I am a woman in the open air”, we reflect on how both artists inscribe a narrative of affirmation, freedom and ancestry on the female body, through aesthetic strategies that break with the historical invisibility of women, especially black women. The theoretical framework adopted is based on cultural studies, with an emphasis on authors who deal with issues of gender, body and identity.

Keywords: Female body; Aesthetic resistance; Ancestry.

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INTRODUCTION

THE BODY AS LANGUAGE

“The body is an effect, not a cause, a discursive effect. What we call ‘the matter of the body’ is already a cultural signification.”

— Judith Butler (2003)

The visual art of Heloisa Marques—especially that produced through textile techniques such as embroidery—and the poetry of Conceição Evaristo intersect within a symbolic field where the female body serves as the central axis of expression. Both artists construct a language in which material—whether fabric or word—becomes a territory for inscribing lived experience. The embroidered phrase in Marques’s work, “As the birds know, I know: I am a woman in the open air,” synthesizes an existential stance that resonates deeply with the notion of *escrevivência* (life-writing) proposed by Evaristo.

This study is situated within the field of cultural studies, understanding culture as a space of symbolic dispute (Hall, 2003). It adopts an intersectional perspective that considers the experiences of Black women, their corporealities, and their ways of narrating the world. The concept of *escrevivência*, formulated by Conceição Evaristo, is articulated with the idea of culture as an identity performance in constant negotiation.

The methodology employed in this research is qualitative, exploratory, and interpretative in nature. We adopt a cultural and symbolic analysis of images and texts, emphasizing critical reading procedures and intertextuality, in accordance with the principles of cultural studies. The image by Heloisa Marques is analyzed as a visual object bearing meanings inscribed within specific historical and social contexts. In parallel, we selected the poem “Presente” by Conceição Evaristo as a textual basis to construct a dialogue between the meanings produced by visual art and written poetics. The analysis considers both visual signs (embroidery, colors, forms, bodily symbols) and verbal signs (embroidered phrase, poetic language), seeking intersections that reveal layers of meaning about the female body and its memory. From a Kantian perspective, the generation of a new being is not limited to the act of procreation but extends to the care owed to it, grounded in the humanity inherent to it.

BODY, MEMORY, AND ESCRIVIVÊNCIA

“The female body is earth and sky, shelter and horizon. It holds the memories of the world and bears the scars of time.”

— Gloria Anzaldúa (1987)

Conceição Evaristo is a writer, essayist, and professor, born in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the Fluminense Federal University (UFF) and is one of the

foremost voices in contemporary Afro-Brazilian literature. Her work is marked by themes of memory, ancestry, the condition of Black women, and social inequalities. As the creator of the concept of *escrevivência* (a type of writing that emerges from the life experience and condition of black women in society), she articulates writing and lived experience as a form of resistance and identity affirmation. Among her most notable publications are Ponciá Vicêncio (2003), *Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres* (2011), and *Olhos d'água* (2014).

The critical reception of Evaristo's work has expanded significantly in recent decades, establishing her as one of the most important figures in contemporary Brazilian literature. Her writings have been the subject of analysis across various academic fields, particularly in comparative literature, cultural studies, gender studies, and ethnic-racial relations. One of the most discussed aspects is the concept of *escrevivência*, developed by the author herself. According to Evaristo, "escrevivência is not reducible to autobiography. It is a writing of the self that carries the collective experience of the Black Brazilian population, especially that of women" (2011, p. 25).

This concept has been explored by scholars such as Eduardo de Assis Duarte (2014), who argues that *escrevivência* breaks with Eurocentric writing by placing Black life at the center and origin of literary creation. The notion of *escrevivência* articulates experience and language, memory and subjectivity, establishing a unique mode of narrating the world in opposition to dominant narrative structures.

Critics also emphasize the central role of orality, memory, and ancestry in Evaristo's work. For Regina Dalcastagnè (2012), Evaristo's writing recovers a tradition of silenced voices, making the word a territory of struggle and permanence.

