



Chapter One

The Radicalization of Marginality in Jesus's *Quarto de despejo*: *Diário de uma favelada*

Autobiographical Writing and Women's Agency

In establishing their subjectivity women have used writing as a means of chronicling personal growth and actively redefining themselves in a society that oftentimes had already established categories of identification for them. This has not proven easy because of societal restrictions, whether it be in North America or Latin America. As Debra Castillo notes, "Women in Latin America are consciously involved in a practice that has long been recognized in their male counterparts. To play on a famous structuralist formulation, to write in Latin America is for them more than a verb, transitive or intransitive—it is a revolutionary act" (20). The principal reason for the revolutionary nature of this act is its transgression of historically traditional established norms governing gender roles, especially in the area of literary production. One of the most important difficulties women writers face is lack of opportunity and agency. For lower-income women in particular, denied access to continued formal education to develop reading and writing skills, as well as women financially unable to pursue a career in writing, the only outlet for their life stories is through the mediation of others. However, by telling their stories to others what is affected and compromised are individual agency and the development of a voice as subject. In cases where women have had to tell their stories to mediators of disparate socioeconomic backgrounds, one challenge has been the navigation of differences of privilege and hierarchy between the subject and the collaborative voice (Castillo 29).

There has been not only limited access to literary production for women but also a difference in the terms used to classify men and women's application of knowledge. Men are oftentimes categorized as lucid beings while women are seen as purely intuitive. As Castillo observes:

This explains the different status given the representative man's self-reflection which is seen as a self-construction which can represent the terms of identity of his culture and epoch and women's self-writings which are seen as 'merely' autobiographical, subjective and personal, failing to ramify beyond their immediate context, other than to confirm women's narrow self regard for their inchoate natures. (28-29)

Women, however, have found ways of breaking the silence and participating in literary activities that allow for self-expression. Diaries, letters, testimonials, and memoirs proved especially open to personal expression when other forms of writing were prohibited, allowing women, especially in the case of the first two categories, to record private thoughts without fear of public criticism.

The struggle then became the legitimization of these personal writings as important texts in understanding feminine subjects. As Laura Marcus points out in *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, women have historically been situated outside the laws of genre and selfhood within which the 'pacts' of fiction and of history operate (230). However, progressive feminist studies of the autobiographical genre have recognized its ever-expanding parameters and consequently, the importance of these literary categories in tracing the development of the feminine subject in a particular socioeconomic, historical, and political environment, and as texts in their own right that provide more than just biographical knowledge. In *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith presents an inclusive definition of autobiography that opens up a space for these forms of writing:

Since all gesture and rhetoric is revealing of the subject, autobiography can be defined as any written or verbal communication. More narrowly it can be defined as written or verbal communication that takes the speaking "I" as the subject of the narrative, rendering the "I" both subject and object. From that operational vantage point, autobiography includes letters, journals, diaries, and oral histories. (19)

The construction of this self is an aspect that is especially exposed in autobiographical writings, represented not only in terms of women's so-

cioeconomic evolution but also in terms of the psychic construction of femininity. On one hand these writings are a vehicle for female self-expression, while on the other hand if read 'symptomatically' they can reveal, as Simone de Beauvoir says (qtd. in Marcus 221), how one becomes a woman.

This subjective process of socialization and its multiple representations in the autobiographical narrative is a necessary element in understanding the reformulation of individual identity. In particular, the diary has been legitimated as a form of autobiographical narrative that has proven especially useful in understanding women's reconstruction of the self. The structure is one that allows the writer to record daily events and emotions that have an impact on her life in a personal forum, usually without the pressures of writing for a specific readership.

Among the emotions the subject is free to explore is the content written solely for the subject's edification. This intimate expression of self-analysis makes the diary very similar to what Raoul defines as the "journal intime." However, the subsequent redirection of the diary to a wider audience bestows Jesus's writing with qualities of an autobiographical narrative. Yet, given these dual incentives of self-reflection and public display, the text serves as an example of and challenge to definitions of diary and autobiography.

According to Raoul part of the diary's attraction for women writers is the self-reflexive textuality that explores the uncertainty of the constructed self as well as its relation to writing. This is achieved by the triple self-projection of author/character/reader characteristic of the journal intime. Through this projection the "I" subject is converted into an "I" object and "I" addressee. Stylistically, Raoul notes the use of suspension to mark hesitation, rhetorical questions, exclamations, parentheses, short meandering sentences, and gaps as examples of this analysis of the subject's tenuous positioning in the text (59-60).

Gilkin also notes that the diary's chief characteristics are "[i]mmmediacy, authenticity, accessibility accretion, density, fragmentation and repetition. . . . Written in the moment or about the . . . moments recollected from a day, diaries draw their readers into their moments of being" (5). It is this reliving of the subject's life over a period of weeks, months and years that Gilkin believes "shows us individuals in a process of creating what may be called spontaneous autobiographies, narratives of the self as the self unfolds" (3-4). The use of these stylistic features of the diary to recount important moments from her life in the favela allows Jesus to not just narrate and explore the self, as Raoul and Gilkin propose, but reformulate it in relation to her historical positioning. In this sense, Gilkin's theory of spontaneous autobiography falls short by not accounting for the active reformulation of selfhood.

