

Dangerous Minds: Brazil's *Escritura da exclusão* and *Testimonio*

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Abstract: The radical nature of the emerging branch of textual production in Brazil called *escritura da exclusão*, or writing of exclusion, challenges literary norms and resists traditional critical paradigms. This essay borrows from Spanish American *testimonio* theory in order to examine three representative texts, *Sobrevivente André du Rap* (*do Massacre do Carandiru*) by André du Rap, *Diário de um detento: O livro* by Jocenir, and *Capão Pecado* by Ferréz. While there are clearly limitations to the applicability of this body of theory to Brazilian literature that need to be recognized and addressed, the *testimonio* model can be useful in illustrating how each of these three authors wages a symbolic battle against social injustice by assuming a confrontational stance toward the institution of literature.

Key Words: André du Rap, autobiography, Brazil, *Escritura da exclusão* (writing of exclusion), Ferréz, Jocenir, marginality, prison literature, rap, *testimonio*

Over the past decade, a new crop of writers has emerged in Brazil that represents the “dangerous” elements of society, namely the marginalized populations from the urban peripheries and the penitentiary system. Drawing from a vast reservoir of personal experience, these authors write about violence, drugs, poverty, hunger, and police repression, denouncing the endemic social injustice in their country. Not surprisingly, their works have ignited a series of polemics, particularly with regard to the question of literary status. The Brazilian critic Regina Dalcastagnè asks, for example, why the intellectual product of a middle-class writer is considered literature, whereas that of a person of humbler origins is commonly referred to as a testimony (quoted in Giron 40). Regardless of how one assesses its literary value, this growing branch of textual production is critical to understanding the social transformations currently taking place in Brazil, insofar as the antagonism of these writers and narrators toward literature is symbolic of a broader resistance by excluded groups against society as a whole.

This essay will contend that the Spanish American *testimonio* and its attendant body of criticism offer a potential model for approaching the issue of literary status as it pertains to the writing of the excluded in Brazil. After all, the latter shares with *testimonio* its defining characteristic: its extra-literary nature. In his foundational essay entitled “The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative),” John Beverley asserts that because it is produced by individuals historically deprived of a means of self-representation, “*testimonio puts into question* the existing institution of literature as an ideological apparatus of alienation and domination [...]” (35, Beverley’s emphasis).

Indeed, the same might be said of the Brazilian *escritura da exclusão*, or writing of exclusion.¹ This should not be construed as an attempt to classify the recent textual production of marginalized writers in Brazil—itsself hardly a homogeneous category—under the rubric of *testimonio*. Instead, the points of convergence and divergence between the testimonial genre and a group of three representative works—*Sobrevivente André du Rap* (*do Massacre do Carandiru*) (2002) by José André de Araújo (André du Rap) and Bruno Zeni, *Diário de um detento: O livro* (2001) by Jocenir, and *Capão Pecado* (2000) by Ferréz—provide valuable insights into how each of these Brazilian subjects wages a symbolic battle against social injustice

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in his country by assuming a confrontational stance toward literature as an institution. This essay will outline some of *testimonio*'s salient characteristics (as theorized by pioneering critics such as Beverley and Doris Sommer) and test their applicability to the narratives of André du Rap, Jocenir, and Ferréz, then turn to the case of Carolina Maria de Jesus as well as to some key reevaluations of *testimonio* criticism, which prove particularly helpful in illuminating the limitations inherent in any comparison between *testimonio* and Brazil's literature of exclusion.²

The extra-literary nature to which the testimonial genre owes so much of its artistic and political appeal derives in large part from three characteristics that have become its hallmarks: the erasure of the author, the plurality of the speaking subject, and the inherent orality of the narrative. By undermining the hallowed role of the author, *testimonio* subverts literature as an institution, since, as Beverley observes, "our very notions of literature and the literary are bound up with notions of the author, or, at least, of an authorial intention." This is particularly true of mediated *testimonios* such as the iconic *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, in which the compiler or activator replaces the author and therefore represents "both a challenge and an alternative to the patriarchal and elitist function the author plays in class-divided and in sexually and racially divided societies [. . .]" ("The Margin at the Center" 29). At the same time, however, the inevitable interference of the mediator has raised serious doubts as to the authenticity of testimonial narratives. It is also common for the compiler or activator to include a preface, epilogue, and explanatory notes, in effect "framing" the testimonial narrative and depriving it of its own legitimacy. Furthermore, the excessive use of mediation risks displacing what is being portrayed from its context, creating the comforting illusion that it is more distant and alien from the reader's reality than it truly is.

