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Politics of Writing: Latin American Testimonio, Brazil's Literatura Marginal and the Question of Neoliberalism

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Politics of Writing: Latin American *Testimonio*, Brazil's *Literatura Marginal* and the Question
of Neoliberalism

Politics of Writing: Latin American *Testimonio*, Brazil's *Literatura Marginal* and the Question
of Neoliberalism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies

By

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Abstract

In the light of Latin American *testimonio* theoretical approach, which includes questions such as the cultural production under the intensification of neoliberal policies and the inquiry of the complicity between literary practices and the state as formulated by Rama in *The Lettered City*, this study examines the novel *Capão Pecado*, representative work of the writer and cultural activist Ferréz, and the potential relation to the formal elements of the former criticism. By thinking alongside John Beverley's case study on *I, Rigoberta Menchú's* testimonial narrative and Ferréz, prominent author of the contemporary production of *literatura marginal* and representative of the expression of the individual residents of the urban peripheries of the metropolises of Brazil, this study finds not only thematic continuities between the two discursive modes, showing that *testimonio* not only taught us important lessons and continue to provide a pathway to understanding the growing literary branch in Brazil, but also shows alterations in the patterns of relationship between literary practices, literary field, and the state.

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I – Introduction

One remarkable development in the Brazilian literary territory has been the presence of writers emerging from the urban peripheries. This improvement has opened a space for the expression of the individuals who have been historically underrepresented. From this growing branch, under the rubric of *literatura marginal*, arose its most prominent representative, the writer and cultural activist Reginaldo Ferreira da Silva, best known as Ferréz. Growing up in Capão Redondo, a low-income district of the city of São Paulo mostly known for its poverty and violence, provided the author a source from where he draws the characters and plots in his novel *Capão Pecado*. The value of lived experience associated with the author's literary work takes a form of a written document which often assumes a testimonial inflection generating tension between authenticity and legitimacy. This connection, presented as a collective representation, echoes the notion framed by the literary critic Angel Rama that in Latin America, since in Brazil in particular, literature has always been complicit of the power of the state. Therefore literary representation and representative democracy always appear to increase the gaps under the pretext of bridging it closer. Within the context, of Latin America, a context in which the written word has been mostly concerned with consolidating the relation between critical reason, historical model, and state supremacy, this indicates a need to reexamine the nature, purpose and the relation between those institutions and Ferréz's literary representation. Thus, considering Rama's assertion in his influential study in *The Lettered City*, the question I pose primarily is to what extent the critical approach taken by the North American Academia on Latin America's testimonial narrative, in particular the stance that puts into question the role of the institution of literature, is continued in Ferréz's literary representation? Within this context I examine Ferréz's fiction *Capão Pecado* in relation to written practices and the power of the state. The terms of this evaluation then allow

me to move on to the main question of this study, which is how Ferréz's literary representation interacts with the Brazilian institution of literature and the state. Along with this question I also investigate how the testimonial elements presented in Ferréz's fiction relate to the Latin American testimonial narrative of Rigoberta Menchú. In order to pursue this analysis, I first examine *literature marginal* and Ferréz and then its relation to the larger Latin American debate on *testimonio*, in particular John Beverley's theoretical approach on the testimonial narrative of Rigoberta Menchú.

The transformations that occurred in the political and economic scenario in Brazil in the last three decades, such as political movement towards democracy, extended citizenship, and income distribution have been reflected significantly in the cultural scenario. These changes promoted social inclusion -- as we see forward with the raise of the C class -- and favored the emergence of a type of literature produced at the margins of the Brazilian society. This is the context in which *literatura marginal* arises, as an artistic expression of the peripheries of São Paulo which aspires to create discursive and material spaces of empowerment for members of subaltern social groups. This type of literary production incorporates marginal art such as rap, funk, break dancing, graffiti, and clothing design, and also utilizes a program of sociocultural resistance. This innovation changed the classic way in which literature has been produced in Brazil. The merging of written words, music, and image into a book format created a hybrid form of literature. Ferréz's novels, as with the texts produced by the authors affiliated to *literatura marginal*, manifest concern with social themes and express the prevalence of violence and abjection as part of the everyday experience of the spaces of the urban peripheries of São Paulo. Themes such as these have been significantly underscored in Ferréz's novel *Capão*

Pecado, but no emphasis has been given to the contradictory aspect that emerge from these representations and what they imply.

In order to answer the questions posed by this study, I start developing my argument by situating Ferréz's literary representation in relation to the Brazilian literary field. Next I will analyze the use of violence and abjection as a strategy to counteract negative stereotypes and to create a positive model for the community which results ironically in evoking the very problems that the author sought to counteract. This unintended effect, I suggest, should not be overlooked or dismissed as a marketed form that assails the peripheries all while commodifying the space and its residents in an exotic product of the urban violence, but rather seen as an attempt at reducing the social fragmentation. Through the evaluation on the themes illustrated above, I argue for the necessity of searching for other forms of critical approach which are not restricted to the existing form, style, and rationale. In order to understand the contemporary literary production in Brazil, it is critical to accept the prevalence of social function and the representation of violence, and abjection. Engaging "negative communities"¹ as Williams points out "upholds the task of reading, of thinking, and, indeed, of articulating critical language as an active and committed transaction between the past and the future" (19). The occurrence of these themes ultimately speaks of the human experience existing on the face of the widespread dependency in the margins of a global economy.

¹ The notion of "Negative Community" as presented by Gareth Williams in the introductory chapter of *The Other Side of the Popular*, is viewed "as a potential condition of possibility for new constitutive relations between institutionalized thought, theoretical reflection, and the subaltern/posthegemonic specters of the neoliberal social order (19).

Next, I analyze Ferréz's literary representation, cultural activism, and the testimonial value associated with his work in light of John Beverley's theoretical approach on *testimonio* with the model of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* in the context of Latin America Subaltern Studies. The testimonial elements and many other aspects presented in Ferréz's novel, under the rubric of *literatura marginal*, have been earlier framed by Spanish American *testimonio*. Thus Beverley's theoretical approach allows me to show both Ferréz and Menchú's discourses coupled under the light of Rama's assertion on Latin American literature. However, despite the similarities shared between these two discursive practices, the theoretical approach on *testimonio* has not been thoroughly regarded as a system to understand *literatura marginal* in Brazil. A leading factor that discourages this connection is the use of languages itself; the official language of Brazil is Portuguese and not Spanish. Another possible reason has been the way in which the diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus's *Child of the Dark* was received by the critics associated with Latin American *testimonio* in the moment *testimonio* attained importance in U.S academia. Some Brazilian academics saw in the critics' lukewarm reception of *Child of Dark* an exclusionary side of *testimonio* which caused, as I perceive, a certain hesitation on the critical exchange between *testimonio* and Jesus's diary. By revisiting Carolina Maria de Jesus's episode I intend to disclose a threefold issue. First I contrast Jesus's *Child of the Dark* with *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, and *Capão Pecado*, to show that Jesus's diary neither belongs to *testimonio* nor to *literatura marginal* as assumed by the literary critic Bueno and by the writer Ferréz. The second is to show that in spite of the limits of the application of the theory to *literatura marginal*, the larger debate on *testimonio* -- which includes important themes such as literary representation and representative democracy and the critique to the neoliberal orientation that Latin America countries have adopted and intensified over the two last decades -- has provided and continues to provide

important directions on literary practices and theory. Although considering that writing, as much as any other cultural practice, has always been greatly involved in oppression as in the *Lettered City*; this discontinuity marks significantly the two discourses; for Beverley, *testimonio* stands as a farewell to literature. In contrast, Ferréz seems to present an alternative to this break, redefining it through the diverse integrations to *literatura marginal*.

The last of my three objectives is to show that by excluding Jesus's *Child of the Dark*, Ferréz's and Menchú's texts relate not only by their literary activism and ideological power, which retrieved a certain degree of social and cultural legitimacy to the authors and to the community they represent, but also for presenting the same dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion, which in both cases women are sacrificed. In other words women representation becomes problematized in both modes. In the *testimonio I, Rigoberta Menchú*, we see the restrict roles for women, and the appropriation of a type of voice to wield greater authority. In *literatura marginal*, we see the clear prevalence of male writers, and in the novel *Capão Pecado*, women's absence, secondary role and misrepresentation.

By presenting the situations above, I think I have provided a clear pathway to finally arrive at the question I pose for this study: that is how Ferréz's novel and cultural projects under the light of the *testimonio* theory relate to the historic complicity between the power of the state and the institution of literature in Latin America as in *The Lettered City*. I argue that Ferréz's novel under the rubric of *literatura marginal* shows an alteration in the relation between literature as practice, the literary field, and the state, in particular, in the racial and class domains, rather than the continuities of the *Lettered City* as postulated by Rama. Hence the space that Ferréz occupies in relation to literature in the context of neoliberal hegemony is not the same of Rama's *Lettered City*; he produces a kind a literature that criticizes the role of the state and

society as a whole while affirming another form of producing literature. This form not only disengages the ways in which literature has been produced and perceived -- as shaped in a certain format and style -- but it also associates itself, with other segments of the marginal art. This hybrid form of producing literature operates within and outside of the limits of the book itself, creating an all-inclusive related apparatuses.

Although Ferréz's contribution to the Brazilian cultural arena can be highly valuable, he also problematizes the representation of women. As I argue in this final chapter, even though Ferréz's literary representation does not evolve from a process of social differentiation, the exclusive form that the author adopts -- privileging a group over the other -- as a representative member he ultimately reproduces the modus operandi between the state and, the institution of literature. The main reason for the ascendancy of *Lettered City's* writers or *letrados* of the colonial and post-colonial periods which brings continuities as Rama noted lies in their ability to employ writing in largely illiterate and quasi-illiterate societies. The need to represent the members of Ferréz's social group emerges *per se* from the same social and cultural matrix and from the restrictions imposed on subaltern groups that prevent them from representing themselves. In this sense Ferréz's fiction not only arises on similar social and cultural ground, but also operates with comparable authority, speaking on behalf of the members at the center of the group, while stereotyping those at the margins.

Because of the aspects of inclusion and exclusion that clash on the same facet of Ferréz's literary work and cultural activism, he becomes a paradigmatic model of representation that matters to the public debate. In the cases in which representation is necessary and the "other" is involved, it should contain the perspective of the "other" to convey a more affluent and heterogeneous mode of expression, and to validate a space of inclusion.

Thus, Ferréz literary production, like many other authors affiliated with *literatura marginal*, indicate the need of democratization in both the process of literary production, and on the principles ruling the literary field. The promise of an extensive exercise of democracy in the literary field and practices as well depends on deeper improvements in the social and cultural sectors, which includes not only income distribution but also comprehensive education, and finally the recognition of the importance of diverse cultural expressions.

II - Cultural Activism and Differentiated Citizenship

Citizenship increasingly has become an important designation in Brazil's public sphere in recent years. The term has extended its significance since important reforms were implemented in the political and economic sectors in the country, such as the transition into democracy in 1985, the drafting of the new constitution in 1988, and recent improvements in the economic indicators. The gradual process of democratization that began in 1974 is finally installed, and Brazilians have started to understand the meaning of being a citizen. The vitality of the Brazilian civil society became visible for those who went to the streets and for those who watched on TV the images of millions of people demanding a free presidential election. Later, a new constitution that has as its central principle the promise to safeguard the rights of the entire citizenry, without exceptions, is sanctioned and the rights of Brazilians are extended. These advances towards democracy and a more comprehensive citizenship paved the way for Luiz Ignácio da Silva - a blue collar worker who became the leader of the labor party, to be elected the president of the country. Lula, as he has become to be known, seemingly embodies, through his personal and political traits, the very way by which lower income Brazilians have gained social and civil rights. During Lula's second term successful strategies to combat income inequality were launched and they propelled the emergence of 28 million people from poverty. Today, all Brazilian citizens have the same constitutional rights, but the enforcement of these rights is far from being egalitarian. Rights in the nation are associated somehow to material condition, an arrangement whose effect lies over a differentiated treatment for citizens. The promise for more egalitarian citizenships, and for greater citizen justice and dignity committed to democracy in Brazil, has been experienced with tremendous conflict among citizens. Its principle collides with prejudices over the terms of national membership (what constitute being a Brazilian citizen) and

the distribution of rights (Lehnen 2). However, Holston argues, “even the most entrenched systems can be disjointed by insurgent citizen movements” as in the case of Brazil where rights are also being transformed. (Holston 16) This insurgence is grounded on the poor conditions of life in these peripheries, particularly the hardship of illegal residence, house building, and land conflict. The dwelling circumstance led the urban marginalized population to “become new kinds of citizens, not through the struggles of labor, but through those of the city” (16). All these transformations have brought the matter of citizenship to the forefront of civil, social, political, and cultural discussions. It also led to what is the focus of this study, by combining literary production and cultural action, and also denunciation of differentiated citizenship which has produced a specific type of artistic expression in Brazil’s cultural arena.

Brazilian Democracy

The transition toward democracy in Brazil was not abrupt nor did it represent a clear break from the military government. With the adoption of a policy of political liberalization called *abertura*, starting in 1974, the military regime that had been in power for a decade, and had been providing the state protection against communism, corruption, and chaos, begun to have its legitimacy at risk as communism started to collapse. The military, which had been successful at the task of repressing those forces no longer had a visible or plausible enemy from which to protect the state.

This lack of purpose for the military government leads to what Mainwaring and Viola have characterized as two distinct phases of the transition to democracy: first, the period 1974-1982 which they call “transition from above” and after, the period 1983-1985 which was the

“transition through withdrawal” (33). The defining feature of the military regime in power between 1965 and 1985 was its attempt “to preserve social exclusion through the combination of economic growth with a varying level of repression” (Saad-Filho 12). They relied on the economic policy of import-substituting industrialization (ISI) which created new patterns of inequality, featuring the concentration of income and wealth. The power of the regime gradually declined after 1974 due to the political exhaustion of the government’s heavy-handed approach towards disagreement and the economic downfall caused by the failure of the regime’s growth strategy. Between 1977 and 1985 started a growing movement for democracy, not coincidentally, this change occurred when the elite in Brazil formed a consensus around a political democratic orientation. A severe economic crisis as well as eroded political internal support of the regime itself propelled the popularity for political change. As Skidmore argues, the military were involved in several financial scandals involving officers; they did not have support of public opinion for the tortures committed against civilians, and for the income discrepancy between the rich and the poor, even among the officers themselves (Skidmore 239-40). With all these dissatisfied sectors, a social movement called *Diretas Já* -- formed by the opposition leaders who stood up against the military government, and a political division within the regime caused by dissatisfaction of the new generation of army officers toward the role of the military as government, in parallel with the weakened leadership of the president Figueredo - led Brazil to democratization. Millions of Brazilians went to the street of the metropolitan cities demanding free presidential elections, and the “New Republic” was finally installed in 1985.

In 1990, with the election of Fernando Collor de Mello, and subsequently with the election of Fernando Henrique Cardoso to the country’s presidency, Brazil officially entered the

neoliberal era. Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on the state as facilitator of the market, continued and intensified the privatization of the economic and social sector. Cardoso's election in 1994 rebooted Brazilian democracy that accelerated privatization and market friendly policies. These measures guaranteed business a central place in the economy and society, strengthened its influence by expanding its transnational links, and weakened its adversaries, especially trade unions. As Weyland noted, by weakening collective action among less affluent sectors, these government policies played into the hands of conservative and centrist parties. Because "the center right thus 'won the war,' it saw democracy no longer as a threat" (118). In fact, Cardoso's market reforms put the left on a defensive side. Whereas the PT (workers party) had looked progressive and modern in the 1980s (Keck 1992), now the government used appropriately the neoliberal discourse to legitimize its reforms and depict the left as backward and lacking a comprehensive, credible alternative to neoliberalism (Dulci 1997). The Workers Party had difficulty responding to Cardoso's strategy. As Weyland elucidates, by defending employees dismissed from the public administration or from private enterprises, PT risked appearing as the protector of "special interests" that had enjoyed privileges not available for the large majority of the Brazilian poor workers (118).

The widespread acceptance of market reforms and electoral incentives moved PT to the center. In this way, PT, headed by Luís Ignácio da Silva, known as Lula -- soon to be the president of Brazil -- was no longer a threat to business and conservative politicians, but rather a "party to be regarded as acceptable for heading the government" (119). By the late 1990s the PT regained its popularity and came to be seen as a legitimate political force. This led other left and central right political parties in Brazil to coalesce with PT well enough to elect Lula. Therefore

Lula's successful campaign for the presidency in 2002 and the PT's takeover of government power in January 2003 did not trigger any threat to Brazilian democracy.

President Lula

Lula's presidency (2002-2010) represented a sociopolitical as well as symbolic division. Far from the social background of the former President Cardoso, Lula is the son of poor rural migrants, a man with little formal education, held the nation's highest political office. Lula's election crystallized the demand for inclusion of the socioeconomically barred population. And, for many Brazilians, his election symbolized a possible path from marginalization to material, social, and cultural agency.

The high expectation that took place in the country however was not fulfilled by Lula's remarkable achievement. The left in Brazil and abroad had abundant reasons to be dissatisfied with Lula's trajectory his party, and his government. The first two years of President Lula's administration had no significant difference between the social programs of the PT and those implemented by the previous administration. As Saad-Filho noted Lula maintained the macroeconomic policies introduced by the neoliberal administration led by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, based on flexible exchange rates, free capital mobility, inflation targeting, central bank independence, and fiscal conservatism. No privatizations were reversed, and there was no land reform (2). The restrict access to the land - which is concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy owners, and the lack of infrastructure and job opportunities in the rural areas of Brazil led populace to migrate to the limits of metropolitan areas. Indeed, João Pedro Stedile, main leader of the landless worker's movement, declared that the concentration of land property in Brazil increased during Lula's administration due to a set of inefficient policies. In the meantime the

government broadly continued with the agribusiness-oriented economic strategy. During Lula's first administration, his conservative fiscal and monetary policies prevented any significant improvement of the country's economic indicators. During 2006 elections the administration was crushed by a persistent succession of corruption scandals sustained by the media and political hysteria which suggested that Lula might be impeached or at least defeated in his reelection.

Nonetheless, this didn't happen and Lula adopted a different approach in his second administration and changed significantly. He recomposed his top team, decimated by the scandals. Even if the new appointees did not control monetary and exchange rate policies, they have been able to implement activist and distributive fiscal and financial policies. The administration pushed up the minimum wage gradually and consistently, and bet in a reasonably but ambitious growth plan focusing on investments in infrastructure, transport, and energy (Saad-Filho 2). In the higher education sector, fourteen new federal universities were created, staffed by thousands of new academics, to cater for 210,000 new students (2).

