



DECOLONIZING NARRATIVES: CONNECTIONS AND DISTANCES BETWEEN “QUARTO DE DESPEJO” AND “I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS”

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RESUMO: Este artigo apresenta um estudo literário comparativo que analisa as conexões e distâncias entre *Quarto de Despejo: Diário de uma Favelada*, da escritora brasileira Carolina Maria de Jesus, e *Eu Sei Por Que o Pássaro Canta na Gaiola*, da autora estadunidense Maya Angelou. Ambas as obras destacam a produção, narração e protagonismo de mulheres negras, permitindo uma ressignificação do que significa ser uma mulher negra e pobre na sociedade. Para embasar essa análise, é essencial abordar a Literatura Comparada, visto que a pesquisa confronta autoras de diferentes nacionalidades, com obras de distintos gêneros e pertencentes a contextos históricos diversos. No entanto, ambas compartilham a experiência de dar voz a sujeitos historicamente marginalizados, transformando suas vivências em Literatura de Resistência. Por meio da escrita, Carolina Maria de Jesus e Maya Angelou denunciam o racismo, expõem injustiças e questionam a subjugação que sofreram. O objetivo deste estudo é estabelecer um diálogo comparativo entre as duas obras, explorando suas convergências no que tange aos aspectos sociais, raciais e estéticos. Além disso, a pesquisa examina os pontos de divergência entre os textos, considerando os diferentes contextos socioculturais e períodos históricos em que foram produzidos. A análise busca demonstrar a importância da memória como instrumento de reivindicação, expressa através da escrita que dá voz ao subalterno. A metodologia adotada baseia-se em pesquisa bibliográfica do tipo qualitativa e quanto ao objetivo é uma pesquisa explicativa, fundamentada em autores como: Angelou,(1969); Bosi

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(1996); Carvalhal (1943); Gadamer(1960), Jesus(1960); Sarmiento-Pantoja, Augusto(2022); Sarmiento-Pantoja, Tânia(2022) e.Spivak(2010).

Palavras-chave: Literatura comparada. Escrita de resistência. Protagonismo feminino negro.

ABSTRACT: This article presents a comparative literary study that analyzes the connections and distances between *Quarto de Despejo: Diário de uma Favelada* by the Brazilian writer Carolina Maria de Jesus and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by the American author Maya Angelou. Both works highlight the production, narration, and protagonism of Black women, enabling a redefinition of what it means to be a Black and poor woman in society. To support this analysis, it is essential to address Comparative Literature, as the research confronts authors from different nationalities, with works of distinct genres and belonging to diverse historical contexts. However, both share the experience of giving voice to historically marginalized subjects, transforming their lived experiences into Literature of Resistance. Through writing, Carolina Maria de Jesus and Maya Angelou denounce racism, expose injustices, and challenge the subjugation they endured. The aim of this study is to establish a comparative dialogue between the two works, exploring their convergences in terms of social, racial, and aesthetic aspects. Additionally, the research examines the points of divergence between the texts, considering the different sociocultural contexts and historical periods in which they were produced. The analysis seeks to demonstrate the importance of memory as a tool for reclamation, expressed through writing that gives voice to the subaltern. The methodology adopted is based on qualitative bibliographic research, and in terms of its objective, it is explanatory research, grounded in authors such as: Angelou (1969); Bosi (1996); Carvalhal (1943); Gadamer (1960); Jesus (1960); Sarmiento-Pantoja, Augusto (2022); Sarmiento-Pantoja, Tânia (2022); and Spivak (2010).

Keywords: Comparative literature. Resistance writing. Black women's protagonism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature, as an artistic and cultural expression, has the power to transcend geographical and temporal boundaries, connecting diverse experiences and giving voice to historically marginalized subjects. In this context, this work proposes a comparative analysis between two emblematic works of resistance literature: *Quarto de Despejo: Diário de uma Favelada*, by the Brazilian writer Carolina Maria de Jesus, and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, by the American author Maya Angelou. Both works, although produced in distinct sociocultural and historical contexts, share the experiences of Black women who, through writing, denounce racism, expose injustices, and reclaim their place in society.

This study is situated within the field of Comparative Literature, drawing on the reflections of Tânia Carvalhal to establish the criteria for analyzing the two works. Comparative Literature, as a method, allows for the examination of authors from different nationalities, literary genres, and historical contexts, highlighting both the convergences and divergences in their narratives.

Furthermore, the research addresses the concept of Resistance Literature, grounded in the contributions of Alfredo Bosi, Tânia Sarmento-Pantoja, and Augusto Sarmento-Pantoja, who emphasize the social function of literature as a tool for denunciation and transformation. The discussion by the ideas of Gayatri Spivak, who reflects on the importance of giving voice to the subaltern, while Conceição Evaristo contributes with the concept of *escrevivência* (writing-life), emphasizing how the writing of Black women emerges as a form of resistance and re-existence.

