

From Diaspora to Nomadic Identity in the Work of Lispector and Felinto

Paula Jordão  
*University of Utrecht*

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**Paula Jordão,**  
**"From Diaspora to Nomadic Identity in the Work of Lispector and Felinto"**  
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**Abstract:** In her article "From Diaspora to Nomadic Identity in the Work of Lispector and Felinto" Paula Jordão analyzes Clarice Lispector's *A Hora da Estrela* (1977; *The Hour of the Star*, Trans. Giovanni Pontiero, 1992) and Marilene Felinto's *As Mulheres de Tijucoapapo* (1982; *The Women of Tijucoapapo*, trans. Irene Matthews, 1994). Despite being stylistically different, Lispector's *A Hora da Estrela* and Felinto's *As Mulheres de Tijucoapapo* depict protagonists who share the same social and ethnic background and diasporic identity as women from the Northeast of Brazil. A closer look at the narrative trajectory of these two main characters shows us that they complement each other in the questioning and reformulation of their female identity. Although in a completely different way, they both defy a stereotyped female identity built upon patriarchal standards and put forth a nomadic identity in which memory, trauma, and gender play a central role. As "conscious pariahs," they are maybe the promise of the "New Brazilian Woman."

**Paula JORDÃO**

### **From Diaspora to Nomadic Identity in the Work of Lispector and Felinto**

What can two such different novels as Clarice Lispector's *A Hora da Estrela* (1977; *The Hour of the Star*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero, 1992) and Marilene Felinto's *As Mulheres de Tijucopapo* (1982; *The Women of Tijucopapo*, trans. Irene Matthews, 1994) possibly share, one might ask. Dissimilar in their approach to female identity and subjectivity, the two novels do not seem to have much in common, except that their protagonists share the same ethnic background: the Brazilian *Nordeste*. In the case of Lispector's novel, the "anti-heroine" does not go beyond an image of anti-femininity according, at least, to patriarchal standards: Macabéa is ugly, dirty, and dim-witted. By contrast, Rísia, the amazon of *As Mulheres de Tijucopapo*, has all that Macabéa lacks: a will to rebel against those standards, which she evinces during her journey back to the mythic community of Tijucopapo. However, despite their differences, the two novels share what Helena Parente Cunha sees as an explosion of female speech (16), a common trait of Brazilian literature in the 1970s and 1980s. Further, they seem to establish a kind of dialogue in their reformulation and reconstruction of female identity as well as in the way they relate to the collectivity to which they belong. Macabéa and Rísia share a similar destiny as poor *nordestinas* who try to survive in the big city and complement each other in their questioning of a stereotyped female identity according to patriarchal standards. They also put forth a new, nomadic identity in which memory, trauma and gender play a central role.

As novels that describe the psychological, social, emotional, and relational development of their protagonists, *A Hora da Estrela* and *As Mulheres de Tijucopapo* contain characteristics that confirm but also contradict the ones usually attributed to the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. This apparent paradox is present in Clarice Lispector's novel, since we witness both the creation and the parodic destruction/deconstruction of the main character Macabéa by the narrator Rodrigo S.M. Macabéa, who left the Northeast for the big city, is characterized as a typical anti-heroine, not only because of her physical and intellectual shortcomings but also due to her social class and ethnic identity. If her initial position as poor *nordestina* in a predominantly white and bourgeois society is already challenging, her situation becomes even harder when her individual limitations become apparent. She is physically unattractive, has a weak health, is very poor, is intellectually underdeveloped and lacks the most basic notions of hygiene. Her emotional relationships with other characters are equally off-putting. Gloria, the co-worker she relates to and who could mean a slim chance of a friendship, ends up as her rival in love matters, once she "steals" Macabéa's boyfriend. Olímpico, who for a short period functions as her (again very slim) promise of romance, turns into a clear disappointment when he exchanges her for Glória. Macabéa's limited life and inability to realize who she is becomes repeatedly and painfully clear in the words of the narrator, who describes her as "inept for living" (24), and as someone remaining outside the world. Her "absence" from the world and emptiness of existence change only briefly at the end of the story, when the *clairvoyante* makes it clear to her who she really is (not), she is run over by a car. Her ignorance, lack of understanding of her own situation and incapacity of changing her destiny would therefore hardly make her an example of a protagonist from a *Bildungsroman*.

