

## Postcolonial Female Fiction: from the Solitary Stand in Carolina Maria de Jesus to the Solidary Diction in Conceição Evaristo

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**RESUMO:** Este trabalho discute o lugar da autoria feminina numa modernidade periférica, que se estende de finais dos anos 50 do século XX às primeiras décadas do século XXI. Marcas duplas de gênero e cor, nas penas de Carolina Maria de Jesus e de Conceição Evaristo, traduzem radicalmente a experiência literária como resistência simbólica ao processo diaspórico dos povos afrodescendentes e problematizam noções de pertencimento sob a égide de ‘nação’. No caso de Carolina, o gênero documental lavrado em seus diários mascara a natureza irrefutavelmente literária e solitária de seus escritos. Em se tratando de Conceição, o literário se constrói por imperativos memorialísticos, que fundam o lugar autoral na solidariedade das vozes subalternas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVES:** Autoria feminina; Literariedade; Carolina Maria de Jesus; Conceição Evaristo; Gêneros textuais.

**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the place of female authorship in late modernity extending from the late 50's in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Double marks of gender and color in the writings of Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo's, radically translate literary experience as symbolic resistance to the diasporic processes undergone by afro descendant peoples as well as question notions of belongness under the concept of 'nation'. In Jesus's case, the documentary genre of her diaries masks off the undeniable literary and solitary nature of her writings. In the case of Evaristo's, literary writing is wrought by memorialistic demands which found authorship in solidary subaltern voices.

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**KEYWORDS:** Female authorship; Literariness; Carolina Maria de Jesus; Conceição Evaristo; Text genres.

Sure, she would move on. One day, she would narrate, loosen up the voices, the murmurs, the stifled scream which was hanging there, which belonged to each and everyone. One day, Maria-Nova would write the speech of her people.<sup>1</sup>

Conceição Evaristo, *Becos da Memória*

Half a century pulls apart Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo. However, if long-lasting subaltern experience of gender and color did not suffice to bring them together. Both Afro Brazilian writers would strengthen their bond by the radically literary-propelling nature of their writing, primarily that which might bother traditional criticism as ‘documentary’. Self-baptized “the Canindé slum dweller” and reportedly poorly educated, Jesus wrote over five thousand pages among diaries, novels, and plays from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties in the twentieth century. Evaristo, a contemporary poet, essayist, and fiction writer, has been writing and publishing in diversified genres. As she likes to say, her biography intermingles and recovers an immemorial past of ‘the defeated’, to resort to a category by Walter Benjamin (1994). A vital impetus lies right at the core of this sisterhood, which shall be taken care of in this discussion. I refer to the aesthetically-conditioned aspect, actualizing and coming full circle in pages of a common and unfinished story. I stress their fictional-propelling characteristic as the main quality in that realization whether in the openly documentary writing in Jesus’s diary *Garbage Room* (2006) or whether in Evaristo’s biographical novel or short story-like biographies such as *Becos da Memória* (*Memory Corners*, 2006) or *Insubmissas Lágrimas de Mulheres* (*Insubmissive Tears of Women*, 2011). The following discussion sustains that to the subaltern, whereas writing might ensure social status, fiction becomes crucial for spiritual survival. The overwhelming strength of fiction overshadows Jesus’s ‘documentary’ efforts to report on the subhuman conditions she lived

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<sup>1</sup> My translation from the original: “Sim, ela iria adiante. Um dia, ela haveria de narrar, de fazer soltar as vozes, os murmúrios, os silêncios, o grito abafado que existia, que era de cada um e de todos. Maria-Nova, um dia, escreveria a fala de seu povo.”

in, on the one hand, and makes it possible for Evaristo, several decades later, to vindicate her predecessor with shared authorship and academic interest. To the effect of a change of this caliber, it is relevant to underline [1] the collapse of traditional nation-conceived fiction and [2] the mutation in the concepts of fiction and literariness.

Joel Rufino dos Santos, an Afro Brazilian intellectual, develops a rather productive etymological motto to address Jesus's case. By stating "she is three: the woman, the writer, and the character" (SANTOS, 2009, p. 21), the historian and fiction-writer himself reviews the concept of alienation:

In common language, it means madness (the mad person is out of his/her mind) or the passing on to someone else whatever rightfully belongs to him or her (to alienate a car, for example). Philosophical language maintains those two basic understandings, but goes beyond. It is alienated he or she that is out of his or her circumstances – for example, an industrialist who sides with the workers on class-struggle confrontations; an imprisoned convict who systematically sides with jail agents, and the like. We, human beings, at some point along our trajectories part company with nature, including the other animals – we get alienated, therefore, to exist as human beings. **Alienation, in this case, turns out to be an act of self-governing.** (SANTOS, 2009, p.20, highlights added).<sup>2</sup>

By ascribing positive value to the concept of alienation as inherent to the human condition Rufino raises the "as if" condition to existential imperative concluding that "literary pleasure proves to be a kind of alienation; someone by you has to remind you that whatever you are reading is not true. Like all other pleasure, it is dangerous: you'd better get busy with the real, objective, and useful things." (p.24).<sup>3</sup> When referring to her own writing with

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<sup>2</sup> My translation from the original: Na linguagem comum, significa loucura (o louco está fora de si) ou entrega a outrem do que é seu por direito (alienar um carro, por exemplo). A linguagem filosófica mantém estas duas acepções básicas, mas vai além. Alienado/a é o que está fora de suas circunstâncias – por exemplo, um empresário que trava a luta de classes do lado dos empregados, um presidiário que se coloca sistematicamente do lado dos carcereiros, e assim por diante. Nós seres humanos, em algum ponto da nossa trajetória nos separamos da natureza, incluindo os outros animais – nos alienamos, portanto, para existirmos como humanos. **Alienação, neste caso, é um ato de autonomia.**"

