

# Awakening and Resistance in Paulina Chiziane's *As Cicatrizes do Amor* and Clarice Lispector's *Amor*: A Comparative Analysis

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## Abstract

This article analyzes two Portuguese-language short stories, offering a comparative examination of the female characters in Clarice Lispector's *Amor* and Paulina Chiziane's *As Cicatrizes do Amor*, through the lenses of feminist criticism and comparative literature. By comparing these narratives, the article investigates the personal transformations and struggles of women in patriarchal societies. Chiziane's *As Cicatrizes do Amor* set in Mozambique, portrays love as shaped by cultural and social constraints, while Lispector's *Amor* provides an introspective exploration of the protagonist's psyche, depicting an existential and emotional awakening that challenges societal norms and expectations. Through the transformative journey from submission to awakening, comparing women's experiences across diverse cultural contexts and their struggles with love and pain, the article presents the expression of feminist consciousness and individual differences.

**Keywords:** Feminism; Amor; Comparative Literature

## 1. Introduction

Comparative Literature as a discipline emerged in the 19th century, shaped by the scientism that defined the era. According to Sandra Nitrini (2000), the term comparative literature originated from a methodological approach borrowed from the sciences, where comparison and contrast served as tools for confirming hypotheses. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said (1993) expands on this idea by describing the field as one that seeks to "move beyond insularity and provincialism" by examining multiple cultures and literatures together. Similarly, Tötösy de Zepetnek argues that "comparative literature has an ideology of inclusion of the other" (Tötösy, 1998), embracing marginalized literatures, genres, and diverse text types. This emphasis on inclusivity and dialogue across cultures is relevant when examining the representation of women's struggles for autonomy and self-expression in literature. The journey from oppression to liberation is neither linear nor uniform but is shaped by cultural, social, and familial forces. This

dynamic is notable in the two Portuguese-language short stories under discussion, where the protagonists confront significant obstacles in their pursuit of self-determination, reflecting the broader themes of resistance and empowerment that comparative literature seeks to explore.

The first short story to be examined is *As Cicatrizes do Amor* (*The Scar of Love*) by Paulina Chiziane, the pioneering Mozambican woman who became the first to publish a novel. Born in 1955 in the province of Gaza, Chiziane is known for her nuanced portrayal of Mozambique's social, cultural, and political complexities. Her works often delve into themes of love, oppression, resistance, and the female experience. Some of her most acclaimed works include *Balada de Amor ao Vento*, *Niketche: Uma História de Poligamia*, and *As Cicatrizes do Amor*, each of which has made a significant impact on Mozambican literature while giving a powerful platform to women's voices. *As Cicatrizes do Amor* tells the story of Maria, the daughter of the ruler of Matutuine, whose father refuses a marriage proposal from a poor man he deems unworthy. Furious by the rejection, the man leaves for the mines of Johannesburg, while Maria unexpectedly gives birth to a daughter. As a result, she is cast out of her home and embarks on a journey to reunite with her beloved, the father of her child.

The second short story, *Amor* (*Love*), is part of Clarice Lispector's 1960 collection *Laços de Família* (*Family Ties*). Born in Ukraine in 1920, Lispector became one of the most influential voices in 20th-century Brazilian literature, renowned for her introspective and psychologically complex prose. Her works, such as *Perto do Coração Selvagem* and *A Hora da Estrela*, often delve into themes of identity, existence, and human emotion. *Amor* follows Anna, a middle-aged housewife living a seemingly peaceful and orderly life in Rio de Janeiro. Her routine is unexpectedly disrupted when she encounters a blind man chewing gum, an event that sparks a deep moment of introspection. While initially unsettled by the encounter, Anna returns to her domestic life, with a renewed sense of self-awareness and a changed perspective on the world around her.

As discussed above, Chiziane's story is set in Mozambique, while Lispector's unfolds in Rio de Janeiro, each offering distinct geographical and cultural contexts that shape the characters' experiences. Despite these differences, both works share a common thematic thread: the quest for female emancipation. Through their personal journeys, the two narratives explore the complexities of love, pain, and identity formation, revealing the multifaceted challenges women face in patriarchal societies. By delving into these themes, Chiziane and Lispector offer profound insights into the struggles for autonomy and self-expression, shedding light on the expression of feminist consciousness and individual differences across diverse cultural contexts. In the next section, this exploration will turn to the development of feminist thought, examining feminist ideas as they have evolved over time and the influence of cultural and societal forces on these movements.