Rísia's story begins with her departure from São Paulo in order to return to her mother's birthplace Tijucopapo. Besides having a symbolic meaning since it implies her return to her northeastern roots (partly symbolized by the strong and courageous women of Tijucopapo), Rísia's journey is also her answer to the diverse and multiple traumatic events she experienced in her childhood and youth. Her physical abuse by her father, her very complex and contradictory love-hate relationship with her mother, her awareness of her position as Other in a society that disparages her identity as poor *nordestina*, and finally her pain as a result of having been (figuratively or literally) deserted by her loved ones (Nema and Jonas) are a few of those traumas. During her therapeutic journey through which she constantly recalls her traumatic and painful past, Rísia affirms her determination to fight for a socially, ethnically and sexually less prejudiced reality and future. On her way to achieve it, she is willing to join a revolution that will eventually make it possible. Her exile and her symbolic nine-month-journey finishes with what seems to be the end of her own private and individual revolution, and her son's and her own (re)birth. She eventually reaches her new reality: one without traumas and

where the other has finally his or her respectable and respected place in a multicultural and multiethnic society.

In her study *O Bildungsroman Feminino. Quatro Exemplos Brasileiros* on novels written by Brazilian women writers in the 1930s to the 1950s, Cristina Ferreira-Pinto points out a few characteristics of what she sees as being typical of the Brazilian female *Bildungsroman*. Ferreira-Pinto begins by mentioning a few aspects that are also characteristic of the novels of apprenticeship written by men. Among others, she mentions the conflict between the character and his or her background (usually limited and backward), the character's isolation, conflicts with her/his parents, a journey to the big city or to another environment, emotional problems, a process of self-education, and an open end. Besides these aspects, the novels of apprenticeship written by women reveal a clear concern regarding the search for a female identity. Whereas in the case of male writers, the male character is generally in conflict with his father, the heroine's conflict involves her mother, who is usually absent, either physically or emotionally. Furthermore, while the hero searches to fulfill his calling and strives to develop his particular worldview, women look for an identity and wish to develop their own selves in their own terms. Finally, another fundamental difference has to do with the end of the narrative. If, in the case of the male character, he is led to integrate in his social group, a quite different thing happens to the female character who ends with another journey, either physical or metaphorical (see Ferreira-Pinto, *O Bildungsroman Feminino* 147-49). The characteristics exposed above are significant to the analysis of *A Hora* and *As Mulheres*, in that they show how both novels constitute an alternative to the male novels of apprenticeship, and, consequently, contribute to the reformulation and construction of an alternative female identity.

Following the framework developed by Ferreira-Pinto, we can see that Macabéa and Rísia too are involved in a situation of conflict with the world they live in, which is partly caused by their ethnic and social origins. As often happens to so many *nordestinos*, they are confronted with a socially, geographically, and morally hostile environment that, predominantly white and bourgeois, does not accept their otherness. As diaspora subjects, they too are forced to flee the poverty associated to that environment, as well as the (in)direct threat of violence that is associated with it. Or, to apply Paul Gilroy's definition of identities of diaspora, they flee "the threat of violence rather than [decide upon] freely chosen experiences of displacement" (Gilroy 318). Consequently, they leave in search of another place and of an opportunity for a new life and eventually a new identity, even if that new place is not quite the answer to their initial difficulties. In spite of sharing the same background, the two protagonists not only proceed in different directions in their trajectory, but also develop in very different ways. While the big city seems to be the final destination for Macabéa, Rísia chooses to travel back to the symbolic and mythical Tijuapapo. Furthermore, while the city represents to Macabéa isolation and, eventually, her literal and figurative end, it means to Rísia the beginning of a new life and above all, an alliance with others in her struggle for a world with more justice. Their diversity notwithstanding, both protagonists search for and finally reach a reformulation of their identity. Rísia's departure from São Paulo and symbolic return to the northeastern Tijuapapo seems to be her answer to Macabéa's unsuccessful efforts to start a new and more prosperous life in the big city after leaving Alagoas. Rísia thus answers Macabéa's powerlessness and silence with her own cry of revolt and with her struggle for ethnic, social, and moral justice.