The act of using writing within a specific discursive model in a self-reflexive way is what makes Jesus's endeavor an autobiographical one. This participation in the autobiographical act allows an examination of the degree to which her diary incorporates the four principles Smith believes are present in women's autobiography (45–46).

While the diary lends itself to a freer structure and unlimited thematic content, it does have thematic characteristics that distinguish it from other forms and provide the reader with a certain sense of constancy each time the diary is read. As Judy Simons notes in her book *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women from Fanny Burney to Virginia Wolf*:

The format of the diary, with its record of routine personal activity, naturally encourages introspection in its conscious recall of individuals' encounters with others or, more usually, with themselves. Repeatedly, women's diaries document their loneliness, highlighting the lack of comfort and understanding available to them in their daily lives. (8)

These first two chapters highlight the extra- and intratextual elements that work together in Jesus's formulation of her identity through her diary *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada*, as well as the effects of the autobiographical discourse on the reformulation of the individual subject.

This first chapter focuses on Jesus's redefined identity through the interaction of inner and outer discourses on social, racial, and structural levels. In chapter 2 I apply the principles of Vieira's insider/outsider framework and Johnson's analyses of the inside/outside oppositions in autobiography to Jesus's text in order to demonstrate how she creates a hybrid discourse of individual representation on a thematic level. Ultimately, the text displays a hybridity of marginal and dominant discourses while opening up questions about its applicability as a possible representation of feminine writing and the problematics of the definitions and challenges of such a categorization.

My analysis will focus on the edited, published diary *Quarto de despejo* while also referencing her unedited manuscript and collection of posthumously published poetry *Meu estranho diário*. Given the complicated nature of Dantas' collaboration and intervention, these original manuscripts provide a fuller account of an individual who in the edited diary was:

... a different woman from the one that emerges from the pages of her unedited diaries. The former was docile, wistful, and seemingly reluctant to comment on the gritty realities of Brazilian politics. Dantas presented her through his editing as

a woman who was aware of her miserable condition but who stood at a curious distance from the events she lived through. (Levine 15)

The subject that emerges has a clearer sense of her voice, particularly as a poet, and her relationship to the community of poor and favelados. However, my study will focus on her edited diary as a text, however mediated, that is still able to reveal within the mediated discourses and silences the important aspects of her redefinition as a hybrid process that navigates insider/outsider identity.

As I later discuss in my analysis of Hurston's work, the study of this dynamic between the edited and "non-mediated" voice is a point of comparison between Jesus, Hurston, and other writers still to be explored, that reveals the complex process for subjectivity that Black women writers of the diaspora must navigate.

Jesus: The Early Writer

Jesus was born in Sacramento, Minas Gerais, in Brazil in 1914, in a rural area populated mainly by descendants of slaves. In Sacramento, Jesus was not exposed to the comforts of life but had to struggle with her family to survive. Although not initially interested in attending school, she was convinced to attend by the White woman who ran the school. She was only able, however, to receive two years of formal education before she and her mother were forced to leave because of a new job made available outside of Sacramento. These two years nonetheless were enough to provide her with the basic reading and writing skills that would later result in a writing career.

Jesus was eventually forced to move to one of the *favelas* in Canindé, São Paulo, struggling to support herself and her three children by collecting and selling paper and tin cans. In an attempt to record her life but at the same time escape from the poverty that surrounded her, Jesus started writing fiction (especially short stories) and poetry. In 1955 she decided to concentrate her efforts on writing a diary of her life in the favela. In 1958, while involved in a shouting match with neighbors at the dedication of a new playground, Jesus's threats to record everything in her diary aroused the interest of journalist Audálio Dantas, sent to cover the inauguration ceremony. After contacting Jesus and reading some of her diary, Dantas edited and published segments of it in 1960 under the title *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada* translated in English as *Child of the Dark: the Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*. In general it covers Jesus's life from July 15, 1955, to January 1, 1960, with gaps in between. The recollections she places in the diary can be grouped into five broad

categories: (1) Her personal routine; (2) observations and emotions about life in the favela; (3) social commentary (for example, neighbors' behavior, relations between Black and White Brazilians, etc.); (4) future plans for herself and her family; and (5) political commentary. The diary turned out to be an unexpected financial success, outselling the 1960 novel published by best-selling Brazilian author Jorge Amado. Critically however, its impact on discussions of social inequities was recognized but not its possible exemplification of high art.