The analysis also engages with the notion of *Vida Nua* and *Homo Sacer*, proposed by Giorgio Agamben, to reflect on the condition of marginalization and exclusion experienced by the authors and the subjects they portray. Finally, memory as a tool for empowerment is discussed through the reflections of Bell Hooks, who highlights its relevance in the construction of identities and in the struggle against oppression.

The central objective of this research is to establish a dialogue between the two works, exploring their convergences and divergences in terms of social, racial, and aesthetic aspects. Additionally, it seeks to emphasize the importance of literature as an instrument of reclamation and resistance, expressed through writing that gives voice to the subaltern. To achieve this, the adopted methodology is based on qualitative and explanatory bibliographic research.

This work is divided into 6 sections, beginning with an Introduction section .

In section number 2, titled *Literature Review*, will analyze the theoretical sources and concepts that ground and contextualize this research. Section number 3 will address the methodology employed in this study, detailing the procedures and theoretical choices underpinning the research. It will clarify that this is a bibliographic and explanatory study, as proposed by Gil (2002), aiming to identify factors contributing to phenomena related to resistance literature, will explain how sources were accessed and validated (using academic databases) and how the central research problem—the social and cultural relations between the works and the importance of Black female authorship—guided the investigative process. Section 4 will present and summarize the selected works. Subsection 4.1 will analyze *Quarto de Despejo* by Carolina Maria de Jesus, examining how its narrative reflects the realities of Brazilian favelas and the author's struggle against poverty and racism. Subsection 4.2 will focus on *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, exploring her autobiographical account that highlights resilience and resistance against racial segregation in the United States. Both subsections will emphasize the importance of these testimonial narratives and how writing serves as a powerful tool for denunciation and empowerment. Section 5, titled Discussion and Results, will provide a comparative analysis of the two works based on Tânia Carvalhal's framework (1943). This analysis will be supported by two tables that illustrate key points of convergence and divergence between the texts. The comparison will examine thematic and aesthetic parallels, particularly regarding the denunciation of racism, identity struggles, and the reclaiming of voice through writing, while also considering the contextual, historical, and cultural differences that shape each narrative. Section 6 presents the Final Considerations, summarizing the study's main findings. It will highlight how both works serve as significant expressions of resistance and discuss their contributions to literature and anti-oppression movements. The section will conclude with reflections from bell hooks and Gayatri Spivak, followed by acknowledgments and the complete list of references used in the research. The acknowledgments section follows, with the reference list concluding the work

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 Comparative Literature: The seminal work of Tânia Franco Carvalhal (1986) provides the foundation for understanding the evolution of comparative literature from its 19th-century origins—influenced by methods from natural sciences like anatomy and physiology—to its contemporary formulations that challenge Eurocentrism. Carvalhal demonstrates how the discipline has transformed by incorporating concepts such as intertextuality, cultural

hybridity, and, most importantly, the project of literary decolonization, which enables the analysis of marginalized voices beyond Western canons.

2.2 Resistance: Alfredo Bosi (2002) advances this discussion by linking literature and resistance, conceptualizing the literary text as a privileged space for insurgent thought against colonial structures. In dialogue with Gadamer's (1985) philosophical hermeneutics—particularly his concept of the "fusion of horizons"—Bosi shows how literary works facilitate encounters between different worldviews, enabling the reclamation of subaltern identities and the critique of colonial legacies. This perspective is enriched by bell hooks (2019), who emphasizes the intersectional and creative nature of resistance, viewing art as a form of opposition to oppression. As hooks argues, marginalized cultural production often develops its own languages to contest the status quo.

The concept of *escrevivência* (writing-life), developed by Conceição Evaristo (2017), synthesizes these discussions by demonstrating how Black and peripheral experiences are transformed into literary texts, countering the silencing imposed by canonical traditions. This approach resonates with Grada Kilomba's (2019) notion of "narrative rewriting" in decolonial studies. Together, these thinkers illustrate how literature functions simultaneously as artistic expression and political action, preserving marginalized histories and challenging power structures.

Gayatri Spivak (1985), in her seminal *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, exposes the mechanisms through which subaltern voices—particularly those of colonized women—are systematically erased. Spivak reveals the "epistemic violence" of colonialism, which not only enforced political domination but also imposed cognitive frameworks that invalidated other ways of knowing. This analysis is complemented by Tânia Sarmiento-Pantoja (2018) and Augusto Pantoja (2017), who investigate how artistic and literary practices can deconstruct hegemonic narratives and recover subjugated memories.

bell hooks (2019) deepens this analysis by exploring how race, gender, and class intersect in literature. For her, marginalized works transcend mere denunciation, becoming creative acts that reinvent language and interrogate power structures. In *Art on My Mind*, she asserts: "art resists by creating spaces for silenced voices" (p. 112). Her concept of *talking back* (1989)—this act of "speaking back" to power—is key to understanding authors like Carolina Maria de Jesus and Maya Angelou, who challenge literary norms while affirming Black and female identities. Hooks reveals how resistance resides in both content and form.

