

# **(In)visible Violence: Carolina de Jesus's *Quarto de despejo* and Clarice Lispector's *A hora da estrela***

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**Abstract** This paper focuses on Clarice Lispector's *A hora da estrela* and Carolina de Jesus's *Quarto de despejo* to compare the different kinds of violence the protagonists endure and how representational violence has silenced Brazilian women writers' voices. The reception of both literary works is different as Clarice Lispector's and Carolina de Jesus's literary voices and literary works are appropriated into mainstream discourse. In *A Hora da Estrela*, Lispector critiques the supremacy of the dominant discourse and presumed transparency through Rodrigo's oppression of Macabéa's agency and life. In *Quarto de despejo*, Audálio Dantas alters Jesus's text by severely editing, changing, and selecting entries he believes to be important. Both literary works depict the various forms of violence women have to overcome to survive in the city of São Paulo. Macabéa and Carolina face violence on different levels as each protagonist tries to fight against victimization to shape their own subjectivities.

**Key words** Violence; representational violence; Clarice Lispector; Carolina de Jesus

In Latin America, social and economic turmoil in the form of rebellions, protests, wars, dictatorships, and military coups, marked the mid-twentieth century. In Brazil writers such as Manuel Bandeira, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and João Guimarães Rosa depict this instability in their literary works. In addition to the social, economic, and cultural upheavals, women writers encountered a number of barriers that made it difficult to write and publish in a patriarchal society.

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 Nordeste, <sup>1</sup> Macabéa, who moves to the city of São Paulo to search, in vain, for work

and a sense of belonging. Carolina de Jesus's first and most famous published work is *Quarto de despejo* (1960), written in the format of a diary. The story is told from the perspective of Carolina and portrays the harsh conditions of a single Afro-Brazilian mother living in the slums and working as a paper collector in downtown São Paulo.

Although scholars have analyzed each of the works, there is a lack of a comparative analysis between the narratives. The critical reception of each narrative is also significantly different, despite the common theme of violence and marginality. In this article, I juxtapose the two works to rediscover 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 the dominant discourse, 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. *A Hora da Estrela* and *Quarto de Despejo* both examine the different kinds of violence the protagonists endure as they try to positively shape their sense of self while critically addressing the representational violence that has shaped Clarice Lispector's and Carolina de Jesus's literary voices.

The social background of the authors contributes to their works. As a diarist, the connection between the life and writing of Carolina Maria de Jesus is naturally more direct. She was born in 1914 in the countryside of Minas Gerais in Brazil. Her mother was a poor rural worker but she managed to send Carolina de Jesus to school for two years, which was enough for her to learn how to read and write. As an adult, Carolina de Jesus moved to São Paulo to live in the Favela do Canindé (*slums of Caninde*) with her three children: José Carlos, João José, and Vera Eunice. The Favela of Canindé is situated in Brazil's largest city, São Paulo. At the time Jesus was writing, Canindé had about 60,000 inhabitants living in poor very poor shacks. Historically, the term favela derives from the War of the Canudos (1896-1897), which was fought in Bahia, a state in northeastern Brazil. In this war, the rebellion against the government was defeated and the veterans were promised jobs in the São Paulo, but given none. Without money most veterans moved into the hills to live in improvised houses, which received the name of Morro (Hill) da Favela.<sup>2</sup>

In *Quarto de despejo*, when Carolina de Jesus moves to São Paulo, she cannot find regular employment, but she refuses to beg for money. She goes to work as a *catadora de papel*,<sup>3</sup> selling to recycling factories whatever she finds on the streets in exchange for a few Cruzeiros.<sup>4</sup> Carolina de Jesus and her children live in extreme poverty amidst the constant threat of hunger and violence. Despite harsh conditions, she enjoys reading and manages to write diaries, short stories, poems and tales.

Audálio Dantas, a Brazilian journalist who was interested in the social conditions of the inhabitants of the Favela do Canindé, was introduced to Carolina de Jesus during one of his visits. Dantas encouraged her to publish and in 1960, Jesus published *Quarto de despejo*.

The narrative became a worldwide sensation, and was translated into English by David St. Clair 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, the narrator, 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. 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. She is often referred to as the Black Cinderella, because she acquired fame and money, and eventually moved out of the favela.<sup>5</sup> 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.