Macabéa's attitude of silence is also an attitude of exile. To Cláudia Nina, *A Hora* shows the intimate relation between a narrative of silence and of exile. In Lispector's novel, we witness a dominant atmosphere of silence that is the expression of loneliness, immobilization, and expatriation. According to Nina, in the narratives of silence (which is the case of *A Hora*) characters "are strangers not only in the world, in the landscape with which they do not interact, but also inside themselves for they feel unable to risk a self-knowledge journey. In a depersonalized society in which they are barely known, they feel anguish and nausea but they are so indifferent and passive that they ignore the word 'revolt'" (Nina 22-39). Furthermore, Macabéa's silence is significant not only as a sign of her nonquest for her identity, but also as an effect of the overbearing attitude of the male narrator. As he begins his narrative in *media res* ("I am about to begin in the middle by telling you that -- that she was inept. Inept for living" [24; here and in subsequent quotations the English versions of the novels are used]), Rodrigo S.M.'s domineering stance goes so far as to imprison the female protagonist in "an

impersonal limbo, untouched by what is worst or best" (23). Later in the text, he refuses her any possibility of escaping such imprisonment in her search for an (affirmative) identity. Macabéa's "impersonal limbo" becomes, however, a two-edged sword for it deconstructs Rodrigo's identity as a creative entity. If, on the one hand, we are able to detect in his words a possessive attitude towards his own creation, as the quotation above demonstrates, on the other hand he is the one subverting that same domineering stance by using a self-reflexive parodic discourse. Let us recall Rodrigo's own words: "I must add one important detail to help the reader understand the narrative: it is accompanied from start to finish by the faintest yet nagging twinge of toothache, caused by an exposed nerve" (23). This self-reflexivity and self-subversion goes even further when he confesses his complicity (and why not also his solidarity) with Macabéa. As a social and individual failure, her weakness and annihilation become his own: "The typist doesn't want to get off my back" (21); "I see the girl from the Northeast looking in the mirror and -- the ruffle of a drum -- in the mirror there appears my own face, weary and unshaven. We have reversed roles so completely" (22); "Macabéa has murdered me" (85).