<sup>3</sup> My translation from the original: "o gozo literário é também uma espécie de alienação: alguém, ao seu lado, precisa lhe lembrar que aquilo que está lendo não é verdade. Como todo gozo, é perigoso: melhor ocupar o seu tempo com coisas reais, objetivas, úteis."

a neologism, Evaristo calls it “biographilliving”<sup>4</sup>. Another way to locate her gut-level experience as a writer as inextricably bound to her biography. An experience I identify and call “aesthetic temper” in Jesus.

Before diving into the aesthetic effects in the concrete writing of both, I point out to Lukács, as a theoretical reference to substantiate the defense of the fictional quality in both writers. I underline the counter-hegemonic nature of that quality, especially where the descriptive and report-like matrix of literary tradition in Brazil would warmly welcome documentary and reflexive writing (Candido, 2003; Velloso, 1988).

In the essay “Narrate or Describe?” (1968), Lukács strongly sets up the limits between participation and observation as mutually exclusive drives in social criticism forged in literary writing. To the Hungarian thinker, much of the mid to late nineteenth century fiction, apparently critical to the capitalist scene in those days, would fall into *observation* and *description* rather than evolve into *participation* and *narration*. Presumably engaged writers would fall short of organizing a text where relations between the different elements of their narrative would be visible and narrow. Whether the scene at stake was a horse race, whether it was the description of an object, should they stand aloof and disconnected from the tensions along the main narrative axis, they would divorce history and pay homage to a “biography of things”, granted their virtuosity. A mirror-like relation would bring together immediate objectivism in turns with an equally deleterious subjectivism, through which the subject’s conflicts are no longer anchored in his/her historical inscription. In Lukács’s perspective, it is the lack of relation between the subject, with his/her personal history and the objective world that subverts the possible bond between the narrator and his/her surroundings, ensuring his/her humanity, as experience is qualified by participation.

On the basis of Lukács’s understanding of

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<sup>4</sup> “Escrevivência” in Portuguese.

historically-engaged narratives, I move on to discuss the fictional anchorage deriving from the relation between objective and subjective life wrought into literary matter by the narrator of *Garbage Room*. I take notice, therefore, of one of those three personae constituting Carolina Maria de Jesus, as pointed out by Joel Rufino. I take notice of the fiction writer, despite her immediate, documental, and biographical matter and objects of interest, integrating her diary. I am interested in the literary caliber exceeding the most documental obviousness, and sometimes heavy-handed metaphors she reproduces. Let's take note of Jesus's aesthetic creation resulting from alternating moves from external references and comments. Let's pay particular attention to the pattern **description-comment-ornamentation-description**, in the following passage:

[João] Bought a cup of sparkling water, 2 cruzeiros. Gave him a lecture. Can you believe a slum dweller with such fine selections?

[...] The children eats (sic) a lot of bread. They like fresh bread. But when there isn't any they eat stiff bread. Stiff is the bread we eat. Stiff is the bed we sleep (sic). Stiff is the life of the slum dweller.

Oh! São Paulo the queen who proudly shows off your golden crown which turns out to be the skyscrapers. You who wear velvet (sic) and silk and put on cotton socks which turn out to be the slum.

[...]The money was short to get the beef, I made noodles with carrot. The was no oil, it tasted horrible. Vera is the only one who complains and wants second helpings (JESUS, 2006, p. 37).<sup>5</sup>

The question-comment concluding the description of her child João's unauthorized actions (l.1-2) unveils the family's socio-economic status. Jesus knows where she speaks from. More relevantly than its descriptive aspect, the refinement of the rhetoric question echoes in dialogism the voice of the absent one (of the 'non slum-

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<sup>5</sup> My translation from the original: "[João] Comprou um copo de água mineral, 2 cruzeiros. Zanguiei com ele. Onde já se viu favelado com estas finezas?  
... Os meninos come muito pão. Eles gostam de pão mole. Mas quando não tem eles comem pão duro. Duro é o pão que nós comemos. Dura é a cama que dormimos. Dura é a vida do favelado.  
Oh! São Paulo rainha que ostenta vaidosa a tua coroa de ouro que são os arranha-céus. Que veste viludo e seda e calça meias de algodão que é a favela.  
...O dinheiro não deu para comprar carne, eu fiz macarrão com cenoura. Não tinha gordura, ficou horrível. A Vera é a única que reclama e pede mais."

dweller', the one on upper social steps). She, therefore, imprints a polyphonic character to her diary that goes much beyond the possible immediate objectives of 'communicating' her misery. After all, where does that question-reprimand come from? Three times reiterated, the term "bread" (literally and metaphorically the family's food-for-survival) is qualified by contrasting adjectives – "mole" and "duro" - which, in Portuguese, can be applicable to nouns other than 'bread', signaling their 'hardness'. The last adjective – "duro" – meaning 'stale', 'stiff', and 'hard', in Portuguese, reverberates three times in the opening of the following sentences. The rhythm attained by that repetition, by effect of gradation, is crowned with the nouns preceding the adjective "duro", in a progression going from the most concrete to the most abstract: "bread", "bed", and "life".