Testimonio also challenges literary conventions through the substitution of the traditional bourgeois protagonist by an enunciating subject who speaks in the name of a given collectivity and narrates a common, lived experience that urgently needs to be told ("The Margin at the Center" 27). Rigoberta Menchú consciously assumes this metonymic function when she claims to speak on behalf of all Guatemalan Indians: "The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people also: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people" (1). Domitila Barrios de Chungara, a Bolivian miner, begins *Let Me Speak!* in a similar fashion: "I don't want anyone at any moment to interpret the story I'm about to tell as something that is only personal [. . .]. What happened to me could have happened to hundreds of people in my country" (15). Beverley avers, moreover, that the plurality of the subject is inherent to the genre, "even in those cases when the narrator is, for example, a drug addict or a criminal" ("The Margin at the Center" 28). In other words, the testimonial subject does not necessarily purport to stand on higher moral ground than the reader nor the others for whom he or she speaks. This point will prove to be particularly relevant to the case of Brazil's *escritura da exclusão*, in which some of the subjects or writers have criminal backgrounds.

As Beverley and others have observed, the lack of a bourgeois author and the presence of a plural subject in *testimonio* signal a return to oral forms of cultural production. Indeed, the testimonial text is often the transcript, more or less edited, of a recorded oral narrative and thus retains at least some of the characteristics of spoken language. In *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, for example, the mediator Elizabeth Burgos-Debray remarks in her preface that she included in the text repetitions and digressions typical of oral expression. She did, however, feel compelled to correct minor grammatical errors, arguing that "it would have been artificial to leave them uncorrected and it would have made Rigoberta look 'picturesque,' which is the last thing I wanted" (xxi). The inherent orality of accounts such as Rigoberta Menchú's is seen as key to the testimonial project because it "implies a challenge to the loss of authority in the context of the processes of cultural modernization that privilege literacy and literature as norms of expression" ("The Margin at the Center" 29). Similar oral markers are apparent, to varying degrees, in the Brazilian texts by André du Rap, Jocenir, and Ferréz.

Of the three, it is André du Rap whose account most closely resembles the traditional

Spanish American testimonial model. Like *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, the main section of *Sobrevivente André du Rap*, entitled “Depoimento,” is a mediated narrative consisting of the edited transcript of a series of oral interviews conducted by the journalist Bruno Zeni. In his prefatory note, Zeni implicitly acknowledges the potential pitfalls faced by the mediator when he stresses that he limited his editorial intervention to rearranging the order of the account and omitting his own participation in the interview process from the text.

What is unique about André du Rap’s book is the inclusion of two presumably unmediated sections, “Fragmentos de uma correspondência,” a selection of his prison correspondence, and particularly “Free style (De improviso),” comprised of excerpts from a testimony that he recorded on his own—that is, without the interviewer’s direct participation or interference. The title of the latter is meant to convey not only the influence of rap culture upon the speaker, but also, as Zeni explains, the unmediated nature of the text itself: “[E]scolhi trechos do relato que André gravou sozinho, em agosto de 2001 [...]. *Free style* é o procedimento pelo qual um ou mais cantores de *rap* improvisam uma letra, eventualmente podendo desafiar um ao outro na arte da rima [...]. Acho que é uma definição justa para o depoimento que André fez com toda a liberdade, *sem a minha mediação*” (9–10, my emphasis). The presence of André du Rap’s direct testimony is clearly intended to corroborate the authenticity of the work as a whole. Nevertheless, the selection of which passages to include or suppress and the insertion of headings by the “coordinating editor” (Zeni) is clearly yet another form of mediation. Moreover, the preface and essay “Uma voz sobrevivente” at the end of the book—in which Zeni quotes such luminaries as Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault—have the effect of framing André du Rap’s account within the mediator’s own interpretation and intellectual legitimacy.³ By contrast, the statements made by several of André du Rap’s acquaintances in the “Aliados” section have a somewhat different legitimizing function. These “allies” act as character witnesses, yet they do not confer legitimacy on his narrative by virtue of their bourgeois credentials, since many of them share André du Rap’s marginalized status. In addition, Zeni’s name appears on the cover and on the publication data page, establishing him as a de facto co-author.⁴ Zeni thus falls unwittingly into some of the same traps that he had hoped to avoid.