According to Cynthia Sloan, we can interpret the narrator's self-subversion as a sign of the "game" Lispector plays with the reader, by which she undermines the masculine libidinal economy that is clearly present in the narrative (91). Macabéa regains in this way a kind of power over Rodrigo that will eventually cause his narrative death as her creative father, and, even more significantly, the destruction of his normative and symbolical law. Contrary to what happens to Lispector's protagonist, Rísia's story is not one of ignorance of her identity, nor it is one of enunciative silence. Hers is rather an auto-diegetic text in which she affirms her revolt in a strong, and almost excessive and obsessive way: "My mouth is filled with dirt, it tastes of red, I spit grit, I grind my teeth. I was five years old and I was eating dirt and shitting roundworms like crazy, my eyes bulging out like a dolphin's; that didn't stop me from stampeding out the next day, however, and sliding from the top to the bottom of the mound of dirt, wrapping myself in dirt, and rolling in it, and eating and spitting and shitting and bawling into the four winds to go tell them: 'You go to hell and take my worms with you, papa and mama, and take your quarrelling and your quarrelling about me and your quarrels that make me cry so hard'" (12). To Macabéa's situation as an orphan and to her general passivity Rísia opposes not only her conflict with her parents, especially with her mother and aunt, but also her active efforts to change her situation, translated in constant movement. As Marilena Chaui reminds us in her preface to the novel, Rísia is a woman who is always on the verge of leaving for somewhere, either by taking boats made of paper, or airplanes, or flat bed trucks (9). Rísia's incessant departures are also the metaphorical translation of her identity's constant transformation. For Rísia, to exist means to leave for other places, to have other experiences, and to be connected to others, either in the present or by making a (frequently painful) journey to past events and past relationships. Her trajectory is one of change, and of confrontation with her fragmented self. The narration of this relational process can therefore only be a repeated and a repeating one, since it translates the constant (circular) movement of approach and separation from others and from herself. Felinto's protagonist thus corresponds to what Rosi Braidotti defines as a nomadic subject: "she/he connects, circulates, moves on; s/he does not form identifications but keeps on coming back at regular intervals" (35). This nomadic subject identity can be characterized as: "a play of multiple, fractured aspects of the self; it is relational, in that it requires a bond to the "other"; it is retrospective, in that it is fixed through memories and recollections, in a genealogical process" (Braidotti 166). Rísia's quest for her identity should therefore not be understood in terms of phases or stages of growth and development, as it is usually the case in novels of apprenticeship. Rather, Felinto's protagonist seems to establish her own rules of non-apprenticeship by the constant renewal of her identity, a process in which memory plays a central role.

As I have mentioned above, the protagonists of the two novels represent complementary approaches to female identity. Rísia experiences what Macabéa was not able to do entirely: a new life as *nordestina* in the big city. This new life includes the social, ethnic and even religious discrimination that comes with her social background, as well as emotional disappointments, and, finally, her return to her origins in an effort to cope with and to recover from her traumatic experiences. According to Ferreira-Pinto, Rísia's journey comprises three facets: a geographical one (her return from São Paulo to the *Nordeste*), a psychological one (by which she reinvents herself in her violent litany to her mother), and a mythical one (involving mythical characters of Brazilian culture, such as Lampião and the

Amazons of Tijuapapo) (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire* 70-71). Although Ferreira-Pinto touches upon some of the main aspects of Felinto's novel, she does not mention a topic that is key to the understanding of the formulation of identity in *As Mulheres*, namely the role of memory in the protagonist's recovery from her traumas.

The neglect of her mother, the physical and psychological abuse by her father and his sexual involvement with her aunt, the departure of both her friend Nema and, later on, of her lover Jonas constitute the main reasons for Rísia's feeling of abandonment and betrayal. Her repeated and unarticulated references to those events reveal not only the depth of her trauma, but also show the relevance of memory as a means of coping with pain and of recovering from it. As Marita Sturken states in her two essays on recovered memory and victims of trauma, "remembrance is an activity that will help one recover ... fragmentation is a primary quality of traumatic experiences ... Recovered memories are not produced in isolation. Rather, they emerge in dialogue with a therapist, or in the context of a therapy group, where testimony falls not on silence but on affirmation ... Testimony involves a constitutive relationship between a speaker and a listener ... The listener is the means through which the traumatic memory can be spoken, known, and made real" ("The Remembering of Forgetting" 104; "Narratives of Recovery" 235-37). Sturken's words might apply to Rísia's situation, whose fragmented, repeated and associative narration reveals her efforts to confront, cope with and eventually exorcize her past (and present) ghosts. Her narrative contrasts visibly with Macabéa's silence that, imposed by the narrator's overbearing ventriloquism, confirms her impossibility to give voice to and therefore to recover from her traumatic existence. In Rísia's case, we witness not only the confirmation but also the reiteration of the possibilities inherent in narration. Besides being the recollection of past scenes and episodes of her life, her narrative also includes a symbolic letter. In this text she unveils conflicts that have hurt her, and, above all, the emotional distance she establishes between her and others, which is particularly clear in her usage of English words: "I want this particular letter to go in English because English is the most alive language in the world ... English is made of foreign stuff that fascinates me and separates me from all that closeness of sending a letter from me in the language of my own people, in my own language. I don't want them to know about me like that, so closely. I want them to not understand me" (53). Among all the addressees she mentions in her letter, her mother occupies undoubtedly a central place. This is due to the emotional distance between them, which played a crucial role in her identity formation.