In this sense, Evaristo's literature is perceived as a space of identity reinscription, where characters—especially Black women—gain voice. The bodies of her characters, often marked by exclusion, are portrayed as bearers of knowledge and histories that resist social and historical erasure.

Moreover, the representation of the Black female body as a political territory is a recurring theme in critical discourse. Influenced by authors such as bell hooks and Audre Lorde, feminist criticism has recognized in Evaristo's work a fertile ground for discussing Black subjectivities and intersectionality. As bell hooks states, "the Black body is a site of resistance, of rewriting, and of reappropriation of identity" (1995, p. 240).

The growing institutional recognition of Evaristo—through the inclusion of her works in university entrance exams, literary awards such as the Jabuti (2015), and her candidacy for the Brazilian Academy of Letters (2018)—has also become a subject of study. According to Duarte (2014), "Evaristo's recognition in institutional spaces marks a rupture with the traditional canon and an opening to plural voices in Brazilian literature."

Thus, the critical reception of Conceição Evaristo's work extends beyond the analysis of her texts, integrating a broader discussion about the role of literature in constructing identities and contesting narratives in the public sphere.

When Evaristo (2011) conceptualizes the term *escrevivência*, she elaborates a unique epistemology of textual production anchored in the everyday experiences of Black women, considering their life trajectories, affective memories, and ancestral ties. This is a form of writing that transcends the limits of individual autobiography and configures itself as a collective gesture of narrative insurgency, grounded in orality, memory, and Afro-Brazilian ancestry.

In this context, the poem "Presente" exemplifies this conception by inscribing the body as a symbolic locus of resistance and historical preservation. This is a free translation of the original poem:

Presente
My body,
living history,
tattooed
by fire,
pain,
love,
pleasure and struggle.

My body,
sacred text
of an entire life.
My body is the present.

In the poem "Presente," Conceição Evaristo constructs a poetics of the body in which the subjectivity of the Black woman is inscribed as a territory of resistance, memory, and existential affirmation—"My body, living history." The author mobilizes a symbolic language in which the body is presented as both subject and object of experience—not merely as physical matter, but as a bearer of historicity. This history is not neutral: it is "tattooed by fire," an expression that evokes the pain and violence inscribed on the Black female body in a racist, sexist, and unequal society—"My body, living history, tattooed by fire, pain, love, pleasure and struggle."

In the verse "pain, love, pleasure and struggle," the complexities of Black female experience are synthesized: there is no idealization, but rather a recognition that the body is a site of suffering and joy, of affection and resistance. Here, Evaristo rejects simplistic readings of the Black woman as merely a victim or a warrior, presenting instead a plural and contradictory subjectivity.

By calling the body a "sacred text of an entire life," Evaristo brings the corporeal matter closer to the written word, making the flesh itself a narrative. This is a powerful metaphorical device that fuses biography and literature, aligning with her concept of *escrevivência*: writing as a form of bearing witness to oneself and one's people. The poet thus elevates the body to the status of the sacred. The term "sacred"

displaces the Black female body from a place of objectification—an inheritance of slavery and historical hypersexualization—to a space of reverence and dignity. It is a gesture of symbolic and political reinscription.

The verse “My body is the present” concludes the poem with a powerful affirmation of identity. The word “present” here carries a dual meaning: it refers to the current moment, the here-and-now, but also to a gift. The Black female body does not belong solely to the past of slavery or to a utopian future—it exists in the present, with value, power, and presence. This is a declaration of full existence.

“Presente” is a poem that encapsulates the strength of Evaristo’s poetics: conciseness, lyricism, and political potency. By thematizing the body as archive, text, and present, Evaristo inscribes the Black woman as a historical and literary subject, transforming marginalized experience into language, and language into an affirmation of life.

In Evaristo’s poetics, the Black female body is not merely a theme but an agent of enunciation, memory, and resistance. It emerges as a sacred text, traversed by social tensions, affections, and historical processes that become material for literary creation. By claiming writing as a field for inscribing Black female subjectivity, *escrivência* displaces the literary canon and breaks with the historical invisibility of Black narratives, especially those led by women. Thus, the body—both biological and symbolic—becomes an instrument for confronting structures of oppression and a fertile ground for the production of situated knowledge.