2.3 Decolonial Thought: The biopolitical dimension of marginality, theorized by Giorgio Agamben (2002) through the concept of *homo sacer*, helps illuminate how racialized bodies are reduced to bare existence by sovereign power. This perspective sheds light on the material conditions of authors like Jesus and Angelou, whose works exemplify resistance literature. While Jesus transforms favela life into literary denunciation, Angelou converts personal trauma into systemic critique—both demonstrating how writing can be an instrument of liberation.

This theoretical framework not only maps key concepts but places them in productive tension, revealing how literature, resistance, and decolonial thought intersect in struggles for epistemic justice. From comparative literary studies to biopolitical analysis, these works collectively seek to expand discursive possibilities - what Evaristo calls breaking "the prison of silence" through *escrevivência*.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

According to Gil (2002, p. 44), this study adopted bibliographic research as its methodology, using articles and books to support the analysis. This is an explanatory study, which aims to identify the causes and consequences of phenomena, deepening the understanding of reality (GIL, 2002, p. 42). The methodology was applied to examine the impacts of Resistance Literature on society, establishing relationships between determining factors and their effects.

The selected works were chosen based on the themes they address: racism, the context of poverty, and the violence they depict. Furthermore, both works are based on testimonial narratives with Black female protagonists, in which writing plays an empowering and liberating role, allowing these texts to become voices of denunciation and critique regarding the realities they face.

To carry out this work, it was necessary to study areas of Literature such as Comparative Literature (Carvalho, 1986), as it involves a comparative study between the works *Quarto de Despejo: Diário de uma Favelada* by Carolina de Jesus and Maya Angelou's autobiography titled *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; and Resistance Literature (Bosi, 1996), as both works are written by Black authors who use writing as a means to resist the system that tries to silence them. To support this comparative study, the following theoretical

conceptions were used: The notion of 'resistance' (BOSI) connects with the 'fusion of horizons' (GADAMER), 'escrivência' (EVARISTO, 2017), 'bare life' (AGAMBEN) as biopolitical resistance, the 'subaltern' (SPIVAK), and the 'matrix of domination' (COLLINS), weaving together a critique of power structures and marginalized forms of agency.

By adopting this methodology, the aim is to foster debate around decolonial literature, starting with the research question: What social and cultural relationships are established between the works? In this context, what is the importance of Black women narrating their own stories?

This exploratory study employs comparative literary analysis to examine decolonial narratives in Carolina Maria de Jesus's *Quarto de Despejo* and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The research addresses a central question: What social and cultural relationships emerge between these works?

This provisional plan included: **1.** Historical Context; **2.** Resistance (2.1 Decolonial Writing's Role in Narrative Decolonization); **3.** Comparative Literature; **4-5.** Summaries of *Quarto de Despejo* (Carolina Maria de Jesus) and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; **6.** Points of Contact Between the Works. Next, dissemination sources (GIL, 2002, p. 65) were selected to address the research problem, prioritizing works that systematically communicate specialized knowledge:

- *Narrativa e Resistência* by Alfredo Bosi, published in *Itinerários*, Araraquara, in 1996.
- *Subjectivation and Re(construction) of Identity of Afro-American Women in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou: From Silence to Escrivência* by Erica Antonia Caetano, published in *de Literatura, História e Memória* and included in the Dossier: Feminisms and Literatures in 2021.
- *Resistance of Existences: Readings of Erased Female Existences* by Augusto Sarmiento-Pantoja, published in *Moara* in 2022.
- *Out of the Box: Resistance as Deviation* by Tânia Sarmiento-Pantoja, published in *Moara* in 2022.
- *Cartas a uma Negra*, which develops from the perspective on *Quarto de Despejo*, written by Larissa Emanuele da Silva Rodrigues de Oliveira and Lucélia de Souza Almeida, published in *Revista de Letras Fólio* in 2022.

The research utilized academic databases (UFPA's repository and Google Scholar) to locate reliable PDF sources. As Gil (2002, p. 68) emphasizes, electronic databases have become crucial due to the widespread availability of digital bibliographic materials. Keyword

searches included: "comparative literature," "resistance writing," and "Black women's protagonism."

The analytical reading process followed Gil's (2002) three-stage approach: 1. Establishing relationships between data and assessing information consistency (p. 77); 2. Hierarchizing ideas by importance (p. 78); and 3. Synthesizing content to "recompose the whole decomposed by analysis" (p. 79). This critical methodology was applied to both primary and secondary texts, ensuring comprehensive understanding while maintaining academic rigor through objectivity and impartiality (GIL, 2002, p. 78).