When seen from a psychoanalytic point of view, the neglect of the mother originates a fracture in the development of the child's most essential emotional center. According to psychoanalysts Jessica Benjamin, Nancy Chodorow, and Dorothy Dinnerstein, the mother is: "simultaneously the first love, the first witness and the first source of frustration of the child" (qtd. in Williams, "Which Came First?" 139). The protagonist of *As Mulheres* sees herself bereft of such emotional basis. Confronted with the trauma that results from such abandonment, Rísia becomes involved in an identification process with her mother by which she tries to minimize and even resolve that traumatic loss. As Diana Fuss affirms in her study *Identification Papers*: "All identification begins in an experience of traumatic loss and in the subject's tentative attempts to manage this loss" (38). In her attempt to manage or diminish this loss, Rísia addresses her mother in a way that evokes the different stages generally delineated in a psychoanalytic analysis: ambivalence, violence, repetition, and remembrance. In her frequently violent discourse, she seems to oscillate between love and total detachment symbolized by the words in English she often uses, in a paradoxical effort to finally reach harmony in the relation with her mother (and with herself), as her final words in the novel reveal: "So, that's it, mama. I want my life to have a finale like a big screen movie in another language, in the English language. I want to have a happy ending" (120).

The image of Rísia's mother is not only associated with emotional abandonment, but also with a refusal of her ethnic origins. As a daughter of a black mother and of a Native Brazilian father, Rísia's mother was given away for adoption as a young child and has consequently lost any attachment to her emotional and ethnic background. She unconsciously tries to pass her detachment to her daughter, a fact that is symbolized by the brilliantine she rubs on Rísia's hair in order to conceal her ethnic origins: "It was at Poti, and my mother was the adopted daughter of sister Lourdes, auntie's mother. My mother had lost all contact with the truth of herself. Mama's last native link died out with the rays

of the moon on the moonlit night when she was given way. Everything about mama is adopted and adoptive. My mother has no origins, in reality, my mother doesn't exist. I don't know if my mother ever was born ... Manjopi -- my hair looked like a hangman's ropes kneaded with the brilliantine mama put on it and that the sun melted at midday ... A family with crinkly hair: you used to hate our hair, mama" (23, 59, 117). Finally, Rísia's emotional and physical detachment from her mother has another reason: her mother's weakness and passivity towards life in general and towards her husband's infidelity, in particular. In Rísia's eyes, her mother belongs to the group of women whom she despises and condemns, either for their betrayal (as it is the case with her father's mistresses), or for their hypocrisy (as it is the case with the women of her religious community). These are the women she regards as traitors of their own gender because of their lack of dignity and self-esteem. This lack of dignity and self-esteem become clear in the following quotation: "My street had women in it who carried their Bible under their arm and wore long skirts at the door of the church, and, at the door that gave to the guava tree, went in for copulation after a beating" (70). It is then not surprising that she turns to the mythical Amazons of Tijucopapo in search of an example of strength or resistance, establishing therefore what one could call a feminine genealogy with Latin-American characteristics.