As a survivor both of the hardships of daily prison life and the massacre that took place in Carandiru on October 2, 1992,⁵ André du Rap believes that speaking out against the treatment of those who are incarcerated is his moral obligation, despite anonymous death threats aimed at silencing him: “São poucas pessoas que têm coragem, e têm essa necessidade de falar a verdade. Hoje em dia eu sou um alvo, um alvo fácil, porque eles falam que eu sou polêmico. Eu falo a verdade. Eu não tenho que ter simpatia por ninguém, eu tenho que ter respeito pelos meus companheiros” (179–80). The solidarity between inmates is the bedrock of prison culture and the impetus for the denunciation in his account. In contrast to Rigoberta Menchú and Domitila Barrios, however, André du Rap never explicitly assumes the metonymic subjectivity that has become synonymous with *testimonio*. He instead asserts his individuality, guarding against stereotypes of and social prejudice against convicts: “É muito comum ouvir por aí, ‘O cara é ex-presidiário? Ah, o cara é bandido.’ Mas quem fala isso não sabe a história de cada um. Antes de eu ser preso, eu era o André. Eu era o André que estudava, que trabalhava, eu tinha uma família [...]. A partir do momento em que eu fui preso, eu me tornei quem? Não André, mas o bandido” (106). In large part he blames the media for perpetuating these misconceptions about the inmates and for not objectively portraying what goes on inside prison walls: “Muitas vezes a mídia mostra uma realidade que não é nossa” (108).

André du Rap insists upon his personal identity in order not to be dismissed as just another criminal, but he also states unequivocally that he feels no shame for being a convict: “[E]u não tenho vergonha de ser ex-presidiário, não. É a minha história” (106). Although he acknowledges the underside of prison life, he also tries to humanize it and mitigate the facelessness of the incarcerated masses by describing his own personal experience: “[E]sse é o outro lado que eu quero mostrar. Porque o crime tem os dois lados: tem o lado do dinheiro, da mulherada, das curtições, você ser bem visto dentro do crime, mas tem o outro lado também, a sua falta de liberdade, a soli-

ção, e a falta de compreensão e amor-próprio, porque você é simplesmente mais um número” (183). He therefore touches upon what is one of the fundamental paradoxes of *testimonio* as well: to convey effectively a collective plight, it is often necessary to depict it on the individual level. The presence of his name in the book's title reflects the same paradox. Beverley, noting a similar tendency in the titles of Spanish American testimonial narratives, concludes that the genre makes possible the “affirmation of the individual self *in a collective mode*” (“The Margin at the Center” 29, Beverley's emphasis). The same can be said of André du Rap's account.

When considering the question of orality in *Sobrevivente André du Rap*, it is important to bear in mind that both testimonies in the book, “Depoimento” and “Free Style (De improviso)” are edited transcriptions of spoken narratives. Zeni writes in his preface, “Na edição do texto, procurei ser o mais fiel possível às particularidades da fala de André—mantive inclusive *suas incongruências e incorreções*—por acreditar que não se pode separar a forma e o conteúdo daquilo que se diz, se escreve ou se cria” (9, my emphasis). This statement has the effect, however, of further stigmatizing André du Rap by drawing attention to the flaws in his spoken Portuguese. The inevitable implication that the speaker is to some degree inarticulate casts doubt upon his ability to speak effectively without the mediation of his highly literate editor. At the same time, a value judgment is implicitly being passed on oral expression, which perpetually falls short of conforming to literary standards. In fact, André du Rap's speech is not so much incorrect, but rather characteristic of colloquial Brazilian Portuguese in general, as the following typical excerpt illustrates: “Um belo dia tô lá, uma semana que eu tava no pavilhão, peguei o café, abri a tranca, aí tô indo no pião—pião é quando cê tá andando pra algum lugar, no nosso dialeto. Tô indo no pião pela galeria, trombei um companheiro de mileano, muitos tempos atrás” (170). Indeed, the oral markers in evidence here (“tô,” “tava,” “cê,” “pra”) are common in middle-class Brazilian speech patterns.

Orality permeates *Sobrevivente André du Rap* not only on the level of the transcription of the spoken word in “Depoimento” and “Free Style (De improviso),” but also through the perceptible influence of rap and hip-hop culture upon the speaker, as I have already noted.⁶ It is significant that the latter section begins with André du Rap defining himself first and foremost as a DJ, hence his pseudonym:

[V]ários manos da quebrada chegavam, “Ô, quem que é fulano, quem que é o André, quem que é o DJ?”—e sempre vinha um que, sempre tem um no sistema que conhece você, conhece a sua história. Porque na época eu tocava nos bailes, trabalhava nas promoções com várias equipes de baile—Black Music, Chic Show, Zimbabwe, Kaskata's—na época que estavam no auge. De vez em quando eu tocava nos bailes também e conhecia vários manos, várias minas. (167)

This name-dropping of the various groups with which he was associated, “na época que estavam no auge,” functions here as a strategy to legitimize his own identity claim as a rap artist.