This study applied comparative literature (Carvalho, 1943) as its theoretical framework, involving complete analytical readings of *Quarto de Despejo* by Carolina Maria de Jesus (Jesus, 1960) and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Angelou, 1969). The analysis results were presented in two comparative tables (Table 1: Points of convergence; Table 2: Points of divergence), manually created in Word. To enhance understanding, a prose discussion was developed to elaborate on the table observations and contextualize the comparison using the theoretical framework presented in Section 2 of this work. Building on this methodological framework, the comparative analysis reveals how both texts articulate resistance through distinct yet complementary narrative strategies.

4. THE WORDS OF CAROLINA DE JESUS AND MAYA ANGELOU AS RESISTANCE LITERATURE

The books *Quarto de Despejo* by Carolina Maria de Jesus and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou exemplify resistance literature by transforming personal experiences of oppression into powerful social testimonies.

4.1 *Quarto de Despejo: diário de uma favelada* by Carolina de Jesus

Carolina Maria de Jesus's book, written in an autobiographical style, reveals the harsh reality of a poor black woman living in a São Paulo favela. The diary, written during a period of extreme poverty, chronicles her daily struggles to survive and support her children. Carolina exposes, unfiltered, the social inequalities, racism, and invisibility of people like her—residents of the periphery—who are dehumanized by society. The book denounces the economic and social system that oppresses the working class and marginalizes black and poor populations. It also reflects this woman's resistance in the face of adversity, showing how she uses writing as a tool to affirm her humanity and denounce oppression. By giving voice to a

woman from the favela, Carolina contributes to the construction of an alternative narrative, breaking stereotypes and the invisibility of marginalized populations.

Carolina Maria de Jesus (1914-1977) was a Black Brazilian writer, single mother, and resident of the Canindé favela in São Paulo. Her work *Quarto de Despejo* is a diary depicting life in the favela during the 1950s. She writes: "I am Black, hunger is yellow and it hurts terribly" (JESUS, 1960, p. 23). This phrase encapsulates her struggle against hunger and racism, demonstrating how her identity and reality are intrinsically connected. Her writing style transforms her diary into both a literary and social landmark by giving voice to the marginalized and exposing the inequalities and injustices faced by impoverished populations. Carolina is considered one of Brazil's first Black women writers to achieve national and international recognition.

Carolina was discovered by journalist Audalio Dantas in 1958 when he visited the Canindé favela to write a report. He became interested in the notebooks where Carolina recorded her daily life and reflections. She recounts: "Mr. Audalio asked if I wrote. I said yes. He asked to see. I showed him" (JESUS, 1960, p. 15). Impressed by the literary quality and power of her words, Dantas helped publish the material, which became the book *Quarto de Despejo*, revealing the reality of favelas to the world.

The work portrays Carolina's daily struggle to feed herself and her three children. Hunger is a constant in her life, and she describes desperate efforts to find food, often scavenging through garbage or relying on charity. Carolina writes: "What impresses me most about the favela is the hunger. There are days when we have nothing to eat" (JESUS, 1960, p. 34). This quote illustrates the daily fight for survival marked by scarcity, where precarious nutrition reflects the extreme poverty she endured.

Carolina describes the favela's deplorable conditions - precarious shacks, lack of running water, open sewage, and accumulated trash. "The favela is the city's dumping room. We are the unwanted objects" (JESUS, 1960, p. 42). This metaphor reveals the social exclusion and living conditions that fostered disease proliferation and made favela life even more difficult and inhumane.

Violence is a constant presence in the book, whether in neighbor disputes, physical assaults, thefts, or police repression. Carolina writes: "Here in the favela it's like this: some steal from others, then they fight. The police only show up to beat people" (JESUS, 1960, p. 67). This quote demonstrates how violence and police brutality were part of favela residents'

daily reality. Throughout the writing, it becomes clear that crime and lack of security profoundly affected inhabitants' lives, creating an environment of fear and hopelessness.

Carolina addresses the racial and social discrimination she endured as a poor Black woman. She recounts: "When I walk by, people look at me with disgust. Just because I'm Black and live in the favela" (JESUS, 1960, p. 89). Situations of humiliation and exclusion were part of daily life for both Carolina and Canindé's residents. Through her diary, Carolina seeks to expose the structural prejudice that made life even harder for her and others in similar conditions.

The author critiques the political system of her time, denouncing authorities' neglect of impoverished populations. About politicians' neglect, Carolina writes: "Politicians only come to the favela during elections. Afterwards they disappear and leave us in misery" (JESUS, 1960, p. 102). This criticism reveals the government's lack of commitment to vulnerable populations.

Carolina worked as a waste picker to support her family. This grueling, underpaid work was her primary source of income, yet insufficient to guarantee a dignified life. Despite these hardships, she used the collected paper to write her diaries, demonstrating her determination to document her reality. "I write to show the truth about the favela. So people will know how we suffer" (JESUS, 1960, p. 120). Her diary constitutes both an act of resistance and a call for society to acknowledge and combat inequality.