The government's social programs were also expanded, especially '*bolsa familia*', Brazil's conditional cash-transfer program which was the hallmark of Lula's time in office. The *Bolsa Família*'s plan and other social policies implemented by Lula's administration is being continued and expanded by the current president Dilma Rousseff (2010 to present) as a successful strategy towards poverty reduction. The effect of the programs has been considerably positive on income inequality, especially in the last decade when it decreased as never before in Brazil's history. Since 2003, lower-income Brazilians have gained access to the C class – the Brazilian lower middle class -- enlarging its base, entering the consumer marketplace, and expanding the growing capacity of the Brazilian economy. During the last ten years, approximately 31.9 million people ascended to this status. The incomes that propel the

emergence of the C class derive mainly from employment growth (67 percent); social programs, such as *Bolsa Família* (17 percent); and improvement in social security (15.7 percent) (Villaverde). Today, of the 201 million Brazilians, 105 million are part of the “C” class. Lula’s government has also played an important role in the political stabilization of Latin America and, in particular, supporting the left-wing administrations in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

Legal textbooks, law students, professors, and judges in São Paulo until today essentially acknowledge lawyer and abolitionist Rui Barbosa’s maxim about justice and equality coined by the end of Brazilian Empire (1822-1889): “Justice consists in treating the equal, equally and the unequal unequally according to the measure of their inequality” (qtd. in Holston 8). This phrase has been taken to mean that unequal treatment is a just means to produce equality by leveling or adjusting pre-existing inequalities. Thus, as Holston points out, Rui Barbosa’s justice may be a means of compensating inequality by legalizing privileges (11). So the success of the re-distributive policies in the form of social programs of President Lula should be seen carefully because it does not directly contest inequality, rather it accepts that social inequalities exist as prior conditions, therefore reinforcing differentiated citizenship.

For these reasons and also because of his modest origins, Lula’s popularity among the poor, and in the poorest regions, is enormous. Notwithstanding, Lula does not have the same approval among the elites, not necessarily for the concerns with differentiated citizenship, but above all, for two unattainable objections against Lula’s government; the expansion of citizenship and the loss of elite privilege across several fields, and the recognition of the poor citizens in the state apparatuses. Although modest, distribution of income has lifted millions of people out of poverty as I previously mentioned. As a result, as Saad-Filho pointed out, the

spread of consumer credit has allowed a large number of marginalized, modestly dressed Brazilians to visit shopping centers, to travel by air, to frequent super-markets and to buy cars. Brazilian roads and airports are clogged up, and their previous (generally lighter-skinned and invariably well-dressed) users complain bitterly about overcrowding (3). For the first time, these policy shifts have greatly increased the legitimacy of the state, and helped to affirm the right of ordinary citizens to a larger share of the benefits. Although the neoliberal orientation – with the emphasis on the state as facilitator of the market -- the meaning of citizenship changed from one defining the relation between the state and the subject into one describing a relation between the market and the individual (Lehnen 9). So the lower-income Brazilians who have gained access to the C class², have been, above all, mediated by market discourses.

In spite of this important accomplishment toward poverty reduction, Brazil remains one of the most unequal countries in the world. According to the 2012 World Bank report, the country has 18 million individuals still living in extreme poverty, which indicate that the Brazilian government emphasis on neoliberal policies is not only far from fulfilling its dream of

² Even though Brazil has a number of different concepts to categorize social class, the use of the letters A to E has been largely adopted by the business market. This classification is generally based on household gross monthly income. The term C class, largely utilized by economists, politicians, and by the press, originated from the study by the economist Marcelo Neri to the research made by the center of social policies of Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV), published in August of 2008 called “The New Middle Class”. The term C class generally refers to the ascension of a social segment in Brazilian society. The research shows, through quantitative methods, that the C class, composed of households with incomes between 750 and 3.229 US dollars per month, increased 22.8% between April of 2004 and 2008, reaching 52.7% of the Brazilian population, the equivalent of 98 million people. The report of FGV not only points to economic growth and inequality reduction, but also to a new profile of consumers to what has been called the Brazilian new middle class (Neri, 5 and Alcântara and Fonseca, 2).

equity, but also it is deepening the problem in “ what remains a deeply divided society.”

(Brandford & Saad Filho 2)

Brazilian Constitution and Citizenship

The process of expanding economic and political citizenship has emerged gradually with the transition of Brazil into democracy in 1985, and the 1988 Brazilian constitution that has as its central principle the promise to safeguard the rights of the entire citizenry, without exceptions. The charter opens with an introductory text that speaks for the social rights and justice, in addition to liberty, fraternity, security (social) well-being, development, equality, and justice as the guiding force of Brazil’s social, political, and civil organization. The Constitution’s opening paragraph posits social rights as the medium that will diminish and suppress social inequalities, which Brazil scores one of the highest in the world.

This rationale reappears in Article 3, which declares the eradication of various social and other forms of differentiation such as race and gender to be one of the hallmarks of the Brazilian nation. Several provisions guarantee the social rights of Brazilians. Examples include the payment of minimal wage to disabled individuals, as well as elderly people without sources of income (Article 203), and five days of paternity leave at the time of a child’s birth (Article 226). Amendments incorporated into the constitution after 1988 also seek to eliminate biases that foment and create social differences. In 1989, for example, (Law 7.716) criminalized discrimination due to race or color.

In today’s new geo-political configuration of the world, confluence of culture and citizenship has increasingly integrated the global political discourses. As Barbero points out, what the new social, ethnic, gender, gay and lesbian, religious, and ecological movements

demand is not only ideological representation but also socio-cultural recognition (Hemispherica 2009). In the same way, cultural rights have progressively been incorporated into the Brazilian debate about the formulation and implementation of citizenship at both national and global levels (Holston and Caldeira; Yúdice, Dagnino, “Citizenship in Latin America”; Armony). The concept of cultural citizenship comprises the rights to identity and the material manifestations surrounding it and therefore includes the right to produce, communicate, and access the many forms of cultural expression, such as literature, music, and religious ceremonies, among others. Moreover cultural citizenship also means the right to (self) representation and to information. In other words, nowadays cultural citizenship is about becoming “active producers of meaning and representation and knowledgeable consumers under advanced capitalism” (Isin and Wood 152). In Brazil, cultural production and performance play an increasingly prominent role in the reclaiming of citizenship. It is in the cultural arena, especially in the privileged domains of music and literature, where social problems are addressed and through which solutions to these troubles are sought.

It is in this scenario that *Literatura Marginal* and *Hip Hop* combine literature and other artistic expressions to criticize the social disparities that permeate Brazil’s peripheral communities both within and outside these neighborhoods.

Insurgency and the Culture of the Periphery

For most residents of the urban peripheries “exclusion of differentiated citizenship often appears to result less from legal and political causes than from personal failings” (Holston 20).

At the margins of the city, where precarious conditions of urban life and destitution of power is the rule -- generally perceived as a result of insufficiency of moral attributes -- emerges the first concept of rights. This formulation refers to the right of those who Holston calls contributor or stakeholder. These identities engage an agency of self-determination entirely different from that embedded in a view of rights as a privilege and state supplied labor rights (26). Under the old regime of citizenship, workers paid for labor rights, contributor rights constitute a different set, of new substance and ethical significance. Contributor residents claim legitimacy that they think they deserve on the basis of their contributions to the city itself – to its construction through their building of homes and neighborhoods, to the city government through their payment of and employment taxes, and to the city’s economy through their consumption. Contributor rights are, therefore, based on three identities unprecedented for most of the urban poor: property owner, tax payer, and mass consumer. There has always been a general perception that differentiated citizenship in Brazil has consistently conceived rights as commodities, but in the context of neoliberalism with its emphasis on the state as a facilitator of the market, differentiated citizenship deepens. Under the global regime, the meaning of citizenship “changed from one defining the relation between the state and the subject – or, even between private citizens – into one describing a relation between the market and the individual.”(Lehnen 9) In the context of neoliberalism, the communitarian code fades away and citizens, then come to participate of an “increasingly mediated by mass-media and market oriented discourses” (10). Thus, if a resident actively participates in the economy– even informal economy, this resident has the right to have rights.

The fundamental attribute organizing the package of contributor rights is that of homeownership, even when referring to the ownership of a house lot. This is a status that not all

Brazilians share, but which ambiguously maintains some elements of special treatment citizenship. For most people, it motivates both their claims and their duties in relation to the city. Their identities as taxpayers and consumers also develop around requirements of residential property, as they pay taxes and fees for the residential lots, buildings, and services and as much of their consumption consists in purchases for their homes. Homeownership in São Paulo's peripheries is extraordinarily high, varying between 70 and 90 percent. Even though squatters and renters are excluded of land property they account only 10 percent on average (Holston 26). The status of homeowner, tax payer, and consumption becomes an instrument of the resident's stakes in the city. This conviction, not only legitimates their demands for the right to the city. It also gives residents the sense that they are citizens of the city, for many a first substantive understanding of their citizenship and its agency.

These changes in attitude grant respect to the residents but not for the individual moral attributes. In this model he or she does not have to prove personal worthiness to an official or have it acknowledged by the state to find his or her rights. The conviction that urban citizens have earned their rights and respect is grounded in the process of building the city, paying its bills, and consuming its products. The equality of inclusion it demands is insurgent, even though it constantly bumps into the existing system rather than insisting on transforming it. It is insurgent because "*the right-to-rights* that citizens claim is not minimal" (31). This inclusion encompasses the totality of possible rights for those who have historically been denied the exercise of most rights. Therefore the recognition of the *right-to-right* of these citizens produced an extensive opportunity to remake Brazilian citizenship in a democratic society and it is within this rearrangement that emerges the necessity to formulate and organize the terms of a culture of the periphery.

As Lehen points out the connection between historically disempowered groups, such as the inhabitants of urban peripheries, and insufficient socioeconomic, civil and cultural rights, and the reclaiming of citizenship via cultural expression is increasingly prominent in Brazilian artistic expression, notably in contemporary fictional output, where citizenship and crisis have become prevalent themes (3 10 11). In fact, Brazilian literary production and sociocultural action denouncing differentiated treatment for citizens destabilizes the notion of subordination associated with the inhabitants of the peripheral areas of São Paulo. This action allows the reinterpretation of the periphery as enclosed apparatuses of cultural production, therefore challenging the ingrained notion that peripheral spaces create mostly violence and not art.

This is the context in which *literatura marginal* (marginal literature) associated with *arte marginal* (*marginal art*, which includes among its expressions rap, funk, break dancing, graffiti, and clothing design) emerges. *Literatura marginal*, as I present in the next chapter, are texts that denounce social neglect and voice a program of sociocultural resistance. As an artistic expression of the peripheries of São Paulo it aspires to engender discursive and material spaces of empowerment for members of subaltern social groups.

III - *Literatura Marginal*: Writing from Across the Bridge

The association of the terms literature and marginal fetches more than one interpretation. *Literatura marginal* in Brazil has traditionally been used to classify literary works produced and circulated at the margins of conventional literature. These texts, usually seen with skepticism in the eyes of the publishing industry, pose a challenge to literary criticism for the strong link it sustains to the movements of cultural resistance. In Brazil, as in all Latin America countries, publishing at the margins is indicative of an unofficial form of the lettered city. These forms generally indicate that the pre-modern, oral, and archaic worlds are still alive, as opposed to more conventional forms of literature, oriented to the Euro-American understanding of progress and modernization. The writer's leitmotif generally relates to what is peculiar to the individuals and spaces known as marginal. These literary works, however, have taken different forms in the last four decades, making it more difficult to distinguish its framework. In spite of a not-so-clear definition of the term marginal, the adjective was attributed by some writers to characterize their literary production. The adoption of the term marginal gained a more collective connotation with the publishing of the especial editions of the magazine *Caros Amigos*. This periodical, founded in 1997, is a recognized monthly Brazilian magazine focused on politics, social issues, and culture from a left wing viewpoint. It is published in São Paulo and distributed nationally by Editora Casa Amarela, and has a circulation average of fifty thousand copies. *Caros Amigos* presented not only analyses and opinions on the state newscasts, but also assumed a critical discourse and repudiation of the national and the neoliberal world in opposition to the ex-president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Zibordi 2004a). Marcos Zibordi, who has studied the editions published between 1997 and 1999, says the magazine sought to solidify knowledge on certain subjects by turning them into historical documentation (126). This attitude justified the

interest of the Editora Casa Amarela in publishing especial editions on themes that reinforced the alternative and formative character of the magazine. Thus, three special editions ensued from the partnership formed between Editora Casa Amarela and the writer known as Ferréz. The especial editions, entitled “Caros Amigos/ Literatura Maginal: A Cultura da Periferia”, were published during 2001, 2002, and 2004 and afterwards the expression *literatura marginal* slowly disseminated into the Brazilian contemporary cultural terrain (Nascimento 1).

Literatura marginal received special attention in the period from 1990 to 2006. This period contains a range of works that allowed the authors to categorize it as *marginal* like literature. These texts, in association with a sequence of cultural events, made it possible to historicize the emergence of this new movement of literature in Brazilian territory particularly in the metropolitan area of São Paulo, where most of the writers who participated of the editions Caros Amigos/Literatura Marginal lived and wrote about.

A growing anxiety around the use of the term marginal in juxtaposition to literature led the writers of the movement to discuss the application of the term. The first connotation that was brought out is that these texts are placed in the margin of the commercial production and circulation- whereas these books are equal to any similar goods produced and consumed in the capitalist mode, and circulated by means which oppose or present an alternative to the current publishing system. Another relation to these texts was that they are associated with a type of writing that refuses the use of an institutionalized language or literary values of a certain period seen in the *avant-garde*. And, the last meaning was the connection to the intellectual project of the author that is read in the context of oppressed groups, and thus it sought to reproduce this social perspective on his or her texts. The use of rubric *literatura marginal*, as elaborated by the writers affiliated, and by the editions of the Caros Amigos’ magazine, was also employed by the

newspapers to classify the literary production of the 1990s that generated three types of association. The first relates to the textual production of the writers residents of peripheral urban spaces. The second is in respect to themes such as violence, poverty, lack of cultural and social access, and the everyday life of the prison inmates. The third refers to the literary production of convict writers who narrate their experiences in crime and in prison. Regardless the type of marginality that relates the writer to literary mode- be it in relation to society or to the law, what is at stake is the interest in the distinction of the social experiences, the codes, and the cultural affirmation of the marginal subjects. Thus *literature marginal* not only extends as a rubric to those approaches characteristic of literary products – social status, themes, and prison inmates in the editorial market, but also as a particular type of cultural network. (Nascimento 11, 12, 54, 55)

Yet the employment of the expression marginal also denotes literary works produced by minorities, such as the poor, workers, women, homosexual, blacks, the indigenous, people with disabilities, and others groups. According to Nascimento, some of the writers related in one way or another to what *literatura marginal* encloses, such as Marçal Aquino, Fernando Bonassi, and Paulo Lins, do not accept the use of the adjective “marginal” as part of an ethic and literary engagement - mainly because it tends to limit the possibilities of representation to their work. However most of the writers affiliated as such employed the taxonomy *literatura marginal* to delimit the editorial marketplace (56).

One of the problems with the expression *literatura marginal* in Brazil is that the term was widely spread by the press in relationship to the military dictatorship during the 70's. As Hollanda noted, one exclusive characteristic of the artists of this period was the creation of means to produce and circulate intellectual property. In theater, for example, groups performed plays with very modest budgets. In the territory of music, traditional spaces came to exist in

what used to be called *Mambembes*. They were bands and singers who presented their shows in a simple and mobile stage. In cinema, humble cinematographic productions were projected in small theaters and in some of the bars of the *Vila Madalena*, a cultural promoted district of São Paulo. In literature, texts were circulated in little mimeographed books and sold in public spaces by their authors (Hollandia 1981).

Literature, as produced by the poets and writers of the 70's, sought essentially to subvert the values and tastes of the established order. They wanted to be perceived as disconnected from the "intellectualized" or "populist" productions. Their texts frequently assumed an ironic tone - they used colloquial language and profanities in verses on sex, drugs, and mainly the quotidian of the privileged. The books were produced by cooperatives connected to their own groups. Poor printing, blurred and failed letters, and inferior quality of paper were intentionally manufactured as part of these texts (Pereira 1981). Noteworthy in these marginal poets were middle and some upper middle class, students of public universities, and typically a connection to cinema, theater, and music activities. The means of production and circulation of these cultural practices were sponsored by friends and families of the artists. The books were edited inside of the circle of universities, bars, and cinemas attended by the same intellectualized middle class, where the books were sold and consumed. Pereira points out that these productions only echoed inside their own group for it reflected clearly social experiences that characterized privileged groups (99).

In 2001, the writer Ferréz wrote, organized, and edited texts of a literary project to the magazine's especial editions "Literatura Marginal: a cultura da periferia" which combined ten writers and sixteen texts. During 2002 and 2004, another two editions were organized by Ferréz and circulated by the magazine *Caros Amigos*, gathering thirty eight more authors. In 2000, when Ferréz published his second novel *Capão Pecado* (Capão Sin 2000), he already had used

the name *literatura marginal* to refer to a group of writers, who had published from the middle 90's on, with similar social background and whose production sought to reflect the social reality of underrepresented groups. These texts were written and gathered at the margins of the literary marketplace and also at the city.

Capão Pecado is a romance based on the author's social experiences as a resident of the district of Capão Redondo, located in the southern part of São Paulo. The reception of the book was not enthusiastic, nor was it endorsed by any of the well-known literary critics, but it did draw attention of the press that focused more on the sociologic aspects related to the production and less in the literary characteristics. Under this designation, Ferréz emerged as a cultural exception, often associated with one of the most violent places in the city. Critical reception pointed out three main aspects to Ferréz's work: use of colloquial language, supplemented with slangs – particularly those used in the urban periphery of São Paulo, exaggerated realism, and similarities with hip hop expression (Nascimento 15).

Despite the unenthusiastic reception, *Capão Pecado* allowed Ferréz to launch other projects. In 2000, he started to write for *Caros Amigos'* magazine and it was an important connection to the writer who subsequently became nationally known. This accomplishment also helped the author to get sponsorships, promote other writers with similar social backgrounds, and expand the project of *literatura marginal* in the magazine.