Quarto de despejo's financial success allowed Jesus and her three children to live the dream they always had, to leave the favela and move to a better neighborhood. For six years they lived in a brick house in Osasco, until the prejudices of her neighbors and the press as well as dwindling finances forced them to move to a more affordable house. It was during her stay in Osasco that Jesus wrote her second diary, the follow up to *Quarto*, entitled *Casa de alvenaria: Diário de uma ex-favelada*. While this text was also a realistic portrayal of Jesus's life, it was a happier one because of her change in fortune. The public's reaction to this second book however was not as good as the first. Despite the cold reception, Jesus continued to write and publish over the next few years. In all she published four books after *Quarto de Despejo: Casa de alvenaria (I'm going to have a little house, 1961)*, *Provérbios de Carolina Maria de Jesus (Proverbs of Carolina Maria de Jesus, 1963)*, *Pedaços da fome (Pieces of Hunger, 1963)*, and the posthumously published *Diário de Bitita*. The result of her literary failures and the decline of her celebrity status, however, was poverty, forcing Jesus and family to move back to the poorer sections of São Paulo, although not to the poverty of the favela of years before. Jesus died in February of 1977, seventeen years after the success of her diary, but economically in only a slightly better situation than before its publication.

When studying Jesus's life, critics always focus on two questions: what caused the incredible success of her first diary, and why, given that success did her life end in such poverty? While the answer to the second question is a complex fusion of issues of racial, gender-based, and class prejudices, combined with pressure to conform to particular societal standards and the nature of publications, the first can be answered in part by understanding the historical situation in which she was writing.

In the midst of the national debate on progress, Jesus's voice called attention to its negative consequences. Levine astutely notes that the Jesus of *Quarto de despejo* was a societal product who reflected the distance between rich and poor, the inability to ascend socially, and the perpetuation of poverty in the country (46–47). Her diary was received in part as an indictment of the political and economic system from one of the marginalized most affected by its weakness and least empowered to speak.

Under Kubitschek's presidency the racial, class, and gender inequities became even more apparent, despite his promise for "fifty years of progress in five" (Skidmore 174). Although the newly constructed capital of Brasília served as a monument to this ideal of progress, this symbolic gesture was not able to erase the poverty faced by a great number of Brazilians. Nonetheless, Jesus's challenge to these politics, although not explicitly calling for action, encouraged closer scrutiny of the treatment of the disenfranchised while still in its own way keeping alive the possibility that change was possible. As Meihy and Levine note in *Cinderela negra*:

[The social involvement as such becomes an explicative element for the understanding of the trajectory of *Quarto*. The alliance of civil society and the support of the government corroborate the hypothesis of the transitoriness of the woman from the favela. In this sense the book definitively influenced community action . . .]¹

O envolvimento social portanto passa a ser elemento explicativo para o entendimento da trajetória do *Quarto*. A aliança da sociedade civil e o apoio do governo corroboram a hipótese da transitoriedade favelada. Neste sentido o livro influenciou definitivamente a ação comunitária. (125–126)

Meihy and Levine point out an important aspect of both *Quarto de despejo* and its author: their complexity. Neither Jesus nor her text gave clear, unequivocal answers about the reality of poverty in the favelas and its solutions. In fact, while denouncing those left behind by the "projeto desenvolvimentista," *Quarto de despejo* still reveals a belief in its redemptive power:

[[T]he book became one more emblem. As a filter between the semicolonial world that came from the interior of the country and another, a proof of the future, Carolina's words confirmed the belief in the project of development.]

[O]livro passou a ser um emblema a mais. Como filtro entre o mundo semicolonial que vinha do interior do país e o outro, atestado do futuro, as palavras de Carolina confirmavam a crença no projeto desenvolvimentista. (Meihy and Levine 126)

As both authors note, Jesus's problem was not just declining sales but a lack of acceptance by the middle-class Brazilian society of which she wanted to be a part, as well as by the press that originally hailed her as a star:

Ninguém, contudo, procurava entender os dilemas que explicariam as contradições e apelos de uma migrante, ex-favelada que, num contexto tão conturbado como o dos anos 60 e 70, teria dificuldade de ajustamento. (39)

No one, nonetheless, tried to understand the dilemmas that would explain the contradictions and appeals of a migrant, ex-slumdweller who, in a context as turbulent as the 60s and 70s, would have difficulty adjusting.

Although the diary as a genre is simple in structure and relatively free of limitations, Jesus invests her text with the same complexity that is present in her own character. On one hand she writes for herself, relating everyday events and encounters in a conversational, idiomatic style while on the other hand constantly keeping in mind the public (mainly White Brazilian) to which the diary once published would be marketed. Thus, inclusion of poetry using metaphors and other symbolic imagery serves as a stylistic contrast that helps Jesus demonstrate her literary influences to her readership and in so doing dispel stereotypes about *favelados*.

The Diary and Historical Positioning

It is this complexity that makes *Quarto de despejo* a compelling study not just of the nature of poverty, nor of the consequences of failed social and economic systems, but also of the effects of these factors on the individual. Neuman explains that in conjunction with nationality and the juncture of historical and political forces, "Gender, sexuality, attitudes about our bodies, and socioeconomic class all figure crucially in the autobiographer's representation of self" (222).