Rap and hip-hop permeate the narrative in other ways as well. André du Rap refers twice to his own lyrics, the first time in describing his unexpected transfer from Pirajuí, which caused the disbanding of his group, União Racial, and the second in denouncing the beatings and torture that prisoners generally face upon arriving at a new facility. These intertextual references imply that the speaker is in effect repeating and re-elaborating in his oral testimony what he has already expressed through rap. His lyrics therefore constitute another form of bearing witness to prison life. André du Rap avers that rap music is his preferred medium of self-expression, which he views as equal to the written word: “Eu escrevia mais letra de rap, poesia, sempre gostei mesmo de usar a mente pra música. Mas conheço vários caras que escrevem livro. Tudo é conteúdo, é só você pegar, encaixar as coisas [...]” (54). Perhaps even more importantly, he exposes the conflation of popular and high culture by identifying himself as both rapper and poet.

Sobrevivente André du Rap also illustrates and takes as its theme the way in which orality, in the form of rap, has the potential to subvert the established order. Those who administer the penitentiary system in Brazil clearly view rap as a serious threat to their authority. André du Rap describes instances in which he claims to have been victimized by the prison management, solely

on the basis of his association with rap culture. He recalls, for example, how a jail director arbitrarily denied him parole, referring to him as a “preso indisciplinado” and a “líder de motim,” after he informed her of his intention to continue rapping on the streets (92). He also tells of how he was beaten at least once by prison guards for the same reason: “Cheguei a apanhar por causa das minhas letras de rap. Os funcionários olhavam e falavam, ‘É, você é revolucionário, então nós vai te revolucionar na pancada’” (181). In both cases, the representatives of power label him as subversive because he is a rapper.

Further, the prison functions in this respect as a microcosm of the “outside world,” or Brazilian society at large, which (according to André du Rap) also tries to suppress rap and hip-hop movements and by extension the self-expression of marginalized groups: “Por que a gente não está na mídia, por que a gente não estoura, não tem um canal aberto pro hip-hop? Porque eles não querem ver essa realidade” (185). André du Rap therefore views his chosen form of expression as a conduit to social change, a “revolução através das palavras”: “Porque a gente fala a verdade doa a quem doer, e a gente fala a nossa realidade” (185). This antagonistic, even militant, stance toward the rest of society is characteristic of the Brazilian *escritura da exclusão*.

Unlike André du Rap, Jocenir authors his own prison narrative, *Diário de um detento: O livro*, without any outside mediation. His self-proclaimed status as a writer precludes a complete identification with the rest of the incarcerated population. Nonetheless, in the tradition of testimonial subjects such as Rigoberta Menchú and Domitila Barrios, he does make an explicit statement in which he assumes the role of spokesperson: “Respeito os dramas pessoais de cada um, reconheço que existem situações bem piores do que estas que serão relatadas. Porém, este é meu inferno, doloroso e meu. Meu e de milhares de companheiros que tentam sobreviver trancafiados.” Jocenir emphasizes that his wish is not simply to tell his own story, but rather to present the reader with a vivid account of what life is like for the average Brazilian prisoner: “Quero pintar um quadro que possa dar uma idéia do que se passa no interior de uma prisão brasileira, um quadro macabro, mas também repleto de histórias humanas” (17). In comparison to *Sobrevivente André du Rap*, however, his status is arguably closer to Bruno Zeni’s than to that of André du Rap himself, insofar as Jocenir also mediates the prison experience as an outsider—albeit from within.⁷

Though he conquers the respect of the majority of the other inmates during his time in jail, Jocenir depicts himself as an outsider in relation to prison culture. The sensation of being out of place pervades his account: “Os dias correram e eu pude perceber que entrava num outro mundo, diferente de tudo o que eu experimentara em termos de convívio humano [...]. Tudo aquilo que aprendi sobre moral, dignidade, respeito, auto-estima, honra, amor-próprio, covardia, tinha de ser reavaliado, pois ali nada disso existia, ou existia de forma diferente” (43). He repeatedly declares his solidarity with his fellow prisoners, yet he cannot share their class-consciousness because he comes from another stratum of society: “Nasci e fui criado em bairros de classe média, talvez por isso minha facilidade em notar que a história da grande maioria dos presos está absurdamente ligada ao estado de miséria em que se encontra nosso povo” (108). Interestingly, he attributes his enlightened understanding of the plight of Brazil’s marginalized populations to his middle-class origins. At the same time, he makes it a point to distinguish himself from those same excluded groups: “[P]ara mim, a periferia era uma coisa distante: seus dramas, suas peculiaridades, sua miséria, sua violência, só percebi de verdade quando estava cumprindo pena, pois a grande maioria dos companheiros vem da periferia” (99). In this way, he positions himself as a mediator who, by virtue of his background, has more in common with his middle-class reader than with his fellow inmates.

