



HUNGER, VIOLENCE, AND SILENCE: Clarice Lispector's *A hora da estrela* and Carolina de Jesus's *Quarto de despejo*

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Clarice Lispector (1925-1977) and Carolina Maria de Jesus (1914-1977) are two women authors who changed the face of Brazilian literature through their unique literary voices. Clarice Lispector's most violent and last published work is *A Hora da estrela* (1977), a novel told by a third person male narrator that depicts the life of a poor Nordesteña, Macabéa, who moves to the city of São Paulo to search, in vain, for work and a sense of belonging. One of Carolina de Jesus's most famous published work is *Quarto de despejo* (1960), written in the format of a diary. The text is narrated by first person narrator, Carolina, and the story portrays the harsh conditions of a single Afro-Brazilian mother living in the slums and working as a paper collector in downtown São Paulo. Despite the common theme of violence and marginality, the reception of each narrative was significantly different. In this article, I juxtapose the two works to rethink their similarities and differences, as well as to problematize their distinct reception by the general public and literary scholars. I further suggest that Lispector's and Jesus's literary voices are often appropriated and incorporated into dominant discourses; a case of representational violence. The protagonists of each narrative, Macabéa and Carolina, face physical and psychological violence on a daily basis as they struggle to survive at the margins of society. Despite their difficulties, they fight against victimization and search for their own sense of self. In this sense, through a comparative approach, this article focuses on Carolina de Jesus's *Quarto de despejo* and Clarice Lispector's *A hora da estrela* to analyze different

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kinds of violence women face by first, problematizing the representational violence that women authors are submitted to; and second, by discussing the physical and psychological violence the protagonists have to endure as they try to shape their sense of self.

Carolina de Jesus's *Quarto de despejo*, became a worldwide sensation, and was translated into English by David St. Clair only two years later with the title: *Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*. The book is composed of diary entries from July 1955 to January 1960, wherein Carolina talks about the hardships she has to endure on a daily basis, the different kinds of violence that threaten the safety of her family, and the crushing implications and consequences of hunger.² Jesus wrote extensively and published many other works such as *Casa de Alvenaria*, *Pedaços de Fome*, and *Provérbios*. Jesus's writing style is unique, marked by direct syntax filled with metaphors, similes and everyday puns that create an alternative view of Brazilian society and politics. Although her literary voice is often downplayed or even ignored, scholars such as Elzira Perpétua, Robert Levine, and José Carlos Meihy have recognized her literary talent. They argue that Jesus's writing has a naturalistic touch, with the support of a number of metaphors that expose the contrasting views of the city and its inhabitants (LEVINE and MEIHY, 1994, p. 46; PERPÉTUA, 2013, p. 3). Carolina de Jesus is often referred to as the Black Cinderella,³ because she acquired fame and money, and eventually moved out of the favela. However, unlike Cinderella, her story does not have a happy ending as she is not successful in finding formal employment and she struggles economically. Jesus is proud of her African heritage and she fights victimization through her writing, but after her overnight success she is basically forced back into anonymity and poverty.

A Hora da Estrela is considerably different from Lispector's previous works because of its explicit descriptions of violence. Lispector tackles visible violence,⁴

² I emphasize that Carolina is understood here as the narrator, the literary voice of the text. Further discussion about Carolina de Jesus's literary voice is undertaken further along the article.

³ The term was first used by Robert Levie and José Carlos Meihy in their book *The Life and Death of Carolina Maria de Jesus*.