In *Quarto de despejo* we have an example of an individual affected by several of these factors, particularly nationality, historical forces, politics, gender, educational patterns, and the psychic and social trauma suffered by the poor. While Neuman here places the socially constructed self in direct opposition to an individualistic resistance to social forces, I contend that the two are not mutually exclusive. She later takes a similar position when defining the autobiographical self. The "poetics of difference" present in autobiography that Neuman proposes best elucidates the coexistence in the individual of agency and a constructed self. When the individual recognizes his or her historical positioning and attempts to reformulate identity in a specific discourse, working both within and outside the discursive limits, the result is an identity that draws on yet questions sociocultural categories for its conceptualization.

Rewriting Race in Brazilian Society

A beginning understanding of the role of historical positioning in Jesus's hybrid redefinition of her identity must start with an examination of the interaction of race, gender, and class as well as their connection to Brazilian society of the 1950s and 1960s. In the Brazilian society of her time (and to a certain degree, today as well) Afro-Brazilians were judged by different standards based on expectations of inferiority. Jesus was not only subject to such racism but also acutely aware of it: "I wrote plays and showed them to directors of circuses. They told me: 'It's a shame you're black.' . . . The black is persecuted because his skin is the color of night" (*Child of the Dark* 61–62, 106). Afro-Brazilians were not seen as equals—and certainly not as writers.

By addressing both racial inequality and her racial pride in her diary Jesus confronted head on the stereotypes and persecution and turned the diary into a weapon of subversion: "They were forgetting that I adore my black skin and my kinky hair. . . . If reincarnation exists I want to come back black" (62). She took the negative stereotypes and turned them inside out, stressing instead the positive aspects and wearing her race as a badge of honor. As further subversion and manipulation of society's discrimination Jesus offered her text as a self-declaration: a diary, to be published, by an Afro-Brazilian woman.

Jesus further asserted her rights as a Brazilian woman of African descent in terms of her sexuality. Throughout her life she insisted on cross-racial relationships instead of the more popular belief in relationships within one race. As Levine and Meihy observe: "One of the reasons that Brazilian society disparaged Carolina's preference for white men was that it violated an unwritten code that judged it entirely unacceptable for a black woman to initiate and control sexual choice. White men could choose dark-skinned sexual partners, especially if the women were unusually attractive" (*Life and Death* 141–142).

Unlike the mores of Brazilian society, Jesus did not believe that her sexuality should be determined by prejudices and sexism but rather that it should be in her hands to decide. As a woman of African descent her insistence on a personal choice of partners allowed her to assume an agency traditionally reserved for Caucasian men.

Subverting Gender Roles

Jesus's process of rewriting her textual and social self could not be complete without addressing her role as a woman in Brazilian society. By confronting her socialization from girlhood to womanhood she could use the diary as a space to challenge the roles she was asked to play. As a

gendered subject Jesus's position as a woman and her role as a mother illustrate Smith's first principle of the effect of the autobiographer's gendered status on the text. In addition, her day-to-day performance of these roles exemplifies what according to Béatrice Didier "are two faces of the same process of affirmation of oneself in a society" (*qtd. in Bunkers* 26) by using to its advantages the very tools and concepts employed in its domination.

One of the ways in which Jesus affirms herself is through the reversal of negative gendered stereotypes like the ones that told her as a child that men were brave and the only ones capable of defending their principles and their nation: "When I was a girl my dream was to be a man to defend Brazil, because I read the history of Brazil and became aware that war existed. I read the masculine names of the defenders of the country" (*Child of the Dark*, 53). As such, part of her perception of herself was as girl/not-man and not able to defend her country. This association of weakness and inactivity with femininity and its converse with masculinity stayed with Jesus, to a certain degree, in the present during her writing of the diary: "If I were a man I would not let my children live in this miserable hole" (*Child of the Dark*, 156). In this quote the power associated with masculinity is again of ability—the ability to change one's location and everything associated with it. Because of this misconception and her desire to be an agent of change, in both instances cited, Jesus expresses a desire to switch her gender.

However, as Jesus matured, her writing developed, allowing her to reverse the negative connotations of femininity and demystify to some extent her perception of masculinity. Even though the war that Jesus read about in the history books was an armed one in which men defended their nation, she recognized that, together with all the poor, they were in their own battle: "Here in the favela almost everyone has a difficult fight to live. But I am the only one who writes of what suffering is. I do this for the good of the others" (*Child of the Dark*, 37–38). In this quote Jesus—the woman—chooses an action that makes her a participant in the battle of the favelados, as opposed to a passive bystander. One key difference from the history books she read is Jesus's position in the war. Here she is clearly an army of one, fighting for her compatriots. Jesus's representation of her relationship with her own mother not only is another key to understanding her gendered self but also exemplifies the effect of temporality on her self-definition. Because of its link with social and historic elements (for, as Sartre points out, lineage is part of the proof that we are historical beings) Jesus's representation as a temporal being is important to understanding how she perceives her identity.

When we consider temporality as a factor affecting the development of social constructs (that is, of the individual, of family), it is possible to

understand its application as a force linking the present and future, in both linear and nonlinear representations of time as well as more specifically through the impact of memory on Jesus's self-definition. Consequently, we can carry the link of temporality to social constructs into the present, future, or other nonlinear permutations by examining the role of memory in reformulating a contestatory identity against society's limits.