As he himself points out on numerous occasions, Jocenir’s education and, more specifically, his perceived talent for writing set him apart from most other prisoners: “A maioria da massa carcerária é precariamente alfabetizada. Alguns mal conseguem escrever seus nomes.” Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the other prisoners ask him to compose letters and poetry on their behalf. What is curious, however, is how he re-interprets, instead of simply transcribing, what they dictate to him: “A dor de cada um se transferia para mim, de mim para o

papel. Primeiro ouvia atentamente o que o companheiro dizia, procurava interpretar suas ansiedades, seus sonhos, seus desejos [...]. Incorporava nos versos minhas experiências que, sabia, eram as mesmas daqueles homens [...]. Traduzia o cárcere com um lapis” (97).

Although Jocenir again asserts his claim to speak on behalf of the jailed population with whom he shares many of the same experiences, he in effect acts as its “translator” or mediator. The ability to write confers an almost ethnographic distance between him and the other prisoners: “Por ler e escrever com facilidade, o que é raro na cadeia, tomei contato com muitas almas infelizes. Isso era bom, mas virei espectador de muitas tragédias” (55). He sees himself as a spectator, one who by definition watches without becoming involved in what he observes. He also ratifies this distance by disparaging the writing of other prisoners, such as in the case of an anonymous note of encouragement that he received soon after being incarcerated: “Era um bilhete muito mal escrito, uns garranchos difíceis de ler” (46).

Favoring literature over orality, Jocenir affirms his identity as a writer throughout *Diário de um detento*, a notable departure from *testimonio*'s characteristic erasure of the author. Unlike André du Rap, who expresses himself in a colloquial style of speech, Jocenir opts for a more formal register, though he also incorporates into the text prison slang as well as excerpts from the lyrics of the song he co-wrote with the rapper Mano Brown. As is to be expected, *Diário de um detento* is, as a written account, more susceptible to artistic intervention than oral-based narratives such as André du Rap's. One of the most overt instances of literary mediation in Jocenir's book occurs in the final paragraphs, in which he describes his release from prison: “Tomamos o rumo de casa, e no caminho era como se eu renascesse [...]. Sentia o vento bater em meu rosto, contemplava toda a natureza, olhava para o céu, botava as mãos pela janela do carro para que a chuva fina tocasse minha pele, aquela água era um bálsamo divino que lavava minha alma para uma nova etapa da vida que ia começar” (170–71). Adhering to literary convention, the author fashions a poetic, conclusive ending to his account of prison life. At the other extreme, André du Rap's narrative is highly disjointed and non-linear, lacking a distinct beginning or end, which allows Zeni to rearrange the different segments without diminishing the overall coherence of the testimony. The contrast between the two works is symbolic as well: Jocenir is able to “close the book,” so to speak, on his prison experience and embark on a new stage in life, presumably reintegrating himself into the middle class, whereas for André du Rap, leaving prison means a return to the margins of society, hence there is no possible closure.

If mediated testimonies such as *Sobrevivente André du Rap* are at one extreme in terms of authorial function, then *Capão Pecado* and similar works—including Paulo Lins's *Cidade de Deus*—are situated at the other. Indeed, Ferréz's status as the author of a fictional rendering of life in the urban periphery would seem to preclude a comparison with the testimonial genre, which, according to Beverley, represents a “radical break [...] with the novel and with literary fictionality as such” (“The Margin at the Center” 37). Nevertheless, the fact that the author bases the story upon his own experience growing up in the Capão Redondo slum confers an almost autobiographical legitimacy to his text. Furthermore, literary depictions of the excluded in Brazilian letters have traditionally taken the form of what Beverley refers to as a “vertical model of representation (in the double sense of mimesis and political representation),” in which a professional writer speaks about or on behalf of those who are cast to the margins of society (*Against Literature* 17). By contrast, Ferréz is a member of the same peripheral community that he portrays in his novel, thus upsetting the notion of the bourgeois author in the same way that the *testimonio* genre does.

Capão Pecado can be interpreted on one level as the story of the ups and downs of an adolescent love affair between the protagonist Rael, a teenager raised in the slum of Capão Redondo, and his best friend's girlfriend, Paula. According to this perspective, Rael is not so different from the traditional protagonist of a bourgeois novel, except that the plot unfolds against the stark backdrop of urban poverty and violence in Brazil. Another possible interpretation is suggested, however, by the preface. In it, Ferréz recounts what seems like the typical “boy meets girl” story, only with an added twist in which the boy is not a middle-class playboy,

but rather a poor Brazilian or *marginal*. The result is a far cry from the usual happy ending:

[A menina] é a culpada dos sonhos do menino terem ido para água abaixo, e o álcool completa o círculo de dor tão comum por aqui. A criança chora, o gato foge, ela desanima, e os sonhos acabam mais uma vez. [...]