By ornamentation in the pattern I refer specifically to the stylistic elements Aristotle points out in book III of his Rhetoric, as argumentation helpers (ARISTÓTELES, 2005). As opposed to what the name might suggest, ornamentation is described as structuring mechanisms to argumentation and as crucial to rhetorical purposes. In the concrete case of an enunciation place taken by a female slum-dweller, her enunciation is strengthened (as its parts are ornamented) as it succeeds in referring to, alluding to, or emulating classical or neoclassical conventions of her Parnassian predecessors. In the midst of precious gems and metals, and the Greek urns of those notorious poets, Jesus invests with prosopopoeia in the apostrophe to the city ("Oh! São Paulo the queen"). She dresses her interlocutor with a velvet and silk made golden crown. However, she carefully and wisely exposes, by contrast with the fine and dear material on the upper part of that figure, the queen's feet, wearing unrefined and rough material – cotton – placed on the lower part of the queen's very royal body.

It is worthy noticing, in addition, that the unexpected combination of high and low elements accounts for a

shock or surprise effect, proper to the satirical poetry of one of the most notorious seventeenth century poets in Brazil. As opposed to Jesus, Gregório de Matos was highly learned and had perfect command of the poetic coda in his days, articulating social criticism to the specific genres proper to the different circumstances he addressed. The poem “Desaires da Formosura” (“Beauty’s Inelegance”) by Matos suggests a parallel use of high and low lexica in gradation from top to bottom, like in the passage above by Jesus. The poet relates what was regarded as the most spiritual beauty to rare and precious elements until he ends up with the grossest references to the woman’s physiological functions, as can be seen below:

Ruby, shell of pearls, pilgrim,  
Animated crystal, live scarlet,  
Two sapphires on top of smooth silver,  
Waved gold on top of fine silver.

This little face belongs to Caterina;  
And because she sweetly subjects and kills  
She is not less ungrateful because she is divine  
And lightening by lightening hearts she comes to  
fulminate

Transported one afternoon  
Drinking admiration and merriness  
Fábio saw she who he had already put up altars:

He said equally lovingly and hurt:  
Ah gentle muchacha what could it be of you  
If so beautiful as you are you did have not shit!<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Jesus, the manipulation of poetic effects might be accounted for by her poetic flair and aesthetic aspect, as I call it. However, a display of cultivation and reading permeates her prose, with generalized enclitic use of pronouns and careful choice of rare lexica, but reaches a peak in direct citation of presumably prestigious poets, as can be observed below:

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<sup>6</sup> My translation from the original: “Rubi, concha de perlas peregrina,/ Animado cristal, viva escarlata,/ Duas safiras sobre lisa prata, Ouro encrespado sobre prata fina. // Este o rostinho é de Caterina; / E porque docemente obriga e mata, / Não livra o ser divina em ser ingrata / E raio a raio os corações fulmina. // Viu Fábio uma tarde transportado/ Bebendo admirações, e galhardias / A quem já tanto amor levantou aras:// Disse igualmente amante e magoado:/ Ah muchacha gentil, que tal serias/Se sendo tão formosa não cagaras!”

I pushed on the cart and off I went for more scrap paper. Vera kept on smiling. And I thought of Casemiro de Abreu, who said: "Smile child. Life is beautiful". Except if it was beautiful on those days. Because nowadays it is much more adequate to say: "Cry child. Life is bitter". (HANSEN, 2004, p. 85-7).

Inflexion of meaning, wrought in the ironic comment to the original verse by a Brazilian romantic poet, nevertheless, aggregates authorial value e dilutes any hypothesis of a deferential stand on Jesus's part. The verse reproduced refers to a diametrically opposed reality – a class-based nation – from that which the listener, reader, and writer re-work.

The physiological gaze cast upon the city, animated as a body unevenly dressed, as in the passage above, gains an extra clout by metonymical elaboration in a further reference to the city as home. The elevated and low terms and images mentioned are reiterated in the metaphorization of the social-existential topic, which nourishes the title for Jesus's diary:

[...] At eight-thirty in the evening I was already at the slum, breathing the odor of the excrement mashed with the rotten clay. When I am away in the city I have the feeling I am in the living room with its crystal chandeliers, its velvet (sic) rugs, ceten (sic) pads. And when I am in the slum I have the feeling I am an object out of use, worth to be in a garbage room. (JESUS, 2006, p.33)<sup>7</sup>.

The passage still plays with the differentiated use of "estar" and "ser". The narrator's transit about the city gives her the feeling of the transience ascribed by the verb "estar", her ephemerons being in a noble place – the city. By striking contrast, the slum is more than a place for staying ("estar"), for it gives her the ontological feeling of "being" – and of a reified "being", a commodity, for it goes round on the circuit of commercial exchanges and can be out of order and out of use. The aesthetic effect in Jesus's

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<sup>7</sup> My translation from the original: "[...] As oito e meia da noite eu já *estava* na favela respirando o odor dos excrementos que mescla com o barro podre. Quando *estou* na cidade tenho a impressão que *estou* na sala de visita com seus lustres de cristais, seus tapetes de viludos, almofadas de sitim. E quando *estou* na favela tenho a impressão que *sou* um objeto fora de uso, digno de *estar* num quarto de despejo." The forms of the verbs *ser* and *estar* I italicized in the passage are translated as forms of the same verb *to be* in English. The ensuing discussion above highlights the semantic play with the two verbs in Portuguese as well as the aesthetic effects attained.



Diary evinces, therefore, the viscerally literary temper of that writing, which develops far beyond communicating misery or reporting on social injustice, as suggested before.