⁴ The expression "visible violence" refers to the kind of violence depicted in a text that is usually clearly stated, such as beatings, rapes, hunger, and insults. It is opposite from a disguised violence of repression and oppression, common to Lispector's earlier works. The term visible can also be

depicting the miserable life of a Nordesteira, Macabéa, who moves to Rio de Janeiro and suffers psychological and physical abuse, such as poverty and hunger. Marta Peixoto comments about Lispector's literary choice: "the strategy for writing the victim no longer entails containment within ideological and narrative structures that minimize the violence, but involves, on the contrary, an unleashing of affective forces" (1994, p. 83). In this quote, the brutality and cruelty that the protagonist, Macabéa, faces in São Paulo is emphasized. Nevertheless, Macabéa tries to fight against discrimination. Peixoto's choice of the term *victim*, suggests a passive view of a helpless subaltern subject. I believe it is problematic to equate victim with subaltern, because subalternity does not necessarily imply that the person occupies a position of victimhood. Thus, I avoid the term victim in this article, because although Macabéa can be seen as a subaltern subject, she is not a helpless victim, especially in the end of the narrative when she dares to feel happy.⁵

To compare and contrast Carolina de Jesus' *Quarto de despejo* and Clarice Lispector's *A Hora da estrela* requires a flexible and ongoing theoretical discussion. The question of literary genres should be problematized as each text is commonly classified into binaries of fiction and non-fiction, which consequently attributes more or less literariness to text. Such dichotomous distinction can be rather simplistic and often downplay the complexity of the works. Autobiographies have been an intriguing genre, starting with the presumption of a unified self to the constructions of multiple selves, all the while playing with the slippery distinction between fiction and reality. Scholars such as Edgar Nolasco have argued that an authors' life and work are constructed from and of each other, as both are fabric of signs imaginarily created and lived (NOLASCO 2004, p. 22 and BARTHES in Nolasco, 2004).⁶ Lesley Feracho explains that the representation of the self can be complex because of "women's historical silencing- social, economic, and artistic" (2005, p. 5). Women writers may find in writing an outlet for self-expression and an opportunity to struggle for

viewed in parallel with Chow's notion of visibility, referring to a kind of violence clearly perceptible from most points of view.

⁵ For further discussion about subaltern subjects, see Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subalter Speak?*

⁶ My translation.

empowerment. Lispector and Jesus play with their texts, experimenting with alternative representations and exploring their access to dominant discourse through their writing. Nolasco suggests that Lispector not only made her life story subject of her fictions, but she became her own fictional theme in the most singular form (2004, p. 78). Such theorizations about life and texts do not downplay Lispector's literary abilities, but on the contrary, praise her talent as a writer and adds layers of complexity to her texts.

However, the normative reception of Carolina de Jesus's work often classifies her writing as strictly autobiographical, without any recognition of her talent as a literary writer. In this sense, there is a need to problematize this reduction of Carolina de Jesus's texts to give the author agency and highlight her voice as a writer. *Quarto de despejo* is commonly understood as an autobiographical text, because Carolina Jesus writes about her experiences, ideas, and thoughts. Nevertheless, the voice of the narrator of the text cannot be simply equated to the author. To a different extent and through distinct discourse strategies, autobiographical texts are also manipulated by the voice of the narrator, which may or may not to a greater extent reflect the authors' reality. *Quarto de Despejo* can be viewed as a kind of testimonio, which according to John Beverly is "a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet form, told in first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant experience" (2004, p. 31). *Quarto de Despejo* has as focus the life of Carolina de Jesus, but as any text, the narrator acquires an independent voice of the author, in a mixture of multiple selves that contribute to the literariness of the text. Elzira Perpétua, along with Roland Barthes, questions the traditional tendency of dividing texts into dichotomous classification of literature and personal life narratives, by showing the unsettling presumptions of such categories and the fluidity of texts (PERPÉTUA, p. 256). Thus, this article defends that Carolina de Jesus's *Quarto de despejo* can be seen as a literary text and further suggest that Carolina's voice in the text cannot be simply and completely equated with the author, Carolina de Jesus. In order to emphasize the literariness of the text, Carolina is used to refer to the voice of the narrator in the fictional work, while Jesus is used to refer to the author herself. This choice is intended to challenge the seduction of voyeuristic access to works produced by subaltern subject, which values *real glimpses of the life of the other* but does not consent a literary textual space to subaltern subjects.