O calor foi mais uma vez roubado do corpo—ele foi morto—, estava quase sem esperanças de ter um bom futuro, pois queria ter algo, mas estava sem dinheiro, numa área miserável onde todos cantam a mesma canção, que é a única coisa que alguém já fez exclusivamente para alguém daqui [...]. (17–18)

He in effect summarizes not only the destiny of the excluded populations of Brazil, but also that of Rael in the novel. The protagonist of *Capão Pecado* therefore fulfills the same metonymic function as a testimonial subject. The transition from the “boy meets girl” story in the preface to the novel proper is, in a sense, analogous to the “zooming” effect of the poem preceding the former, which begins with the universe and ends with Capão Redondo, described as the “fundo do mundo” (13).⁸ The movement from general to specific is yet another example of an approach to the testimonial paradox according to which the collective drama is most effectively portrayed through the story of an individual.

Although Ferréz takes a more literary approach than André du Rap and Jocenir, orality permeates *Capão Pecado* in ways that are reminiscent of their two accounts. The distance between the level of narration and that of the dialogues is minimal. In other words, much like the speech of the characters themselves, the third-person narration closely resembles colloquial, oral expression, as the following passage demonstrates: “A vizinha estava saindo pra comprar pão. Se assustou com o barulho, mas antes de entrar, ela viu Rael sair com uma arma dentro da metalúrgica. Entrou em casa, ligou para a polícia e ferrou mais um irmão periférico” (165). In this example, the slang expressions “ferrou” and “irmão” tinge the narration with an oral quality. Furthermore, similar to the other two Brazilian works, *Capão Pecado* is heavily influenced by rap and hip-hop culture, evident mainly in the segment written by the rapper Mano Brown that precedes the first of the five parts of the book.

As the cases of *Sobrevivente André du Rap*, *Capão Pecado*, and—to a lesser extent—*Diário de um detento* demonstrate, the Brazilian writing of exclusion challenges the institution of literature by undermining at least three main literary conventions. It is therefore symptomatic of social transformations currently underway in the country, which the literary critic João Cezar de Castro Rocha conceptualizes as a shift from a dialectic of malandroism and a relational order to a dialectic of marginality and a conflictual order: “Não se trata mais de negligenciar as diferenças, mas de evidenciá-las, recusando-se a improvável promessa de meio termo entre o pequeno mundo dos donos do poder e o crescente universo dos excluídos” (57).⁹

At the same time, however, authors and testimonial subjects such as André du Rap, Jocenir, and Ferréz clearly presume a middle-class readership of their texts. As previously mentioned, Beverley observes the traditionally vertical relationship between the writer and those who are written about. Even when the enunciating subject belongs to the marginalized group on whose behalf he or she speaks, this verticalized relationship persists if a bourgeois reading public is presumed. Ferréz implicitly acknowledges middle-class readers as his primary audience when he explicitly dedicates his book to those “que não foram alfabetizados e, portanto, não poderão ler esta obra” (11). His ideal reader is his own community, and the very impossibility of that ideal becomes the basis for a denunciation of social injustice. In *Sobrevivente André du Rap* and *Diário de um detento*, this assumption about the readership is revealed first and foremost through language. Both Jocenir and André du Rap articulate their narratives in such a way as to guarantee their intelligibility to a wide audience. This often involves the decoding of the prison slang that peppers their accounts. Jocenir explains, for example, that “[a] cela também se chama barraca, o chão da cela é praia, a cama por ser concreta, se chama pedra” (59).

André du Rap often narrates in the second-person singular, especially when describing the functioning of the prison. It is almost as if the reader were being initiated into prison life just like any other newcomer: “Quando você chega novo na cadeia, chama-se triagem. Você chegou, você

é triagem [...]. Às vezes, você é perseguido dentro da cadeia. Tem uns funcionários que testam você, 'Vamos ver se aquele triagem ali vai dar um ponto pra gente pôr ele no castigo.'" He continues with an impromptu explanation of some of the "house rules" for benefit of the reader as if doling out advice: "Tem que ser um cara ligeiro. Pegar os ritmos da cadeia. Na hora da bóia, não pode ficar transitando na frente do carrinho, na hora que o faxineiro tá passando o pano tem que ter respeito. Muitas vezes tá subindo painelão de bóia, você ajuda também" (49). The use of the second-person singular reflects both the dialogic character of testimony and the need to create a pact of complicity between the speaker and the reader. Doris Sommer makes a similar point when she observes that in *testimonio*, "[t]he interlocutor and by extension each reader is addressed by the narrator's immediate 'you' [...]. [The narrator] calls us in, interpellates us as readers who identify with the narrator's project and, by extension, with the political community to which she belongs" ("No Secrets" 152). Likewise, André du Rap's second-person narration is an effective strategy for attenuating the vertical distance between himself and his reader.