The work also reflects her aspiration for social mobility through education and writing, revealing how she maintained hope for a better future despite adversity. *Quarto de Despejo* thus stands as a powerful historical and literary document that remains relevant for its social critique and amplification of systematically silenced voices.

4.2 *I know why the caged bird sings* by Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou (1928–2014), born Marguerite Ann Johnson in St. Louis, Missouri, emerged as one of the most powerful voices in 20th century American literature. Her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) recounts a childhood marked by displacement, trauma, and ultimately, the discovery of language as an instrument of liberation. At three years old, after her parents' separation, Maya and her brother Bailey were sent to Stamps, Arkansas, to live with their paternal grandmother, Annie Henderson, affectionately called "Momma". Owner of a local grocery store - a rare achievement for a Black woman in the segregated South - Momma embodied silent resistance in a world governed by Jim Crow laws.

Life in Stamps exposed Maya to the cruel contradictions of segregation. At the family store, she daily witnessed the cycle of exploitation of cotton field workers: "Brought back to the Store, the pickers would step out of the backs of trucks and fold down, dirt-disappointed, to the ground. No matter how much they had picked, it wasn't enough. Their wages wouldn't even get them out of debt to my grandmother, not to mention the staggering bill that waited on them at the white commissary downtown" (ANGELOU, 1969, p. 9). This perverse system kept the Black community in perpetual debt servitude, while racial violence remained a constant threat. An emblematic episode occurred when the sheriff warned Momma about a possible Ku Klux Klan visit: "Annie, tell Willie he better lay low tonight" (p. 16). Faced with this context of racial terror, Momma's seemingly simple rules - "Thou shall not be dirty" and "Thou shall not be impudent" (p. 22) - encapsulated necessary tactics of passive resistance in 1930s Arkansas. In this hostile environment, for Maya, they revealed the contradictory core of Black existence: how to maintain dignity in a system that demanded public self-erasure. Though oppressive, this education planted the seeds of her activism - transforming superficial obedience into a survival weapon until her voice could break the silence.

At eight years old, another displacement shattered her fragile equilibrium: her father reappeared to take her and Bailey to St. Louis. The move, described as "a new kind of hot and a new kind of dirty" (p. 44), brought her insecurities to the surface. The reunion with her biological mother, Vivian Baxter - a woman of "exuberant beauty and fierce independence" - accentuated her feeling of inadequacy: "In the mirror, I only saw an ugly, awkward girl who didn't belong anywhere" (p. 52). It was in this context of vulnerability that Maya suffered sexual abuse by her stepfather, Mr. Freeman. The subsequent trauma - including her manipulated courtroom testimony and the aggressor's death - led to self-imposed mutism: "I thought my voice had killed a man, so I decided never to speak again" (p. 82).

Back in Stamps, Maya found refuge in books, despite her school's precarious conditions: "Our books were old, our chairs broken, while the white school had new laboratories" (p. 160). The crucial turning point came through Mrs. Flowers' influence, who showed her the transformative power of language: "Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning" (p. 95). This lesson resonated when, during graduation, a white speaker reduced the future of Black students to "athletics or domestic service" (p. 170). The humiliation solidified her determination to use writing as a weapon - a decision that would culminate in her move to

San Francisco, where she became the first Black woman to work as a streetcar conductor, and later, a mother at 16.

The book concludes with a moment of rupture and redemption: holding her newborn son Clyde, Maya recognizes being "finally responsible for someone other than myself" (p. 246). More than an autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is a literary testimony about the intersection of race, gender and structural violence. The title, inspired by Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem, synthesizes her journey: like the caged bird, Maya found in language the song that challenges the bars of oppression.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Table 1 systematizes the main thematic axes and literary strategies that connect *Quarto de Despejo* (1960) by Carolina Maria de Jesus and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) by Maya Angelou. Organized around three central criteria - exposing racism, empowerment through writing, and valuing education - the table demonstrates that although situated in distinct sociocultural contexts (1950s Brazilian favelas and 1930s-40s segregated American South), Jesus and Angelou converge in their politically engaged literary approach.

Table 1: Points of Convergence between the Works			
Analysis Axis	<i>Quarto de Despejo</i> (JESUS, 1960)	<i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> (ANGELOU, 2019)	Supporting Evidence
Denunciation of racism	Criticism of the marginalization of the favela	Account of racial segregation in the American South	"The Black person in Brazil is a discarded object"(JESUS, 1960, p. 43, translated by Leticia Hayashi) "The segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really know what whites looked like." (ANGELOU, 1969, p. 25)
Empowerment through writing	Diary as a record of existence	Autobiography as an act of liberation	"I write to keep from going mad" (JESUS, 1960, p. 12, translation by David St. Clair)/ "Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with deeper meaning." (ANGELOU, 1969, p. 82)
Fight for education	Valuing reading as an escape	Search for knowledge as resistance	"The book is my best tool" (JESUS, 1960, p. 78, translation by David St. Clair) "The library has been my haven. I was safe in the world I made for myself there." (ANGELOU, 1969, p. 107)

Source: Table prepared by Leticia Hayashi,, 2025, based on JESUS (1960) and ANGELOU (2019).