Similar to the complexities of classifying women's writings according to traditional conceptions of literary genres, the reception of women's writings has several layers of pre-established paradigms that should also be questioned. Women's literary works have often received unfair reception as authors are often judged by sexist paradigms. Women of color's writing have to overcome another barrier; that of racism. Although Clarice Lispector's and Carolina de Jesus's literary works are often both subjected to sexists' reception, the second has yet another aspect of discrimination, racists' receptions. In contrast to Jesus's works, Lispector's literary works have a privileged position, usually acknowledged as part of both the Brazilian and world literary canons, as well as being taught and studied in Brazilian schools. Clarice Lispector's fictional works are widely praised for their literariness and their proximity to the dominant culture. For example, Susan Quinlan's *The Female Voice in Contemporary Brazilian Narrative* offers readers a glimpse of the variety of Brazilian women writers. She discusses women's fiction and their literary works, including Yoruba's influence on Brazilian literature. Even so, while writers such as Clarice Lispector are cited and applauded, writers such as Carolina de Jesus are left out of the analysis in the book. Jesus does not even merit mention in the timeline of Brazilian women writers at the beginning of the book. This snub is repeated in Cristina Ferreira-Pinto's detailed collection of Brazilian women authors of the twentieth century. In the given timeline, many writers such as Rachel de Queiroz, Nélide Pinon, and Clarice Lispector are mentioned, but Carolina de Jesus is once again left out. Even acclaimed anthologies, such as *The Norton Anthology* 10th edition, includes texts from Lispector, but not Carolina de Jesus. This kind of exclusion of Carolina de Jesus reflects how her texts have been ignored as part of the Brazilian literary cannon, obfuscating her voice as a literary writer.⁷ In the past, Jesus was applauded, reaching nation-wide fame, but only momentarily during the boom of the publication of *Quarto de despejo*. Her recognition as a writer was rapid and unstable, as voyeuristic access to the life of a *favelada* triggered attention from reader; while Lispector gradually becomes a consecrated and canonical author. Carolina de Jesus is seen as an exotic other, an Afro-Brazilian single mother living in the biggest favela in Brazil, obscuring the importance of her works. Over

⁷ Now with scholars, such as Aline Arruda, who are recovering fictional texts written by Carolina de Jesus, we hope that the her voice as a literary fictional writer will be recognized and consolidated.

time, Lispector acquired a literary reputation and is studied as a Brazilian writer, while Jesus's work has not been commonly associated with the canon of Brazilian literature. In recent years there has been a successful reintegration of Carolina de Jesus's literary works into Brazilian Literature by intellectuals, scholars, and activists.⁸

One noteworthy point that reflects in the different reception of *Quarto de despejo* and *A hora da estrela*, is that of their respective English translations. Giovanni Pontiero's translation of *A Hora da estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*) was published in 1986 almost ten years after the original was published in Portuguese. The English title is quite similar to the Portuguese title and thus, the connotation of the title is maintained. The late translation suggests that Lispector's fame had been steadily increasing. Differently, David St. Clair translated Carolina de Jesus's *Quarto de despejo*, only two years after its original publication, with the title *Child of the Dark*. The proximity Jesus's publication and the translation of her work into English speaks to the momentary attention her narrative received. The text was celebrated for its exoticness, but as previously mentioned, it is excluded from the Brazilian literary canon. The change of title contributes to Jesus's image as representative of a race, because instead of translating her metaphorical title of *Quarto de despejo* into *evicted room* or *storage room*. Clair chooses to change the title to reflect Jesus's subject position, not her literary choice of words. This English title qualifies Jesus's subject position and does not follow the metaphor she created to make a social critique through an elaborate play with language.