In the aforementioned essay on description and narration (Lukács, 1968), a cosmovision is evoked as proper to those who keep up a holistic-like type of narrative. With the narrative parts and elements interconnected, thus, proper criticism to the generalized parceling of production orders can then take place. Homer's *Iliad* comes in as an emblem for Lukács's theoretical construction. Generous description of each object meets the purpose of binding them historically to their users. That is, those objects have a history of their own and, like their corresponding characters, are **not** commodities to be disposed of or replaced at random. Objects are heroic legacy, part of the body, I would add, the body of the heroes - as their 'arms' would testify. In book XVIII of the *Iliad*, Achilles's mother Thetis gets her son 'made-to-order' arms from Vulcan, so that he can avenge the death of his beloved Patroclus:

And Vulcan answered, "Take heart, and be no more disquieted about this matter; would that I could hide him from death's sight when his hour is come, so surely as I can find him armour that shall amazeth the eyes of all who behold it. When he had so said he left her and went to his bellows, turning them towards the fire and bidding them do their office. Twenty bellows blew upon the melting-pots, and they blew blasts of every kind, some fierce to help him when he had need of them, and others less strong as Vulcan willed it in the course of his work. He threw tough copper into the fire, and tin, with silver and gold; he set his great anvil on its block, and with one hand grasped his mighty hammer while he took the tongs in the other."<sup>8</sup>

Notice below the unique hand-made ornamentation of the arms is made with dear material and comprises a narrative itself:

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Butler's version of the corresponding passage in Portuguese, translated from the Greek by Odorico Mendes: "Diz Vulcano: "Sossega, não te aflijas./ Pudesse à minaz Parca subtraí-lo,/ Como lhe hei-de aprestar brilhantes armas,/ Dos humanos espanto." Eis vai-se aos foles,/ Vira-os ao fogo, e ordena-lhes que operem./ Eles em vinte forjas respiravam,/ Ora com sopra lento, ora apressado,/ Segundo o que há na mente e quer o artista./ Cobre indômito ao fogo e estanho e prata / E ouro pôs fino, ao cepo vasta incude, A tenaz numa mão, noutra o martelo." Disponível em: < [http://pt.wikisource.org/wiki/Anexo:Imprimir/Il%C3%ADada\\_\(Odorico\\_Mendes\)](http://pt.wikisource.org/wiki/Anexo:Imprimir/Il%C3%ADada_(Odorico_Mendes)) >. Acesso 03 jan. 2012.

First he shaped the shield so great and strong, adorning it all over and binding it round with a gleaming circuit in three layers; and the baldric was made of silver. He made the shield in five thicknesses, and with many a wonder did his cunning hand enrich it. He wrought the earth, the heavens, and the sea; the moon also at her full and the untiring sun, with all the signs that glorify the face of heaven- the Pleiads, the Hyads, huge Orion, and the Bear, which men also call the Wain and which turns round ever in one place, facing Orion, and alone never dips into the stream of Oceanus.<sup>9</sup>

If the ‘production order’ Lukács refers to is heroically on display when the several stages of the manufacturing process are inextricably related to man’s life, Jesus production cycle stands out for its epic status. Repeatedly, the literal action of **collecting** – garbage (scrap paper, cans, etc.) – is mixed with the work of **collecting words**. Symbolically, paper (scrap paper) is recycled (long before the generalized recycling ‘waves’) into stationery - raw-material for Jesus’s aesthetic undertaking: “I am unguided, unsure about where to start with: I want to write. I want to work, I want to do the laundry.” (p. 40).<sup>10</sup> This time, the reiteration of the first person of the verb “to want” anticipates equivalent predicates that start firing off, from the most ethereal (“to write”) to the most specific (“to do the laundry”). They are both mediated by laborial action (“to work”) in two versions: spiritual (to write ‘fiction’) and physical (to do the laundry) – both, in Jesus’s case, handwork.

It is also relevant the ambivalence of ‘paper’ as well as of ‘collecting’. Metonymical labor brings together **waste (scrap paper)** and **poetry**. They are values integrating a poetic economy contrary to mercantile economy: it is worthy of value whatever is disposed of as raw material for producing whatsoever is dear in the symbolic order: “...I like to be home, locked in. I don’t like to be chatting on the corners. I like to be by myself and

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel Butler’s version of the corresponding passage in Portuguese, translated from the Greek by Odorico Mendes: “Sólido forma o escudo, ornado e vário/ De orla alvíssima e triple, donde argênteo/ Boldrié pende, e lâminas tem cinco./ Com dedáleo primor, divino engenho,/ Insculpiu nele os céus e o mar e a terra;/ Nele as constelações, do pólo engastes, / Oríon valente, as Híadas, as Pleias,/ A Ursa que o vulgo denomina Plaustro,/A só que não se lava no Oceano. Disponível em: < [http://pt.wikisource.org/wiki/Anexo:Imprimir/Il%C3%ADada\\_\(Odorico\\_Mendes\)](http://pt.wikisource.org/wiki/Anexo:Imprimir/Il%C3%ADada_(Odorico_Mendes))>. Acesso 03 jan. 2012.

<sup>10</sup> My translation from the original: “Estou desorientada, sem saber o que iniciar. Quero escrever. Quero trabalhar, quero lavar roupa.”

reading. Or writing! I turned at Frei Galvão street. **There was hardly any scrap paper.**" (p. 23, highlights added). Jesus's interior world – that of her domestic and spiritual writing – contrasts with the external world, imposing and threatening as physical subsistence presses on. As a result, the ambivalence of 'paper', a term flooding her Diary, conditions the horizons of meanings of the final sentence, as **miser**y – both material as spiritual – as "there was hardly any scrap paper".