Clarice Lispector, on the other hand, was born to Jewish parents who emigrated from Ukraine to Brazil in 1920, when she was only two months old. Lispector lived with her mother, father and sister in Recife during most of her childhood. In contrast to Carolina de Jesus, Lispector enjoyed the benefits of being raised by an upper-middle class family and she graduated with a law degree. As an adult, Lispector lived in Rio de Janeiro and became a contributor to several newspapers. She married a diplomat and they lived for many years in Europe and the United States. She wrote many poems, short stories, and novels that have continuously gained popularity and literary recognition. *A Hora da Estrela* is considerably different from Lispector's previous works because of its explicit descriptions of violence. Lispector tackles visible violence,<sup>6</sup> depicting the miserable life of a Nordestina, Macabéa, who moves to Rio de Janeiro and suffers psychological and physical abuse, poverty and hunger. 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" (83). Peixoto emphasizes the brutality and cruelty the protagonist, Macabéa, faces in São Paulo. Nevertheless, Macabéa tries to fight 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.

To compare and contrast Carolina de Jesus' *Quarto de despejo* with Clarice Lispector's *A Hora da estrela* requires a flexible and ongoing theoretical discussion. 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. Lesley Feracho explains that the representation of the self can be complex because of "women's historical silencing-social, economic, and artistic" (5). Women writers may find in writing an outlet for self-expression and an opportunity to struggle for empowerment. Lispector and Jesus play with their texts, experimenting with alternative representations and exploring their access to dominant discourse through their writing. *A Hora da estrela* can be viewed as a meta-fiction, with a narrator, Rodrigo, who is also a character in the story. *Quarto de despejo* may be considered as an autobiographical text in the strict sense as Jesus portrays elements very close to her reality and experiences through the voice of the narrator, Carolina. 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. The purpose of this distinction is to emphasize the literariness of *Quarto de Despejo*, which is viewed as a kind of *testimonio*.<sup>7</sup> The implication is that Jesus writes what she sees she does not create literature. However, I argue that like any literary text, Jesus's work features a narrator who emerges from the text, but does not automatically coincide with the author. This choice is intended to challenge the seduction of voyeuristic access to works about subalternity. It is my view that Carolina de Jesus's work is literature.

The reception of Clarice Lispector's and Carolina de Jesus's narratives has been significantly different, both nationally and internationally. 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. Jesus does not even merit mention in the timeline of Brazilian women writers at the beginning of the book of Brazilian women writers. 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, Nélida Pinon, and Clarice Lispector are mentioned, but Carolina de Jesus is once again left out. This kind of exclusion of Carolina de Jesus reflects how her writings have been ignored as part of the Brazilian literary canon, obfuscating her voice as a literary writer. In the past, Jesus's fame was momentary and her recognition as a writer was unstable, while Lispector gradually becomes a

consecrated author. 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.

The English translations of both works further reflect the different treatment of the narratives. Giovanni Pontiero's translation of *A Hora da estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*) was published in 1986 almost ten years after the original. The English title is faithful to the Portuguese title. The late translation indicates that Lispector's fame had been steadily increasing. By contrast, 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 illustrates the momentary attention her narrative received. It is celebrated for its exoticness, but 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. The 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.

Clarice Lispector's fictional works are widely praised for their literariness and their proximity to the dominant culture. 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 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, although in recent years there has been a successful reintegration of Carolina de Jesus's literary works into Brazilian Literature by intellectuals, scholars, and activists. One noteworthy group, LITEAFRO, organized by the Professor Eduardo de Assis at the Federal University of Minas Gerais does groundbreaking work in rediscovering and publicizing works by Afro-Brazilian authors.