According to Ferréz, the idea of compiling texts produced by several writers residents of the periphery of São Paulo came about by the good reception of the literary romance by Paulo Lins, *Cidade de Deus* (City of God 1997). The story opens up a possibility of deconstructing the myth of “exception”, an appellation used to classify a type of literature conceived from a context

of violence and poverty. With the endorsement of *Caros Amigos* magazine, Ferréz not only brought new writers to public acknowledgement but also extended the visibility of the editorial of the three editions published in 2001, 2002, and 2004. The new contributors for those special editions were composed of writers, rappers, and graffiti artists connected to the movement of hip hop who were also members of the cultural movement created by periphery neighborhoods. Significantly, they were all residents of Capão Redondo, a district which until a few years ago, was known only for its poverty and violence.

Beyond the criteria that oriented the work of the editors with respect to the use of the term *literatura marginal*, two particularities presented in the second and third edition suggested an extension to the use of the adjective “marginal.” Along with the titles of each contributor there was also published the district of residency for each of the authors, or the prison in which those inmate writers served time in jail. That reference indicated that these writers might be inhabitants of the urban periphery or detainees of the prison system. The clue left by the three especial editions of the magazine *Caros Amigos/Literatura Marginal* is that the trademark marginal was being appropriated by the authors to categorize the author’s social condition and their literary products as well. This elaboration suggested a new movement in *literatura marginal* in Brazil. It indicated a differentiated type of literary representation within the contemporary cultural scenario.

The use of the nomenclature *marginal* always flustered many of its interrelated members. This expression generally relates *marginality* to the spaces and associated subjects. So the designation became, after all, a buttress of typecasts hardly associated to the strict meaning of “poor”. Despite the oversimplification of the term, the employment of the terminology *marginal* to literature helped to place the movement in the context of a contemporary Brazilian culture.

This application also allows cinematographic productions and music to appropriate this aesthetic as it relates to the experiences of a particular place and subject. In this context, *literatura marginal* participates in that expansion, such as rap music which conveys this aesthetic to the middle class, as is the case with the group *Racionais MC's*, or other rappers representing these social groups like *Gabriel, O Pensador*. This association goes through the production of films such as *O Invasor* (The Invasor), *Cidade de Deus*, (City of God), and *Carandiru*. Recently television also started to air programs with themes similarly related, such as *Turma do Gueto*, TV Record, ou *Cidade dos Homens* and *Central da Periferia*, TV Globo.

As Nascimento clarified, *literatura marginal* of the writers of the periphery belongs to a new generation of marginal writers. The expression *literatura marginal* of the writers of the periphery serves to distinguish the texts produced by the writers of the periphery from other texts published in the 1990s which could be categorized as *literatura marginal* as to distinguish from the literary works produced during the 1970s. The new generation of marginal writers refers to a group of writers of the periphery that in the early 2000 appropriated certain meanings of the term marginal, and through a collective cultural action, attempted to provide a particular perspective in conjunction with specific issues related to the literary scenery of their time. Another characteristic that differentiates the movements of *literatura marginal* in Brazil refers to the geographic space where they are concentrated. The marginal poets of the 70's were mostly in the state of Rio de Janeiro and the new generation is predominantly composed of São Paulo peripheral residents – nonetheless both states comprise the dominant cultural axis of the country.

Ferréz, literature and the hip hop nexus

Ferréz was born in the favela Valo Velho in the southern outskirts of the city of São Paulo in 1975. His pen name pays homage to two Brazilian folk heroes: the well-known Lampião (actually Virgulino Ferreira), a bandit leader from the northeast of Brazil and Zumbi, the legendary slave leader. Despite having little chance of a proper education, he became familiar with literary works. After leaving school, his jobs included selling brooms, doing odd jobs, and archiving workers lawsuits against their employers. He has since come to be considered a literary representative of the Brazilian periphery. Ferréz is currently the most well-known Brazilian writer and activist to emerge from the poorest areas of the city of São Paulo. His fictional works which consist of a collection of concrete poems, four novels, a children's book, an assortment of short stories, and chronicles of urban life, narrates the everyday experiences of the residents of São Paulo peripheries. With an "insider" perspective Ferréz narrates the stories, mostly set in the community of Capão Redondo, which, like many other low-income districts of the outlying areas of São Paulo, houses Brazilians that came mostly from the drought areas of the northeast part of the country who came to the city of São Paulo in search of better living conditions.

Besides being prominent, Ferréz is also known as a social activist, rapper, and entrepreneur. Utilizing art as social agenda, Ferréz, along with other *paulista* writers such as Sérgio Vaz and Ademiro Alves, known as Sacolinha, have become spokespersons for *literatura marginal* and the social segments this genre represents. The author is also actively engaged in the promotion and publication of other marginal writers. For Ferréz, culture contains the resistance to cope with material and discursive inequalities, and to transcend it. Such conviction has materialized in many cultural enterprises that he produced. In association with the *paulista* rap group Racionais MCs, he created a community library to serve the district of *Capão Redondo*.

More recently, in conjunction with the activist group *Projeto Periferia Ativa*, Ferréz launched a *brinquedoteca*, a play “library” for children residing in very poor neighborhoods. He also participates in the production and consumption of cultural goods, in hip-hop inspired fashion items, through his clothing line and boutique *Idasul*.

Envisioning the creation of a variety of cultural actions to combat inherited socio economic problems in this neighborhood Ferréz, along with a few his childhood friends and some of the artist’s residents of *Capão Redondo*, created the *Idasul*. It is an artifact-like store that operates as an organic type of business in the community. *Idasul* foundation was intended to contribute to the sense of local pride. The homonymous name of the fashion trademark and shop suggest the clothes and accessories produced and sold by *Idasul* clearly refer to the adjective *sul* (south). Besides giving residents a dose of appreciation for its place of residency, *Idasul* aims to give to the community a sense of unity. Inspired by the traditional Brazilian family crest, the phoenix crafted in the logo of the *Idasul* is projected to refer to the emblem of the descendants of African slaves while signifying the possibility of transcending adversity, as Ferréz has done through his artistic endeavors. Accordingly this symbol is thought to make visible the social and cultural aspects of the district of Capão Redondo where the residents come from and they also represent (Ferréz’s blog).

Beyond promoting a positive identity to the periphery, *Idasul* accessories and clothing line are entirely produced in the community. The organization supplies low-income residents and neighborhoods with access to cultural goods, which, as Lehen points out, will in turn give them a form of sociocultural identification (157). Ferréz’s clothing line, while providing employment for the community, is also a vehicle through which the artist can transmit his literary creations. Every item displays a textual fragment from Ferréz’s works, thereby presenting what he

perceives as a culture of the periphery. As Nascimento noted, this initiative is part of an effort that accounts to uphold the values of the community, distinctive tastes, and behaviors. Some examples are the preference for certain genres of music, ways of speaking and dressing (148). For Ferréz this aesthetic is meant to be acknowledged by other social groups other than his own. Although the project *Idasul* is partially designated for social affirmation and responsibility, it is also a business and as such seeks to be profitable. In connection with hip hop, this business is furthermore interested in identifying and producing the works of new talent of the national rappers, in particular those delivering political messages and with less access to the mainstream media. This production allows Ferréz to make a living and to be able to afford to write his texts while seeking a firmer ground within Brazilian literature terrain.

This activity, in particular, reproducing the neoliberal model while commodifying marginality all along with resistance, problematizes *literature marginal* representation. At first the strategy to create material and symbolic space to the marginal expression makes it difficult to evaluate its potential as an oppositional practice or as a new market strategy. This is a turning point between *literature marginal* and *testimonio* as we see in Chapter Four.

Noticeable too is that while *Idasul* acknowledges Ferréz's target readers (*Capão Redondo* residents to whom he believes to contribute to intellectual, cultural and critical formation), the cost of the books as sold in the main bookstores suggests that they are consumed by privileged leftist readers. This is another aspect that differentiates Ferréz from the marginal writers of 1970s; his texts reach readers of different social classes.

With all signifiers of the art design materialized in the stamp of the *Idasul*, the clothing, travels, and the texts can be read outside the setting of *Capão Redondo*. As Lehnen points out,

“Art (the literary text) enters the public sphere through the mechanisms of consumption (design)” (157). This exchange defies the idea of subjection implied in the “commodification of citizenship” (157).

The author is also an active contributor in the series “*Literatura Marginal*” printed by the publishing house LM in conjunction with *Ação Educativa* under the rubric of “*Selo Povo*” (People’s Stamp). *Selo Povo* aims to promote and make available books (to the general public who would not have the means to pursue books) written by contemporary marginal authors from Brazil. It has also republished books by those considered subaltern writers such as Lima Barreto and Carolina Maria de Jesus who have been appropriated by the national canon.

Ferréz activities still participate in many other cultural projects integrating different peripheral spaces of the city of São Paulo, such as the successful; *Sarau da Cooperifa*, and *Literatura do Brasil*. The project *Cooperifa*, organized by the marginal writer Sergio Vaz, is an encounter in which literature is the central activity. These events seek to validate the literary production of the participants into instruments of empowerment. Also the project *Literature do Brasil*, originally directed by the marginal writer known as Sacolinha who in association with Ferréz and Vaz, heads the production of the movement of *literatura marginal*. When the project was first presented to the local community, it aimed to stimulate reading practices, generate discussions, and motivate literary production thereby revealing local talents. Over time this project developed and became the *Associação Cultural Literatura no Brasil* which now includes many others advances, such as the defense and preservation of historic patrimony, congregation of Brazilian and International writers living in Brazil, grant literary titles, awards and honorees, promote literary seminars and courses, and promote cultural and social exchange among public and private sectors.

The transformations that occurred in the political and economic scenario in Brazil in the last three decades – political stability towards democracy, extended citizenship, and income distribution, promoted social inclusion which reflected significantly in the cultural domain. In spite of social improvements, the existing discrepancies increased under the global economy, and made more visible who has and has not access to the means of production and consumption. As a result, a growing tendency to fight social injustice and confronting society arose. Fighting these battles on this cultural ground, though, required the community participation and then, the accommodation of different forms of artistic expression, such as literature, music, graffiti, and other forms of the popular segment.

By engaging the community, the members of the group made it possible to win a symbolic battle against social injustice on two levels; representational, whereby locals can express themselves, and material; which allowed participation in the means of production and consumption. In this sense, the development puts into question the role of the existing institution of literature to the contemporary Brazilian cultural arena.

The desire of speaking for themselves of their own experience - the everyday life of the peripheries of São Paulo, the access to new technologies, and integrated use of media related to marginal arts has helped the authors of the peripheries to fictionalize their own reality. This action, legitimate by experience and until a certain degree, ratified by the community interrupts the state narrative that, as Spivak indicates, is the “absolute place where history is narrativized into logic,”³ (16). Williams also adds it is the “absolute place where logics are narrativized into

³As Williams wrote, both subalternity and the thought of subalternity appear to reside on the limits of representation. Both, in their own way, confront “the absolute place where history is narrativized into logic.” As such, subalternity is not necessarily to be immediately retrieved for

histories' but also allows the politics of culture to stop, and to begin another, perhaps otherwise (100).

In a country where the popularity of soccer and popular music dominates the impresario's attention, and literature and criticism are filtered by the perspective of the elites Ferréz's influence in the Brazilian cultural sphere is highly valuable. Indeed, making literature accessible to a segment of the society where the lack of formal education, limits reading and writing to a minimum level, this accomplishment is perhaps his major contribution.

Paradoxically, though, while the face of the peripheries rises at the center of the cultural arena as a class discourse, representing an advance in social relations, Ferréz's cultural activities can take an exclusive appropriation, which not only is reflected in his novels, but also put into question his ideological position as a group representative.

Despite the achievements, Ferréz presents, among other themes, a very critical viewing on the role of public education and public security – topics also reflected in his fiction that are usually seen as radical by other social segments. His action, which in practice seeks to reduce the social gaps by providing cultural support to the disenfranchised population, also can take a discursive turn into very restrictive pathways. His generalized criticism toward the role of the universities as the machinery of alienation and dismissive position in relation to other segments of the Brazilian resistance problematize the aspect of the boundaries that he ultimately seeks to counteract. Also, as a spokesperson of the peripheries of São Paulo, Ferréz usually steps on the country political-legal field as well. The writer and cultural activist are frequently called by the

significance. Rather, it is a question of the conditions of possibility and impossibility of critical reason and of the latter's relation to domination. (Williams 100)

media to talk about crimes involving members of the periphery and the city. His political interventions, though, consistently advocates for the marginalized individual, which not only generate a polemic debate over the causes of urban violence, also but split the public opinion on his one-side viewing on the conflict. It is within this context of a divided society that Ferréz finds substance to write his most representative work: *Capão Pecado* (Capão Sin 2000) that will be subsequently analyzed.

IV - The Bottom of the World: An Imagined Place

The ideological and aesthetic body of *literatura marginal* that shares other practices of cultural expression that narrate the oppressed urban population, remains an uncanny form to literary conventions. Similarly Ferréz's literary production and extra-texts do not directly correspond as well to the common signifiers of literary representation. Thus in order to examine Ferréz's novel, which closely relates to his cultural projects, it is essential, as I suggest, to have a broader perspective on his over-all literature. As part of the new social movements emerging as an unconventional form of identity politics, in which agency emerges as a radicalization of the neoliberal cultural policies, Ferréz's literature speaks indirectly with his social activism. Through this approach, in which art takes the face of politics, the author seeks to mobilize the residents of São Paulo periphery against victimization both from the outside and within the community. Ferréz sees literary practices and cultural activities as having the potential for social transformation.

Capão Pecado is set on São Paulo's periphery, in the district of Capão Redondo where the author and a population of more than three hundred and twenty thousand people reside. The first edition of the novel carries more than the story line that tells the everyday life of the dwellers, it also portrays photographs of Capão Redondo and its residents. One possible reason for the addition of the images is to introduce "at first glance," the place and its people by the local perspective. Just like the buildings where people live in the city, Capão Redondo has been also a restricted area. Instead of cameras and restrictive walls, what keeps people away is the adoption of local codes that limit the access of non-locals other than institutionalized groups (police, ambulances, fire department, etc.) to the peripheries of São Paulo. Capão Redondo is then, an imagined village for the residents living within the urban perimeter of the city; the

community is mostly known for its tragic events related to poverty and violence. The images of Capão Redondo as shown on TV (as of the peripheries in general) are none other than a depiction of a state of chaos and abjection, which not only infuse fear on the viewer but also help to promote a generalized negative view of the community.

Aligned with the objectives of *marginal literature*, the author wants to create a positive model of peripheries to counteract its all-encompassing image of violent, barbaric, and threatening ghettos that upset the urbanized residents of the city. This positive attitude towards poor communities living in spaces of social neglect gained popularity through publications such as Paulo Lin's *Cidade de Deus* (City of God 1997), Drauzio Varela's *Estação Carandiru* (Station Carandiru 1999), MV Bill and Celso Athayde's *Falcão: Meninos do Tráfico* (Falcon: The Children of the Traffic 2006), and Luiz Eduardo Soare's *Elite da Tropa* (Elite Squad 2005). The success of these books, in part, was driven by the release of the films based on those books. Indeed, the general intent of these books is primarily to denounce social discrepancies that lead to criminality, in particular drug trafficking within these broken communities. Although, unlike the written form, the cinematographic depictions, particularly *Cidade de Deus* and *Tropa de Elite* (2008 by José Padilha), which ensued from the books, deliver to the viewer rather a spectacle of violence, creating and reinforcing negative beliefs on the peripheries and, above all, its young male residents.

Also, the discourse of fear disseminated by the media sustains a troubled sociability in the private, affecting social relations, and public spheres, influencing social policies. All these reports focused on the threatening presence of the others – usually the subjects of the peripheries affect individual social relations. Violence and fear thus are cause and effect of social fragmentation. This disintegration reflects the debilitation of the public sphere and leads, in turn,

to the debasement of the peripheral areas of the city and its residents as characteristically disruptive. All this not only affects social relations, but also influences social policies (qtd. in Lehnen 130). For Benito Rodriguez Martinez, the mass media describes the peripheries residents, especially the youth, either as helpless victims that need the state protection or as “agents of their own violence,” responsible for their own demise (64). According to Martinez, the victim or the victimizer status serves to justify inoperative civil and social mechanism of citizenship. The films *Cidade de Deus*, *Tropa de Elite*, and *Última Parada 174 (Last Stop 174* 2008 by Bruno Barreto) employ voyeurism on the wretched that popularizes and vilify the favela all while commodifying the space and its residents in an exotic product of violence. Nonetheless those films do not – for the most part – have the transformative potential that is sought by *literatura marginal*.

The adaptation of those novels to the screen was targeted to a demand for crime and violence. Thus the depiction of the poor districts and its dwellers, as Ferréz has pointed out, do not represent the reality of the peripheries, instead a typecast to suite the fantasies of the upper classes.

For the author one of the problems with the cinematographic representation is the distance between the social perspective of the filmmaker and his subject: the “other.” Paradoxically while Ferréz and by extension *literatura marginal* put into question crime and violence as a form of exploitation of poverty, it also profits on the darkest side of the favela. So, it seems to be the point in which the treatment of the violence – despite the potential to exoticism presented in both forms, turns into a two way direction.

Indeed the experience of growing up in Capão Redondo, whereby Ferréz expresses his social perspective, and which constitute per se a distinctive element in Brazilian literary production, gives to the author a degree of legitimacy. The author defends that “lived experience” somehow is what distinguishes forms of representations. He also affirms that crime and violence are elements present in the everyday life of the peripheries of São Paulo, and so they exist as part of his fiction as they are in his life. As follows the scenes screened in the daily life of the author suggest that his fiction ensues from his reality. Likewise the quotidian of the peripheries as represented in his fiction, reproduce the “truth” that the traditional media seek to omit for its participation in the interests of the state and the private sectors. In order to properly represent his community, Ferréz uses his novels and cultural activism to both denounce the hardships of the people living in the peripheries and to inform that periphery they now can talk for themselves. One of the penuries that encompass his criticism toward the State is the poor treatment that the police impose on the residents of the peripheries. In these neighborhoods, impoverished workers fall into the blind spots of justice whereby simple lives account to be unrecognized as citizens.

In the novel, as in the author’s life, it is common for the police to invade the area and stop the residents while using violence against the people - verbal and physical. The following event is exemplary of this convergence. In an interview to local media, Ferréz discusses a disturbing operation involving the police and the death squad. He affirms that periphery dwellers are seen by the police as members associated with local crime. In this respect, the death squad mass shooting involving the murder of four young males in Capão Redondo, as described by Ferréz, exposes what Lehen calls the “dual (geographic and socio-legal) injunction experienced by its inhabitants vis-à-vis the official realm of the city and its authorities”(Lehen 125). The

attack of the death squad supported by the police sets Capão Redondo as a no-man's land, a domain where even though the "law is present (in the belligerent physical presence and performance of the police); it is invalidated by its apparent agents" yet all the chaos is mediated by the media (127). Ferréz accused the Globo TV network for releasing images of a war between the trafficking command PCC and the police that caused a frenzy resulting in one hundred and seven deaths. He concludes by saying that "if the peripheries continue to be neglected, the future will be like *Mad Max*; this terror reflects the terror that everyone feels. If you plant guns, you will harvest dead bodies, if you plant books, you will harvest libraries" (Folha de São Paulo 2006). Within this treatment, the physical and legal bodies are subjected to the law, police escorting the death squad invasion, but the law does not safeguard the rights of the residents as indicated by the infringement on personal rights and dignity.