Rísia's criticism itself should, however, not be considered uncritically. In fact, her incapacity and even refusal to regard her mother as a victim or at least as a product of Brazilian patriarchal culture, makes her a reproducer herself of the negative (misogynist) aspects of that culture. In other words, although Felinto denounces maternity and gender stereotypes as oppressed elements within Brazilian society, she does not address the possible reasons for such oppression. On the contrary, she does not allow Rísia's mother any kind of autonomy either in her behavior or in her speech that would enable her to escape her subaltern fate. Imprisoned in that oppressed situation, Rísia's mother remains a character that has neither a voice, nor the means to regain it. She becomes therefore a double victim of silence: in the plot and in her text, a kind of silenced Jocasta, to use Marianne Hirsch's expression in her introduction to her *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* on the image of the mother in feminist studies in the 1980s: "What earns the Spinx, the non-maternal woman, privilege over Jocasta, the mother? Why do even feminist analyses fail to grant Jocasta as mother a voice and a plot?" (3).

In spite of Rísia's ambiguity towards her mother, she puts forth a kind of identity that is characterized by independence, autonomy and rebellion against the values represented by the (female) characters she relates to, and therefore attempts to subvert a stereotypical conceptualization of gender. In this subversion, we can find to a certain extent the continuation of the issues already raised in *A Hora*. In fact, even if in a timid way, Macabéa too seems to question some of the patriarchal values prevalent in Brazilian society, such as female fertility and the submission of women to men. Contrary to Glória who, possessing large hips, "was made for bearing children" (59), "Macabéa, by comparison, had all the signs of her own unmistakable doom ... [Macabéa] had ovaries as shrivelled as overcooked mushrooms" (59, 58). Described initially as if she had a physical deficiency, Lispector's protagonist eventually challenges the ideal of fertility cherished in and by a patriarchal society, when it becomes clear that her (lack of) fertility does not prevent her from feeling and behaving like a woman. In fact, expressed frequently in the text, her sensuality and desire show Macabéa as capable of loving someone, and not as someone who is deprived from any hope of romantic fulfilment, as Williams says in her study "Macabéa in Wonderland" (26). Macabéa does not become a stereotype of asexuality or frigidity, either. The sensual strength and intensity of her longing make her a challenge to the moral standards that are accepted by bourgeois culture, which dismisses female desire as hysterical, and therefore as abnormal: "She [Macabéa] understood what desire meant -- although she didn't know that she understood. That was how it was: she was starving but not for food, it was a numb sort of pain that rose from her lower abdomen, making the nipples of her breast quiver and her empty arms starved of any embrace came out in goose bumps. She became overwrought and it was painful to live. At such moments, she would shake with nerves and her workmate Glória would rush to get her a glass of water with sugar" (44). In her relationship with Olímpico, Macabéa also shows a behaviour that does not conform to the passivity and subordination often attributed to women in heterosexual relations in a patriarchal society. To Olímpico's petulance and megalomania, she opposes her own wise ignorance, which often unveils his superficiality and sexist mentality.

As mentioned above, Rísia's overt criticism of the promiscuous and hypocritical behavior of the women of her religious community also unveils her subversion of stereotyped gender values. This subversion acquires a more radical facet when she expresses her openness and acceptance of a moral and sexual behaviour that challenges the moral rules of a heterosexual and patriarchal order. This is for instance clear in her reaction to the disappearance of her lover Jonas. In a provocative and even almost self-destructive way, Rísia's violent disruptive discourse and unrestrained (sexually and morally) behavior seem to refuse any kind of rules or moral boundaries. Love alternates with hatred, and her sexual experiences are unrestrained: "And that, as far as fairies and pansies and my own morality are concerned, I almost had an affair with a woman" (72); "I'm a whore, take me anywhere you want to (84); "Because that was the only way I could surrender myself to the complete and total indifference that comes from giving my own body, without pride, without dignity, without love, without pain" (85).