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Although Lispector's fame has been constantly arising as a literary author, her voice has at times been diluted in such process as scholars use her writings to illustrate their beliefs. The French philosopher and literary critic Hélène Cixous was responsible in some ways for making Lispector's texts famous worldwide. She wrote extensively about Lispector's works, using her fiction to corroborate with her theoretical ideas. Cixous work was brilliant, nevertheless, it is important to mention that her use of the literary text was, at times, shaping Lispector's voice. In a sense, Cixous can be said to have been co-opting Lispector's literary voice to best fit her theoretical paradigms. For example, in her comments about *A Hora da*

⁸ One noteworthy group that revisions Brazilian literary canon to include Afro-Brazilian literary voices is LITEAFRO from UFMG, founded by the Professor Eduardo de Assis.

Estrela, Cixous notes that “Rodrigo is just a vessel, a prop, with which Lispector writes and reflects herself in Macabéa” (1991, p. 146). Cixous equates Lispector with Macabéa and reduces Rodrigo to a mere vessel. It can be argued, however, that Rodrigo has in fact an active voice as the narrator, independent from the voice of the author. Lispector does not reflect herself in Rodrigo nor Macabéa; she creates a literary narrator and character who are distinct from her own persona, but who nevertheless suffer influence from her persona. Ana Koblucka contributes to the discussion by critiquing Cixous’s analysis, which she believes it is “the window [which] once again turns into a mirror, the radical otherness of Lispector’s narrative experiment in *The Hour of the Star* becomes assimilated into the mosaic of Cixousian poetic imagination” (2011, p. 18). As Koblucka suggests, Cixous uses the narrative to reflect her own theoretical premises. Intentionally or not, Cixous’s reading undermines Lispector’s agency as a creative writer. This appropriation induces a rather passive classification of Lispector’s literary voice, by equating her voice with that of Rodrigo’s and Macabéa’s. Rodrigo is not simply a vessel, he is a literary creation with a life of his own. Whether Cixous misrepresents Lispector by framing her work within Eurocentric ideals will continue to be debated. Moreover, it can be argued that, in *A hora da estrela*, Lispector challenges dominant discourses that claim to control and define the other, by having her own voice appropriated by an egocentric male narrator.

Carolina de Jesus also has her literary voice appropriated, but to an even greater extent with her work *Quarto de despejo*. Lesley Feracho comments that “Jesus and Audálio Dantas (through his editing of the diary) engage their readers’ interest by speaking to them” (2005, p. 47). By juxtaposing Jesus with Dantas, Feracho attributes a significant degree of authorship to Dantas, recognizing his active role in the process of publishing Jesus’s diaries. That is, Dantas not only compiles the texts, but, to a certain extent, he re-writes Jesus’s *Quarto de Despejo*. Nevertheless, Audálio Dantas, claimed a position of transparency for his intervention, saying that he only collected Jesus’s writings to publish them. Gayatri Spivak has discussed the danger of writing about the Other, or subaltern subjects. In such process, it is seductive to believe in the transparency of one’s own work: “representing them [subalterns], the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent” (1988, p. 29). Intellectuals claim to be only a vessel for the subaltern. Spivak argues that the assumption that the subaltern is being clearly portrayed can be seductive but it is misguided, because any kind of intervention automatically

alters and shapes the voice of the subaltern. The editor, Audálio Dantas, intentionally or not, directly manipulated her writing.

Through his editing, Jesus's writings are shaped to fit certain patterns and expectations. One must acknowledge Dantas's work as a compiler and editor, since he helped Jesus publish and disseminate her work to a broader audience. Nevertheless, he did select, change, reorganize, and edit Jesus's writing. Dantas's editorial work is therefore not transparent; he is a mediator between the author's text and the audience. His selection and organization of the texts entail actively shaping the narrative and its reception.⁹ Although Carolina de Jesus wanted to publish her fairy-tale like stories, Dantas knew that her diaries would have a greater impact on the public and pushed for their publication.¹⁰ Audiences tend to search for a glimpse of subalternity through a voyeuristic gaze. Jesus the writer of diaries is accepted; Jesus the writer of fairy tales is not.