Belonging to the city limits, but restricted from the bounds that divide citizens, low-income residents of impoverished communities become mistreated subjects of the middle-class, the police, and the drug traffickers. Accordingly these communities are subjected to two forms of powers: the official rule; which control the space of the city, and extra-judicial; pressured by the illegal commerce of drugs (*Pena Estado de Exceção*). Trapped between the tensions of these two domains, the periphery population becomes easy targets of several forms of victimization from both within and outside. The episode of the police and death squad in the search for the drug dealers, which resulted in the murder of the four young males demonstrates that Capão Redondo's residents as any other periphery occupy "spaces of visibility – for the action of the police and organized crime, and invisibility -- for the state protection" (Lehnen 127). In spite of the advances that Brazil has done in the political and economic field that conveyed to the extension of the citizenry, the law infringements in the favelas and peripheries indicates that

citizenship has not been recognized, and the lives of any resident can be terminated as potentially threatening –whether real or imaginary.

Many texts on the media addressing the area, of Capão Redondo state that one might not know Capão Redondo but the police know. As Caldeira points out, inside the cities of Brazil exists many other cities, as Mano Brown attests in the novel, “*da ponte João Dias pra cá é outro mundo, tá ligado?*” (From João Dias bypass in, the world is other), such as the gated communities where wealthy people live in Alphaville in São Paulo, and Morada do Sol in Rio de Janeiro. They occupied the metropolises with privatized systems of security for school, commerce, clubs, etc. For Caldeira this type of urban organization constitutes a severe form of social apartheid of which both sides in the city are very aware (87). Today security products represent ten percent of Brazil’s gross domestic product (Teixeira 76).

The country’s new pattern of urban wars has generated around forty-five to fifty thousand homicides per year. For many theorists the global economy stages in the center of this urban phenomenon. The new geo-politic order constituted an imminent field that is becoming more and more homogenized (Penna 188). Hence this new world, relying on universal values dictates that local specificities are no longer filtered by usual national mediation. In case of emergency, as in the war between the police and the drug cartel, the sovereign state command military action. It is like a coordinated effort of militarization to discipline a state of misery (188). This state of affairs resonates within what Agamben has identified as “state of exception”, a doctrine of emergency whereby the states are free to violate the rights of protection of its own citizens. In its practice, the action of the state, with the support of the conservative Brazilian population, weakens the principles of democracy and human rights. The very presence of the death squads,

for example, reenact the period of the dictatorship in Brazil, echoing in local levels of what has been postulated as a justified war.

As Negri and Hardt have argued, all strategies addressing social struggle in today's world have to take into account this specific communicative relationship, all the while dissolving identity and history in a completely postmodernist fashion (34). As follows, all strategies concerned with the global economy, both progressive and conservative that attempt to return to the national frontier, are doomed to fail. The Empire is basically the "present political constitution" that came to stay; to counteract though, is necessary to appropriate of its affirmative potentialities. From the vast arsenal of legitimate forces one can have moral intervention (35).

Indeed, through moral intervention, *Capão Pecado* reclaim a measure of legitimacy – civic, social, and cultural – for the marginalized individuals that the novel depicts. In this context, the fiction reclaims – through insurgency, legitimacy for São Paulo's peripheral communities, both within and outside these neighborhoods. This intervention occurs by making visible the reality of the three hundred and twenty thousand residents and workers of Capão Redondo's existing conditions.

In fact, the injection of the community in the cultural sphere is also manifested in the photographs and texts written by rappers such as *Mano Brown* and other names affiliated to *literatura marginal*, exclusively to the first edition of *Capão Pecado*. The extra-characters not only account for ethical support, but also reveal the agency of the periphery and the collective aspect of this cultural enterprise. Even though this supplemental material had been suppressed in its second edition, these elements considerably changed the way the novel reads. Through a local

perspective, the thirty seven photographs that accompany the book portray areas of Capão Redondo and the residents as a form of validation of the representative work. Some of the images pose the author and the members of the *Idasul* as integrating into the community landscape. By contrasting playfulness, and lack of appropriate housing and public spaces, the existing photographs give an individual and human quality to the text. It also seems to ratify the commitment of a collective project whereby residents can actually see themselves and validate a project they co-wrote. The inclusion of the extra-literary elements, in part, is to oppose to a type of representation placed in the literary tradition, constructed on the grounds of an exclusive perspective where the popular subject depiction can be absent, secondary, or stereotyped. In effect, one epigraph seems to play with expectation on literary work as produced in the periphery: “Dear system, you might not read this, but at least you saw the front cover,” this idea alludes to the lack of education that limits lower-income resident’s access to cultural properties. As a result individuals cannot fully access the spheres of citizenship regardless of its extended coverage. The statement also indicates that the system, as Lehnen notes “is not paying attention to the cultural artifacts that are emerging from within these communities” primarily because favelas are perceived generally as producers of transgression or passive users of bourgeois consumer-culture (137).

Changing this perception involves; among other strategies, pointing out the various causes of violence that surrounds the doomed romance of Rael and Paula. Thus, in the context in which different treatment offered to citizens is the norm, cultural insurgence generally takes the appearance of violence. It shows a broader perspective on the ways that other groups (in the same urban perimeter) live, and which violence is at the stage. Despite the fact that the novel seems to convey a hopeless view of the community, the texts knitted in local fiber dialogue with

the periphery larger social context and propose an alternative to the dreadful landscape that appears in the novels. In this sense these texts produced by *literatura marginal* in general, echoes Holston's proposition that the most entrenched systems can be disjointed by an insurgent process of civil, political, and social agency arise in the fissures of differentiated citizenship. Indeed the opportunity to this breakage is found at the core of the new Brazilian Constitution of extended citizenship.

This move around the legitimacy, involving the question of citizens or quasi-citizens in *Capão Pecado*, converts into means of empowerment as other cultural initiatives organized by Ferréz as well. Characteristic of the new social movements, emerging as a form of identity politics, Ferréz's literature speaks indirectly with his social activism. Through this approach, in which art takes the face of politics, he seeks to mobilize the residents of São Paulo periphery against victimization both from the outside and within the community. Nonetheless, in the task of counteracting dominant representation, which usually profits on the violence of the poor, Ferréz's novel simultaneously contests and reinforces negative stereotypes of the residents of the peripheries.

The use of violence in the novel, like the use of violence in the media and cinema, problematizes representation, which is complicated by the seal of authenticity that encompasses the novel. Accordingly, the story of an unknown place and its residents unintentionally create a disagreement hard to conciliate. At a first reading it seems to betray Ferréz's project to create an affirmative identity to periphery and its residents. *Capão Pecado* tells the story of a place or places where people struggle for survival. As Lehnen points out, these spaces are not inhabited by the working class that hopes to transcend its social spatial abjection (133). Rather, the social

aspirations of Capão Redondo populace are lowered to not be held in the conflicting web between the police and the drug lord's powers.

With a focus on the increasing violence and social fragmentation that permeates the life of people in the peripheries, *Capão Pecado* emphasizes a state of emergency which mistakenly evoke the problems that they thought to counteract; the dominant representation of the crime and violence associated to the residents of the periphery.

Under this viewing, crime and violence in the novel are apparently crafted to meet the market demand for cultural products, responding, somehow the appeal of the cultural industry. Even though the violence in *Capão Pecado*, the media, and cinema's representation can make it all indistinguishable from each other, it can also take a different tone when viewed under Ferréz's larger cultural project, a project that speaks of a nonviolent form and agency of the community. In fact, a broader view on the Ferréz's literary production also takes an uncommon way form in Brazilian cultural discourses. One way of looking at these texts is to disqualify them for its incongruities. Another is to look at them as a possibility of engaging a larger and more complex discourse, and that requires new ways of thinking literature.

As follows, the novel on one level reproduces a dominant discourse on the periphery residents, on the other, contrasts crime and redemption, calamity and solidarity, and unrelenting efforts to reorganize the place above its chaotic reality. Since violence is systematically plotted as a device that relates cause and effect, all sectors involved are brought out to the surface. Thereby the story provides several examples of how public assistance affects the private life of the residents making it still more difficult for the vulnerable population, to accomplish the simplest tasks, which ultimately convey to a perception of failure. From all deficits in public

infrastructure, schooling is the most regarded one in the life of the characters. Even though unemployment and informal employment figures have improved in Brazil the people with little or no formal education do not qualify for these jobs. In the meantime, the propagation of the peripheries grows in parallel with informal activities. With few labor options, many young people no longer perceive professional life as essential to the individual affirmation, instead they try to find different ways to access consumption, such as the character of Matcheros, a young man who takes part in the informal economy and has an unclear source of income. The vagueness on Matcheros' activities suggests some sort of commerce that borders illegality. Limited job opportunities also present crime as a viable alternative to the people threatened by financial constraints. This is the case of the brothers Will and Dida as well as the young Testa, who gets involved with drug trafficking and ends up getting killed by the dealer Burgos. Later Burgos is also killed by the police who shoot him in the head and dump his body into the river without registering the indictment. The early death of those characters denounces the full brutal cycle of the life that awaits young males. The body of Burgos joins thousands of other bodies in the periphery that amount to a market sustained by the city and maintained by police violence and corruption. Other thread that relates crime and violence as part of this cycle, is the lack of social and family structure. Through the case of the character of the father, Damião, we see that many children are raised apart from their parents. Damião spends the day at work and afterwards long periods of time on public transportation, making it difficult to see their kids by the end of the day. Children such as of Damião are left at home with the TV on and without parental guidance. For the protagonist Rael, the "chains and balls" that imprisoned the slaves in the past -- of which most residents descend -- "were replaced" for TV programming. Watching TV without supervision indicates that these children are predominantly oriented by the mass media which

greatly emphasize consumption. With no access to social norms and communitarian ethos, TV market oriented discourses becomes the role model for the deprived children. As a result, this relation reproduces an organic state of anomie and perpetuation of this culture.

Another social component that contributes to this state of anomie in *Capão Pecado* is the use of alcohol that breaks the families' relations as we see in many characters of the novel. In order to show a more comprehensive side of the occurrence in the peripheries, Ferréz dedicates a whole chapter to this topic on the character Carimbé. Without formal education and barely employed, Carimbé drinks, first to escape from the everyday boredom of his job and later for being fired from the job he desperately needed. Carimbé then engages in a series of events and misunderstandings. When confronted, the adult man cannot explain or speak for himself. Due to his simple mindedness and modesty, the world becomes overwhelmingly frightening to him, Carimbé then drinks in the expectation of dealing better with it. As in the case of many other characters in the novel, Carimbé also does not find a way out of this ruthless cycle. Excluded of an active system of production, he offers his own body to the consumption of alcohol. The character's psychological and physical deterioration symbolize his state of impoverishment; his despondency isolates him from society and from his family that loathes him. The character of Carimbé, depicted as representative of peripheral communities, reflects both social and individual destruction.

In the same direction, criminal inhabitants do not become criminal without a reason; the social structure somehow facilitates the access to this culture, as Negrodo says "*uma bomba pra você ja foi programada entende? É como uma cilada...mas, repare, talvez seja melhor seguir a honestidade.*" (A bomb was armed for you, get it? It's like an ambush...but, look, perhaps it is better to follow the honesty alley) (Cp 110). The author seeks to alternate the living and

psychological condition in which the criminal characters were raised with individual choice. In one way or another, the characters are cautioned against the hazards of getting involved with the culture of violence.

In the literary field, criticism tends to disqualify, to restrict, or to exalt the phenomenon of *literatura marginal*. Those approaches, sometimes polarized, do not pay much attention to the specific aspects of the texts, such as the texts' hybrid, and contradictory elements. According to Eslava the elements that define the practices of *literatura marginal* are not consistent. The variety of practices and specific realities are shaped into a collective project (46). As an example, despite the similarities employed in the use of language in these texts, they reveal substantial differences. The colloquial use of language in Paulo Lins' novel, *The City of God*, ex-resident of the favela, is closely tied to his academic trajectory, while Ferréz's writing, also bound to the peripheries, is closer to an autodidact. The same can be said about the author Fernando Bonassi, whose body of work consists of marginalized subjects, although in his stories prevail a more elaborate use of language. Thus the multiple forms that emanate from *literatura marginal* are neither uniform, nor are the respective signifiers of literary construction.

The ideological and aesthetic body of *literatura marginal* accommodates other forms of cultural expression that also related to the themes of the oppressed urban population. While maintaining a dialogue with predominant cultural mediations of the peripheries (which includes rap, funk, break dancing, graffiti, and clothing design), *literatura marginal* also maintains an overt social program (47). Both *literatura marginal* and *art marginal* must support one another. Together, these artistic segments seek to provide space -- material and symbolic -- to validate the presence of the members of the communities in the Brazilian cultural arena. As a group they

contest the absence of traditional and civic bonds, the individuality of each segment of art, and seek for ways to reconnect these ties within the ruptured terrain of the metropolis.

For the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, to counter-act the effects of neoliberal globalization, the social groups struggling against intense inequality must use any non-violent means against late capitalism; which include those invented by the late capitalism (Sousa Santos 62). The resistance consists in transforming an unequal exchange into a shared authority exchange.

As a result counter hegemonic globalization from *below* may include movements and organizations of varied of segments that are related to the interest of the peripheries of the world system. In this arena, for example, Sousa Santos includes art, literature, and critique that must arise in the search for alternative cultural values that is, at the same time, able to accommodate differences (Sousa Santos 11). For Negri and Hardt, the possibility to revert the ontology of the imperial social control is to transform it into an ontology of production of collective freedom. (Negri and Hardt 46f).

Along with these guidelines, Ferréz integrates art, literature, and community work, which he firmly believes to contain the potential for social transformation. Having art as a tool, Ferréz has spoken to national and international audiences while actively promoting and publishing marginal writers, both from Brazil and from Latin American countries such as Mexico and Argentina. The author's interaction with international writers and audiences provides an example of what can be called "globalization from below" which, as I aforementioned, operates as a counter hegemonic form of globalization.

For Ferréz, the cultural sphere where artifacts and symbolic values are negotiated is an important battlefield to resist unequal material and discursive exchanges. For Hines and Lang, the global economy maintains a solid strategy to protect multinational companies and international banks against the capacity of the local economy. The best response to these crises, they say, is to adopt a new protectionist approach to managing economies based on the (re)introduction of trade barriers. This should be done with social and global equity, a sane economy and a sustainable environment (Lang and Hines 120). The counter hegemonic model as presented by Hines and Lang can also be found in Ferréz's project, *Idasul*; a business model that not only employs and supplies low-income residents with assets with social cultural identification, but also create a space of opportunity that resist passive consumerism.

Significantly, the integration of those different artistic segments does not restrict the space of *literatura marginal*, on the contrary, for its cultural and sociological significance, literature plays a central role in the advancement of those developments. The accesses to literature and practices as well become still more critical with the states' emphasis on global policies as opposed to domestic concerns, which reflect the education deficit, in particular in the poorest segment of Brazilian society.

While the branch of *literatura marginal* grows apart of literature itself, all those projects involving Ferréz and community speak out of a need. The violence that emerges from Ferréz's fiction, a key element of *literatura marginal*, clearly express a necessity of searching for other forms of critical approach which is not restricted to the form and style. In order to make sense of the contemporary cultural production in Brazil, it is critical in accepting the prevalence of social function and representation of violence and abjection which ultimately are exemplary of the human experience existing in a state of non- privileges.

Although in the face of the literary recognition for multiple cultural expression of the subaltern groups that, as Dalcastagnè wrote, are “artistic representation who provide access to a richer and more expressive perspective than the one provided by the political discourse” it is critical to ask if this space of literary expression, based on the recognition of the lived experience, is being equally provided to the existing minorities that constitute subaltern groups (20). This question will be analyzed in the next chapter in the light of the literary critic Angel Rama and his study on the lettered city.

The testimonial aspects presented in literary texts of *literatura marginal*, which Ferréz is representative, generally ensue from personal experience and relate largely, but not exclusively, to the spaces of urban peripheries. This singularity has been earlier framed by the Spanish American *testimonio*. In the following chapter, I examine Ferréz’s novel *Capão Pecado* under John Beverley’s theoretical approach on *I, Rigoberta Menchú* testimony narrative. In spite of distinctive aspects of each mode, *testimonio* can provide a valuable pathway to understand how the author, by confronting the institution of literature, reclaims a certain degree of visibility social and cultural to his texts and by extension, to peripheral communities.

It is important to emphasize that regardless of the different meanings that literature generates, which is not the objective of this study to outline, Menchú’s testimony signals the exhaustion of the lettered city, a long time existing articulation between the state and literature in Latin America. In other words, Menchú’s testimony itself, in the face of the political economic transformation that occurred in Guatemala during the 1980’s which saw, for example, the end of the cold war, the displacement of the revolutionary left, globalization, and so on, emerges as a culture practice of subaltern population affecting the notion of historical condition in which literature has been written. Even though Ferréz does not write testimony in the sense of Menchú,

he reproduces *testimonio* as a strategy. Therefore, because Menchú through her narrative allows us to see the failure of literature, as Beverley pointed out, we are able to see this effect of that failure in Ferréz's narratives as well. Ferréz does not reproduce literature in the traditional sense, he does not write like the classical authors, because the traditional relation with the state has been altered and so has literature. So rather than reproduce literature in the classical sense of the bourgeois novelists, he does something else; Ferréz writes as a collective form of cultural resistance. In contrast to the individual style of conventional literature, he associates written practice with other artistic cultural practices in the production of apparatuses to fight the tension between globalization and resistance.

V - Menchú's Solidarity and Ferréz's Marginality

The testimonial elements contained in the contemporary textual production in Brazil, under the rubric of *literatura marginal* has been formerly identified to the Spanish American *testimonio*. In this chapter, I examine in what sense the activist and writer Ferréz's representative texts and cultural associated projects can be analogous to the large Latin American debate on *testimonio* based on the groundwork of the Spanish American *testimonio* theory. Also, to what extent these literary works employ a critique to the neoliberal orientation that Brazilian politics and economy has adopted and intensified over the last two decades. Finally, how Ferréz's novel and cultural projects relate to the complicity between the state and the institution of literature that Angel' Rama's calls *The Lettered City*.