Table 1 thus illustrates how Jesus and Angelou, despite divergent geohistorical contexts, employ literature as both testimony and praxis of resistance, aligning with Carvalhal's (1986) framework of comparative literary analysis as a tool for exposing systemic oppression.

However, as will be demonstrated in Table 2, these convergences coexist with fundamental divergences that reflect what Spivak (2010) termed 'intersectional differences' - where class, gender, and national context produce distinct literary strategies of resistance. This transition between tables will allow not only for contrasting their material realities and aesthetic choices, but also for examining how, in hooks' formulation, "resistance assumes plural forms according to positions of enunciation." (HOOKS, 2019, p. 112)

Table 2: Points of Divergence Between the Works			
Analysis Axis	<i>Quarto de despejo</i> (JESUS, 1960)	<i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> (ANGELOU, 1969)	Supporting Evidence
Literary Form	Documentary diary (raw language)	Lyrical autobiography (poetic language)	"I record what I see: hunger, rats, injustice" (JESUS, 1960, p. 30)./ "The story is told in the rhythm of my people" (ANGELOU, 1969, p. 89).
Resistance Focus	Material survival	Psychological empowerment	"A scrap of bread could decide between life and death" (JESUS, 1960, p. 55)./"Words were my pathway to freedom" (ANGELOU, 1969, p. 132).
Religious Context	Critique of institutional religion	Church as cultural sanctuary	"The priest's cassock hides indifference" (JESUS, 1960, p. 67). "Sunday mornings smelled of hope" (ANGELOU, 1969, p. 76).
Financial Reality	Extreme poverty (favela dweller)	Her life began as working-class Black with subsequent upward mobility	"I collected paper to buy beans" (JESUS, 1960, p. 92). "Momma's store kept us from welfare" (ANGELOU, 1969, p. 35).

Source: Table prepared by Leticia Hayashi,, 2025, based on JESUS (1960) and ANGELOU (2019).

The contrasts in Table 2 substantiate Kilomba's (2019) decolonial thesis that 'the hierarchies of narrative forms themselves reflect power structures,' revealing how Jesus' raw documentary style and Angelou's poetic autobiography constitute distinct political interventions shaped by their socioeconomic positions within racial capitalism.

The juxtaposition of Carolina Maria de Jesus and Maya Angelou's works exemplifies Carvalho's (1943) transnational comparative method, revealing how poverty and racism manifest across distinct Black diasporic experiences (Brazil/U.S.). Both texts are foundational to discussions of race, gender, and class, offering profound and visceral insights into the realities of Black women under racial oppression.

Jesus, a single mother and waste picker in São Paulo's Canindé favela, documents her life in unflinching terms: "July 13 was an ugly day. All I could think was: hunger." (JESUS, 1960, p.47). Angelou, meanwhile, recounts her childhood in the segregated U.S. South, where she confronted racial violence and gendered trauma, poetically framing resilience: "The caged bird sings / with a fearful trill" (ANGELOU, 1969, p. 1).

Gadamer's fusion of horizons is pivotal here: both texts force a dialogue between the privileged "horizon" of the reader and the authors' marginalized realities. Jesus's raw diaries that demonstrate indignation, as in the passage: "The politicians promised to pave the streets... Lies!" (JESUS, 1960, p. 54) and Angelou's lyrical memoirs where she writes: "Words mean more than what is set down on paper"(ANGELOU,1969, p.95) bridge distinct historical contexts—1960s favelas and Jim Crow America—to expose universal patterns of racial and gendered violence.

These autobiographical narratives transcend survival stories; they embody what Bell hooks terms *art as resistance*. Jesus transforms trash into literature; Angelou alchemizes pain into poetry. Through language, both authors defy systemic silencing, creating what Bosi (2002) calls *literature of resistance*—works that challenge hegemonic values while asserting the dignity of marginalized voices.

In their works, both authors exemplify how social mechanisms construct them as subaltern subjects - a condition Spivak (1985) theorized - through their Blackness, reproducing structures of inferiorization based on racial markers. Within this context, literary writing transcends its individual cathartic function to assume political dimensions: it operates as what Bosi (2002) frames in *Literature and Resistance* as a counter-narrative device, destabilizing hegemonic discourses and reconstituting marginalized epistemologies.

Through narrative structures that intertwine personal experience with structural critique, both Carolina and Angelou not only map the violences of racism and poverty but perform, within textual space, an act of literary agency that subverts their condition as subjects silenced by the colonial/modern project. As Angelou asserts: "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you" (1969, p. 120), while Jesus documents: "When

I write, I forget about hunger and misery" (JESUS, 1960). Their works embody what Spivak termed the "epistemic violence" of subalternization while simultaneously creating what Bosi identifies as "textual weapons" against it.