In addition, Danta's act of collecting Jesus's writings is sometimes mistaken with an act of heroism. Such interpretation associates him with a savior that saved Carolina de Jesus from anonymity. Another parallel can be made with Gayatri Spivak's statement about distorted views of domination disseminated by dominant discourses of colonial exploitation in India: "White men seeking to save brown women from brown men" (1988, p. 61). This expression describes how audiences are induced to see Dantas as the heroic figure who went out of his way to help a poor and helpless Afro-Brazilian woman. In such scenario, Carolina de Jesus is

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⁹Other critics have also acknowledged that in *Quarto de despejo* Carolina's voice is molded by Dantas to fit an acceptable pattern of diaries or testimonies. Robert Levine and Jose Carlos Meihy published *The Unedited Diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, which contains other diary entries written by Carolina de Jesus in 37 notebooks. Levine and Meihy select extracts to compile one book and the outcome is very different from *Quarto de despejo*. In this collection, the narrator Carolina is more active, aware of her conditions as a poor Afro-Brazilian woman living in the community of favelas and her voice is more intense, critical and with various literary mechanisms. Violently or not, Carolina's voice in the *Child of the Dark* is screened to fit a particular pattern of diaries, which reinforces the importance of reexamining the narrative to rediscover the subtle power of Carolina's literary voice.

¹⁰ Jesus talked about her desire to publish her fairy tales in several interviews to Brazilian newspapers.

only accepted as a writer of diaries, because as such as does not represent a threat to dominant discourses. She is seen as a helpless black woman who is saved by the kind white reporter. This appropriation of the other creates an exotic view of the subaltern position in which they are spoken for, appropriated by a dominant discourse and consequently ignored. Thus, it is important to problematize Danta's role as the editor and to dismantle his subject position as a heroic. He was an editor and Carolina de Jesus was a writer.

Spivak's critique of the myth disseminated by colonialist discourses of "white men seeking to save brown women from brown men" (1988, p. 61) is also applicable to *A Hora da Estrela*, because Rodrigo assumes the role of Macabéa's savior. As narrator Rodrigo embodies the figure of the colonizer who believes he has the power to represent and save Macabéa. He writes about Macabéa with a degree of ownership and claims to write not because of his own desire, but out of duty: "What I am writing is something more than mere invention; it is my duty to relate everything about this girl among thousands of others like her" (LISPECTOR, 1977, p. 13). He equates Macabéa with all Nortestinas, suggesting they are all the same and they are all hopeless. He claims to bring meaning to Macabéa's life by telling her story and saving her from anonymity and darkness. Behind this mask of kindness lies the brutality of the colonizer's domination over the colonized. Rodrigo does not necessarily care about Macabéa. He is both repelled and attracted to her exotic otherness, but he does not see her as in the same subject position as he has in society. He says: "Yes, I'm in love with Macabéa, my darling Maca, in love with her homeliness and total anonymity. . . In love with her fragile lungs, the scrawny little thing" (LISPECTOR, p. 68). Rodrigo is seduced by Macabéa's powerlessness, just as a colonizer is attracted to the colonized. He uses unflattering adjectives, and a short nickname, Maca, to refer to "his" Macabéa. Rodrigo does not give Macabéa voice but uses her for his benefit, self-enjoyment, and as a means to reaffirm his own identity and superiority as the holder of knowledge. Through the construction of an arrogant and dominating narrator, Lispector makes a biting criticism of critics and authors who claim to speak for and represent subalterns.