Jesus's mother, for example, not only influenced her past but equally as important, her present identity. The first connection is that of social position and cycles of poverty: "Today I looked in a mirror. . . . My face is almost like my departed mother. A tooth is missing. . . . The fear of dying of hunger!" (*Child of the Dark*, 147). Jesus's mother was someone intimately familiar with poverty and passed this on to her daughter. When Jesus looks in the mirror she not only sees her past through a remembrance of her mother's suffering but also experiences an instant connection with her present, for her face is her mother's face. The cycle of poverty threatens to engulf Jesus as it did her mother. The daughter of a poor woman has become a poor woman herself, possibly carrying that stigma to her grave.

The cycle of poverty and loss of hope is passed on to Jesus's relationship with her daughter yet becomes another space in which her writing subverts the traps that gender and class strictures have laid for her. In one moment of optimism Jesus observes, "[S]he put on the shoes and began to smile. I stood watching my daughter's smile, because I myself don't know how to smile" (*Child of the Dark*, 92). It is interesting to note that here, Jesus's focus is not on her own survival and provision but that of her daughter. When she is a good mother, she feels like a worthwhile being. Her identity is not only tied to her children's but is also, as we saw with her mother, part of a legacy passed and on affecting her children's identity as well. Although Jesus is the principal "utterer" asserting her space in this society, it is her daughter who plays a part in reinforcing that space. The last line shows the psychological effects of Jesus's constant struggle: the unfamiliarity of happiness. However, the mother-daughter relationship provides her with someone—Vera—who can reclaim that emotion and the right to it. It is Vera who smiles—because of her mother's care, and, just as importantly, in her mother's place.

What this demonstrates is an affirmation of the parent-child relationship in an oppressive society and specifically, of the mother-daughter relationship as an important identity in the restrictive "universe" Zilá Bernd refers to. Jesus also stresses the parent-child relationship as a principal responsibility, especially considering her identity as a single mother. "I reflected: I've got to be tolerant with my children. They don't have anyone in the world but me. How sad is the condition of a woman alone without a man at home" (*Child of the Dark* 27).

Nonetheless, if we look at Jesus's refusal to marry, we initially question her awareness of the difficulties of single parenthood while refusing to take the one step that would change that—marriage. One answer can be found in the theory by bell hooks that proposes a positioning of the self in a marginal space that is radical and empowering, continuing the ideas first presented in her text *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. As hooks emphasized, the power of the margin lies in finding and holding to “a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. . . . I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and the marginality one chooses as a site of resistance—as a location of radical openness and possibility” (149–150, 153).

By society's standards, marriage was not only a woman's goal but also a way of being accepted. Consequently, a single mother would be looked upon negatively, as someone outside of society's standards of morality: a marginal. Jesus was completely aware of the extra hardship this added to her and her family's life, but realized a truth expressed decades later by bell hooks: she realized the positive aspect of her marginalized space and saw it as a priority over the acceptable alternative. The marginal space of a single mother afforded her freedom from the restrictions a husband would place upon her writing: “Senhor Manuel showed up saying he wanted to marry me. But I don't want to, because I'm in my maturity. And later a man isn't going to like a woman who can't stop reading and gets out of bed to write and sleeps with paper and pencil under her pillow” (*Child of the Dark* 50).

Jesus knew that according to society's rules a married woman was not to have any interests outside of the home. Therefore, she had to reject the state of marriage in order to keep her freedom. This freedom and the writing ability it allowed her to explore and develop were a part of her resistance. As Levine and Meihy note, Jesus's engagement in temporary love affairs and her unwillingness to commit to one lifetime relationship was in general a point of criticism by many journalists of the time: “But these were liaisons, not marriages. . . . Carolina's desire to have lovers but not submit to a husband (in a culture rampant with marital violence against poor women) also annoyed her critics” (*Life and Death* 141).

There were the two facets of Jesus's relational identity in which she dared (in society's view) to make her own rules: her relationships with her children's fathers or possible stepfathers, and the consistent choice of White Brazilians as her lovers. What Levine and Meihy add to my contention that Jesus rejected marriage because of its conflict with her desire to write is the sociocultural concern: a concern with the subservient role women had taken on in the domestic sphere throughout Brazil, especially given the noted cases of domestic violence involving poor women:

Yet in other ways, Carolina's environment shaped her. She was submissive when she dealt with men. . . . The lives of females are often seen as more trivial and less important than the lives of males. Women internalize this view, diminishing their self-esteem as a result of social pressure. This was certainly not the case with Carolina Maria de Jesus. She commented succinctly and matter-of-factly on the disadvantages being a woman added to the other obstacles in her path as an indigent, unskilled black migrant. That she was a mother who self-confidently brought up her children amidst squalor, insisting that her children be honest, moral and attend school, was entirely lost on those who judged her. (*Life and Death* 141-142)

These two reasons both demonstrate Jesus's concern to present a model of a strong Afro-Brazilian woman who would not compromise her intellectual integrity (and growth) or her psychological and physical principles and development. However, Levine and Meihy astutely note the complexity of Jesus's decision to assert her sexual preferences. It was not just an assertion of her agency but an example of her submissiveness. Despite her many attempts in various areas of her life to control the effect of the environment on her, her relationships with men were a direct result of sexism that continuously emphasized her unimportance in society. It is another example of Jesus's movement between a marginal approach to relationships where she asserted her will and a vulnerability to dominant discourses of devalorization.