In *As Mulheres* we witness a frequent intertextuality between the novel and the Bible that provides another example of transgression of moral and religious principles. The first instance of this intertextuality is embodied in Jonas, Rísia's lover. As a homonym of the prophet in the Old Testament who fled God's imposed responsibilities and duties, the name Jonas reasserts the character's symbolic association with (human) selfishness and treason. On the other hand, however, since it concerns a mere (failed) romantic relationship, it belittles its religious connotation, and makes it (too) secular. Rísia's frequent references to Psalm 91 are other examples of a disruptive Biblical intertextuality. Originally a text of spiritual comfort, forgiveness, and hope, it loses its original symbolism, because it also represents Rísia's power over others, her will to take revenge on others for having despised, hurt, and left her, and her despair and self-destructive feelings:

[I] wanted to be like the Bible, the greatest book, the 91st Psalm, God's commands. I wanted to be God so I could kill all the people I wanted to, and make the world in my own way ... Until I was a certain age I knew the 91st Psalm by heart. If I still knew it, I probably wouldn't hesitate to recite it in the middle of these nights ahowled by packs of starving wolves, sung by swollen frogs, by little crickets, by snakes lying in ambush, in the middle of these menacing nights where I lie down to sleep and glimpse stars through the openings in the shacks I'm stopping at, almost dead from the death of him who died and left me exposed to all dangers. If only I could pray. I am too scientific to believe in what I pray for. If only I could believe. If only I could telephone. If only I could hear, coming from the heavens, the voices of a choir of angels: the 91st Psalm. (70-81)

Rísia's "naked" and daring perspective of her relationship with Lampião, one of the mythical characters of Brazilian culture and history, provides a last example of her rebellion against the dominant morality she is immersed in: "But today my body needs a man ... I wanted to be seduced ... I wanted a man with all the acts of the previous men, and with new acts. I wanted the perfection of an act. The man and I moved together in every act. We still didn't sleep. And when I tried to enwrap the man's member with my hands and he got aroused, and when I wanted to appease it in my mouth and he wet himself like a child wets itself, I cried. I cried with my mouth full of liquid salted with tears, I fondled the man's member that I had sucked and slept like someone who has just emerged from the waves of the sea" (95-96). Described in non-conventional and daring terms for its sexual transparency and eroticism, her relationship can be seen as the beginning of a new era as far as gender and sexuality are concerned (see Ferreira-Pinto, *Gender, Discourse, and Desire* 68). In this new order, women and men would be in a position of equality and women would be able to reaffirm their independent, free, and autonomous subjectivity in a thoroughly enjoyed sexual relationship.

The new order Rísia wants to bring forth is not limited to her individual identity, but is also closely related to the community to which she belongs. This collective side of her identity becomes particularly relevant when we consider her ethnic origins and, consequently, the diasporic fate she shares with so many other *nordestinos*. Tijucopapo is to Rísia a promised land. Both a crystallized mythical image in her memory and the symbol of a paradisiacal future, Tijucopapo shares some of the characteristics Pierre Nora attributed to his *lieux de mémoire*. According to Nora, the *lieux de mémoire* comprehend the three senses of the word: the material, the symbolic, and the functional one. The first one addresses tangible and changeable realities. The second one is the product of imagination and it sustains the crystallization and the transmission of mementos. The third one concerns rituals (see on



Nora in Ricoeur 528). As a reminder of the heroines who fought the Dutch invaders in Pernambuco in the seventeenth century, Tijucopapo is not just an element of Rísia's symbolic reality but is also part of Brazilian reality and (mythical) history. Moreover, by passing on her recollection of that (mythical) place to other generations, Rísia fulfills the task attributed to the *lieux de mémoire* - the enrichment of its meaning to a community, and in this particular case, to (a part of) the Brazilian Northeastern community. Finally, by reviving events that are part of a forgotten history in which women played an essential role, Rísia broaches another aspect of Tijucopapo as a *lieu de mémoire*, namely the making of another history or of a renewed history that belongs to the legacy of gender of the Brazilian Nordeste.