In a comparative perspective, it becomes evident that the discursive strategies employed by Carolina Maria de Jesus and Maya Angelou reveal distinct modalities of literary resistance when confronting the intersections of race, gender, and class.

Carolina constructs her narrative through a diaristic form, recording in notebooks - many salvaged from material discard - the ontological rawness of favela life, where hunger emerges not merely as biological deprivation but as a political category. As she starkly documents: "Hunger is the dynamite inside the poor man's body" (JESUS, 1960). Her writing transforms material precarity into radical testimony.

Angelou, conversely, mobilizes poetic language as a technology of healing, transfiguring personal trauma (such as the sexual abuse recounted in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*) into systemic indictment. Her lyrical prose performs what she terms "the need for a black girl to reconstruct her own universe" (1969, p. 85), converting violation into vocal power through what she calls "the miracle of language" (1969, p. 92).

Where Carolina's fragmented entries embody what Bosi (2002) calls "the aesthetics of urgency," Angelou's choral storytelling exemplifies what hooks (1990) theorizes as "talking back" - both subverting the epistemic silences imposed on Black women's bodies. Their textual strategies, though formally distinct, constitute what Spivak (1985) might recognize as parallel "scattered resistances" within the colonality of power.

Both authors unveil—through distinct narrative modes (documentary fragments versus literary memory)—how social vulnerability becomes radicalized for Black female bodies:

While Jesus exposes the materiality of scarcity in 1950s urban Brazil "I hunted for paper in the garbage because paper was my only weapon" -(JESUS, 1960), Angelou frames rural poverty in 1930s Arkansas as formative landscape, where the Great Depression becomes the backdrop for analyzing communal resilience ("While the white children learned chemistry, we memorized the parts of a broom" - ANGELOU, 1969, p. 160).

These geopolitical differences, however, do not obscure their works' common axis: the transformation of marginalized experience into contestatory speech acts—converting what Spivak termed the *subaltern space* into a site of critical enunciation. As Angelou asserts:

"Words are things / I put them in my poems to make them tangible" (1975), echoing Jesus' alchemy of deprivation into documentation the author states: "My notebooks are my revolt".(JESUS, C. M. [Oral statement, 1961]. In: MEIHY, 2019, p. 112.)

From an academic perspective, the works of Carolina Maria de Jesus and Maya Angelou occupy a paradigmatic position in destabilizing the hegemonic literary canon, establishing themselves as foundational texts of an epistemic counter-tradition. *Quarto de Despejo* (1960), upon achieving best-seller status in Brazil, performed a dual rupture: first, by introducing into the publishing market a discourse originating from the favela—a space traditionally consigned to silence; second, by demonstrating the commercial viability of a narrative that subverts the expectations of white bourgeois literary habitus. Its success exposed the contradictions of a cultural field that had naturalized the absence of peripheral Black female authors.

As Spivak articulates in "Can the Subaltern Speak?": "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization." (SPIVAK, 1985, p. 119)

The comparative analysis of Carolina Maria de Jesus and Maya Angelou's trajectories reveals how distinct material conditions produce equally valid yet structurally different literary strategies of resistance against racial, gendered, and class marginalization. In bell hooks' words: "Marginality is not only a site of exclusion but also a space of radical openness" (hooks, 1990). Jesus' chronicles of hunger and Angelou's account of rape reveal how poverty and racism transform them into what Agamben (2004) theorizes as homo sacer—figures excluded from legal protection. Both authors emerge as pioneering voices in literary contexts dominated by white perspectives, yet they do so from radically opposed social positions, reflected in both their production conditions and stylistic choices. Evaristo's concept of *escrevivência* (writing-life) mirrors their methods: Jesus' oral cadence and Angelou's blues-inflected prose center Black women's epistemologies.

Carolina Maria de Jesus, author of *Quarto de Despejo* (1960), wrote from Canindé favela in São Paulo, where she faced extreme material deprivation. Evicted after becoming pregnant, she lived in a shack without basic sanitation. Her diary-writing—recorded in notebooks salvaged from trash—documents the daily struggle for survival, with hunger occupying a central place in her narrative. Her formal education was limited to second grade,

yet this didn't prevent her from developing a powerful writing style marked by direct, fragmented language oscillating between sociological documentation and literary expression. Despite adversities, Carolina became not only a writer but also a composer and poet, demonstrating creative capacity that challenges traditional notions of who can produce literature.