Guided by the need to decolonize hegemonic discourse and rewrite a narrative of the nation capable to include subaltern individuals, South Asian scholars organized in 1982 the Subaltern Studies group. The founding members were the historians Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee, both with Marxist orientation. Also joining the group were David Arnold, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Gayatri Spivak among others. This attempt at speaking of another version of the India history was anchored in Post-Colonial Studies, an interdisciplinary field with strong influence of poststructuralist theoreticians, such as Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan. Post-Colonial Studies centered on the question of colonialism and identity echoed in other authors such as Said, Bhabha, Spivak, Hall and Fanon. As follows those intellectuals sought to rewrite the history of the subaltern groups since their experiences as postcolonial subjects, were marked by displacement. They sought to intercede official discourses of the elites in the process of construction and reaffirmation of national identities and retrieve historic recognition of the peasants in the formation of India.

Following the path created by those South Asian scholars, the Latin American Subaltern Studies group, founded in 1993 by John Beverley, Robert Carr, José Rabasa, Ileana Rodríguez, and Javier Sanjinés, using those fundamentals sought to redefine the main paradigms by which the subaltern was studied in Latin America. This turn was marked by political changes that saw the dismantling of authoritarian regimes in Latin America, the end of the cold war, and the end of the politics of utopia. In addition the era also witnessed the displacement of revolutionary projects, the processes of re-democratization, and the new changes created by the effects of the mass media and transnational economic activities. All these developments called for new ways of thinking and acting politically. In this viewing Marxist critiques of the subaltern came to incorporate postcolonial theory into Latin America. This juxtaposition brought about new perspectives on the legacy of European colonization, and North American imperialism as well, by that time hidden behind the myths of equality.

This is the context in which the Spanish American *testimonio* emerges. A type of narrative that, unlike the guerrilla vanguard of the 1960s and 1970s, did not address the question of state power, but that remains as a model for new forms of politics. Now *testimonio* is part of the emerging culture of an international proletarian, popular democratic, and subject in its period of ascendancy (Beverley 10). In the need of theorizing *testimonio* as a new genre of literature, Beverley chose Menchú's book as a prototype, which was first published in 1982. The book was written during a period of significant tension and violence in Central America. The revolutionary upturn and the initial overthrow of the Somoza regime in 1978-79 in Nicaragua caused at that time a bid for power in both Guatemala and El Salvador. In this way, *testimonio* echoed the genre of guerrilla largely associated with Che Guevara's *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*, which were designed to get support in the mode the Cuban Revolution as

theorized by Régis Debray in *Revolution in the Revolution*. At that time Régis Debray was married to Menchú's interlocutor, the Venezuelan anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos, and Menchú herself was affiliated with one of the major Guatemalan guerrilla groups, the Ejército guerrillero de los Pobres. It was in this context -- in the affirmation of Mayan indigenous culture -- that *testimonio* emerged under what Beverley calls "identity politics" (11). This mode becomes emblematic of the new social movements that follow the displacement of the revolutionary left in the 1980s.

After the English translation of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* came out in 1984; Stanford University added the book to its reading list of Western culture tracks. It quickly spread to many other campus' reading lists as well where it remained a controversial focal point of multiculturalism in the United States.

Beverley's terms to define *testimonio* as a genre came out in his essay "*The Margin at the Center*" which was published in 1989 and contributed to the widespread discussion of *testimonio* that followed in the U.S. academies in the 1990s. Beyond the question of identity, Beverley was concerned with understanding the involvement of people like Menchú and her family in the armed struggle in Guatemala. The Guatemalan indigenous groups had been, on the whole, "impervious or hostile to earlier guerrilla activities carried out basically by ladino (that is, Spanish-speaking, non-Indian) Marxist activists in the 1960's" (12). The author sought to register the possible controversies that the indigenous question and the leftists eventually would bring out. Yet, the inquiries that headed these studies relied less in the concepts of history and culture of the grand narrative of Western modernity and more in what Guha calls, "the small voices of history." Even though Subaltern Studies originated in Marxism, it also proposed a fundamental revision of classical Marxism, particularly around its insistence on a singular

historical teleology (William 80). This standpoint also allowed Latin America to overcome the barriers of dependency theory which limited Latin America's cultural exchange and agency to the Latin America's economic relation.

While developing a theoretical approach on *testimonio*, Beverley was interested in both postmodernism and subaltern studies. His viewing was that both approaches mourn and reflect critically on the reasons for the breakdown of the belief of the radical social change in Latin America and the United States; ideas that he associated with the protagonists of the genre. *Testimonio* was Beverley's entry into Latin American Subaltern Studies between 1992 and 2002. While his book on the genre is placed within the disciplinary boundaries of literary criticism, *testimonio* itself and its potentials in the face of the social movements, defy literary classification. And yet the problem of the boundaries can be even more complicated when progressive or left-nationalist literature is represented by writers who "represent" marginalized groups. Such mediations, as one would argue, could be the case of Elisabeth Burgos compiling the narration of Rigoberta Menchú. This relation not only raises questions on the borders of literature, genre and subgenres, placement, authorship, but in part it echoes a type of mediation very known in Latin America that the Uruguayan critic Angel Rama called *letrados*. In his influential book of Latin American cultural criticism in the 1980s, *The Lettered City*, Rama asserts that since the colonial period written language, in a way or another, had been complicit with the state and the institution of literature in Latin American.

A great part of Beverley's quarrel on *testimonio* is to considerably reduce the function of the interlocutor and focus on the authority of Menchú's as narrator. In addition, Beverley and Zimmerman, who were writing a book on Central America wars, conclude their chapter on *testimonio*, *Literature and Politics*, asserting the position of *testimonio* in relation to literature. It

states: “while literature has been a means of national-popular mobilization in the Central American revolutionary process, that process also elaborates or points to forms of cultural democratization that will necessarily question or displace the role of literature as a hegemonic cultural institution” (13).

Beverley, as other protagonists of *testimonio* during the Cold War years, regarded the mode as narrative closely related to the national liberation movements and other social struggles inspired by Marxism. Today, detached from the bipolar world, *testimonio* is read and debated in the context of the global economy, which made it possible for Latin America to advance the historical boundary in power/knowledge relations. Also, the proliferation of channels of communication which crosses “cultural boundaries has the effect of dismantling old forms of marginalization and domination and making new forms of democratization and cultural multiplicity imaginable” (William Rowe and Vivian Schelling 1).

Following these transformations, the traditional notions of power relations and mediation between culture and state have also been fundamentally changed. The economic system of the last three decades configured another form of power relation, one that “multiplies the centers and border-crossing networks and that is no longer necessarily national” (Balibar 51-52). It is within the geopolitical transformations that the founding statement of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group emerges. A statement that calls for new forms of intellectual engagement after the collapse of the national-popular in Latin America, together with its “problematization of the center-periphery model of dependency theory⁴” (116). What became important in this view, as

⁴ Dependency theory became popular in the 1960’s as a response to research done by Raul Prebisch who found that increases in the wealth of the richer nations appeared to be at the expense of the poorer ones. The traditional neoclassical approach assert that poorer countries were late in coming to solid economic practices and that as soon as they learned the techniques

Gareth Williams indicates, is the group's call for self-interrogation, the intellectual's ability to negotiate the new limits, the new borders, and the new possibilities of the global cultural economy: to engage in discourses of critical exchange between North and South that do not reproduce neocolonial epistemologies and historical forms of intellectual paternalism (William 82).

This disposition entails the production of a new meaning, a new critical language to cultural exchange at the current time. As suggested by the words of the founding statement: "the defining technological feature of this phase, permitting among other things, the circulation of texts and cultural practices from areas...the U.S multiculturalism debate of Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* is a small but significant example of the new ways in which cultural objects are created and circulated" (116).

For practical purposes, *testimonio* coalesced as a new narrative genre in the 1960's and further developed in close relation to the movements for national liberation and the generalized cultural radicalism of that decade. In Barbara Harlow words, *testimonio* is explicitly or implicitly part of what has been called "resistance literature" (qtd. in Beverley 31). In Latin America, where *testimonio* received special attention and development, it became recognized as a genre for two related reasons. The first was the 1970s decision of Cuban's *Casa de las Américas* to begin awarding a prize in this category in its annual literary contest, and the second was the

of modern economics, then poverty would begin to subside. However Marxists theorists viewed the persistent poverty as a consequence of capitalist exploitation. And a new body of thought, called the *world system approach*, argues that the poverty was a direct consequence of the evolution of the international political economy into a fairly rigid division of labor which favored the rich and penalized the poor. (Ferraro, 2008)

reception of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) and Miguel Barnet's *Biography of a Runaway Slave/Autobiografía de un cimarrón* (1967).

Published in English in 1984, Rigoberta Menchú narrates her own experience as a Quiché Indian woman who speaks for the Indigenous groups of the American continent. Menchú had survived the genocide that destroyed her family and community and decided to confront the systematic extermination of the indigenous by telling of her experiences and the violence she witnessed. Menchú is also an illustrative case in which the adoption of techniques from another culture allows her to retrieve recognition for her own people and culture. By appropriating the Spanish language, the Bible, and trade union organizations, she is able to localize in the ladino's written texts the words she can use against their original users. As Burgos-Debray noted, Rigoberta Menchú has "chosen words as her weapons" that allowed her to cross the new borders of the global cultural economy (Menchú, 20). Menchú's adoption of Ladinos' techniques and adaptations helped her fight against the oppression of a dominant culture and economic inequalities. Later, when she finally gained international recognition for the work she had done and consequently for the group she represents, for which she was awarded the Nobel Peace prize; Rigoberta Menchú became a social activist and spokesperson for her indigenous group in Spanish America, speaking at national and international forums. This alternative is, perhaps an example of what Souza-Santos's calls subaltern cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitan solidarity. In his terms, to counter-act the effects of neoliberal globalization, the social groups struggling against intense inequality must use any non-violent means against late capitalism; including those invented by the late capitalism to betray its promises of freedom, equality, and discrimination (Souza Santos 62). The resistance consists in transforming an unequal exchange into a shared authority exchange. So the after-effects of Menchú's *testimonio*, with its emphasis

on the sociopolitical and cultural activism all-encompassed by the written word, operates as a model that allows marginalized communities to fight against social and cultural isolation. The visibility of Menchú's *testimonio* - which sought to raise social awareness, is extended to the international foundation Rigoberta Menchú that offers material and symbolic support to the community. The existing foundation, rooted in defense of the human rights and recognition of the indigenous groups, also provides developing programs for the indigenous community. On this groundwork the social activist and Nobel peace prize recipient Rigoberta Menchú enunciates new possibilities of power relations in the global Latin America.

Almost a decade later a similar strategy is also being used by the writer and social activist Ferréz under the rubric of *literatura marginal*. The association of literary texts, cultural projects, and NGOs help the author, and by extension the community, to win an emblematic battle against racism and social neglect in the Brazilian contemporary urban cultural arena. An important difference should be highlighted from the beginning, even though Ferréz claims his place at the margins of literature, he does not withdraw from it but instead keeps writing. Menchú's *testimonio*, however, claims no position in relation to literature. In Menchú's case, the written word applies as a way to address her message. *Testimonio* though presents itself as rather a critical and alternative practice to literature and its failure as Beverley argues. While Menchú's narrative lacks the very instrument of literature - the written word as a legitimate form of the official language, the peasant member of the indigenous Quiché's group carries the potential for transformation that lies at the heart of humanities. Thus the distance that separates Menchú from the exclusive form in which literature operates inside of the general field of humanities - relying greatly on the official language's agents and mediators, puts into question literature as an institution that maintains privileges and promotes alienation. In this way Menchú's appropriation

of the written word performs an act related to a cause while Ferréz presents himself as an author who also performs in the publishing market. Even though both actors carry the potential for social transformation, the testimonial aspect in Ferréz's texts is renewed, resorting to a strategy able to cope with the intensification of the market policies, which modified the way in which literature has been produced and perceived.

The cultural activism with a strong political orientation that relate both modes became the means by which underrepresented groups such as the Guatemalan Indigenous Quiché and the African Brazilian slave's descendants counteract the polarization of wealth and misery that reached unprecedented levels with the dismantling of the former nation state model. Ferréz in Brazil, following Menchú in Guatemala by reproducing the model, which in Balibar's words, translates into a multiplication of centers, forming a network rather than the core areas from modernity. And it is the reverse movement which projects elements of the former periphery into the "central" societies (51-52). Considering the points of convergence in Latin American contemporary literary production under the global economy, it is possible to say that Brazilian *literatura marginal* has been highly influenced by *testimonio*. The distinct elements of the *literatura marginal* can be viewed, as I suggest, as a strategy to overcome the aspects of exhaustion of *testimonio*.

In this chapter I consider the defining elements of both *literatura marginal* and *testimonio* literary modes in Latin America subaltern studies. I center my argument, particularly on Beverley's distinction between testimonial narrative and documentary fiction and its significance to the assessment of "truth" and the question of the mediation. Thus, in order to understand the relation between these two discursive modes, it is critical to reevaluate the case of Carolina Maria de Jesus's *Quarto de Despejo* (Child of the Dark). In revisiting the case I intend

to deepen Bueno's claim on *testimonio* critics' lack of attention on Jesus's testimonial narrative which I believe is essential to the continuity of exchange of the cultural production between Portuguese and Spanish languages. I will then contrast Ferréz's fiction, as a discourse of inclusion, with Angel Rama's statement that literature has always been an exclusive practice in Latin America.

Despite the different ways in which these modes relate to literature, one of the common elements between Menchú and Ferréz is that both dialogue within and outside their groups which allows them to borrow techniques as a form of provision to the dissolution of the nation-state taking place in the course of the past few decades. Neither *testimonio* nor *literatura marginal* question the existing economic system per se. Indeed, they reject master discourses and dominant maps of interpreting the world. In both modes the narrator(s), who act social and politically, are associated with the quality of speaking the "truth" which is bounded by their lived experience within their group. This value lends to the narrator, who lives and acts in a real social context, a representative worth. Either in third person or eyewitness, both narrators speak of the collective struggle, in rural or urban areas, relating to historically marginalized population. That involves violence in a variety of forms such as the oppression from totalitarianism, social neglect, military or police violence, racism, and international capital. Noteworthy, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and *Capão Pecado* as many critics perceive, employ techniques of mainstream writers such as horror, violence, poverty that have been exploited as an "active" form - as popularized by films made with historical ethnic undertones, or "passive" documentaries and advertisement portraying images of wretched groups as victims of an unfair social system. Although the use of the representation of the violence and abjection handed by the group's members, Menchú and Ferréz have not been differentiated from the standard techniques used on the broadcast images

that circulate on the screens; they are often seen as reproducing the same strategy. Under this viewing Menchú and Ferréz's use of violence to convey their messages would emerge from the same necessity of the Moghuls, employing techniques of voyeurism on the wretched, which victimize and vilify all the while commodifying marginalized communities. This notion, which seeks to justify the use of violence associated with the value of authenticity added to their texts, problematizes the question of representation. Although it is important to bear in mind that violence for both authors is a common element that dictates the everyday life of both Menchú's Guatemalan's countryside and Ferréz's urban periphery, the representation of violence and abjection becomes a predominant component of their cultural expressions. The same cannot be said in the cases in which violence and poverty are only projected, because it often lacks the very rationale of a lived experience that ultimately leads to the understanding of a particular problem inside a particular group. In the case of Menchú violence is used as a form to affect and mobilize the readers for her cause. In Ferréz's fiction, violence is used as part of a strategy to raise social awareness. In both cases, violence is not organized outside their everyday lives, but as part of the social world they inhabit.

Thus, by appropriating the written word, which has been traditionally placed in the hands of authoritative elite, who historically has spoken for the minorities, *testimonio* and *literatura marginal*, in different ways, implicitly challenge the "legitimacy" sealed by the institution of literature and allows the entry of the subaltern into literary territory.

The correspondences between these discursive modes are not only contextual but strategic as well. Menchú adopts alternatives such as the use of the Spanish language, stories from the Bible, and trade unions to fight social injustice. Ferréz, in the same way by refusing literary convention as the only form of writing, writes his fictions in the oral tradition of the

language. Another common practice used by both is the way they dress for public speaking. Menchú dresses in indigenous costume and Ferréz in his *Idasul* hip hop style jersey, as a symbolic reminder of their groups. Also they both created NGOs to work in solidarity to their causes. These are some of the approaches used in the ascendancy of these type of literary productions. This combination of social and cultural action towards a particular segment are validated nationally and internationally. However, the similarities between these two modes should not hide major distinctions that cannot easily be compared as Beverley has formulated.

In Beverley's terms, *testimonio* translates literally as the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense. It is to say that, in Spanish *testimonio*, the legal connotation implies that the narrator is conveying an honest message and that the reader is thought to respect it. In Beverley's account, the narrator predominantly speaks in first person and has a certain urgency to communicate a problem. In many cases because the narrator is not someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer, the production of *testimonio* generally involves a tape-recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is an intellectual, often a journalist or a writer (32).

In order to evaluate the presence of the "reality effect" -- as Beverley refers in his critical approach to Menchú's *testimonio* -- in Ferréz's novel, and Menchú's testimonial narrative, I do not distinguish Menchú's authorship from Ferréz's. In other words, I accept Beverley's argument that the narrative itself is entirely composed by Menchú despite Debray's editing and shaping the text. As Beverley defends *testimonio*, it is not a "reenactment of the anthropological function of the colonial or subaltern 'native informant,' of which Spivak, among others, has written" (39). Indeed, for Beverley, Rigoberta Menchú is rather an "active agent of a transformative cultural and political project that aspire to become hegemonic in its own right," it is to say, someone

“who assumes the right to tell her story in the way she feels” than to ratify the notion that subalterns only can speak through institutional mediation (92). In this way, I regard both authors with comparable authority and autonomy regardless of the use of the mediator. Notwithstanding, the representative aspect of the acting demands further attention and I will return to it.

In spite of the fact that Ferréz’s novel, *Capão Pecado*, falls under the category of literary fiction, his writings have been viewed as a written documentary. Indeed Ferréz’s personal experience of growing up in Capão Redondo, which reverses the assumption of the bourgeois author, traditionally related to the novels, gives to his text “the sensation of experiencing the real” or “reality effect” that Beverley suggests. Nonetheless, this effect arises not primarily from the use of the first-person witness-narrator as Beverley advocates, but by the interconnection between fiction and reality in which the former is intrinsically attached to the latter. The author’s experience is not distinguished from the resident who lives and takes part in the lives of the community.