Similar to Clarice Lispector and Carolina de Jesus, who have had their voices appropriated and even silenced in distinct ways, the protagonists of *A hora da estrela* and *Quarto de despejo*, suffer different forms of violence as they try to survive in a racist and sexist society. In both narratives, the role of doctors and dentists are paralleled with that of voices of authority, who often undermine or

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speak for subaltern subjects. In the role of authorities, such voices claim to help the protagonists, but only further oppress Macabéa and Carolina. In *A Hora da Estrela*, after several days of feeling ill, Macabéa decides to go to the doctor. Her appearance is that of a poor young woman who suffers from hunger. She goes days without meals, in addition to being deprived of sleep and physical activity. The doctor knows that Macabéa's malnutrition is not caused by dieting, but he chooses to ignore the reality of her hunger: "The doctor took a good look at her and felt sure that she didn't diet to lose weight. Nevertheless, he finds it is easier to go on insisting that that she shouldn't diet to lose weight" (LISPECTOR, p. 67).¹¹ Even though the doctor is aware that dieting is not a concern for Macabéa, he conveniently tells her to stop skipping meals. He chooses the easy way out, choosing not to deal with her real problem: hunger. Macabéa's real problem is not even considered. The doctor does not want to see the reality of her poverty, so he pretends the problem can be easily fixed by simply telling her to eat. Macabéa is forced into silence, as she is not given space to voice her struggle of hunger. She is forced into silence by a figure whose role is to help patients.

In *Quarto de Despejo*, when Carolina takes home more money than usual from her recyclables, her son João, asks to be taken to the dentist because his tooth has been hurting for several weeks. Without hesitating or thinking about the cost, she takes him to the nearest dentist. At Dr. Paulo's office, Carolina waits her turn and then she explains that her son has a bad toothache. The doctor ignores her and fails to discuss about the possible procedures with Carolina. He just starts to pull out João's tooth. Carolina only has space to ask: "'How much is it, Doctor?' 'A hundred cruzeiros.' I thought the price was exorbitant. But he was already sitting in the chair" (JESUS, p. 120).¹² Carolina is silenced because the doctor fails to acknowledge her as a patient and hear her concern. The dentist ignores Carolina's opinion, because he judges her to have none. The little money she makes she is forced to give out by paying for a procedure she gave no consent to. She is forced into silent acceptance, because she is trapped in the situation and her morals prevent her from making a scene or leaving without paying.

¹¹ The quotes from *A hora da estrela* are of my authorship.

¹² The quotes from *Quarto de despejo* are of my authorship.

Despite the violence authorities often inflict upon Carolina, she fights against victimization by positively shaping her sense of self. She learns that to survive in a racist, classist, and sexist society, she needs to care about herself despite the cruelty of others. She is very proud of who she is; often proclaiming her African ancestry and challenging the dominant discourse of a racist society. As an example, when Carolina is confronted with a prejudice remark by factory workers, she writes about her resistance: “‘It’s a shame you’re black’ [factory workers] . . . They were forgetting that I adore my black skin and my kinky hair [Carolina]” (JESUS, p. 72). Carolina positively shapes her sense of self by reaffirming that she likes the color of her skin and hair. She asserts her own paradigms of beauty through writing about it in her diary. Even though she is surrounded by negative input, Carolina fights to positively shape her subjectivity.¹³

By contrast, in *A Hora da estrela*, Macabéa cannot positively shape her sense of self. When she is still young, Macabéa loses her parents and has to live with an unmarried aunt who constantly abuses her. Macabéa’s aunt is an overly devout religious woman who has a distorted view of society and women’s roles. She hits Macabéa, many times in the head, because she thinks punishment is good for discipline: “her aunt rapping her on the head because the old woman believed that the crown of the head was the vital part of one’s body. Her aunt would use her knuckles to rap that head of skin and bones which suffered from a calcium deficiency” (LISPECTOR, p. 27). Macabéa suffers physical violence from a young age, as her aunt beats her excessively and continuously. This abusive relationship prevents her from constructing a positive sense of self, as she first assumes that she has done something wrong and deserves to be punished. She is not encouraged to think about her own subjectivity nor does she have the space to search for her own sense of self. Macabéa is beaten into silence and isolation from society.