Rísia's renewal of history is also present in the way she addresses historical dates and periods. By relating them to events which other characters are part of, those dates and periods acquire a more personal dimension that contributes to the personalization of History. That is the case of 1935, her mother's date of birth and the date of the first failed coup of the communist party against the Vargas government. Because of the meaning of political and historical failure attached to that year, her mother's birth becomes overshadowed by a general feeling of impossibility and impotency. Something similar happens with 1964, the beginning of the dictatorship led by Castelo Branco and the year of her newborn brother's death, due to a lack of medical assistance. Metonymically speaking, it is as if Rísia's grief and despair became a reflection of the country's own suffering, both protagonist and country sharing the consequences of poverty and misery. Finally, the concomitance of her friend Nema's departure with the leaden years of the dictatorship during the Médici government originates again the symbolic interrelation of Rísia's individual tragedy and the country's predicament. By mentioning these dates, Felinto thus contributes to a recovery of collective and historical memories that are essential to a Brazilian cultural and historical legacy, and therefore to Brazilian identity, never dismissing the individual aspect of those memories in this process.

Rísia's involvement in such a recovery does not mean, however, that she accepts to play the role of unifier of the nation, or of a so-called "building-block," to use Paul Gilroy's concept. In fact, in her refusal to compromise with any kind of rules or principles of the patriarchal, white and bourgeois order, she evinces a diasporic identity, which can be described as: "an alternative to the accepted gender hierarchy and 'family as building-block' basis of the nation-state, offering instead anti-national and anti-essentialist accounts of identity formation based on contingency, indeterminacy and conflict, and offering possibilities for different forms of political action" (Gilroy 339). Her answer is to fight for a revolution (regardless of how mythical it may be): "The landscape I brought painted on the white sheet of paper turned into a revolution. I came to make the revolution which knocks down not my Guaraná on the counter, but those who are guilty of all the lovelessness I suffered and of all the poverty I endured" (119).

*A Hora da Estrela* and *As Mulheres de Tijucopapo* portray female identity as an identity of exile and of Diaspora. Both novels are a good example of the deconstruction in literature of cultural myths of femininity, beauty, or youth in their questioning of issues of identity, sexuality, and desire (Ferreira-Pinto, *Gender, Discourse, and Desire* 2). Further, in their subversive (re)formulation of female identity, *A Hora* and *As Mulheres* also instantiate what Lúcia Helena Vianna characterizes as typical of the literary work written after the 1960s: a renewal of the *Bildungsroman* insofar as this genre deals with the construction of subjectivity. In their trajectory of reconstruction and questioning of identity, the protagonists complement each other in their particular quest. Rísia seems to take Macabéa's end as point of departure, or at least appears to wish to accomplish what Lispector's protagonist was not able or allowed to do. She recuperates the voice Lispector's protagonist does not seem to have entirely, and takes part in a revolution Macabéa did not hear of. As they are both part of a Northeastern Diaspora, they seem to correspond to the notion of "the conscious pariah" defined by David Brookshaw as "self-excluding ... which denotes someone whose status as an outsider enables him/her to depict society more freely" (12). As "conscious pariahs," they are maybe the promise of the "New Brazilian Woman," to use Ferreira-Pinto's expression (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire* 7).

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Author's profile: Paula Jordão teaches Brazilian and Portuguese literatures at the University of Utrecht. Her interests in scholarship include Brazilian and Portuguese contemporary literature and Brazilian contemporary cinema. Jordão's recent publications include "Inleiding." *The Value of Literature in the Seventies: The Case of Italy and Portugal* (Ed. Monica Jansen and Paula Jordão, 2007), "Da Memória e da contra memória em *O vento assobiando nas ruas*." *Para um leitor ignorado. Ensaios sobre a ficção de Lídia Jorge* (Ed. Ana Paula Ferreira, 2009), and "O cruzamento do desejo e da memória em 'O Belo Adormecido' e 'Assobio na Noite' de Lídia Jorge." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* (2009). E-mail: <[a.p.jordao@uu.nl](mailto:a.p.jordao@uu.nl)>