Still, Clarice Lispector's narratives have received more recognition, sometimes for questionable reasons. For example, French philosopher and literary critic Hélène Cixous has written extensively about Lispector's works and uses Lispector's fiction to prove her theoretical ideas, in a sense co-opting Lispector's literary voice to fit her theoretical paradigms. In her comments about *A Hora da Estrela*, Cixous notes that "Rodrigo is just a vessel, a prop, with which Lispector writes and reflects herself in Macabéa" (146). She equates Lispector with Macabéa and reduces Rodrigo to a mere vessel. It might be argued, however, that Rodrigo has in fact as active a 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 personal and authorial voice. Thus Ana Koblucka critiques Cixous's analysis arguing that "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" (18). As Koblucka suggests, Cixous uses the narrative to reflect her own theoretical premises. Cixous's reading undermines Lispector's agency as a creative writer. This appropriation induces a rather passive classification of Lispector's ideas, by equating her voice with those Rodrigo and Macabéa. Lispector challenges the dominant discourse that claims to control and define the other, by having her own voice appropriated by an egocentric male narrator. Whether Cixous misrepresents Clarice Lispector by framing her work within Eurocentric ideals will continue to be debated.

Carolina de Jesus has her literary voice appropriated, but to a greater extent, because her editor, Audálio Dantas, has directly manipulated her writing. Through his editing, Jesus's voice is silenced. Her 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. Several scholars recognize Dantas active role. Lesley Feracho comments that "Jesus and Audálio Dantas (through his editing of the diary) engage their readers' interest by speaking to them" (47). Feracho attributes a significant degree of authorship to Dantas, recognizing his active role in the process of publishing Jesus's diaries. Dantas not only compiles the texts, but, to a certain extent, he re-writes Jesus's *Quarto de Despejo*.

Although Dantas, has 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 and the seductiveness of believing in the transparency of such work: When "representing them [subalterns], the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent" (29), because they claim to be only a conduit for the subaltern. Spivak argues that assuming that the subaltern is being clearly portrayed can be seductive but is misguided because any kind of intervention automatically alters the original dynamic. 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.

Another dilemma is that Danta's act of collecting Jesus's writings may be seen as

heroic, as he is associated with bringing light into the dark world of Carolina de Jesus. A parallel can be made with Gayatri Spivak's statement about colonial exploitation in India: "White men seeking to save brown women from brown men" (61). This expression describes most audiences that tend to view Dantas as the important figure who went out of his way to help a poor and helpless Afro-Brazilian woman. Jesus is accepted as a writer because she is not seen as a threat. 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.

Spivak's critique of the myth "white men seeking to save brown women from brown men" (61) is applicable, when Rodrigo takes on the role of Macabéa's savior in *A Hora da Estrela*. 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" (13). He equates Macabéa to all Nortedinas, suggesting they are all the same and they are all hopeless. And 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 appropriation and domination of the colonized by the colonizer. Rodrigo does not care about Macabéa; he is both repelled and attracted to her exotic otherness. 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" (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.<sup>10</sup> 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.

In the work of both Carolina de Jesus and Clarice Lispector, the role of doctors and dentists is problematized. They claim to help the protagonists, but 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" (67). Even though the doctor is aware that dieting is not a concern for Macabéa, he conveniently tells her to stop skipping meals. He searches for 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 eating. Macabéa is forced into silence, as she is not given space to voice her struggle and she is too repressed to shout out.

In *Quarto de Despejo*, when Carolina brings home more money than usual, her son João, asks her to take him 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.<sup>11</sup> At Dr. Paulo's office, Carolina waits her turn and then she explains that her son has a bad toothache. The doctor does not consult her about possible procedures and 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" (120). Carolina is voiceless to decide what she wants to do with her son. The dentist ignores Carolina, ignores her opinion, because he judges her to have none. Although Carolina has money to pay, she is forced into silent acceptance because she is trapped in the situation.

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. Carolina takes pride in her African heritage and she tries to positively shape her sense of self. 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]" (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.<sup>12</sup>

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” (27). Macabéa suffers physical violence from a young age, as her aunt beats her excessively and continuously. This abusive relationship prevents Macabéa from constructing a positive sense of self, as she will always think she has done something wrong and deserves to be punished. She is not encouraged to think about her own subjectivity, she is beaten into silence and isolation from society.