The familiarity of the author to his topic, cultural activism, and discursive practice, gives the effect of “reality” to Ferréz’s fiction. Unlike Menchú’s first witness narration, Ferréz narrates in third-person, oscillating within an omniscient narrator, and the resonance of the author voice among several others. In spite of Ferréz’s narration and fictional story, an indistinctive line between fiction and reality persists. Each of the four chapters in his novel is introduced by other marginal authors. These writings, with the photographs, function as local testimonials that seek to ratify the events narrated in the chapters. In this way these extra texts not only reaffirm the link between fiction and reality, but also add to the novel a seal of consent of the community that it represents. One of the highest points of this communal and testimonial element in the novel is the introductory text of the rapper Mano Brown, leader of the band Racionais MC’s, the most

prominent voice of hip hop in Brazil. The relationship between Ferréz and Mano Brown, *literatura marginal*, and hip hop also remains both within and outside the novel.

The notion of “fiction-reality” also appears in interviews and speeches on other media. As an example, the characters in Ferréz’s fiction are named or nicknamed after neighboring residents of Capão Redondo, which as the author states might not be living in this world by the time he finishes his book. But if they are, as we see, they would be signed in their text and comments in Ferréz’s blogs and social media. Other examples that dissolves the line between real and fiction is, particularly for residents of the city of São Paulo, the geographic borders with Capão Redondo itself. Although Capão Redondo remains as a large and imagined place for the city’s residents, the immediacy of the city access to the peripheral district makes it very real. The very existence of Capão Redondo can be seen in traffic signs, from the top of the buildings and overview cameras, as the stories shared by its poor worker residents who usually work in the houses of the medium and upper class city residents as well, and TV news and media reports, all these make Capão Redondo a real place.

In lectures and interviews readers and viewers can trace in his commentaries passages that closely relate to the situations in his novels. In *Capão Pecado* for example, the character Burgos decided to shoot and kill his brother who had contracted HIV. Burgos says he did not want to see him going through the pain and suffering caused by the progress of illness (83). Years after his novel had been published, during an interview with Antonio Abujamra to the talk show *Provocações*, Ferréz is asked to talk about his experience with love out of control, to which Ferréz recounts the passage of a person he knew who shot and killed his relative because he had contracted HIV. According to Ferréz, it was an out of control, but still an act of love, because he could foresee his relative’s outbreak coming and decided to give a happier end to his story.

The notion of realism in which *Capão Pecado* is anchored is not undermined by the fiction and third person narrator. On the contrary, it empowers the author not only with the idea of telling the “truth” - sustained in interviews and the statements, but also allows him to address more complex questions involving the everyday life in the peripheries. Unlike Menchú, Ferréz contrasts violence and individual choice, which somehow speaks to a more diverse sensitivity of those experiencing the everyday life of the oppressive metropolises. In Menchú’s book, indigenous community codes help to keep the unity of the group. The oldest members teach the youngest when and how to do their chores according to the tradition of the group, as we see in the planting ceremony with its use of certain social protocols. The lack of public services in the place where Menchú’ lives forces the group to develop mechanisms for coping with the absence of the public infrastructure while maintaining a relationship with the structure of the city. They do this by sharing the tasks with members of both the family and the community as well. Later the group, guided by family members and assisted by the community, also finds ways to fight poor labor conditions and injustice. In contrast, the inefficient public infrastructure of the poorest urban areas of São Paulo affects deeply the private lives of the residents. While Menchú’s group finds out a common way to deal with the limits of the urbanization, the peripheral dwellers of *Capão Pecado* - inside the proper limits of the city but excluded from the system of citizenship, suffer with an ineffective public system. In addition, the residents of Capão Redondo lack the social and family ties of Menchú’s community. This aspect, associated to other social factors that rely heavily on public infrastructure, such as inadequate or lack of utility services, public transportation, schooling system, and public spaces, reveal the image of a fragmented community. The hardship in the peripheries, not only points to the scattered face of communal work, but also develops into other problems, such as in the case of the alcoholic Carimbé who

was ejected from the productive system, and ended up having to join his family who despised him. In another case, crack addicted Testa, died before he could understand the codes of the crime culture in which he lived. We are also reminded by the character Damião of the kids who are left at home and guided by the market discourses of the TV, replacing the absent parents who spend a long time at work and on public transportation trying to get home. Also the case of the gloomy Matcheros who spend his days playing video games and consuming fads, which points to a failure in the relation between production and consumption. Thus fiction allows Ferréz to combine violence and individual choice under urban chaos and the state of anomie that involves the residents of the peripheries.

Very aware of the use of Manicheism and stereotypes written by travelogues or/and produced by the cinematographic industry, Ferréz, paradoxically engages in a similar scheme in order to show where the production of violence starts in our society. In this way the use of fiction serves not only to disrupt current discourses of extended citizenship and point out the consequences of social neglect, but also to communicate that the periphery now can not only speak but fictionalize for themselves. Even though such appropriation relies on the articulation of the apparatuses that have been long played into the hands of the elites, the author's intention is not to reproduce traditional representation, but offer a view from inside the periphery of São Paulo. Ferréz is very critical on the ways in which the media in general depicts poor workers, usually from the perspective of those who have not experienced the "real" scene. For that reason they tend to be too critical and sometimes even romanticize the lives of people in peripheral areas. Accordingly the author makes the conscious decision of criminalizing some of his characters to show a larger image of the crime culture. As follows Ferréz gives to some of them a

non-solidary attitude towards the community, but at same time reinforcing the expectation of the readers on a deranged population.

As in the case of the protagonist Rael, who embodies the values of the traditional romance keeping the promise of redemption and transcendence, but when put under trial the hero does not resist the local entrapments, and enraged, kills his rival. But before going to jail where he is later murdered in his cell as part of a commissioned crime, Rael is turned in to the police by the neighbor who heard the gunshot. This episode illustrates both, the subversion of the representation of the traditional hero and also the author's refusal of concealing the fragile image of social fragmentation. Fiction also offers other possibilities, such as acquainting the reader with a subject who is perhaps more representative of the group. Matcheros, Rael's best friend, is the one who survives and keeps the promise alive. Matcheros is depicted as a shallow and uninformed young man who has a suspicious source of income, possibly bordering illegality. In this way the alienated Matcheros, who has the ability to negotiate with local structures, is the one who carries the communitarian ethos. He ends up employing members of the community and they are presented as having the prospect of a hopeful future. The emergence of Matcheros suggests perhaps a more "authentic" hero to the existing circumstances of the characters.

While Ferréz's novel attempts to problematize the everyday life of the characters on the periphery engaging in a presumed perception of the residents of the city, Menchú's non-fictional approach presents a clear and linear understanding of the trajectory of the indigenous in Guatemala. Although her choice does not take inconsistencies away from her text, such as some of the events she claims to have witnessed, Menchú's description of the violent death of her brother complicates the distinction that Beverley maintains between *testimonio* and fiction. David Stoll's charge on Menchú's inaccurate description of the Guatemalan military violent

actions against the indigenous people defies Beverley's claim in which the first person witness contributes thoroughly to the "reality effect." For the purpose of this study, is not essential whether the events were eyewitness accounts or told. Either way, it does not reduce the urgency of Menchú's description of the struggle of the indigenous people and also the challenge that *testimonio* imposes to the institution of literature.

Menchú's testimony and objective narration also attenuate the obstacle related to languages. Within her own and many other indigenous groups the struggle of the identity is not only an economic and political struggle, but also an epistemological one. As Menchú wrote while taking the position as the leader of the organization, the fact that she found most distressing was that the tribes could not understand each other because they spoke many different languages. In addition, as she wrote, the reality was that most indigenous people at that time did not know how to read or write (189). It might explain in part why Menchú's chose of an objective approach, since fiction involves interpretation which could complicate and perhaps delay or reduce the immediacy of delivering her message. In fact, in 1982 when her book was first printed in Spanish, the Guatemalan Civil War was still taking place and she could then try to mobilize support for her political cause.

Ferréz, on the other hand, despite the high rates of functional literacy in São Paulo peripheries, which involves deficiency in the ability to interpret more complex texts, is favored by the unity of Portuguese, the official Brazilian language spoken in the whole country. This singularity comparably helps Ferréz to reduce, until a certain extent, the educational deficit. So by modulating different uses of language, from formal to local slang, the author seeks to go through existing social barriers. Another tool used in the novel that facilitates the reading, is the employment of a literary technique strongly associated with action movies. The adoption of a

documentary-like form in the novel, centered on describing the events of everyday life rather than alluding to them, makes the text more fluid as well.

Noteworthy Menchú, like Ferréz, regardless of the way they chose to tell their histories, both have clearly written and co-written their narratives to appeal to the upper class readers. Menchú's written narrative is not aimed to the people she directly represents, which is evidenced by the problems with language and literacy rates among the indigenous' groups. Despite the literary dislocation or perhaps because of it, after the English translation of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* came out in 1984; the book was added to the reading list of Stanford University and it quickly spread to many other campus' reading lists as well where it received special attention for its significance to the field of humanities. Finally, as mentioned earlier, she went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992.

Ferréz somehow also struggles to reach the subject-character of his novel. If on one hand, reshaping language adds a certain familiarity to the text, as the other, the novel itself complicates it. Novels have been traditionally associated with the bourgeoisie; "the rise of the novel, correlated...with the rise of the middle class" (Warner 25). On the other hand, although not less problematic, is Menchú's testimonial form, which uses biblical parables to teach indigenous groups to fight social neglect and to justify the use of violence. By doing this then some degree of interpretation is employed. Having the "Bible as a necessary weapon" as Menchú says, extrapolates Beverley's discussion on "experiencing the real" by suspending interpretation. Accordingly what their distinctive approaches, fictional and non-fictional, reveal is the convergence of their social and political aim. Both actors' affirmation and commitment, in accordance to their own collective struggle, intend to maintain a dialogue -- oral and written -- either within and outside of their communities on national and international levels.

With all analogous aspects these categories contain, the application of Spanish American *testimonio* theory has not been thoroughly applied to the textual production of Brazilian marginalized authors as one would reason. The first and perhaps foremost obstruction to the flow in literature and criticism exchanges between these cultures is the use of languages; Brazil's official language is Portuguese and not Spanish. But language barriers are not the only issue inhibiting the interaction between Brazil's *literatura marginal* and Latin American Spanish *testimonio*. Another objection, which in varied degrees has been debated among Brazilian scholars, is about certain disagreements with Carolina Maria de Jesus's book, *Child of the Dark* (Quarto de Despejo, 1960): is it or not exemplary to *testimonio*? This divergence, I argue, has contributed to the hesitation in the course of cultural exchange between Latin American debate on *testimonio* and Brazil on *literatura marginal*. In the hope of encouraging the continuity of open access to cultural and critical production between these two distinctive languages, I revisit de Jesus's *Child of the Dark* to provide a reflection on the restriction enacted by this case.

In 1999, Eva Paulino Bueno wrote a compelling essay on the lackluster reception that Jesus's *Child of the Dark* had by the Latin American critics working in the United States that were greatly associated with *testimonio*. Even though Bueno recognizes fundamental differences between Classical and Spanish testimonial, she argues that *Child of the Dark* is significant to the genre because it is representative of the struggle of the black woman's Latin American experience. She claims that Blacks in Latin America in general and Brazil specifically, are often not accorded a degree of independent culture (10). So the denial of a Black culture as she states, leads to the denial of the work by Black artists and intellectuals as representative of a culture. For Bueno, Jesus's individual perspective on the favela where she lives shows per se the lack of community connection so pervasive in what she believes translates into the black experience of

women in Brazil. For Bueno, Jesus's individual representation, as a result of historic fragmentation, collides with the communitarian aspect of *testimonio's* discourse. Therefore *testimonio*, as it has been understood, "does not accommodate the Black experience" (10). Bueno parallels the absence of the community ethos of the Black culture symbolically to the denial of the unification imposed to the African slaves originally brought to the Americas who were forced to re-create their cultures in extremely adverse condition. These were disadvantages that did not affect indigenous people, since they already had occupied the land, spoke the language and lived in groups. Bueno then concludes that *testimonio*, as it has been articulated, tacitly favors indigenous over Black culture and ultimately controls women authority.

Bueno's insightful argument, though overlooks the fact that Ferréz, as many other writers associated to *literatura marginal* which include women writers, are Blacks or of mixed race origins, who describe themselves as Afro-descendants. As such, and as the history of Brazil indicates, they are a social group most likely of slave descendants. As follows, Ferréz's speaking of and for the residents of Capão Redondo as a member of this social segment, the close connection with the hip hop groups, as well the soirees and workshops on literature marginal itself, all weaken Bueno's affirmation on the impossibility of Blacks developing community ties. The articulation of politics of identity and social activism, self-described by the members as a collective project thus obscure Bueno's argument that disqualifies Black unity. Also, as observed by Echeverría, the condition of the skin color is modified under the modern identity. The condition of white skin to the modern identity converted itself into a condition of *blanquitude* (white attitude) (Echeverría 4). In other words, in modern capitalism, the individuals of color are allowed to obtain modern identity without having to "white" themselves completely; the ethnic visibility under capitalist identity can be achieved by demonstrating their "white attitude," which

involves behaving in a way that denotes the “white” attitude. This involves acquiring proper gestures and manners, such as the ways of speaking, of walking, dressing, eating, etc, that indicate distinctiveness. So it is important to consider that in Latin America, as in Brazil, the intolerance that characterizes all forms of “racism identity-civilizatory” is more elaborated than that of ethnic racism, because it centers attention in a more subtle indicator than the color of skin, such as the existence of an introjection of a capitalist ethos. This criterion ultimately serves as a measure to the inclusion and exclusion of the individuals single or collective in modern society (5). Thus Escheverría’s argument builds more layers to the notion of isolation of the Brazilian Blacks in relation to Menchú’s indigenous as pointed out by Bueno. While cultural racism obscures the ethnic inclusion promoted by the modern capital, Black or almost Black Brazilians, as Ferréz sustains in his fiction and also in his declaration, has through the forces of the capital incorporated symbols of “white attitude.” Unlike Menchú’s group, the urban residents of the peripheries, for example, seek to dress in certain ways to blend into the social spaces.

As writers who represent marginalized segments of Brazilian society, Ferréz, like Jesus, hardly recreate elite models of representation. This type of intellectual, as Atencio identifies, includes Jorge Amado’s exoticized depictions of the *mulata* and the treatises of social scientists such as Gilberto Freyre, whose classic study, *Casa Grande e Senzala* intended of recognizing the influence of the Blacks in the Brazilian culture, but ended up as Thomas Skidmore and others have shown, actually reinforcing racism (Atencio 286). To be fair, when Bueno wrote her essay, *literatura marginal* in Brazil was not as prolific as today. Although among some of earlier marginal works was Paulo Lins’ *City of God*, which was seminal to Ferréz’s novel, *Capão Pecado*, and that had been well received by the critics two years earlier.

The time period that separates *testimonio* from *literatura marginal* allowed innovations to the latter, but these advances have been barely followed by the literary field in Brazil. If *Capão Pecado* clearly stated that Brazil's marginalized people now can speak for themselves and tell their own stories, this advance somehow can be seen as an effort to transcend *testimonio*'s elements of exhaustion and bring it closer to Brazilian experience and literary production. This is why *testimonio* theoretical approach is critical to understand *literatura marginal*. Even more important than the formal, structural analogies between *testimonio* and *literature marginal*, is the fact that both seem to be forms of contestation and resistance to neoliberal orientation, as a radicalization of the former which relates to the paradigm of modernization.

Beverley's effort in defining the functions of the first person witness-narrator and the erasure of the function of the interlocutor is due in part to distinguish Spanish American *testimonio* from the representations that have traditionally played into the hands of ethnographers and social scientists in Latin America. Also, the first person witness-narrator intends to oppose to the figure of the problematic hero of the traditional bourgeoisie fiction, which Beverley sees as a continuation of the imposition of the institution of power, such as literature. In the place of the hero the narrator speaks from her or his experience that should be perceived as "real". This arrangement provides both a degree of the legitimacy to the narrator who wants to speak accurately of his or her experience, and a sense of immediacy that allows him or her to speak out of a situation of emergency.

As follows, a part of what generated Beverley to think of this set of norms seems to have been clenched in Ferréz's novel. The effects above mentioned, however are seized by a fictional third-person narrator, who oscillates within an omniscient narrator, and the resonance of the author's voice among several other voices.

What remains effectively and somehow unchanged in *testimonio* and *literatura marginal* forms is the ideological power of these texts. The subaltern act of writing their own history as Beverley says “puts into question the existing institution of literature as an ideological apparatuses of alienation, at the same time that it constitutes itself as a new form of literature” (40). Successfully the metonymic (communitarian) and metaphoric (legitimacy) function of the narrator and the articulation of the rights of a particular group as well, are key in the creation of this type of literary production.

This is the point in which Jesus diverges from both authors. Unlike Ferréz and Menchú, Jesus does not aim to represent any group. She also does not think of herself as a metonym on the status of the Latin American poor Black women experience. On the contrary, Jesus obscures the use of “we”. Thus, she does not “know why it is that *favelados* are so destructive. It is not enough that they don’t have any good qualities”(63). But Jesus not only shows a critical vision of the residents from where she mostly excludes herself but also is not embarrassed about showing a non-solidarity side of herself. When de Jesus is asked by one of her neighbors to sell or give her a piece of the pig she had raised, she says that she was not going to sell any of it because “when you fattened and slaughtered your pig, I didn’t come around to bothering you.” After the neighbor’s continued insistence she decided to give away some of the lard because she thought that, like a fox, they could invade her yard (151). Jesus’s comments about the members of her own community which are filled with rage, despise, sorrow, but also solidarity, has no place on Menchú and Ferréz’s agenda. Be it in an “I” witness or a third person narrator both speak of an objective “we”. The idea of a solidarity ethos encompasses art and social activism. Menchú’s articulation of indigenous identity is the embodiment of a being who feels ashamed to stay safely in her village while the other could be at risk, so she had to leave “because she knew that

teaching the others how to defend themselves against the enemy was a commitment “I” had to make - a commitment to my people” (166).