## 2. Theoretical Perspectives on Feminist Thought

Throughout history, the patriarchal system, defined by male dominance and the subjugation of women, has taken on different forms and evolved over time. According to Rocha's study, ancient

societies were predominantly patriarchal, with women largely confined to domestic and reproductive duties. This structure was reinforced during the Middle Ages, where the Church and nobility held significant power, further entrenching traditional gender roles. However, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment periods began to challenge these established norms, as intellectuals and progressive thinkers started to advocate for the education and rights of women. These ideas gradually gained traction, but it wasn't until the Industrial Revolution that women began to experience a modicum of economic independence, due to the changing nature of work and labor. The social and economic transformations of this period set the stage for women to enter new spheres of public life.

In the 20th century, the world wars played a pivotal role in further advancing women's rights, as women entered the workforce in greater numbers to support the war efforts. This shift was compounded by the rise of the feminist movement, which sought to dismantle long-standing gender inequalities. Feminism, as a broad socio-political movement, seeks to establish political, economic, personal, and social equality between the sexes (Mendus, 2005). These combined forces led to significant milestones, such as women gaining the right to vote, marking an important step toward their independence. However, as Rocha explains,

In this system, men were elevated, gaining power through wealth, status, freedom, and recognition, while women were denied the opportunity to make their own choices. Their desires and aspirations were often ignored, as they were socialized to accept silence and obedience (Rocha, 2009).

Within the patriarchal framework, men systematically shaped social and political norms to reinforce their dominance and preserve their prestige. This structure positioned women as subordinates, conditioning them to accept passivity and submission and submission, thereby limiting their aspirations and confining them to traditional, domestic roles. Feminist scholars have critiqued this system, emphasizing how patriarchal structures not only limit women's opportunities but also erase their voices from the public sphere, thereby marginalizing their experiences and contributions. According to Simone de Beauvoir, women's silence in society stems from their historical construction as the Other, defined in relation to men and denied the ability to define their own identities. In her groundbreaking work *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir argues that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 2011), emphasizing that women's subjugation is a result of socialization and cultural practices, which enforce their passivity and subordination.

Gayatri Spivak explores how the figure of the woman is frequently linked with silence, suggesting that this silence can be understood and interpreted by women themselves. Spivak suggests that silence is both an imposed and an internalized condition, but it is also something that women themselves can critically engage with. Spivak asserts that women have the capacity to understand and interpret the silence imposed upon them, not as passive victims but as active agents who can reflect on its impact on their lives. As Spivak writes, "For the 'figure' of woman, the relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves; race and class differences are subsumed under that charge" (Spivak, 1994). Here, Spivak acknowledges the intersectionality of women's oppression, highlighting that the silencing of women is not a

universal experience but one that is shaped by race, class, and other societal factors.

In a similar vein, bell hooks challenges the conventional definition of feminism, arguing that it often privileges white bourgeois women while neglecting the struggles of marginalized groups. As she makes clear in *Feminist theory: from margin to center*, a simplistic definition of women's liberation "dismisses race and class as factors that, in conjunction with sexism, determine the extent to which an individual will be discriminated against, exploited or oppressed" (hooks, 1984). For hooks, feminist theory must be reimagined to encompass more than just the concerns of privileged women. Women from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds should utilize their "special vantage points" to critically examine "the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony" (hooks 1984). This broader and more inclusive vision of feminism is not the responsibility of a select few but a collective effort that requires widespread participation.

Building on feminist critiques of patriarchal structures, it becomes clear that an analysis grounded in the principles of comparative literature does not necessarily have to exclude historical elements, as some formalist approaches have suggested. This does not mean giving in to what is called historicism or historical determinism, but rather, making use of the literary and extraliterary data provided by history to enrich literary criticism, literary historiography, and literary theory, thus allowing for a more well-founded study (Carvalhal, 2006). By incorporating these historical and regional contexts, we can more effectively analyze how women's subjugation, silence, and marginalization, as discussed by feminist scholars like Simone de Beauvoir, Gayatri Spivak, and bell hooks, are not universal but are instead influenced by intersecting factors such as race, class, and gender. Based on this, literary analysis can delve deeper into how these intersecting factors manifest in the stories of women in Chiziane and Lispector's works, exploring the expression of feminist consciousness and the nuances of individual identities.