This narrative body finds a visual translation in Heloisa’s embroidered figure: raised arms, exposed belly with red embroidery, attentive eyes, and natural elements composing the scene. The embroidered woman is also living history—exposed, torn, celebrated.

TEXTILE ART AS A GESTURE OF INSURGENCY: EMBROIDERY AS POLITICAL ART

“Woman must write her body, must invent woman in her singularity, inscribe her in language, liberate the possibilities of desire.”
— Hélène Cixous (1975)

Heloisa Marques is a visual artist, researcher, and embroiderer whose work centers on textile art, collage, and the performance of femininity. Her artistic production weaves together embroidery, photography, and organic materials such as seeds, shells, and threads, exploring themes such as the body, ancestry, freedom, and memory. She employs embroidery as both a poetic and political language, re-signifying practices traditionally associated with the domestic sphere and feminine labor.

Marques visually investigates the possibilities of narrating the female body as a territory of creation and resistance. She is recognized for works that intertwine words and images in symbolic

compositions, such as the piece “As the birds know, I know: I am a woman in the open air.” Her work engages with intersectional feminism, decolonial studies, and ancestral knowledge.

Laura Machado, writing for *Revista O Grito!*, describes Heloisa’s production as a form of visual poetry that unites embroidery and collage. Machado notes that the artist revisits childhood collaging—initially a hobby—and transforms it into a reflective, sensitive, and political artistic practice, where the prominence of letters led her to incorporate phrases and embroidery into her compositions.

In an article for *Nordestesse*, Vanessa Fonseca highlights that Heloisa Marques transitioned from collage to textile canvases, using embroidery—composed of phrases, drawings, and embellishments—as a synthesis of political art grounded in dialogue with themes of gender, music, and literature. On the ARTE!Brasileiros platform, her textile work is described as a gesture of self-expression, struggle, and care.

Fonseca (2023) emphasizes that Heloisa’s canvases create true ecosystems, in which writing guides the poetic and symbolic flow. The artist draws analogies between past and present, family memory and popular knowledge, evoking a nostalgia imbued with political weight.

Studies on political textiles, such as the dossier *Threads that Weave Resistance*, situate Heloisa’s work within an insurgent aesthetic that breaks with the domesticating character of textile techniques, combining delicacy and toughness, nostalgia and resistance.

Figure 1 – As the birds know, I know: I am a woman in the open air (Heloisa Marques)



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CXCOVPxLmRv/>

In the embroidery “As the birds know, I know: I am a woman in the open air,” the body is marked as a territory of power and freedom. The image depicts it upright, nude, arms raised, merging with the landscape and the cosmos. It is both source and channel of expression, revealing itself as a sacred and political space, where freedom is not only physical but also symbolic and ancestral.

The red triangle embroidered in the pelvic region alludes to sexuality, but also to fertility and uterine strength—not as submission to the male gaze, but as a self-assertion. From a semiotic perspective, this visual sign functions as a culturally charged symbol evoking desire, potency, and feminine ancestry. As a *representamen*, its iconic form refers to the female sex, but the interpretant reconfigures it as a sign of resistance and emancipation. The red color, far from being mere ornament, is inscribed as a bodily language that demands to be read not through the lens of external desire, but through the strength of the one who inhabits it.

The gesture of open arms, when performed by female bodies in performative, artistic, or everyday contexts, transcends mere physical movement. It connects the body to the sky, symbolically breaking the boundaries between the earthly and the spiritual. Under the lens of body semiotics, this gesture can be understood as a sign that refers to ancestral practices of invocation, openness, and receptivity. It is rooted in non-hegemonic knowledge, often transmitted through non-discursive means such as gesture, silence, the body, and ritual.