By Menchú’s side is Ferréz’s narrator who tells us about the neighbor who was leaving her home when she got startled by a noise, so she saw Rael leaving the metallurgic shop carrying a gun, then “*entrou em casa, ligou para a polícia e ferrou mais um irmão periférico*” (Cp139) (she went back home, called the police and screwed up one more brother). This commentary is one example of the echo of the author’s voice leading the reader throughout the narrative, cautioning us that like the neighbor, the reader who cannot see the whole picture can make poor judgments in the face of the masks of the crime. The same persuasive voice appears to explain what lies behind the crack addicted kids and the abjection of the alcoholics. In order to defend the woe of those who are left apart, Ferréz illuminates the obscure side of the origin of the crime and violence, setting it right before our eyes. This is a strategy that seeks to involve everyone in the picture. A large projection of the image of the Brazilian society is shown to situate the position of the reader in it. By enlarging the perspective of the picture which now places all of us, crime and violence take a bigger dimension. Regardless, if it is practiced by those who act criminally, or by those who only watch it and become complicit of it, no one escapes. In this way the narrator articulates from within and out of the community, a wide-ranging “we”.

Despite the ambiguity in Jesus’s description of the *favela* people who surround her and that sets her apart from the group’s politics; Ferréz defends Jesus’s foundational status in the studies of *literatura marginal*. The author argues that for all sociologic aspects contained in Jesus’s literary production and artistic value, they belong together in the same place; at the margins.

David St. Clair wrote in his *Child of the Dark's* preface that never had a book made such an impact on Brazil. Since its first edition the book has been translated into thirteen languages and later she published four more books. This success, however temporarily, allowed Jesus to enjoy a better life, and finally leave the favela –an environment that she had always despised. Again, Jesus's *Child of the Dark* success and the turn it gave to her life as well do not relate to Menchú or Ferréz's literary production and social activism. On the contrary, as Beverley wrote on Menchú but that can also be extended to Ferréz, these actors aspire not only to interpret the world they represent but also to change it. They innovate by giving to their literary work a collective aspect which is to be endorsed at large by the community.

Carolina Maria de Jesus's subjective and unrestrictive vision of the social world that she portrays in *Child of the Dark*, becomes a bit of a challenge for both *testimonio* and *literatura marginal*, in particular for gender issues. Jesus's description of the *favelados* not only differs from the spirit of community as presented in Menchú's and Ferréz's narratives but significantly points out these genres' problematic figures of women. Although it is not the purpose of this study, and I will not extend the discussion to gender, it is important to bear in mind that in Jesus's book, collective representation is not intended. In spite of it, or perhaps for this reason, Jesus allows a much greater complexity for gender identity.

Sommer noted that women in *testimonio* mix features of several discourses and this is because none of them alone completely describes their contradictory situation as a mother, a worker, a communist, an indigenist, a catholic, a nationalist (121). In this way Menchú, as an Indigenous metonymy, describes what Sommer calls lateral identification, changing loyalties for political action that do not easily lend themselves to the construction of monolithic identity. As part of a survival strategy Menchú tends to conciliate tactics for fighting social injustice while

accommodating the tradition that lies at the core of the Indigenous communitarian codes. The emphasis on collective and an incomplete access to women individual expression elicits the idea of sacrificing women. As Sommer observed, lateral identification “through relationship” acknowledges differences, where the reader is invited into “a community of a particular, shared objectives rather than interchangeability among its members.” (109). The insistence on showing relationships constitutes a defining characteristic of *testimonio* (129).

Indeed, as Menchú says, she “felt slightly more love for her father” than for her mother who mostly emphasized the role of women in the community as Menchú was growing up. The mother’s guidance generally implied that women must sacrifice for the common good of the community. Her father, in contrast held an important leadership role there, and that, as Menchú indicates, is probably the reason why Menchú didn’t learn as much from her mother and also grew up more on her father’s side (247-58). Menchú recalls, though that her “mother was going to be a *chimán* and she learned a great deal with one of these men “but who knows, perhaps that wasn’t to be her role in life” (251). As we see Menchú herself did not pursue what the community expected from her as an indigenous woman, she chose instead to do what the other members did not do – speak for themselves. Sommer’s observation emphasizing women collective expression over individual on *testimonio* problematizes by extension women’s representation in *I, Rigoberta Menchú’s* restrictive roles for women and individual expression, and *literatura marginal’s* male prevalence and women’s misrepresentation as well.

If for the reasons I have argued, we accept the notion that Jesus is neither prototypical of *testimonio* or *literatura marginal* and that, for the lack of gender identities or women’s concerns to these modes, it is possible to say that while the former problematizes roles, as Gilmore points out, “shift[s] discourses on women,” for a common cause, the latter remains as an unrepresented

category. It is in this sense; I say that Jesus's distinctiveness and complexities do not follow the set of principles of these literary categories. Jesus's perspective accommodates many characters, some better developed than others, but each one presents a glimpse of the life in the moment that they meet the protagonist. *Child of the Dark* hardly evokes the idea of group representation but of an individual living in a state of poverty, who perceives herself as a writer and protagonist alienated from the world that she depicts. In the same way, it does not pursue the sense of urgency that *testimonio* and *literatura marginal* do (state of wars; rural and urban). *Child of the Dark's* uniqueness and intricacies must not be condensed; on the contrary, its bulk is what makes this text very representative of Latin American gender and women studies. So Bueno's objection to the lack of attention on Jesus's diary from the critics associated with *testimonio* not only misinterprets some of the formal elements of Spanish American *testimonio* but also disregard the author's potential for women studies.

Bueno's disagreement in relation to *testimonio* theory somehow underscores a degree of uneasiness that undertakes the interaction between Brazil and the Spanish countries' criticism and cultural production already on by the language use. The critic Sklodowska sees a certain discrepancy between the immediate international recognition of Jesus's book, and its non-inclusion among the foundational texts of Latin American *testimonio* (emphasis mine). She also suggests that the book is hardly ever mentioned by the critics associated with *testimonio* which she sees as "probably due to the prevailing marginalization of Brazil vis-à-vis the Spanish-speaking countries" (199).

If analogy is at stake, it can certainly begin with the statement above. The fact that *Child of the Dark* is not a foundational or an exemplary text of Latin American *testimonio* is due to, divergences in the formal elements that define the genre. Sklodowska's insistence upon the

contradiction “between politics of truth” and the use of interlocution on Menchú and also reliability of memory in a testimonial format remains problematic. For the critic the element of “truth in *testimonio* is produced rather than told” (205). As for Stoll, Sklodowska’s focus is on Menchú’s trustworthiness as a narrator rather than in the legitimacy of her voice and cause. Such emphasis rejects the *testimonio* type of authority and by extension as a new form of narrative. But if for Sklodowska, the Spanish American *testimonio* norms do not constitute a new form, why then was there a concern with the previous attempt of making Jesus’s book a foundational text of Latin American *testimonio*? The answer to that question seems to lie on Sklodowska’s evocation of a prevailing marginalization of Brazil vis-à-vis the Spanish-speaking countries. According to the critic, that seems to justify Jesus’s book’s dismissal by the canon and its small popularity among the critics as well. However the author does not explain exactly how she arrived at this conclusion. So the closest related assumption the reader can make from the author’s commentary is that *testimonio*’s trajectory when closely examined, has shown, as the author says, “omissions” and “distortions” (199). Although the lack of further developments on the subject matter in the author’s account lead us to a hiatus, the lost connection, may have touched the bottom feeling of Portuguese language isolation that haunts Brazilians in Latin America, and which has been greatly intensified by the global economy.

Regardless of how one accesses the cultural relations among Latin American countries, the similarity of the formation of our societies *per se* remains a valuable source for cultural interchange. With that in mind we should be aware of the entrapments that haunt us. After all it is useful to bear in mind that in the perverse chain of the power relations we all are targets and snipers. I hope my argument can contribute to a reflection on the importance of the continuity of an open dialogue among Latin American countries. Besides this might allow us not only to think

on a new intellectual ability to negotiate “the new limits”, “new borders” as Williams wrote, without reproducing or instigate neo-colonial epistemologies but also enable us to move around the hindrances generated by “correctness” or “tolerance” by blocking its inhibitory side-effect on cultural developments while maintaining the respect for differences.

Among the critics debating on *testimonio* were those who saw in *testimonio* a possibility for the subaltern to speak and those who saw this affirmation as a flaw. As Beverley notes in *The Real Thing*, the *testimonio*'s moment, in the more urgent sense, “has undoubtedly passed” (77). I suggest its potential has disclosed elsewhere.

While thinking along side with *testimonio*'s theory can be limited to the growing production of literary texts currently taking place in Brazil, the emergence of *literatura marginal* can be seen as a form of continuity of the problems of *testimonio* especially by the aspect of denouncement and resistance. By avoiding some of the formal elements of *testimonio* that has been under attack, such as the presence of the interlocutor, the eyewitness first person narrator and testimonial narrative, *literatura marginal* restored the potential that *testimonio* had, of obliterating neoliberal discourses of reconciliation between history and society, while questioning the role of the state and the existing institution of literature. As Javier Sanjinés suggests, new forms of political imagination and organization are needed (254-65). If the Latin American large debate on *testimonio* already offered a path to *literatura marginal* to move on, it also announces the uncertainties attached to this type of textual production. *Testimonio* has taught important lessons, be it for the critical approach or for the intellectual associated with it, therefore, as *literatura marginal* evolves, it presents, as I suggest, an opportunity of continuity in the field of Latin American subaltern studies.

VI - Living Inside the Theme

In the last part of this study, I want to provide a reflection on legitimacy, a key word to *testimonio* and *literatura marginal* as an instrument of validation to representation of a social group.

Santiago Colás' discussion of George Yúdice's claim, that Menchú is "beyond the field of representation", shows itself to be useful to illuminate some aspects of representation in *literatura marginal*. Yúdice places *testimonio* within a strategic position between postmodern rejection of master narratives, but in opposition to hegemonic postmodern texts, in which as Yúdice sees, the marginal and the marginalized depictions appears only as the horror that excites the writer. Yúdice does not see the use of marginality in the discourses of deconstruction as problematic, but he says it, "exists as a hidden fuel that discourse reproduce itself" (50). In other words, it is necessary to speak of the wretchedness to contest hegemonic discourses even when the representative is a member of the community. As is the case of Menchú's description of the planting ceremony and the significance of the seed and the Earth for her Indian community, Yúdice says that "it reveals an ethic-aesthetic of solidarity that made Menchú's representation possible by her social context" (55). For Yúdice this integration between Menchú and the Indians group that is materialized in nature shows that "representation" is not born of the exclusion, of the "limiting otherness." Representation in this case, then, is something quite different from the classical political representation or the aesthetic of an intellectual who reflects the mimesis of nineteenth-century European realistic fiction (56).

In contrast, Colás sees the status of the artist and agent not quite unlike the other members of the group he or she represents. While definitely part of the community, the

representative is different precisely because he or she has chosen to speak, or even write as it is in Ferréz's case. This affirmation may be still extended to the case in which contrasting Ferréz to an elite, as Colás argues, creates a false impression of which Ferréz is an equal, just like the members of segment of the society that he represents – as if all residents of the periphery of São Paulo were conscious of their struggle and aware of the need to organize to fight the inhuman material condition. Even most importantly, they all could speak for themselves. This perspective though shows that, regardless of being an elite member, one can still adopt a representative position (Colás, 166). The problem with Colás's argument on the distinctiveness of the member representative, regardless the social position, is that it undervalues the lived experience and social perspective of the member representative. Despite the different agendas or even the generalization attached to identity groups, it is undeniable that the everyday life of Menchú, Ferréz and Jesus give to them a degree of legitimacy.

In relation to what Yúdice asserts, that the “use of violence on deconstructing discourse is not about doing violence to the marginal,” Colás adds that, at the same time, these texts could not exist without that prior violence done to the marginal, and it is certainly very much of and about representation (168). But aren't there differences between representations? (168) What Colás seems to be evading is that under the problematic facet produced by the relationship between representation and violence lies in the form in which the violence is presented, and that also matters.

The use of violence in Menchú's *testimonio* is oriented to raise awareness of the violence committed by the Guatemalan state's army against her indigenous group. This is a condition that involves, as Beverley says, a “state of emergency.” Of course that this state of affairs still can be described or supported by an activist committed to the Indigenous cause is encouraging, but how

far can this description reach since it lacks the dimension of everyday experience and the particular way(s) to understand and describe it? So even avoiding the unsteady path of the “truth”, without such proximity, be it testimonial or fictional, the narrative can be poorly represented. In Ferréz’s novel *Capão Pecado*, as I have argued, depiction of violence is intended to enlarge the perspective on the origins of the crime and violence in Capão Redondo district which involves not only the voyeuristic ways in which media has portrayed it, but also the readers as a passive consumer of this media themselves. Hence there are differences in the ways of portraying violence, they are not all reproduced from the same matrix.

Colás also noted that while Yúdice’s argument does not undermine his viewing of *testimonio* as a form that subverts the hegemonic category of “literature,” it elicits a reflective effect on representation. In other words, the concern with representation which Colás identifies as Yúdice’s wish of “reject representation altogether,” Colás observes that it “simultaneously reveal and blocks *testimonio*’s representational nature” (Colás 166).

Under this view, the extra literary quality of Ferréz’s novel is also exemplary of this backside effect. The photographs shown in the book’s first edition and the testimonial texts, written by the rappers that opens or close the four parts of the novel, can be seen as a symbolic construction, crafted to convey a message of community consent and solidarity. As Colás indicates in the act of counteracting discourses, one can always question Ferréz’s inclusion of such devices in the novel as somehow signaling a problematic relation to representation. In his essay “What Is Wrong with Representation?” Colás identifies in Yúdice’s discussion on Menchú’s representative qualities a “desire to escape representation,” and “it may be because of what representation has implied in Latin America” (168). Colás’ assumption, though is certainly substantiated by two of the social practices in which representation functions essentially:

literature and democratic politics. Both have operated historically as practices of exclusion. In Latin America literary representations and representative democracy always seem to extend the distance under the illusion of narrowing it (Sommer 1993)

Indeed this perception has been vastly developed in Angel Rama's influential study *The Lettered City*. Rama noted that the normative role of literature and the writer of the *ciudad letrada* are among the basic forms of institutional continuity between colonial and contemporary Latin America. Rama's interpretation of the social exclusivity of the "Lettered City", considering differences in the ways in which the cities were developed in those territories, was even more marked in Brazil than in much of Spanish America (14). The connection between the *letrados*' (men of the letters) exclusivity and strict concentration in urban centers was crucial for the authority of the lettered city. But the main reason for the ascendancy of the *letrados* lies in their ability to manipulate writing in largely illiterate societies (Rama 23-24)

Unlike our contemporary concern with illiteracy and its relevance for modernization and democratization however, this was regarded as a normal, even desirable, state of affairs. In this metropolitan model, a complex and highly shaped use of written language as its fetishization as well, filled the colonial desire for distinctiveness. Unsurprisingly, these texts escaped the comprehension of the illiterate or functional literate, which involved the vast majority of the Indigenous population and the lower-class creoles (18). Also, the *letrados* was more than a sign of aristocracy and connection to a distant metropolitan center, they also dominate a technique of power, an exercise or formal simulacrum of the ability to discern, organize, sublimate and ultimately control textual production. The restrictive circulation of literature (including history, biographies, sermons, letters, and in special essays) and the prohibition by the colonial authorities of both the publication and the importation of novels, which was seen as a medium

incompatible with the colonial norms, made of literature a place where ambitions and resentments of Creoles, mestizos, and in some cases Indians and slaves or former slaves, could begin to take shape. Thus the colonial intellectual was in the position of having to mediate the writing between the vivid American experience and an increasingly absent and abstract European model of civilization represented by literature.

Accordingly, Latin American literatures evolved with the process of social differentiation and status struggle imposed by those intellectuals. In spite of the progressive role of literature and humanities in Latin America, now quasi-democratic and modern with literacy and education sponsorships as standards of cultural performance, variants of the colonial and post-colonial's arrangements are evoked.

Rama had been properly attentive not only to consistent patterns, but also to variations within them noted that the national independence and the exercise of elective office had suddenly become a booming enterprise, and it was open to the lettered city. The *letrados* then would now give speeches more carefully written, appealing to history and to the classical and modern authors. The prestige of their language, nevertheless, came from its connection to a lettered culture centered in Europe, just as had been true in the colonial period. Meanwhile the *letrados* had also begun to exercise a new sort of influence as spokesmen of this or that group in the new public sphere (9).

So taking into account the role that literature and its representatives have played Latin American history I ask in what sense Ferréz's novel and cultural projects relate to the complicity between the state and the institution of literature that Angel' Rama's calls *The Lettered City*?

But before answering this question I want to quickly return to Colás' discussion and then consider Laclau's and Iris Marion Young's points of view on representation.

For Colás, the special attention that some critics dedicate to representation, manifest somehow their desire of setting Latin America apart from the *Lettered City*. Colás suggests instead that representation need not to be seen as a long distance to go cut across in the struggle for emancipation, but rather as an "ineluctable form that all emancipatory practices must take"(171). Notwithstanding as I aforementioned, Colás' discussion on representation does not contemplate the immediate experience of the author as a valuable asset. For Colás, the use of violence done to the marginal is still "very much of and about representation" therefore it is comparable, regardless the position from where one narrates (168). Colás' suggestion towards democratic practices presupposes that is there a secured space of equal worth for the expression of the minorities in Latin America under U.S-style democracy and free market. In Brazil, for example, public TV and radio are still the primary ways of getting entertainment and information. The main means of communication which include the printed medium, however are concentrated in the hands of six families who closely dispute viewers and publicity. Unsurprisingly the chief policy of these organizations is to air productions that can be easily consumed while avoiding the diversity and complexities that involve the different segments of Brazilians society.

In similar direction, the Argentine theorist Ernesto Laclau argues that "the total transparency between the representative and the represented means the extinction of the relationship of representation" and also that "to be a representation requires the articulation of something new which is not just provided by the identity of what is being represented" (38). In other words, if the represented and representative – which cannot be identical beings -- have the

same will, this will then, unifying both locus of enunciation. The problem with Laclau's proposition is that this agreement presupposes the very manifestation of representation as a 'necessary evil.' So the premise is, since the represented members do not occupy the locus of enunciation, this space can be occupied by a consented representative.

Like for Colás, Laclau's agreement does not concern immediately with the absent voices of the represented group, but with the right of representing those who do not speak for themselves. This thought is rather protective of the legal aspect of representation than concerned with diversity. Laclau's objectivity, as culture comprises, not only supports to maintain a due order to a variety of demands of a group, and establish a priority, but also dismisses the practice of multiple perspectives.

As Iris Marion Young states, the concept of social perspective reflects the fact that individuals placed differently in society experience history and society from this viewpoint (136). In this way, women and men, workers and employers, young and old people, blacks and whites, urban and rural population, homosexual and heterosexual, see and express the world in different ways. Even when people are sensitive and solidary to the problems of the others, they never will live the same experiences of life and, therefore will see the social world from a different perspective.