The verticality of the relationship between the narrator and the reader and the pact of complicity customarily established between the two parties may appear antithetical to Rocha's conflictual order, yet this is not necessarily the case. André du Rap, for example, declares that he has secrets that his middle-class reader cannot know: "[A]conteceram vários fatores que nossos códigos de ética não consistem em estar contando porque é coisa lá de dentro, nossa" (173).¹⁰ Sommer argues that testimonial subjects withhold information because we are incompetent readers. Moreover, what matters is not the content of the secret: "The question, finally, is not what 'insiders' as opposed to 'outsiders' can know; it is how those positions are being constructed as incommensurate or conflictive" ("Resistant Texts" 524–25). André du Rap constructs such a position vis-à-vis his middle-class reader, thus illustrating Rocha's contention with respect to the emergence of a conflictual order.

André du Rap, Jocenir, and Ferréz are far from being the first in Brazil to speak or write from the margins and exemplify a conflictual order, however. The Brazilian figure whose writing has most often been likened to *testimonio* is Carolina Maria de Jesus, an Afro-Brazilian *favelada* (slum-dweller) and single mother who chronicled her experiences of poverty in the pages of her now famous diary, *Quarto de despejo* (1960; *Child of the Dark*, 1962). Unlike traditional testimonial subjects such as Menchú, de Jesus penned that account and subsequent works herself, though her writing underwent substantial editing by the journalist Audálio Dantas. What is presented to the reader is a stark portrait of poverty, hunger, and disenfranchisement as the author recounts her struggles to raise three children by collecting garbage and scraps.

To a large extent de Jesus embodies Rocha's conflictual order both inside and outside the text. Amongst the descriptions of squalor and misery in *Quarto de despejo* we find pointed criticisms of politicians, the middle class, and even her fellow slum-dwellers. In one of the best studies to date on de Jesus, the historian Robert Levine seeks an explanation for why the author of one of the best-selling books in Brazil's history eventually regressed to a life of abject poverty. He finds one possible answer in her truculent personality and in her rebellion against the various benefactors and groups that attempted to co-opt her. Levine concludes that "Brazil's elite and middle class turned their back on her because she did not fit their image of how a protester from the slums should behave" (81). On the other hand, de Jesus's conflictual stance toward society at large is ultimately negated, at least in part, by her fate. For the historian, de Jesus's is a cautionary tale because in spite of her revolt against her condition, she is ultimately exploited over and over: by the journalist and editor Dantas, who is said to have capitalized financially and professionally at her expense; by the publishing houses, who allegedly failed to pay her royalties; by the elitist press, who mocked and depoliticized her, "evad[ing] the issues that Carolina wrote about: poverty, hunger, the fate of blacks and poor women" (82); and by the public at large, who viewed her as merely a curiosity. In the end, Levine notes, the Brazilian author herself had "incorporated into her own discourse about herself and her work the attitudes demonstrated so often by her critics" (74). He thus demonstrates that de Jesus's life stands as a cautionary tale above all because it illustrates Gayatri Spivak's position that the subaltern cannot

speak.

In another excellent study of de Jesus, Eva Paulino Bueno arrives at similar conclusions as Levine, albeit via a different route. Bueno challenges de Jesus's exclusion from the testimonial canon and persuasively argues that although *Quarto de despejo* differs from "classical" *testimonios* in important ways, it offers a unique contribution to this tradition as a representation of Afro-Latin American experience. And yet de Jesus's racial identity may very well hold the key to explaining the relative lack of attention that her book has received from the critics most associated with *testimonio* criticism, who have traditionally favored indigenous subjects. To this end, Bueno exposes a major blind spot of these critics when she points out the exclusionary nature of *testimonio* criticism and asserts that "the form of *testimonio*, as it has been commonly understood, does not accommodate Black experience" (267). This is a fundamental point to bear in mind since, like de Jesus, many writers associated with Brazil's *escritura da exclusão* are Afro-Brazilian. Furthermore, when André du Rap, Jocenir, and Ferréz decry social injustice in its many manifestations (poverty, hunger, violence, crime), they are denouncing a condition that disproportionately affects Afro-Brazilians. Moreover, together with Carolina Maria de Jesus, the representatives of the literature of exclusion herald an important departure from the traditionally vertical representations of Afro-Brazilian experience, of which some of the most influential include Jorge Amado's exoticized depictions of the *mulata* and the treatises of social scientists like Gilberto Freyre, whose classic study *Casa Grande e Senzala*, which seeks to valorize the African contribution to Brazilian culture, has been shown by Thomas Skidmore and others to actually reinforce racism. At the very least, then, narratives such as *Sobrevivente André du Rap*, *Diário de um detento*, and *Capão Pecado* send a clarion message that Brazil's marginalized populations are no longer content with being written about and want to tell their own stories, challenging hegemonic discourses about the subaltern in Brazil.