Marta Peixoto assumes that Macabéa is oblivious to reality because “she believes she is happy” (96). Macabéa may be unaware of her deplorable conditions, but her marginality is so great that she cannot articulate personal feelings to think she is happy. She cannot articulate such thought, because she cannot articulate 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. (48)<sup>13</sup>

This episode illustrates that Macabéa views herself as adrift from others. Her position as a subaltern is so marginal that she is unaware of her identity. 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” (90). As Peixoto suggests, Olímpio likes to feel good about himself by humiliating Macabéa and using her at his convenience, constantly harassing her.

Macabéa is not able to positively shape her own subjectivity even though she has social, economic, and racial privileges compared to Carolina, who positively shapes her sense of self and is proud of her African heritage. 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 (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 without thinking about her own sense of self. Further, 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 (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.

Another significant difference between both protagonists is in the act of writing. Despite the violence Macabéa and Carolina face in the city of São Paulo, the act of writing creates a significant gap between their subject positions. Macabéa is a typist: she only types words and is oblivious to their meanings. Carolina writes her own stories, and is very aware of the language she uses. She uses writing as an outlet and as a means to fight against victimization. Macabéa reflects the loss of identity, meaning, powerlessness, and silence; while Carolina reflects a control of one's subjectivity, and the struggle for empowerment and voice through writing. Although Macabéa has social and economic privileges, Carolina acquires agency through writing and, in this sense, occupies a privileged subject position. 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.

In *Quarto de despejo*, Carolina de Jesus longs for some quiet space and alone time. Since she lives in the Favela of Canindé, however, 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, 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" (4). Such a scenario is ideal and Jesus 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” (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 can be problematic because it reinforces stereotypes that pigeon-hole the inhabitants of the Favelas 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” (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 is a 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? Gossip could be considered as a form of storytelling. Carolina de Jesus herself claims to draw inspiration 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 succeed, but she is the only one that has the will power. Jesus should be recognized as an exception and she should not be considered 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.

In conclusion, Clarice Lispector’s and Carolina de Jesus’s literary voices are often appropriated to better fit paradigms of the dominant discourse. Macabéa and Carolina face different kinds of violence as they are relegated to the margins of society. Finally, while Clarice Lispector’s *A Hora da Estrela* was adapted into film in 1985, Carolina de Jesus’s *Quarto de Despejo* has not privileged from a similar welcome by the film industry. An ongoing discussion about the different receptions of literary works by Brazilian women writers is important to the re-visioning of Latin American literature.

## Notes

1. Nordestina is a feminine adjective used to describe women who are from the Northeastern states of Brazil. The term is a derivation of the term Nordeste, which means Northeast.
2. With time, the term Favela became the term to describe any slums in the hills and outskirts of cities. The favelas grew immensely with the rural exodus during the 70’s and 80’s in which many

people could not find jobs and were forced to live in the precarious conditions of the favelas. Nowadays, some favelas have become extremely big, as with Rochinha with about 200,000 inhabitants. The term favela has been substituted for the term *comunidade*, or *community*, because the inhabitants of these geographical locations have established their own alternative community, with infrastructure, (even if lacking good conditions), shops and lifestyle. The term *favelados*, which refers to people living in the favelas, is no longer accepted because of its negative implication of powerlessness and marginality. The expression *comunidade da favela* is used in this paper as an attempt to acknowledge this change.

3. The name is commonly used in Brazil to refer to the person whose life work is to collect paper / cardboard from the streets. With the advancement of industrialization and introduction of recycling trucks, this kind of work has been largely eliminated, but many still depend on it.

4. The Cruzeiro was the name of the Brazilian currency from 1942 to 1994. This period featured an economy that was quite unstable with high inflation rates.

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

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

7. John Beverly defines *testimonio* as “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” (31). See Beverly’s *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*.

8. Other 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. 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.

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

10. In Portuguese, Maca has a condescending meaning, as it is used to refer to a kind of stretcher that transports disabled or injured people. This can reflect how people are always taking advantage Macabéa, and she becomes a means for people to support themselves, much like a bed. Maca is

also close to the word manca, which means limp, and may also refer to Macabéa's condition as a subaltern.

11. It's worth pointing that in most big cities in Brazil, there are dentists and doctors who may not be licensed, or who are poorly trained but have small practices usually located close to slums or poorer neighborhoods. In these practices, there is no scheduling for appointments and people are seen on a first come first serve basis.

12. 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.

13. 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 that engulfs her.

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