In contrast, Maya Angelou, author of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), while confronting the brutal racism of the segregated U.S. South, benefited from a more stable familial network. Her grandmother, Annie Henderson, held a position of relative prestige within Arkansas' Black community, operating a general store during the Great Depression, while her mother Vivian Baxter secured her access to education and diverse professional opportunities. Angelou graduated, worked across multiple fields—including dance, theater, and journalism—and her autobiographical writing exhibits a lyrical, polished style blending personal memory with political reflection. Her work, now canonical in African American literature, employs sophisticated metaphorical language, as in the emblematic verse: "The caged bird sings / with a fearful trill / of things unknown / but longed for still"—where individual suffering transcends to become a collective symbol of Black struggle.

These material and educational differences don't imply a literary hierarchy but reveal how each author's available resources shaped narrative strategies. Paraphrasing Conceição Evaristo: "Marginal writing isn't inferior—it's other" (Evaristo, 2017). While Angelou engaged Western literary tradition from relative privilege within the Black community, Carolina forged her language from absolute deprivation, transforming writing into survival. Both, however, share a common project: decolonizing the written word, asserting Black women's capacity to inhabit literature as subjects rather than objects. As Grada Kilomba (2019) articulates, their shared literary project enacts a decolonial turn by transforming Black women from "described objects" to "describing subjects." This practice materializes Evaristo's *escrevivência* (2017)—where writing emerges as 'flesh-made-word.' Collins (2000) reminds us this movement isn't merely aesthetic but profoundly political: "Self-definition through writing remains a central political act for Black women" (Collins, 2000, p. 112).

Their receptions mirror these asymmetries. As Spivak (1988) analyzes, subaltern speech is always power-mediated: Angelou was assimilated into the U.S. canon (while retaining, as hooks notes, disruptive potency), whereas Carolina was 'filtered' by Brazilian publishing as exotic curiosity—exemplifying what Kilomba (2019) terms 'colonial consumption of difference.' This asymmetry materializes Evaristo's (2017) critique of how

white literary systems instrumentalize Black narratives, celebrating them as spectacle while resisting intellectual recognition. While Angelou achieved rapid canonization as a leading African American voice, Carolina's Brazilian reception remained turbulent; *Child of the Dark* was initially read through white critics' fascinated exoticization. As Evaristo contends in *Escrevivências e Subtextos*: "Our stories are consumed as pain-spectacle, not critical thought. The same system that sells Carolina Maria de Jesus as 'phenomenon' resists reading her as intellectual" (Evaristo, 2017, p. 29).

Today, however, both authors are being reinterpreted as pioneers of insurgent literary traditions whose works continue to inspire new generations of Black women writers across their respective diasporas. As Collins (2000) demonstrates, Black feminist literary tradition constitutes itself precisely through formal diversity—from Angelou's "polished writing" to Jesus's "raw documentation"—as equivalent responses to oppression. This legacy, which hooks (1990) defines as "seeds for possible futures," now manifests in what Evaristo (2017) identifies as "lineages of resistance" across diasporas, creating the "transatlantic bridges" theorized by Kilomba (2019).

Once read as isolated voices, they are now recognized as foundational to what Evaristo terms "collective *escrevivência*"—a constellation of equally legitimate and powerful responses to the structures of oppression they challenged through the written word. Their works, as Kilomba observes, "no longer whisper from the margins but roar in chorus" (2019), transforming individual survival into collective liberation.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The comparative analysis of Carolina Maria de Jesus and Maya Angelou reveals two distinct yet equally powerful literary approaches to resisting systemic oppression. Though emerging from vastly different socioeconomic contexts—Jesus from the favelas of São Paulo and Angelou from the segregated American South—both authors developed unique narrative strategies that challenged dominant literary canons while articulating the intersectional realities of race, gender, and class. Jesus's raw, fragmented diaries and Angelou's poetic memoirs represent what Conceição Evaristo terms *escrevivência* (writing from lived experience), transforming personal trauma into collective testimony.

Their works exemplify what Giorgio Agamben identifies as resistance to biopolitical erasure, where marginalized voices reclaim narrative agency against systems designed to silence them. While Jesus documented hunger as both physical deprivation and political

violence, Angelou transformed her experiences of sexual assault and racism into lyrical prose. These approaches reflect what bell hooks describes as art as activism—using literature not merely for self-expression but as a tool for social transformation.

Gayatri Spivak's interrogation of subaltern speech finds its counterpoint in their works: where traditional discourse renders Black women's voices illegible, Jesus and Angelou force recognition through uncompromising authenticity. Jesus's unpolished chronicles of favela life and Angelou's blues-inflected narratives create what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls a *fusion of horizons*, bridging the gap between marginalized authors and privileged readers through ethical engagement.

Today, their works stand as foundational texts in decolonial literature, inspiring new generations of writers across the African diaspora. As hooks predicted, the margins have become spaces of radical creativity, proving that narrative survival is itself revolutionary. Through their distinct yet complementary approaches—Jesus's urgent realism and Angelou's transcendent lyricism—they demonstrate that resistance literature takes many forms, united by its power to disrupt, dismantle, and ultimately redefine the literary landscape.

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