The fictional temper of Carolina Maria de Jesus brews on the circuit collection-disposal. It takes off from immediate nature and life, a permanent reference, to fabricate the imaginative space, in a constant back-and-forth swing from abstract-concrete or concrete-abstract. Let's appreciate the denaturalization of cosmic forces in nature, in their indifferent and banal manifestations: "MAY 22 Today I am sad. I am nervous. I am not sure whether I should cry or run until I fall unconcious (sic). The thing is that when the day broke today it was raining. I did not go out to get money. I spent the day writing".<sup>11</sup> Text typology in the Diary proves the failure of crono-logics as a resource for symbolic organization of chaos, and makes Jesus dive into the internal logic of "alienated" writing, in Rufino's terms, resisting, in its gratuity, against mercantile logic. "To get money" and "to spend the day writing" are contradictions juxtaposed without the aid of connectives in the day's entry. After all, money, in cash form, is paper made, and the scrap she collects has exchange value and monetary equivalence. Unexplainable contradictions to the "very clean little black woman", the seamstress, unhappy about her own job, and therefore, startled at Jesus's apparent freedom: "To collect scrap and yet to be able to sing".

It is productive to bring in similar passages in Conceição Evaristo's *Becos da Memória* (2008). The effects of the hard work of the laundry women, the "lineage" several women in the writer's family belong in, are highlighted in the set of contrasts, formally elaborated in sentences without conjunctions:

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<sup>11</sup> My translation from the original: "22 DE MAIO Eu hoje estou triste. Estou nervosa. Não sei se choro ou saio correndo sem parar até cair inconciente. É que hoje amanheceu chovendo. E eu não saí para arranjar dinheiro. Passei o dia escrevendo."

With the persistence of rain, it was worse. **All** would get damp, **all** moldy, **all** clay, **all** mud and cold. The warmers were **few**. The patronesses' laundry would not get dry. The work would take **long** and **much** from us and **little** did come out of it. The **sun**, sometimes, would show and signal hopeful days in the sky. The laundry was rushed onto the clothes line, and hardly was it thrown over it would return **drenched**, and at times, dirty to the basin in the corner of the shack. "They needed washing over again." (EVARISTO, 2006, p. 128, highlights added).<sup>12</sup>

The indifferent action of nature – the rain and the sun are intermingled, ironically, with the opposites "all" and "little" and "few", resulting from the forging of a shock between lack and excess, coexistent and socially produced.

From a broad social historical context where Joel Rufino takes his stand, Carolina Maria de Jesus would have been "a lonely poor", even rejecting the social class identity (her first person plural was in the roll of the poor) and writing not to but against blacks and slum dwellers (Santos, 2009, p. 116). One can understand why and how she could displease both the Greek and the Trojan:

To the social classes who flirted with her, in fascination, Carolina stood for the poor, but that fascination reached an end when they realized she was a "haughty poor". When it came to the poor who rejected her, from the very beginning, her literature was useless. To them she was nothing but a "conceited nigger". (p.118).<sup>13</sup>

It sounds reasonable to say that her uniqueness does not welcome taxonomies. Uncomfortable as it might feel to her readers, she permanently swings back and forth on her positions. At times, she might affect certain pride in her negritude whereas, simultaneously, she takes distance from any collective identity. Let's keep that (im)possibility to speak until later when we can address it with Gayatri Spivak's provocations.

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<sup>12</sup> My translation from the original: "Com a persistência da chuva, era pior. **Tudo** ia ficando úmido, **tudo** mofo, **tudo** barro, **tudo** lama e frio. Os agasalhos eram **poucos**. As roupas das patroas não secavam. O trabalho custava **tanto e pouco** rendia. O **sol**, às vezes, aparecia trazendo um tempo esperançoso no céu. As roupas corriam para os varais e, mal eram penduradas, retornavam **molhadas** e, às vezes, sujas às bacias no canto do barraco. "Era preciso lavá-las de novo."

<sup>13</sup> My translation from the original: "Para a sociedade que a cortejou, fascinada, Carolina representava os pobres, mas o fascínio acabou quando viram ser uma 'pobre soberba'. Já para os pobres que a rejeitaram, desde sempre, sua literatura em nada serviu. Para eles, nunca passou de uma 'crioula metida.'"

The female characters in Conceição Evaristo, by contrast, are not prone or destined to solitude, despite their many ‘highjacks’ in life. Social wear and tear and the multifaceted diasporas, not infrequently, isolate or silence them. It is not, however, a definite condition or attitude on their way, which includes, at the bottom line, the wish for integration – integration, but not domestication. Whether the context is the corners in the eradicated slum in *Becos da memória* or the places visited by the narrator-interviewer in *Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres*, final redemption of the exploited is wrought upon assertion of a collective identity, usually conducted by female figures. Family provides for a constantly widening solidarity core, which takes in all of those who have no ‘representation’, a dear category to the Indian essayist Gayatrik Spivak.