Ultimately Jesus occupied several marginalized spaces that nonetheless contained points of commonality as well as areas of difference. On one hand she is the single mother, but also the writer: a mother who is engaged in a professional activity apart from her job of collecting tin cans and paper. On the other hand there is the added marginalization of color and its further isolation from mainstream Brazilian society when combined with the aforementioned categories. As bell hooks described, Jesus saw these spaces as sites to cling to as means of resistance: a resistance that was a key part of her reformulation of identity. She was not willing to give up any of these sites for the possibility of acceptance. As Jesus stated, "That's why I prefer to live alone, for my ideals" (*Child of the Dark* 50).

Rewriting Class Status

Jesus's awareness of her class position in Brazilian society is another significant step in her identity reformulation and resistance to categorization. The first

step is to overturn the codes of behavior associated with her specific class status. As a marginalized member of the Brazilian nation she is all too aware of how society sees her. In one example she declares, "On a rainy day I'm a beggar. . . . I wear the uniform of the unfortunate. And today is Saturday. The *favelados* are considered beggars" (58). Like a soldier in the army she wears the "uniform of the unfortunate," and as a result is marked as indigent/favelada (slumdweller)/beggar. This realization is a clear example of Jesus's movement from individuality to a group coupled with her recognition that different aspects of her identity carry negative connotations.

As the diary's title suggests, Jesus is conscious of how the position of favelada differentiates herself and her family from other more privileged Brazilians. In one entry in the diary she observes:

I spent a horrible night. I dreamt I lived in a decent house that had a bathroom, kitchen, pantry, and even a maid's room. I was going to celebrate the birthday of my daughter Vera Eunice. I went and bought some small pots that I had wanted for a long time. Because I was able to buy. I sat at the table to eat. . . . When I reached for another steak I woke up. What bitter reality! I don't live in the city. I live in the favela. . . . I don't even have sugar, because yesterday after I went out the children ate what little I had. (*Child of the Dark* 40)

What begins as a dream becomes a terrible reminder of the problems Jesus faces daily. Her dream is to possess the basics—a habitable house with the necessities (bathroom, kitchen) and possibly more (servant's quarters). However, she recognizes that housing alone cannot create a fulfilled life without economic freedom to provide for oneself and her loved ones. This is summed up in the sentence "Because I was able to buy." Within this one declaration of economic stability Jesus also addresses issues of independence and empowerment. In her dream what was most empowering was being able to provide for her children without worry and without assistance from anyone.

Family, nonetheless, is more than an indicator of the responsibilities Jesus has as a mother; they are part of her identity and the lens through which she views her position in society. Friedman's theories explain this duality by pointing out that one common factor women share is their inclusion in a collective. While there are negative connotations, the advantage is the assertion of these collective identities as transformative and empowering (39).

Close study of Jesus's character shows a complex interaction between the individual and the collective that does not limit her self-definition to one or the other. When Jesus states that in her dream she

was able to buy things her children requested, this is another affirmation of her elevated class status. As one moves up the economic ladder, belonging is partially predicated on the ability to provide for one's children. Conversely, the inability to provide for them and for oneself is yet further proof of the poverty in which the family and particularly the head of the family are immersed.

The separation of the classes is especially exemplified by one particular trip to São Paulo to collect paper and scrap metal. On one such occasion Jesus goes to an apartment to collect papers and upon leaving, finds herself in an elevator with a gentleman from the upper echelons of society: "On the sixth floor a man got into the elevator and looked at me with disgust. I'm used to these looks, they don't bother me. He wanted to know what I was doing in the elevator. I explained to him that the mother of those two boys had given me some newspapers. And that was the reason for my presence in his elevator. . . . He told me he was a Senator" (*Child of the Dark* 98). Ascending in the elevator is symbolically ascending the social ladder. When Jesus is confronted with a senator from the upper social register he reminds her of her social position and its place: "The man was well dressed. I was barefoot. Not in condition to ride in his elevator" (98). The interaction between the two is telling because it exemplifies the dual aspect of historical positioning and the importance of the gaze in influencing an individual's identity. In a Lacanian analysis of language acquisition this connection is seen in the mirror stage of development when the child sees him- or herself and becomes aware of the fragmented self. At this moment the subject is aware that the "I" watching is different from the "I" being watched. Through the use of fantasy and identification with the mother and with others the subject then tries to integrate this alienated split image. Therefore, the gaze on the whole serves as an identifier of the self through another person or a specific reality (Agüera 532). In Jesus's case there is first a social categorization motivated by the repugnant gaze. When Jesus comments on her inappropriate physical state for such a place she recognizes once more that she is a part of this marginalized social category. She is not repeating for the reader what the senator has told her but is stating what is fact according to society's standards. This conclusion is not drawn from a single event but from several events and several gazes similar to the one she received, resulting in an internalization of this stereotype.