Macabéa’s marginality is so great that she cannot articulate her own feelings. She does not think of herself as happy or sad. She cannot articulate

¹³ The term subjectivity, used throughout this paper, is based on Donald Hall’s arguments that subjectivity implies a more flexible concept compared to identity, which may have static, unified connotation (3). In this sense, the term is appropriate to delineate multiple identities and, at the same time, a consciousness of one’s identity, which the protagonists struggle to achieve.

reflective thoughts about herself, because she has learned to ignore what she feels, likes or desires. She is not living in an illusion; she is living completely adrift from society, marginalized and excluded. Whatever comes her way she simply accepts, believing that she is outside life itself. For example, when her temporary boyfriend, Olímpio, asks her personal questions, she becomes lost and speechless:

[Macabéa] What shall we talk about then?

[Olímpio] About you.

[Macabéa] Me!

[Olímpio] Why the fuss? Aren't you a human being? Human beings talk about other human beings.

[Macabéa] Forgive me, but I don't believe that I am all that human.

[...]

[Olímpio] Look I'm going. You're a dead loss. (LISPECTOR, p. 48)¹⁴

This episode illustrates that Macabéa views herself as marginal or adrift from other people. Her position as a subaltern is so marginal that she is unaware of her identity. In this moment, we see that Olímpio likes to feel good about himself by humiliating Macabéa and using her at his convenience, constantly harassing her. Peixoto comments about Macabéa tragic situation: “Macabéa is ‘raped,’ not by one individual man, but by a multitude of social and cultural forces that conspire to use her cruelly for the benefit of others” (1994, p. 90). Olímpio is the embodiment of society, which not only relegates her to its margins, but appropriates of her in any way convenient for his own pleasure.

Macabéa fails to positively shape her own subjectivity even though she has social, economic, and racial privileges compared to Carolina, who can positively shape her sense of self. How is it possible that Macabéa does not see her privileges, desires, or rights as a human being? Rey Chow's essay *Postcolonial Visibilities: Questions Inspired by Deleuze's Method* brings to light such questions. Chow suggests that visibilities have little to do with the physical ability of seeing, but are instead intrinsically articulated with our subject positions – with how and what we are taught to see in our surroundings (2010, p. 65). Macabéa is taught to repress feelings and she is punished for any transgression. She cannot articulate any kind of identity for herself. In this way, she learns to live

¹⁴ I quote their conversation and maintain the organizational structure of the original narrative because the very division of the lines contributes to the representation of Macabéa's lost sense of identity, and the confusion, and emptiness which engulfs her.

without thinking about her own sense of self. Further, Gilles Deleuze proposes that the crux of the matter lies between what is visible and what we can articulate: we need to associate or represent our surroundings in order to see our positions, the positioning of others, and the various possibilities within (2011, p. 64-5). As Macabea's oppression prevents her from understanding and questioning her surroundings, she is unable to articulate her own subjectivity. She has been fiercely repressed as a child and young adult; she cannot comprehend her environment or social relationships, which sets her further adrift, away from any possibilities of searching for her own identity. She is clueless about interacting with people and society in general, because she is conditioned to view herself as an outsider, as invisible to others and consequently invisible to herself. Differently, Carolina is able to express what she sees and articulate visions of her surroundings, which consequently allows her to see herself and her own subject position.