In the case of her biographical-novel, *Becos da memória*, 2006, several female characters stitch up collective identities, starting at their family nucleus. In the midst of misery and pettiness – never absent – grandeur and solidarity are intertwined. Some of those characters are spearheads to social retrieval and symbolic multiplication. In the space of perverse inclusion, for example, Maria-Nova, the girl who finds meaning to life in the act of writing, is also the one who sets on to report on the conservative character of school and schooling. She gets to learn, from the peak of pain – hers and her folks’ – new meanings to old academic topics, as, for example, “Slavery Abolition”:

Maria-Nova stood up and said that, on slaves and freedom, she would have many lives to tell. And that would take the whole class and that she was unsure whether it was what the teacher was after. She had to tell about some slave quarters today whose inhabitants were still not free, for they had nothing to live on. [...] There were a lot of stories, out of another History, no matter how far away in time and space they were. She thought of Uncle Totó. Was it what the teacher call a free man? (EVARISTO, 2006, p. 137-138).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> My translation from the original: “Maria-Nova levantou-se dizendo que, sobre escravos e libertação, ela teria para contar muitas vidas. Que tomaria a aula toda e não sabia se era bem isso que a professora queria. Tinha para contar sobre uma senzala que, hoje, seus moradores não estavam libertos, pois não tinham nenhuma condição de vida. [...] Eram muitas as histórias, nascidas de uma outra História, apesar de muitas vezes distantes no tempo e no espaço. Pensou em Tio Totó. Isto era o que a professora chamava de homem livre?”

As Negro Alírio, the militant unionist, the newly-arrived outsider the girl looks up to, Maria-Nova makes sense of her mission in the community space:

She looked once more at Negro Alírio. She meant to tell him what decision she had made. She silenced, however, sure she was going to follow him. Sure, she would move on. One day, she would narrate, loosen up the voices, the murmurs, the stifled scream which was hanging there, which belonged to each and everyone. One day, Maria-Nova would write the speech of her people (EVARISTO, 2006, p.161).<sup>15</sup>

Along Rufino's comment on Carolina-the-character - the solitary poor - Maria Nova and Negro Alírio stand as perfect antipodes to the Canindé's slum dweller. They are socially oriented missionaries and articulators. As in Carolina-the-writer, Conceição Evaristo takes off from the factual records of an 'immediate and original' biography also to attend to the designs of an internal logic, presumably superior in strength to the referential, documental, and immediate reporting. Again, it is interesting to think of this move as in opposition to the documentary matrix prevailing in the Brazilian literary tradition. It might be in the realm of the fictional and of the 'alienated', back to Rufino, the possibilities of rereading the past and putting together the ruins scattered by History and dominant literary traditions. And Evaristo might be able to offer, in the twenty-first century, and in the 'alienation' of her writing, a canal for edification of those ruins, scattered and solitary, among which, Carolina Maria de Jesus's aesthetically marked writings stand out. If their creative imagination brings the two writers together, they part company when it comes to the solitary inscription of the first against the collective stand of the second.

Gender alliance is a conducting thread in the thirteen short stories integrating *Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres* (Evaristo, 2011). All of them are entitled

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<sup>15</sup> My translation from the original: "Olhou novamente para Negro Alírio. Quis falar com ele sobre o que já havia decidido. Calou, sabendo, entretanto, que iria adiante com ele. Sim, ela iria adiante. Um dia, ela haveria de narrar, de fazer soltar as vozes, os murmúrios, os silêncios, o grito abafado que existia, que era de cada um e de todos. Maria-Nova, um dia, escreveria a fala de seu povo".

with the names and family names of the leading female characters approached by the female narrator, under the guise of producing ‘interviews’. An introductory half-page - titleless – announces: “Therefore, these stories do not belong exclusively to me, but they are nearly mine as, at times, they merge with mine. Do I make believe? I do, positively, and shameless”<sup>16</sup>, and she adds later that “between the fact and the narrative of the fact, something is lost and therefore, added,<sup>17</sup> summing it up at the closing of the consideration that “upon recording these stories, I keep up the premeditated act of delineating a ‘biographilliving’”<sup>18</sup> (Evaristo, 2011, p. 9). From the prologue, co-authorship is reiterated in the body of the short stories, especially in “Lia Gabriel” and “Regina Anastácia”, respectively:

While Lia Gabriel narrated her story to me, a recall flash of Aramides Florença messed between the two of us. Not just that of Aramides, but of several other women were confused in my mind. For a spark of a second, it also came to mind the flash image of Painful Mater and of God’s son nailed to the cross, biblical fictions conveying the faith of many. Other goddesses, savior women, trying to get rid of the cross, grew large in my memory. Aramides, Lia Shirley, Isaltina, Daluz and many others who challenged the beads of an infinite rosary of pain. (EVARISTO, 2011, p. 81).<sup>19</sup>

In the juxtaposition of images and flashes, emblematic configuration of the Benjamin’s vision of history written up “against the grain”, authorial merging also clouds the unproductive limits between the strictly biographical and the factual, on the one hand, and the “make-believe” suggested in the introduction to the anthology, on the other hand. After all, a reminder that the truth of fiction is verisimilitude. Thus, women and female characters are interchangeable, and the blurring of those limits causes no damage to literary truth:

<sup>16</sup> My translation from the original: “Portanto, estas histórias não são totalmente minhas, mas quase que me pertencem, na medida em que, às vezes, se (con)fundem com as minhas. Invento? Sim, invento sem o menor pudor.”

<sup>17</sup> My translation of: “entre o acontecimento e a narração do fato, alguma coisa se perde e por isso se acrescenta”.

<sup>18</sup> My translation from the original: “ao registrar estas histórias, continuo no premeditado ato de traçar uma escrevivência.”