### 3. The awakening of self-awareness in silence

In *As Cicatrizes do Amor*, Paulina Chiziane introduces Maria, a character who grapples with both internal and external conflicts while attempting to reconcile traditional customs with her aspirations for a better life. Chiziane writes, "All because of this love, transforming the lover into the shadow of the beloved"<sup>1</sup> (Chiziane, 2000). This phrase encapsulates the intensity and complexity of Maria's emotions, as she becomes consumed by a love that reduces her to a mere shadow of herself. The idealization of love fosters a dynamic in which suffering is romanticized, and endurance is praised. This phrase poignantly captures the intensity of Maria's emotions, illustrating how love, instead of empowering her, gradually consumes her and diminishes her sense of self.

This pattern of love as a vehicle of oppression extends beyond romantic relationships, deeply entrenching itself in the construct of motherhood. In the barracks, when someone begins reading a newspaper article about two abandoned children, igniting a debate over who should bear

<sup>1</sup> The original text in Portuguese is " Tudo por causa desse amor amarfazendo do amante a sombra do amado".

responsibility for such an act. A voice in the crowd quickly places the blame on women. This accusation reflects deeply ingrained societal beliefs that hold women solely accountable for motherhood, reinforcing the notion that their worth is intrinsically tied to their roles as caretakers. As Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira observes, “the deification of motherhood was accompanied by an entire ideology of submission, conformity, and acceptance of boundaries” (Oliveira, 1991). Women are often expected to embrace their maternal duties unquestioningly, with their sacrifices framed as noble virtues rather than burdens imposed by a patriarchal system.

As Pintasilgo (1981) argues, these so-called “pseudo-privileges” do little more than conceal deep-seated injustices, placing the entire burden of responsibility on women. This imbalance not only isolates women but also makes them the scapegoats for any misfortune that befalls their children, reinforcing a system of oppression disguised as maternal duty. Within relationships, especially those shaped by societal ideals of love and motherhood, women often find themselves silenced and rendered invisible, trapped by the very love that is supposed to empower them. However, Maria does not passively accept her circumstances. Throughout the story, she actively seeks to reclaim her voice and identity, challenging the societal expectations placed upon her. When her father opposes her marriage, she is thrown into a desperate situation. Despite his disapproval, she becomes pregnant, and after giving birth, she is cruelly expelled from her home. Determined to care for her daughter and pursue her lover, she makes a bold decision, “I tied my capulana tightly, with the baby securely on my back, and swore: the obstacles that block my path will be removed by my hand<sup>2</sup>” (Chiziane, 2000).

In contrast, Clarice Lispector’s *Amor* presents Anna, whose awakening from silence comes from within. As a housewife, Anna takes on the roles of wife and mother, maintaining an outwardly stable life. Lispector describes her as someone deeply connected to her domestic duties: “Anna tranquilly put her small, strong hand, her life current to everything” (Lispector, 1994, p. 38). Despite her quiet dedication, her contributions go unnoticed by her family. She is disregarded by her husband, and her children, following the example set by their father, treat her with indifference and even hostility. Over time, Anna begins to sense herself fading, as if her very existence is being eroded by the monotony of her daily life. Friedan argues that housewifery makes it “almost impossible for a woman of adult intelligence to retain a sense of human identity, the firm core of self or ‘I’ without which a human being, man or woman, is not truly alive” (Friedan, 1984). Reflecting on her past, Anna muses,

Her previous youth now seemed alien to her, like one of life’s illnesses. She had gradually emerged to discover that life could be lived without happiness: by abolishing it she had found a legion of persons, previously invisible, who lived as one works—with perseverance, persistence, and contentment (Lispector, 1994).

In *Amor*, an accidental encounter with a blind man disrupts the illusion of happiness Anna had carefully constructed for herself. As Anna watches him chew gum in the darkness, she notes that despite his blindness, he appears to perceive things that others miss. “Relaxed, and with open eyes,

<sup>2</sup> The original text in Portuguese is “Amarrei a capulana bem firme, com o bebê bem seguro nas costas, e jurei: os empecilhos que obstam a minha estrada serão removidos pela minha mão”.

he was chewing gum in the failing light. The facial movements of his chewing made him appear to smile then suddenly stop smiling, to smile and stop smiling. Anna stared at him as if he had insulted her” (Lispector, 1994). His rhythmic chewing, the alternating smiles and pauses, evokes a sense of challenge and resignation that deeply unsettles her. This encounter forces Anna to face the emptiness hidden beneath the surface of her life, which, while outwardly stable, is filled with emotional isolation and unacknowledged sacrifices. The illusion of happiness she had clung to starts to fade, and the discomfort she feels becomes the catalyst for her internal transformation, driving her to seek a more authentic life free from the constraints of societal expectations.