Regina Dalcastagnè's recent study of the contemporary Brazilian literature indicates that while literary practices has presented a more heterogeneous perspective of society, Brazilian literary field has not corresponded to this diversity (15). The majority of the Brazilian contemporary authors is still white, male, residents of the large urban centers and members of the middle class and it is inside of this social perspective that representation is constructed. On the

other hand, the texts produced by writers from popular segments of the Brazilian society have the dual mission at once oppose to a type of representation placed in the literary tradition, in which the popular subject depiction can be absent, secondary, voiceless or stereotyped, while reaffirming the legitimacy of her or his construction.

Aware of this difficulty, Ferréz projects his own experience as a resident of a poor district of the city into a larger picture; the everyday life of Capão Redondo. Then, for residing “inside the theme” he is able to retrieve a degree of legitimacy with which to reaffirm as a writer and cultural activist. Ferréz also claims a place not at the center, but at the margin of the literary tradition, position that he frequently reminds us by reiterating his ties with former authors of *literatura marginal* such as Plínio Marcos, Carolina Maria de Jesus, Lima Barreto, and João Antonio, thus reaffirming his place inside this category. In the same way Ferréz also associates his literary production with other related networks, which is not the publishing industry but the hip hop and marginal arts, which besides providing one another support, indicates a search for self-expression of the dominated groups.

The Brazilian rap culture generated its own code and special space at the margins of the market, of the phonographic industry, and MTV television, resisting until this moment with reasonable success to the attempts of co-optation (Dalcastagnè, 29). The Brazilian rappers, particularly Mano Brown, are the agents supporting Ferréz’s literary production. In the case of Ferréz, this arrangement goes beyond literary practices, ensuring the author’s agenda that has art as a form of social activism. By offering literary workshops, lectures, and compiling texts of other marginal writers, the author provides new ways of viewing and writing literature from his community. All this development questions the place of literature in contemporary Brazilian culture. Fairly though, bringing into the question the place from where one writes, it would be

worthwhile to include the problem of the place from where one reads, because it is from this interplay that literature is evaluated. By validating the expression of some groups, and excluding and marginalizing others that do not conform to the literary norms, literature fails to incorporate multiple perspectives what “puts into question the existing institution of literature as an ideological apparatus of alienation and domination” (Beverley 35)

Likewise if we consider, on one hand, the restriction of the literary codes - which limits the participation of the members who lack the means to produce it, and the other, as in the case of Ferréz’s novel, a text that aims to include the subaltern voices through his characters into the literary realm, it is proper to ask how Ferréz appropriates this representation.

The realism in which Ferréz’s fiction, *Capão Pecado* is anchored, is based on the premise that the writer, having grown up as a member of his community, can naturally draw his characters from his neighborhood experiences. Undeniably he could depict the social life of his vicinity so to speak, with focus on particular matters that constitute cultural value to the community. That being said, it isn’t that this viewing will not be revealed to those who did not experience it directly, but that it would be certainly more of a challenge to bridge the historical gaps, and in general, to select the events that speaks to the core of this or that particular culture. But the problem with representation goes further than an accurate and respectful attempt of depicting the other. Ferréz’s authentic model of representation, as he claims, can be seen as a model of solidarity, particularly in the political sense, but it does not present a diversity of viewpoints that he seeks for himself.

The novel somehow betrays the promise of the genre itself by dropping the plurality, which in Bakhtin terms; involve not only the characters and narrators, but also its readers and

authors. If on one hand the novel centers on the life of the poor, Blacks, and to a less extent women and other minorities – a segment that has been secondary, misrepresented, or absent in Brazilian contemporary literature -- on the other their presence is shaped to serve a specific purpose. This form, which ironically deals with identity construction (as captured by the demise of the traditional hero and reaffirmation of a more ambiguous type), also excludes a multiplicity of viewings that allows the reader to recognize themselves and identify the position of the “other.” Thus, when the author incorporates characters such as women into the discourse that deals with group identity, the plan of representation ultimately reveals the very restricted space of expression that those women have in the community. Hence if women’s expression is restricted, would that be a valid model of representation of the group as a whole?

As Dalcastagnè indicates, based on Boudier’s study, the control of the discourse is part of a process that involves a veiled denial of the expression of those who do not fit into certain social requirements (17). As a political act, representation occupies a space of absent voices that can be suspended between two domains; those who speak with authority and those who lack the ability to do so. One of the most effective forms of control discourses are those imposed for entire groups in which the discourse of a dominant group seems to be naturally manifesting the right of expression over the dominated.

An expression that overlays the disjunctions, inarticulacies, and circumstances of those who are hesitant to speak for acknowledging their differences from the “language of the official state”, this would include children, women, elders, immigrants, ethnic groups, people with physical disabilities, low-income workers, uneducated people, homosexual, divorced, single parents, etc. Thus the necessity of inquiring not only the place of those who speak for the group but also what the group is silencing. Dalcastagnè observes that this process that silences groups

and sub-groups is completed not necessarily by a censor agent, but by an introjections of constraints constructed by the social agents, as an internalized form of perception, that stands over all forms of expression (17). In spite of the communitarian appeal of the cultural project, the characters in the novel *Capão Pecado* are organized to conform into a pre-conceived discourse exposing then the face of scattered communitarian work. Some of the characters agonize under a sole perspective and homogeneity of their social position. The strategy of the novel, as it seems, is to engage the emblematic representation of Capão Redondo residents as they are perceived by the media and to restate them with the same associated elements, but also with a social perspective of the local representative. So the violence and crime attributed to the characters of the novel is driven by the author's assumption of the reader's expectancy on the prototypical resident. This play on representation is conceived to put it into a larger perspective, broad enough not only to involve us, but also to demand from us a stance to the questions concerning to the citizens and quasi-citizens residing in his theme. The way we take it ultimately reflects our social position, and then our perspective of the world. In the same way we are involved, we find ourselves in the position of asking who the person is speaking in the name of the "other". This articulation puts into question not only the representative social perspective, but also who is this collective "other," how they are positioned in society and what they silence. By doing this, this discursive form becomes quite exclusive too. The representative focus on his cause – that speaks in the name of a marginalized group -- skips the voices positioned on the margins of the narrative.

As in the case of the character Paula, who despite being the central female character and the girlfriend of the protagonist Rael, is not central to the narrative at all; instead she speaks as if through the voice of her ventriloquist. It is somehow more acceptable, but not less challenging,

when men speak for women and they both agree on the same ideas, although it becomes a problem when it comes to representation of women *per se*. This projected articulation though, imposes to the author a clear limitation in the mastery of representing the “other.”

The development of the female character, and especially the pretentious ways in which violence and sexuality are exploited in his text, raise questions not only as a member of a subaltern group, but on the relationship genre and gender as well. Paula explicitly enjoys violent sex and being treated with a certain degree of humiliation. The voice that describes the scenes and that personify both Rael and Paula, is the same predominantly masculine narrator who tells us that “os dois eram simplesmente o descontrolo total” (they were both simply uncontrolled), alternating descriptions among their sensual plays and violent sexual intercourse (80). In the novel, Paula’s only attribute is her sexual appeal, and her main activity is to provide excitement and feed Rael’s sexual fantasies. “*Ele puxou seu cabelo como se estivesse controlando uma égua*” (he pulled her hair as he was controlling a mare) and “*ela sentiu que ele era bruto, mas gostou*” (she felt he was brute, but she liked it” (Cp 81). So while he is the one who desires to be in control, she is the one who is not in control, and despite the violence, she is able to accommodate the brutality and find a great deal of pleasure in it. Even allowing a dose of forbearance to support the possibility of the narrator’s viewing on hedonistic relationships, Paula would seem rather a male limited projection than the dissimulated character that she is supposed to be. The missing connection or elements that might explain the female character depiction, not only problematizes identity groups, but also bounds poor women to the assimilation of the male dominance. Indeed this omission also occurs within the production of marginal texts itself, where the male writing highly prevailed over female. Literature field in Brazil has been characterized as a space where the written word equates power - a form primarily associated with

the male perception. This limited space, then, already occupied by a particular mode of expression, creativity, and objectivity, presents itself to the female aspirant as a space of impossibilities. Although the disadvantages imposed from the start is not the only stop sign, the restricted access to literary forms deepens the gap. This expected unfamiliarity with the literary forms leads to the lack of exercise of writing as such. Still attached to those discrepancies is a generalized depreciation of women's expression which excludes women of the literary practices as a whole, and with them, the access to these women point of view.

The main reason for the ascendancy of these writers or *letrados* of the colonial period and post-colonial which brings continuities as Rama noted, lies in their ability of employing writing in largely illiterate and quasi-illiterate societies. The need of representing the members of Ferréz's social group per se emerges from the same social and cultural matrix and from the restriction imposed to subaltern groups that prevent them to represent themselves. In this sense Ferréz's fiction not only arises on similar social and cultural ground, but also operates with a comparable domineering style -- speaking on behalf of the members at the center of the group -- and stereotype those at the margins. So the exclusive form that the author adopts as a member representative of this group ultimately problematizes the complicity between the written word, state, and the institutions of literature; however, the literature practiced under neoliberal orientation takes a different path.

This is the point in which representation encounters a known character in Latin American literature, the specter of the *letrado* which brings back the question of how Ferréz's novel relates to the complicity between the state and the institution of literature?

Either for Laclau or Rama, the practice of literature was involved in the production of identification, consent, and ultimately hegemony, which allows us a question regarding the role of Ferréz in the context of neoliberal hegemony in the sense of Laclau and Rama (Gramsci). Considering that in Latin American literature has always been tied to the nation-state's protection, it indicates a particular sociopolitical function of literature. Thus the role of literature as a practice becomes skeptical as a form of emancipation. With globalization and the emergence of other cultural practices, the power of traditional literature is exhausted. Then the questions brought by *testimonio*, as read by Beverley - literature as a failure, and also as a form of criticism to the state and the neoliberal regime, were incorporated by Ferréz into *literatura marginal*, changing the ways in which literature has been perceived, and producing a new form called marginality. Even though Ferréz claims his place at the margins of literature – literature is not the same after Ferréz -- it is redefined as a new form of cultural apparatuses. Hence the space that Ferréz occupies in relation to literature in the context of neoliberal hegemony is not the same of Rama's *Lettered City*; he produces a kind a literature that criticizes the role of the state and society as a whole while affirming a new form of literary practice. This form not only disengages the ways in which it has been produced and perceived by conventional literature, as shaped by a certain format and style, but it also associates itself to other segments of marginal art.

Accordingly, if on one hand, Ferréz's initiative shows the facet of inclusion initiated by a movement of social insurgence that speaks for a parcel of the population that has been historically underrepresented, as literature as well, on the other hand, by homogenizing the characters of the social segment that he represents he bans the manifestation of many "other" viewings from his fiction. For the aspects of inclusion and exclusion that clashes on the same facet of Ferréz's literary work and cultural activism, he becomes a paradigmatic model of

representation that matters to the public debate. In the cases which representation is necessary and the “other” is involved, it should contain the perspective of the “other” to convey a more affluent and heterogeneous mode of expression, and to validate a space of inclusion. So regardless, the restrictions intrinsically attached to the character of representation, a plurality of perspectives would endorse a more inclusive and democratic stance than the systems organized by objective discourses.

Capão Pecado, like many other novels the author wrote afterward, has generated interest in national and international levels. Ferréz’s understanding of his position in the society, as in the literary realm, did not stop him. Rather, he adopted strategies that allowed him to overcome an array of difficulties which continually inspire many other groups and individuals in which I include myself. In particular, we see the valorization of the experience and the appropriation of his way of writing, a mode that refuses the literary norms as the only form of expression.

Thus, Ferréz literary production, like many other authors affiliated to *literatura marginal*, indicates the need of democratization in both the process of literary production and on the principles ruling the literary field. The transformations that occurred in the political and economic scenario in Brazil in the last three decades, political stability towards democracy, extended citizenship, and income distribution, promoted social inclusion which reflected significantly in the cultural domain. Although the promise of an extensive exercise of democracy in the literary field and practices as well, depends on deeper improvements in the social and cultural sectors, which includes not only income distribution, but also comprehensive education, and finally the recognition for the multiple cultural expressions.

Conclusion

The key elements of *literature marginal* present in Ferréz's fiction clearly express the necessity of searching for other forms of critical approach which is not restricted to the existing form, style and theory. In order to understand the contemporary literary production in Brazil, it is critical to accept the prevalence of social function, representation of violence, and abjection. The occurrence of these themes ultimately speaks of the human experience existing in the face of the widespread despondency in the margins of a global economy.

As *literatura marginal* continues to grow, the Latin American *testimonio* and the critique of the neoliberal economy (orientation that Brazilian politics and economy has adopted and intensified over the last two decades), can provide, as I suggest, a valuable pathway to understand the social, political, and cultural aspects that influenced this new "hybrid" way of producing literature in association to other forms of arts. Despite their distinctive aspects, significantly both modes retrieve a degree of legitimacy to their authors and to the community that they represent. As Beverley notes in *The Real Thing*, *testimonio's* moment, in the more urgent sense, "has undoubtedly passed." I say its potential has disclosed elsewhere (77). *Testimonio* has taught important lessons on literary practices, theory, and for the intellectuals associated with it. *Literatura Marginal*, as a re-elaborated form of *testimonio*, presents the opportunity for the continuity of investigation in the field of Latin American subaltern studies while promoting cultural exchange.

At the same time, it is important to highlight that even though *testimonio* and *literature marginal* as modes encircle distinctive elements throughout Ferréz's novel, writing practices and representation of violence and abjection in the Brazilian urban peripheries demonstrate that

literatura marginal is dealing with the same questions in relation to literature and power that Latin American *testimonio* was dealing with during the 1980's. Consequently the continuity of these issues is central to understand Brazilian contemporary literature and cultural practices.

Hesitantly, the Brazilian literary field has not fully incorporated the multiple perspectives of the diverse social segments that the contemporary novel has sought to validate. As Dalcastagnè argues the literary arena still constitutes an exclusive space for the large majority of white male authors living in upper class, urban centers (18). So it is mostly from this selected world that the social perspective, characters, and representation are constructed. In this sense, authors like Ferréz, struggle not only to write what they want and the way they want, but deal with established models of representation present in the literary tradition. Moreover they do it while reaffirming the legitimacy of their own production. So in order to turn the attention away from the literary archetypes and set forth their own project, some authors appeal to the “realism” of their work. In the case of Ferréz, this notion of “truth”, infused in his fiction, is grounded on the proximity of the author with his theme and place from where he draws his characters. Even though the immediacy does not take the character of the representation away from his novel, it might reduce possible distortions.

Ensured of speaking from this solid ground, Ferréz's novel presents itself as an amplified mirror of the city turned to the reader, and reflecting his or her image in it. So it not only involves us, but also demands from us a stance to the questions concerning to the citizens and quasi-citizens who reside in his theme. The way we take it, ultimately reflect our social position, and then our perspective of the world. In the same way we are involved, we find ourselves in the position of asking who the person is speaking in the place of the “other”. The occupation of this space puts into question not only the representative social perspective, but also the identity of the

collective “other,” how they are positioned in society and what they are not saying. The silence of the “others” makes us conscious of the difficulties associated with obtaining voice, and to the group’s lack of access of expression.

While Ferréz’s contribution to the Brazilian cultural arena can be highly valuable, particularly in conveying literature to a segment of the society where the lack of formal education prevails - if not reading and writing only at a minimum level, the energy that draws the characters to the center of his project problematizes representation. As any other medium, literature constitutes a space in which representation is reproduced and maintained. Even though Ferréz does not directly reconstitute a vertical model of representation in the classical sense that Beverley refers to about the lettered city in relation to the state, in some ways he allows marginal representation to be borrowed from the lettered city, such as the model that gives visibility to women in the TV productions and the cultural transnational industry. In this way, when it comes for the depiction of women and gender, he is still trapped into repeating classical complicity with the state, the literary, and other cultural institutions. The promise of representing the members of his own social group per se emerges from the same matrix; the social and cultural restriction imposed to subaltern precluding the groups from representing themselves. In other words, a restriction that impedes the access and the means to produce literature perpetuates the status of literature as an exclusive practice.

The proximity to the theme that the author claims as a group representative does not prevent him from employing his characters in schemes to validate his project. In heading towards certain objectivity Ferréz rejects peculiarities of the group, in particular from women, which reveal the facet of the exclusion of his work. If by one hand the priority of his project, in general, helped him to integrate a symbolic fight against social injustice in the battlefield of the culture by

the other, it does not integrate the voices of the women of his group. Instead, it incorporates women as a prop-like to reinforce the social aspect of his work. This strict focus not only impoverishes the text by limiting the perspective of the represented group, but also produces and perpetuates a discourse of marginalization. This leaning towards language systems has a precursor: the Brazilian literary field. In the former position of classifying literary production, the literary criticism has been characterized as an exclusive space. This is a space of privilege laying off an array of expressions of different social segments and with them the alterity of these voices. This limited space for the expression of some groups somehow is also reflected in Ferréz's work.

In this way the inclusive aspect associated with the *literatura marginal*, whom Ferréz represents, and *testimonio* discursive modes are respectively reduced in the face of the specific interest of both narrators. Even though both forms of representation are limited, it does not cancel its ideological power, whereby it puts into question the role of the society, state, and by extension, literature as an institution. Altogether, as Ferréz himself demonstrates, literature in Brazil has been and still is a legitimate space for the cultural expression of oppressed individuals and groups.

Thus, this strain between the literary field and the practice of literature itself indicates the need for democratization. Although the promise of an extensive exercise of democracy ultimately depends on deeper improvements in the social and cultural sectors. In the case of Brazil this promise includes income distribution, a comprehensive educational policy, and finally the recognition of the value of diversity of cultural expressions.

This study on Ferréz's *literatura marginal* in association with Menchús' *testimonio* shows an alteration in the relationship between literature as practice, the literary field, and the state - in particular in the race and class domains, than the continuities of the *Lettered City* as postulated by Rama. A change that also contemplates the ways in which visual arts are moving around disciplines promoting the integration of the written word with music, image, and above all, creating new ways of reading books, which is not the way it used to be, but now as a hybridized form. Also the incorporation of the apparatuses such as the hip hop, marginal arts and clothing lines, transcends the emblematic format of the book, to merge into an all-inclusive related network. This study shows that literature as a practice is changing rapidly as globalization advances and undoubtedly more research is needed on this subject matter, this is a topic in which Ferréz will remain as an important reference.

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