In order to counteract the internalization of certain codes of marginalization that had built up in her over the years, Jesus manipulates the text to change the very purpose of the diary, from a document written by a subject historically denied access to literary discourse to a transformed identity as a writer from the favela. One paradox of Jesus's

writing however is that it serves to chronicle and distance her from the common experience of poverty. As Carlos Vogt points out in “Trabalho, pobreza e trabalho intelectual”:

[On one hand, the author belongs to the world she narrates and whose content of hunger and deprivation she shares with the social environment in which she lives. On the other hand, upon transforming the real linguistic experience of misery into the linguistic experience of the diary, she ends up distinguishing herself from herself and presenting the writing as a form of new social experimentation, capable of offering her the hope of breaking the circle of the economy of survival that locks her life into the day-to-day of the money matter.]

De um lado, a autora pertence ao mundo que narra e cujo conteúdo de fome e privação compartilha com o meio social em que vive. Do outro, ao transformar a experiência linguística real da miséria na experiência linguística do diário, acaba por se distinguir de si mesma e por apresentar a escritura como uma forma de experimentação social nova, capaz de acenar-lhe com a esperança de romper o cerco da economia de sobrevivência que tranca a sua vida ao dia-a-dia do dinheiro coisa. (210)

Vogt’s observation points out the dual nature of Jesus’s writing: as an economic opportunity and psychological transformation that emphasize the tension and distance that the act of writing provokes. Once Jesus becomes a writer she is both author and subject of her reality and no longer just a favelada.

As Meihy notes in *Meu estranho diário*, “No ordenamento social de Carolina havia hierarquias. Os *iducados* sempre seriam os alfabetizados que, afinal, teriam cultura e esta era a chave para o bem viver” (294). [In Carolina’s social order there were hierarchies. The *educated* would always be the literate that, in the end, would be cultured and this was the key for the good life.” (Translation mine)] Therefore, for Jesus, being thought of as someone who was “stupid” or “uneducated” (the original Portuguese phrase used is “*não tem iducação*”) implied not only being illiterate or not having social graces but more importantly not having (or being denied) opportunities for success. As a writer Jesus is proof that these labels are not all inclusive. She best demonstrates this when she describes one motivation for her writing: “The *favelados* themselves say the *favelado* is stupid. I thought: I’m going to write.” What this quote suggests is that although her love of writing and decision to pursue it began

as a result of familial influence (particularly of her grandfather) and some formal education, she was further motivated by a desire to recreate an identity apart from social categories.

The Diary's Framework and Individual-Community Interactions

Jesus uses the very framework of the diary as part of this separation by working both within and outside of it. One significant feature of its form present in *Quarto de despejo* is the recurring account of daily life, exemplified by the numerous references to Jesus's routine of going to get water for the household duties, collecting cans and paper, and taking care of the children. This underscores for the reader the difficulties in her day-to-day survival and the lack of physical and emotional comfort she feels. One entry early on in the diary gives us an example of her routine, adapting the themes of loneliness and a lack of comfort to the life of a favelada: "I said goodbye and returned home. I made lunch. While the pots boiled, I wrote a little. I gave the children their lunch and went to Klabin paper mill to look for paper. I left the children playing in the yard. . . . I worked fast, thinking that those human beasts are capable of invading my shack and mistreating my children. I worked on, nervous and upset" (*Child of the Dark* 23–24).

The lack of physical comfort available to Jesus is evident by the rigorous routine that leaves her little time for herself and her writing. However, the most noteworthy element is the emotional unease and apprehensiveness Jesus feels, heightened by her sense of isolation. As she later points out, her resulting cautiousness comes from the lack of community and the distrust that exists in the favela between herself and her neighbors. Ultimately, it causes her to fear for the very safety of her children: "They wait for me to leave so they can come to my shack and hurt my children. Always when I'm not at home. When the children are alone they can't defend themselves" (*Child of the Dark* 24).

This lack of solidarity is in sharp contrast to the sense of community exhibited in subsequent statements by Jesus when she speaks of her unity and empathy for the poor. What these seemingly disparate remarks reveal is the complexity of Jesus's own character and of her relationships with others. In describing this interaction María Lugones notes that this relationship is in fact a strategic one defined by the level of awareness of group needs:

Individuals are transparent with respect to their group if they perceive their needs, interests, ways, as those of the group and

if their perceptions become dominant or hegemonical in the group. Individuals are thick if they are aware of their otherness in the group, of their needs, interests, ways, being relegated to the margins in the politics of intragroup contestations. So, as transparent, one becomes unaware of one's own difference from other members of the group. (474)

If we also place Jesus's isolation from other favelados in the context of Friedman's expanded theories of the valorization of community in women's selfhood we have not a contradiction, but a struggle for control over the terms of self-definition. By maintaining a distance from other favelados Jesus is individually striving to maintain and continually reformulate a self-identity not governed by the negative behavior she believes the favelados represent.