As Alfredo Bosi suggests, Lispector’s narratives intensify the inner moment to such an extent that subjectivity itself reaches a crisis, forcing the spirit to seek a new balance. This balance, according to Bosi, is found through the “recovery of the object”—no longer at a psychological level, but in the realm of its own irreducible reality (Bosi 2003). In Anna’s case, the blind man serves as this object, shaking her from complacency and compelling her to confront the deeper metaphysical dimensions of her existence. Her encounter with him is not merely psychological but a rupture that pushes her beyond mere introspection into a search for meaning that transcends her previous understanding of self and reality.

#### **4. Breaking Free: Resistance in *As Cicatrizes do Amor* and *Amor***

In both stories, the protagonists embark on journeys toward self-awareness that ultimately lead them to engage in different forms of resistance. In *Amor* by Clarice Lispector, Anna’s resistance is primarily internal. She begins to question the life choices that have confined her to a role of subservience, yearning for a more authentic existence. This process of introspection is sparked by a chance encounter with a blind man, which forces Anna to confront the monotony and emptiness that have long defined her life. As a result, she starts to reexamine her identity and desires, seeking meaning beyond the confines of her current reality. In contrast, in *As Cicatrizes do Amor* by Paulina Chiziane, Maria’s resistance is more external. She actively challenges the societal expectations and gender norms that restrict her, navigating a world deeply entrenched in cultural and gender inequalities. Her resistance is not passive but confrontational, demanding agency and asserting her right to redefine her life and identity within a patriarchal society.

The protagonists’ differing forms of resistance reflect their growing self-awareness and their desire for change, which are deeply influenced by their respective social contexts. These forms of resistance not only illuminate the personal struggles of the characters but also highlight broader social and structural issues. As Gayatri Spivak notes, “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak, 1994). This underscores the complexity of the oppression women face, as they not only endure the social and historical barriers common to marginalized groups but also experience an added layer of invisibility because of their gender. In *As Cicatrizes do Amor*, Chiziane sets Maria’s story against the backdrop of a military environment, a space that acts as a crossroads where traditional Mozambican values clash with the modern influences introduced by colonization and the ravages of war. The tension between these two forces reveals how historical



events, such as colonization and armed conflict, not only reshaped society at large but also had a profound impact on personal relationships, particularly those involving gender and power. Maria's struggle goes beyond her personal fight, reflecting the broader battle for women's autonomy, freedom, and a more equitable future in a world still marked by the scars of history.

On her way to Johannesburg, Maria faces countless hardships, and for a brief moment, she contemplates abandoning her daughter. However, the thought passes, and she resolves to continue her journey. Along the way, she is threatened with forced labor for crossing the border, yet after six months, she manages to escape, determined to avoid further control. Stealing valuable items in the process, she disappears with a singular goal in mind: "reach the object of my adventure: my man"<sup>3</sup> (Chiziane, 2000). With each step she takes, Maria carries with her the memory of her struggles and the hope of rebuilding her life, driven by the love she seeks. Every obstacle she overcomes brings her closer to realizing her dream, showcasing her resilience, determination, and inner strength. In the end, her persistence pays off as she finds happiness with her husband, and is blessed with two grandchildren. Reflecting on the scars of love, the author writes:

Why do you hide your eyes, Maria? Perhaps you are ashamed of your actions, perhaps you regret your story, or even revolt against the society that led you to the paths of tragedy. The scars of love tore the scabs and poured out a liquid blood that flowed down the curves of your eyelids<sup>4</sup> (Chiziane, 2000).

In this sense, the scars of love are a memory that Maria cannot escape, no matter how much she tries to bury it. This memory, filled with pain and regret, becomes deeply intertwined with her identity. Her decision to hide her eyes is an attempt to shield herself not only from the judgment of others but also from the weight of her own recollections. Faced with societal expectations and personal tragedy, Maria struggles to balance the need to confront her past with the desire to reject the forces that led her to this point. The scars she carries are constant reminders of her choices and the oppressive norms of a society that offered little compassion. Though these memories will continue to haunt her, they also empower her to challenge the very structures that caused her suffering.