The act of writing embodies the protagonists' different views of themselves. Macabéa and Carolina face various kinds of violence in the city of São Paulo, however, the act of writing creates a significant gap between their subject positions and how they see themselves. Macabéa is a typist: she only types words and is oblivious to their meanings. In contrast, Carolina writes her own stories and she is aware of the words, the sentences, the very language she uses. She uses writing to fight against victimization. Macabéa embodies a loss of subjectivity, silence, and powerlessness; while Carolina embodies a positive subjectivity, voice, and the struggle for empowerment. Although Macabéa has social, economic, and race privileges, she cannot positively shape her own sense of self. Carolina has greater economic difficulties and is discriminated by race, but she acquires agency through writing. Macabéa illustrates subalternity to an extreme, as she experiences complete loss of any sense of self; contrary to Carolina who, although marginalized, manages to positively shape her subjectivity through the act of writing.

With *Quarto de despejo*, Carolina de Jesus's subversive act of writing, breaks even further paradigms. She does long for some quiet space and alone time, but living in the *Favela of Canindé*, a private room is highly unlikely. She shares a small one-room shack with her three children. Neighbors, children, and street dogs- there is no moment of complete silence and solitude surround her. Yet she manages to write several books, tales, and diaries with the paper she collects from the streets. To a certain extent, Carolina de Jesus defies Virginia Woolf's

argument that to write “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (1929, p. 4). Such a scenario of private space is ideal and she often remarks about wanting a separate room to write. Nevertheless, with barely any space, no silence, and lacking economic conditions, Carolina de Jesus manages to write her stories.

Regarding Jesus’s search for a separate room, Levine and Meihy remark that “[f]rom the days of her childhood to her final years in self-exile, Carolina’s response was to distance herself from others, in order to maintain control over her life. This trait, in fact, was in many ways the key to her ability to keep her sanity” (1995, p. 143). Even though Carolina does treasure personal space, it is extreme to state that her distance from the others in the *comunidade da favela* is what kept her sane. Levine and Meihy’s arguments imply that Carolina’s neighbors are inferior, unworthy, and could have polluted the brilliance of Carolina if she had spent time with them. Such analysis is problematic because it reinforces stereotypes that pigeon-hole the inhabitants of the *Comunidade* as corrupting and negative influences. Their further arguments contribute to this stereotypical essentialization of otherness: “She was the one who persisted in reading when others played. She was the one who refused to drink alcohol or to gossip or give in to hopelessness” (LEVINE AND MEIHY, p. 143). This statement implies that Jesus views herself superior to her neighbors. Such comments turn Jesus into an example of how success is in the reach of the *favelados*, but they constantly choose to waste their lives with booze, games, and gossip. This can be a rather simplistic view of a greater socio-economic problem: Why are others not writing? Do they even know how to write? Were they able to attend school, even if just for couple of years? What traumas and deceptions cause them to drink? Why is gossip such a degrading activity? Could not gossip could be considered as a form of storytelling? Carolina de Jesus herself claims to draw inspiration to write from the talks she hears from neighbors and friends. Levine and Meihy’s arguments need to be examined, because they imply that everyone around Carolina de Jesus could have succeed, but she is the only one that had the will power. She should be recognized as an exception and not as representative. Although she occupies a subaltern position in the margins of society, she reads and writes which already sets her in a relative position of privilege from other living in the *comunidades*.

To conclude, through a comparative approach, this article compares and contrasts Carolina de Jesus’s *Quarto de despejo* and Clarice Lispector’s *A hora da estrela* to analyze different kinds of violence women face by first, problematizing

the representational violence that women authors are submitted to; and second, by discussing the physical and psychological violence the protagonists have to endure as they try to shape their sense of self. In the literary works, the protagonists face several forms of violence as they struggle to survive in a racist and sexist society. Macabéa falls short of successfully seeing her own subject position and she is entrapped adrift from society. Carolina is also marginalized from society, but she sees herself and understands her subject position in such context, which allows her to positively shape her own sense of self and write. In different ways, the women authors, here considered, also face obstacles to assert their literary voice against racist and sexist paradigms. The reflections undertaken in this article illustrate that questions of gender and race still marginalize women's writings. Thus, a re-visioning of literary canons to include Brazilian and Afro-Brazilian women's voices is much needed.

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