Just as birds fly by instinct, guided by an innate knowledge integrated with nature, the gesture of the woman with open arms evokes an intuitive and ancestral knowledge that operates outside Western rational frameworks. It is a knowledge that emerges from the body and through the body—a body-territory, as Grada Kilomba (2019) affirms when she states, “the body is our first territory; it is through it that we inhabit the world.” Kilomba emphasizes that racialized and gendered bodies carry memories, pain, and resistance, and are also spaces of rewriting and insurgency against colonial structures of power and domination.

The woman is faceless, which may be interpreted as an erasure of individual identity, but also as an aesthetic strategy to represent the female body as a collective archetype. The absence of a face invites the viewer to explore the body as a symbolic space, where embroidery replaces skin as language. Lines, textures, and layers create a stitched memory—between trauma and strength. Thus, the work inscribes itself within the tradition of *escrevivência*, in which the female body becomes a site of writing and resistance, especially for racialized and marginalized women.

The use of natural elements (shells, stones) and forms that evoke landscapes reinforces the idea of the body as an extension of nature. According to Martins (2021), the woman’s body is a territory of knowledge and flows, where myths, cycles, and powers reside—elements that modern rationality has sought to deny. In this way, the fusion of the feminine with the natural recovers ancestral epistemologies



often erased by Western culture. The open sky becomes a metaphor for the body that opens itself to experience, creation, and spirituality—in dialogue with feminine mythologies and origin cosmogonies.

The choice of embroidery—traditionally associated with domestic femininity—subverts the private sphere by transforming it into a political and poetic language. Stitching becomes a gesture of denunciation, reconstruction, and symbolic writing upon the body. According to bell hooks (2000), what is at the margin can become the center. The act of embroidery is also the act of writing, of recording, of permanence. The work affirms manual labor as part of women's identity and insurgency.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: DIALOGUE BETWEEN EMBROIDERY AND POETRY

When comparing the embroidered image “I am a woman in the open air” and the poem “Presente” by Conceição Evaristo, we observe that they form a powerful dialogue between body, art, and ancestry. These works overflow with meanings that emerge from corporeality as a space of symbolic, affective, and political inscription. Both the embroidery and the poem construct an aesthetic of resistance in which the female body occupies a central position—not merely as a theme, but as an active subject of enunciation.

These works challenge traditional dichotomies between reason and emotion, between art and politics, between writing and image, proposing instead an insurgent ontology. From this perspective, the female body emerges not as a passive object of representation, but as a symbolic territory of knowledge, memories, and affections.

A reading in light of decolonial studies, particularly through the lens of Grada Kilomba, deepens the understanding of these aesthetic-political practices. In their works, the artists point to the urgency of decentering the Eurocentric epistemic matrix, which has historically delegitimized knowledge produced by racialized and feminine bodies. In this context, the body ceases to be merely a biological category or a literary metaphor: it becomes an agent of resistance, a space of enunciation and re-existence. Kilomba (2019) proposes writing as an act of epistemological disobedience, in which the word is inscribed on the body, and the body speaks.

In this sense, the embroidered image and the poem not only share themes and symbolisms but also mutually enhance one another as forms of aesthetic insurgency. Both produce meanings that destabilize the boundaries between “legitimate” and “subalternized” knowledge, between text and textile. Embroidery, traditionally associated with the domestic and feminine sphere, is re-signified as a gesture of insurgency, while the poem, by inscribing the body as a “sacred text” and “present,” expands the possibilities for reading and interpreting the feminine as a living, creative, and political force.

These works, therefore, invite us to rethink the ways in which we represent, feel, and interpret bodies in art and in life. By placing the female body at the center of a poetics and politics of resistance, the artists open pathways to other forms of existence and expression, rooted in memory, spirituality, and



collectivity. These are practices that embroider words and poetize threads, in a weaving of meanings that affirms: to resist is also to create, to remember is also to live, and the body—especially the female body—is a living book of stories yet to be told.

The woman represented in both works is more than an image or lyrical subject: she is the performance of ancestral knowledge, a “woman in the open air,” open to the world—not vulnerable, but rather rooted, winged, and powerful.



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