As Levine and Meihy note:

From 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. This helps explain why she was so much of an outcast. 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. She decided when to pack up and move on. (*Life and Death* 143–144)

There were days when Jesus was overwhelmed by the despair of her daily life and gave in to negative behavior she usually was able to avoid. In her diary one can find a few examples of such behavior: engaging in gossip with other women from the favela, or taking a drink of *pinga*. However, the greatest difference between her behavior and that of others is that it did not turn into a controlling, habitual act. Jesus knew that allowing this to happen would jeopardize both her and her children's chances for fulfilling their dreams.

When Jesus highlights for her reader her difference from the favelados and the model of behavior she espouses it has double meaning for her representation to and relationship with the reader. While on one hand it stresses her difference and control, it also brings her reader closer, by emphasizing values they both share. As Kimberly Nance observes, it is an example of the political side of Jesus and represents

a considered political and rhetorical stance. [H]er attempt to forge a social connection between herself and her likely read-

ers might be considered as more than an individualistic attempt to separate herself from her own class. This writer's insistent domesticity serves to challenge her readers' comforting notions regarding poor people's differential experience, adaptation, and inurement to their poverty. (43)

As a strategic identity, Jesus in fact alternated between "thickness" and "transparency," to use Lugones's terms. One of the factors that in part determine her level of individual and group interaction is her level of nationalism—an allegiance, not to a class-based community, but rather, to a national one. As Stephen Hunsaker notes, "This narrative is remarkable for its strong sense of national identification despite poverty, hunger, and cynicism toward government. . . . Carolina's 'thickness' is for the most part limited to the *favela*, and she suppresses the 'thickening' facts of race, class, and gender to imagine herself as a Brazilian rather than isolating herself from the surrounding nation" (43, 47). As a collective act opposite to her individualism Jesus also engages in the community's fight for empowerment to counter society's marginalization of them. However, she also engages in "transparency" when asserting an individual identity, even in the midst of collective allegiance. Her attempts at empowerment of the self and collective is an example of the duality of women that Rowbotham describes as "a dual consciousness—the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription" that is similar to DuBois' identification of dual consciousness for Blacks living in a dominant White culture (qtd. in Friedman 1988, 39).

As DuBois notes:

[T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts. (3)

For Jesus, her identity as a Black Brazilian woman in a nation known as a racial democracy demonstrates some important parallels with the tension of the African American condition described by DuBois. On one hand, Jesus sees herself as part of Brazilian society, exemplified by her at times euphanistic declarations of love for her country. Yet, in contrast, her accounts of racism and marginalization reveal to her and the reader the limits to her belonging.

As Eva Bueno observes, "As a member of a group or a race continuously threatened into silence through slavery, joblessness, and oppression, Carolina relies not on an idealized concept of kinship, tradition, and community. Her body, a black one, is all she owns" (277). As such, Jesus's voice lets outsiders begin to understand the complexities both of "the subject Carolina Maria de Jesus and of those other women who live at the margins of capitalist society" (Bueno 277). While citizenship supposedly guarantees her certain rights and privileges as an equal partner in Brazilian national identity, the reality of her life as a Black Brazilian woman together with that of other poor is one of alienation and disenfranchisement. In the diary, several references stress the tension between a Brazil of opportunity and the marginalization of poverty: "They say that Brazil used to be good. But I am not living when it was good. . . . I was horrified" (147).

A second aspect of the double consciousness as applied to Jesus sets up a contrast not between the individual ideal of belonging and the isolation of oppression, but between citizenship to a national entity and a racial identity that forms part of the whole. As a Black woman she expresses pride in this identity yet realizes its tension with a Brazilian national image that privileges the European. As a result, throughout the diary Jesus embraces her blackness and Brazilianness yet recognizes the ways in which the two are at times constructed as mutually exclusive. As such, her conflicting emotions vacillate between feelings of isolation and the desire for an independent identity where the marginalization she experiences would have no impact. Such tension is reflected on two levels in her text, in the diary's overall thematic and structural license.

The Diary as Emotional Redefinition

Jesus's multiple use of the diary as it reflects her development of subjecthood is best understood by answering three important questions: 1) For what purposes does Jesus write? 2) How does she use the diary to achieve these goals? and 3) To what extent does she hide, reveal or reinvent the "true" Jesus through the textual Jesus's interactions with cultural codes?

Else Vieira provides a framework in which to answer these questions when she places Jesus's writing in the context of Freire's theories of postliteracy and empowerment for marginalized, oppressed people:

The investigation of the theme entails the investigation of the way individuals think, which can only be carried out with the individual not as an object but as a subject of his thinking. . . . [B]ut thinking implies more than situatedness: 'os homens *são* porque *estão* em situação'; ("Men are because they are situ-