<sup>19</sup> My translation from the original: “Enquanto Lia Gabriel me narrava a história dela, a lembrança de Aramides Florença se intrometeu entre nós duas. Não só a de Aramides, mas as de várias outras mulheres se confundiram em minha mente. Por breve instante, me veio também a imagem da Mater Dolorosa e do filho de Deus pregado na cruz, ficções bíblicas, a significar a fé de muitos. Outras deusas, mulheres salvadoras, procurando se desvencilhar da cruz, avultaram em minha memória. Aramides, Lia Shirley, Isaltina, Daluz e mais outras que desafiavam as contas de um infinito rosário de dor”.

Flashes of other queens came to mind: Mãe Menininha do Gantois, Mãe Meninazinha d'Oxum, the Queens of Congo fests, royalties I ran across in my childhood in Minas; Clementina de Jesus, D. Ivone Lara, Lia de Itamaracá, Lea Garcia, Ruth de Souza, Senhora Laurinda Natividade, Professor Ifigênia Carlos, Dona Iraci Graciano Fidelis, Toni Morrison, Nina Simone ... And still several other women, my sisters across the Atlantic, whom I saw in Mozambique and Senegal, in the cities and in the villages. And many others and many others. (p. 106-7)<sup>20</sup>

Geographical crossing in the name of a new cartography of the *I* necessarily dismantles excluding criteria of those teams of “defeated”, who can now show their marks of production on a two-folded front. First, exhuming traditions, stories, names and archaic origins, wiped out in the ‘civilizing’ process. Secondly, making a productive appropriation of practices exogenous to their African origins, like writing, to set up a dialogue with literary and poetic traditions they were excluded of (or, at times, as in the case of Machado de Assis, included by a process of whitening and ‘universalizing’).

It is by the assertion of syncretism that the short story “Adelha Santana Limoeiro” presents her main character:

Since I could not make sense of why her image looked so familiar to me, I decided to find her looks like those on a stamp I had seen several times, still in my childhood days: that of Saint Anne, the old saint, Our Lady’s mother, Jesus’s grandmother. And because most stamps of female and male saints are white, and to confirm my findings of likeliness, I had decided to believe Adelha Santana Limoeiro would look like Saint Anne (that was the way we would put it when we were small), when the saints were black. After ensuring the validity of my likeliness invention round and round, the notion of syncretism helped me out. I mixed it all up. **Adelha Santana Limoeiro, black, could actually remind one of the white saint, because Jesus’s grandmother usually makes a syncretic appearance as**

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<sup>20</sup> My translation from the original: “Lembranças de outras rainhas me vieram à mente: Mãe Menininha do Gantois, Mãe Meninazinha d'Oxum, as Rainhas de Congadas, realezas que descobri, na minha infância, em Minas, Clementina de Jesus, D. Ivone Lara, Lia de Itamaracá, Lea Garcia, Ruth de Souza, a Sra Laurinda Natividade, a Profa. Ifigênia Carlos, D. Iraci Graciano Fidelis, Toni Morrison, Nina Simone [...] E ainda várias mulheres, minhas irmãs do outro lado do Atlântico, que vi em Moçambique e no Senegal, pelas cidades e pelas aldeias. Mais outras e mais outras.”



<sup>21</sup> My translation of: “Já que eu não conseguia atinar com o porquê da imagem dela me ser tão familiar, decidi achá-la parecida com uma estampa, que eu tinha visto várias vezes, ainda na minha infância: a de Santa Ana, a santa velha, a mãe de Nossa Senhora, a avó de Jesus. E como as ilustrações de santas e santos, na grande maioria são brancas, para confirmar os meus achados de pareceria, resolvi crer que Adelha Santana Limoeiro pareceria com Santana (era assim que falávamos quando criança), quando a santa fosse negra. Buscando assegurar a validade de meu invento de semelhança para lá e pareceria para cá, na ideia de sincretismo encontrei a solução. Confundi tudo. **Adelha Santana Limoeiro, negra, poderia sim, relembra uma santa branca, a Santana, pois a avó de Jesus aparece sincretizada com Nanã, mito nagô. Misturando a fé, fiz o amálgama possível. Pisei nos dois terrenos, já que Nanã é também velha. Adelha Santana Limoeiro é Nanã, aquela que conhece o limo, a lama, o lodo, onde estão os mortos. Santana, Nanã, Limo(eiro).**

<sup>22</sup> Note: The writer obviously splits the character’s last family name Limo(eiro) to evince etymology and highlight semantic possibilities. ‘Limo’ stands for ‘slime’ and ‘limoeiro’ is also the lime tree.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Dusreis’ comes out as agglutination for ‘dos Reis’, that is, of the Reis, belonging to the family Reis.

**Nanã, a Nago myth. Mixing faith, I worked out the possible merge. I stepped on the two plots, since Nanã is also old. Adelha Santana Limoeiro is Nanã, that who is familiar with slime, mud, ooze where the dead are. Saint Anne, Nanã, Limo(eiro).**<sup>21, 22</sup> (p.2-3, highlights added)

Onomastic games, nevertheless, are more plentifully realized as a second structuring narrative strategy (co-authorship is the first one). They add sophistication to cultural co-belongness, closer to syncretism than to dialectic synthesis. First names of the female characters in *Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres* reflect legacies that qualify ‘proper’ not just as original, but also what has become ‘one’s own’ on account of historical incorporation – mnemonic product of the alternance between remember-forget. Out of Christian female and male saints (Maria do Rosário Imaculada dos Santos, Mirtes Aparecida Daluz e Mary Benedita) and of the literary characters (Saura Benevides Amarantino), moving on to the names of the slave owners adjunct to the names of their ‘human property’ (Rose Dusreis)<sup>23</sup>, in addition to the memories of their stolen away transatlantic motherlands (Líbia Moirã), and reaching the self-naming processes with Natalina Soledad, baptized as Troçoieia Malvina Silveira, all of the name-titles imprint, in high profile, marks of pain, as well as signs of the overcoming of pain on the part of the main characters. The “Maria de Jesus” in Carolina Maria de Jesus, would perfectly thicken up the broth.