In the same way that Black experience has been shuttled to the side in Brazil, Brazilian testimonials have been largely disregarded by Latin American literary critics. Elzbieta Sklodowska, along with Bueno, attributes *Quarto de despejo*'s lack of status as a "foundational" testimonial text to the continued marginalization of Brazil in relation to Spanish-speaking countries, underscoring yet another facet of the exclusionary nature of *testimonio* criticism (199). It goes without saying that this tendency is highly problematic given that *testimonio* was originally celebrated as being more inclusive and democratic than traditional literature.

As George Gugelberger explains in his introduction to *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, critics have become disillusioned with *testimonio* of late, and not only for the reasons highlighted by Bueno and Sklodowska. For Gugelberger, the primary culprit lies in the institutionalization of *testimonio*, which has diluted the potency of its counter-discourse (3). By becoming the object of literary criticism, *testimonio* has been absorbed into literature, negating the very subversiveness that the genre was originally supposed to represent. As Alberto Moreiras writes, "in the hands of *testimonio* criticism, *testimonio* loses its extraliterary force, which now becomes merely the empowering mechanism for a recanonized reading strategy" (204). Moreover, critics such as Gugelberger and Moreiras have argued that, just as in the case of Carolina Maria de Jesus, *testimonio*'s subaltern subject ultimately does not speak. At most, the testimonial speaker makes us (the readers and especially critics) "visible to ourselves" (Gugelberger 3). Perhaps the greatest limitation of *testimonio* theory's applicability to recent Brazilian narratives, then, is its relative obsolescence. As Gugelberger has declared, "the euphoric 'moment' of *testimonio* has passed" (1).

As Brazil's *escritura da exclusão* continues to grow in popularity, theoretical models will undoubtedly be needed for approaching the texts produced from the margins. Spanish American *testimonio* criticism is but one of many possibilities. If nothing else, the case of *testimonio* provides a glimpse of some of the daunting obstacles to be faced by this emerging body of literature and those who study it. It remains to be seen whether the readers of narratives such as *Sobrevivente André du Rap*, *Diário de um detento*, and *Capão Pecado* will heed these lessons. For its part, the Brazilian writing of exclusion has an important lesson of its own for *testimonio*

criticism insofar as it affords the opportunity to redress the exclusion of Brazil and Afro-Brazilians from discussions of the subaltern in Latin America.

NOTES

¹By referring to this group of narratives as *escritura da exclusão*, I have chosen to follow the example of Luís Antônio Giron. It is worth noting that no critical consensus has yet been reached on what name should be given to this kind of textual production.

²I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer whose comments contributed greatly to the development of these two points.

³I am grateful to João Cezar de Castro Rocha for this important observation. I would also like to thank Professor João Cezar de Castro Rocha for his careful reading of and suggestions regarding an initial version of this paper, which was written during his graduate seminar, "Dialectics of Marginality," at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the fall of 2003.

⁴Traditionally, in mediated *testimonios*, the compiler or activator is even listed first or as the sole author.

⁵According to the official count, one hundred and eleven prisoners were killed in the Carandiru massacre, though unofficial estimates set the death toll much higher.

⁶In fact, Zeni originally intended to include André du Rap's own lyrics in the "Free Style (De improviso)" section. See Giron 37.

⁷I am indebted to João Cezar de Castro Rocha for this insight.

⁸The entire poem reads as follows:

Universo
Galáxias
Via-láctea
Sistema solar
Planeta Terra
Continente americano
América do Sul
Brasil
São Paulo
São Paulo
Zona Sul
Santo Amaro
Capão Redondo

Bem-vindos ao fundo do mundo. (13)

⁹Castro Rocha's fundamental argument about the emergence of a "dialectic of marginality" in recent Brazilian literature takes as its departure point two important studies on Brazilian society. The first is Antonio Candido's famous interpretation of Manuel Antônio de Almeida's novel *Memórias de um sargento de milícias* as illustrative of a "dialectic of malandroism" that has permeated Brazilian culture throughout history. The second is Roberto DaMatta's landmark book *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes*, which explores "the perplexity of a social structure in which hierarchy is connected with social 'intimacy,'" thus establishing a relational order that mitigates social conflict (DaMatta 146).

¹⁰In one of the best-studied instances of secrecy in Spanish American *testimonio*, Menchú tells Burgos-Debray, "I'm still keeping my Indian identity a secret. I'm still keeping a secret what I think no one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets" (247).

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