In contrast, Anna in *Amor* responds to her oppression in a way that differs from Maria's more external resistance. Rather than taking immediate, practical action, Anna embarks on a gradual internal transformation. This approach is closely tied to the historical context. Lispector's work emerged during a time of political and social turmoil in Brazil, under military dictatorship. The era was marked by oppression, censorship, and widespread fear. In this climate of control and repression, Anna is so focused on her family's well-being and stability that she fails to recognize the subtle, internalized nature of the oppression she faces. As Spivak notes, "the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved. The woman is doubly in

<sup>3</sup> The original text in Portuguese is "alcançar o objecto da minha aventura: o meu homem".

<sup>4</sup> The original text in Portuguese is "Porque escondes os olhos, Maria? Talvez te envergonhes dos teus actos, talvez te arrependas do teu relato, ou mesmo te revoltas contra a sociedade que te conduziu aos caminhos da tragédia. As cicatrizes do amor rasgaram as crostas e jorraram um líquido sangue que escorre pelas curvas das tuas pálpebras".

shadow” (Spivak, 1994). For Anna, the challenge lies in expressing and understanding oppression when it is woven into the very fabric of her daily life. Her struggle is not only about recognizing and comprehending her circumstances but also about transcending both internal and external limitations. This prompts her to embark on a journey of self-awareness, seeking a path to personal liberation and a deeper understanding of her own identity.

When Anna encounters the blind man, her heart trembles. She begins to recognize the depth of her own existence and reflect on herself. “And its sign was the intense pleasure with which she now looked at things, suffering and alarmed” (Lispector, 1990, p.41). This moment of awareness leads her to the botanical garden, where she experiences clarity that offers a temporary escape from the oppressive routines of daily life. What initially seems like an act of evasion reveals itself as a profound form of resistance. By immersing herself in the garden’s beauty and vitality, Anna challenges the silent oppression that has permeated her existence. Every flower, every leaf, and every ray of sunlight become symbols of her struggle and her search for freedom and authenticity. However, as Lispector observes, this escape is only temporary, “When Anna reflected that there were children and grown men suffering hunger, the nausea reached her throat as if she were pregnant and abandoned” (Lispector, 1990).

After this brief moment of self-awareness and struggle, Anna finds herself once again trapped by the invisible restraints and oppression imposed by her family. She suppresses her inner yearning for a more vibrant life and continues to submit herself to the unchanging, monotonous routine of her existence. When her son comes running toward her, Anna embraces him tightly, yet she feels a deep sense of ambivalence. “She loved the world, she loved all things created, she loved with loathing” (Lispector, 1990). In this moment, Anna recognizes that true freedom would require the courage to defy both familial and societal expectations. While her complete devotion to her family is often seen as an act of love, it also reflects the societal norms that confine her to a submissive and sacrificial role.

## 5. Conclusion

These two short stories shed light on the complexity of the female struggle, revealing the profound impact social norms have on women’s lives. Through a comparative analysis, Maria’s awakening and her form of resistance are more direct and outward, while Anna’s journey is introspective, focusing on her inner transformation. In *As Cicatrizes do Amor*, Maria faces cultural oppression head-on, displaying remarkable strength and determination as she strives to break free from the restrictive traditions and rebuild her life alongside her lover. In the end of the story, the image of Maria crying in a turbulent natural landscape encapsulates her internal conflict and ongoing resistance. Even though she suffers, she refuses to completely surrender to the forces of oppression. In contrast, *Amor* presents Anna’s brief moment of self-reflection, which is ultimately followed by her return to the monotonous routine of her life. This illustrates the difficulty of breaking free from the internalized societal and familial expectations that confine her. Anna’s resignation to her reality is symbolized by the metaphor of extinguishing a candle, representing the slow and painful fading of her hopes and dreams. Both stories reveal that while



there have been some strides toward female emancipation, true freedom and self-awareness are still fraught with challenges. The path toward genuine liberation is not easily achieved, and the societal and cultural norms that perpetuate women's oppression remain powerful forces. The ongoing journey for equality requires continuous questioning and transformation of these deep-seated structures.

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