It is in the female solidarity that the Philomela-like characters in *Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres* find echo for insubmission against a wide spectrum of physical and moral violence they are the target for. The narrator’s pen invests against misogyny practiced by those who, from any race, color, or creed, substantiate strongly asymmetrical gender relations with the female subjection. The philomelas of Conceição (Oxum) Evaristo populate Brazil up to 21st century and the misogynic picture

referred to becomes more complex either in fiction as well as out of it. Stepping away from frequent (and simplistic) triumphant versions, both black women as several characters in Evaristo's short stories get into the middle social strata, go to school, work as teachers, plastic artists, nurses, dancers, economists, writers, among others. Nonetheless, they go on sharing, like their generation predecessors with less schooling, leading roles and responsibility for their material and affective self-sustenance and that of their families.

The brief visit into Carolina Maria de Jesus's and Conceição Evaristo's writings addresses Gayatri Spivak's questions in two of her most notorious essays on aesthetic and political representation: "Who Claims Alterity?" (1994) and *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (2010). In the first, the Indian critic describes the logic of internal colonization in India after political emancipation. She sustains that post colonial 'internal' representatives (the West alterities) echo nothing but the desire and the interest of the former colonizer. They are privileged 'natives' and informants, coopted and domesticated, as they belong to the upper castes, where the smallest part of India's population lies. Jesus's case is emblematic of that thesis for, in the fifties, the writings and the life of that slum dweller disturbed categories and expectations of either middle or low classes, insofar as 'class' discourses were sought.

As Rufino pointed out, in less than ten years Carolina Maria de Jesus stepped out of the miserable life in the slum, was famous, and neared misery again. Alterity claimed by the writer of *Canindé* echoed, in fact, in her lifetime. She was first published with the mediation by Audálio Dantas, a journalist wandering along the banks of the polluted Tietê River, in São Paulo, Brazil, in search of evidence for the urban collapse in the 'developing years' the country was going through. However, stepping out of the strictly biographical time, Jesus's claim is still echoing in the significant mutations in the realm of literary theory, in the mapping out of literary objects and, doubtlessly,

in the widening of cultural studies, which challenges traditions in the Institutes of Letters and Humanities. Her claims also reverberates on institutional measures and legal provisions which, for sure, taking care of diversity, compete with the market greed, now a lot more volatile and sensitive to 'internal voices' than in those days. 'Alterity', as a problem posed by Spivak in her 1989 essay, as well as 'subalternity', in her 1985 essay, addresses issues of political and aesthetic representation in post colonial India, which are widespread and magnified worldwide in the mid 80's.

Especially in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", the Marxist writer warns against the double displacement of the feminine in colonial historiography, considering that "the ideological construction of gender maintains male domination. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern subject has no story and cannot speak, the female subaltern subject is more deeply in obscurity." (SPIVAK, 2010, p. 66-68). The theoretician bets on the assessment of silence, of what is unsaid, as a methodological procedure. That would suit the investigator who seeks routes less attractive to the eyes of mainstream knowledge producers. In this sense, the excessive discursiveness in Jesus's Diaries, integrating her reporting, the claims for justice, vengeance wishes, moralizing impetus, and prejudices – frustrates the expectations of 'poverty's portraitists' to find homogeneous and good-mannered discourse which might soothe them back with self-satisfaction (SPIVAK, 2010, p. 27). Additionally, as I believe to have demonstrated, Jesus's writing is punctuated by zones of silence which overflow from the discontinued chronological diary, anchored in her undeniable 'aesthetic temper'. The autonomous and literary dimensions of Jesus's writing are a lot more eloquent of her existential condition than what her descriptive records can tell.

Part taking the same aesthetic aspect, the writing of Conceição Evaristo is added with a collective nature of identity assertion and vindication, unknown to Carolina

Maria de Jesus. It seems the fiction by the former bridges up the gap, in Spivak's terms, "between making the mechanism visible and making the individual vocal". Obviously, it is not without a risk that such bridging opens up room for oral manifestation, whose narratives are intertwined, in absence and silence, and whose representation by the fiction writer can also, whether in rare moments, step back from more radical challenges posed to gender roles. To put the slum corners she was actually familiar with, in memory and in writing, Evaristo echoes Jesus, in the biographical pages that feed her fiction. She also shares with her predecessor, a rosary of short stories. The first one translates them in the poetic records of a diary, in which poetic imagination is masked behind chronological and sociological concerns, yet pointed and flamboyant along its narrative flow. The second validates "stories that do not belong to her alone", sure that her fiction and poetry can bring together the defeated and silenced ones. Post colonial female writing in Brazil seems to be setting up a highly productive dialogue with the very mainstream traditions accounting for the obliteration of those female voices and their own memories and traditions. Fiction aspect and poetic imagination have brought back up onto the foreground the scattered ruins of broken female histories and ascribed legitimacy to what was once generally regarded as lacking – in the case of female writing – lacking literariness.

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