

Passages to Our Selves: Translating Out of Portuguese in Asia

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Abstract: This article attempts to re-examine the question of contemporary Luso-Asian writing from a perspective that avoids indulging in any lingering traces of colonial nostalgia. By counterposing divergent narratives from twentieth-century Goan literature and history within a more extensive set of Lusophone paradigms for organizing and understanding the world that may come to be called *lusocosmologies*—above all, by interweaving other literary texts by Antonio Tabucchi and Pundalik Naik—this approach to Lusophone Asian futurity reaffirms the necessity of a multilingual transcultural project that interrogates current conceptions of identity and alterity, and provides for the continual possibility for translation between them.

It is indeed unlikely that Goa would return to India in the event of a plebiscite being held. The Christian Goans would certainly vote to remain as they are, while many of the Hindus believe that they are better off economically under Portugal. Norman Lewis, "Goa" (117)

Recordo as minhas companheiras de viagem: mulheres patéticamente silenciosas e tristes com os filhos nos braços, como "maters dolorosas." [...] En Carachi, a Embaixada portuguesa estava para nos receber, e nas atenções dos seus representantes, nos cuidados por eles dispensados aos refugiados, havia como uma

reminiscencia da casa paterna. [...] Na manhã seguinte podia ler-se no semblante do pessoal uma inquietação mais profunda. As tropas de Nehru tinham violado os limites de Goa e caminhavam através da Índia Portuguesa na sua escandalosa missão de usurpação. Havia luta, fogo, bombardeamentos. Nada foi dito às goesas. O olhar delas, porém, como de quem adivinha, era silenciosamente desesperado. Maria Ondina, "A última noite de Goa" (qtd. in Seabra 184)

As a point of departure, the above epigraphs may serve to illustrate (if unintentionally) what most concerns me in considering the possibility of revisiting any presumably Lusophone spaces in Asia today: ironically enough, it is the delicate task of weighing the risks involved in reviving and recirculating any lingering traces of colonial nostalgia under the guise of literary and cultural studies. As the British journalist Norman Lewis' recently republished 1959 report from Goa suggests, texts that romanticize or relativize the injustices of European colonial politics continue to resurface in contemporary intellectual discourse, quite often due precisely to the frequent limitations of inherited colonial perspectives.

With this in mind, one is compelled to ask: would Lewis, Maria Ondina or others who were once persuaded to concede a measure of popular support for Portuguese rule have reached the same conclusions had it been politically practical at the time to poll a representative sample of Goans, that is, from all social strata and linguistic backgrounds, from rural areas as well as from urban centers, as well as those who chose exile over living under the colonial regime? If such impressionistic examples are combined solely with an established canon of colonial texts originally written in Portuguese, more often than not under a strict regime of nationalistic (self-)censorship, one might end up even further than expected from a comprehensible picture of the cultural and political realities of these differently colonized and decolonized areas, collectively referred to by the rather deceptive name of "Portuguese" India.

In the case of Portuguese colonial and cultural history in Asia, one might begin to avoid such pitfalls simply by considering the following historical facts: that only a small percentage of the population of Goa, Macau, and East Timor ever actually spoke, much less were literate in, the official colonial language over the four-and-a-half centuries of Portuguese rule, especially in the final years, when English and other local languages such as Konkani, Cantonese, and Tetum had already begun to make substantial inroads in education, commerce, publication, mass culture, and nascent political resistance movements.

Concurrently, many former Portuguese colonial subjects had already become a palpable cultural presence in former British colonial possessions, not only in nearby India and Hong Kong, but also in the postcolonial era as part of the Asian diaspora in Anglophone countries such as the UK, Canada, Australia, the US, and beyond. With this in mind, it would be safe to say that it is imprudent, if not impossible, to limit any study of the populations and cultures associated with the former Portuguese presence in India to those enclaves occupied and colonized by Portugal (Coelho 104). The challenge might actually be at this point how to combine materials and texts, both in the original and in translation, to arrive at a radically different place for Lusophone cultures in contemporary Asian literary and cultural studies.

After all, the truth is that “Portuguese” India, at least as it was imagined from the metropolis as “a Roma do Oriente,” rarely if ever corresponded to the cultural and linguistic realities shaped by the diverse inhabitants of this archipelago of colonial enclaves: not only the main territory of Goa, but also Daman and Diu further north on the Gujarat coast, which together became a separate Indian Union territory after Goa achieved statehood in 1987. (Even the sparsely populated inland tribal enclaves of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, occupied by India in 1954, now comprise a separate Indian Union Territory in their own right.)¹ The often arbitrary borders of former colonial rule should not, however, be the only criterion in determining additional pertinent spaces for research; consider the city of Bombay, not so much as a former Portuguese possession in the sixteenth century but as an equally important site of exiled anti-colonial opposition movements in the twentieth. Such groups based there included the Goan National Congress, the Goan People’s Party, the Goan Liberation Council, the United Front of Goans, the Goan National Union, the Partido Socialista de Goa, and the Goan Liberation Army (Stocker 158-9), and their publications and other often oppositional symbolic practices, political and cultural activities, are no less relevant to the historical research of literary and cultural studies scholars simply because they were not always produced in Portuguese (Axelrod & Fuerch 420-421).

In societies still marked to a great extent by inequality and division, ideological mechanisms of imperial domination prevailed, even when articulated in terms of the more accommodating paradigms of Lusophone transcontinental identity, such as the Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre’s theory of *lusotropicalismo*, first elaborated in a public lecture in Goa in August of 1951 as part of a officially sponsored visit, during which his movement was

strictly controlled by the Portuguese colonial authorities to avoid contact with Goan opposition groups in Bombay and elsewhere. As is well known, his brief impressions of Goa and his subsequent visits to other colonial outposts in Africa came to shape a vision of an apparently open and idealistic model, at least for the period, of a future global Portuguese-language-based community, “conscious of a Christian mission” and characterized by “a complex process of adaptation, contemporization, acclimatization and adjustment, of [interpenetration?] of values or cultures, as well as the miscegenation they [the Portuguese] nearly always practiced” (Freyre 32). Nonetheless, this renewed form of what one might come to call *lusocosmology*, presumably conceived of and promoted for the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond, would ultimately reveal its practical limitations, especially after being officially co-opted by the Salazarist regime in Portugal, one set on prolonging its colonial hegemony through the exercise of dictatorial power in the form of widespread censorship and propaganda, lingering institutionalized racism, instances of torture and surveillance, and military-backed suppression of dissent (Castelo 89, 137, 140; Stocker 137, 140, 206, 246).

In the case of “Portuguese” India, such oppressive mechanisms were often evident, right up until the final twenty-six-hour military intervention in 1961 by the Indian Armed Forces that would, for all intents and purposes, bring the Portuguese colonial presence in Asia to an end.² The story does not stop there, however; this epochal event was to become the first of a succession of death throes in the eventual demise of the authoritarian *Estado Novo* and its transcontinental empire in Africa over the course of the 1960s and 70s. The process of decolonization that begins in Goa would thus not only eventually play a pivotal historical role in the liberation struggles that would challenge Portuguese rule in Africa throughout the 1960s and early 70s, but would also initiate those repercussions that would culminate in the April 1974 Revolution and, with it, the end of military dictatorship in Portugal and the loss of its African colonies along with East Timor (Stocker 252).

With these complex and often contradictory historical accounts in mind, how might Lusophone scholars avoid this kind of sentimental reprise of the colonial past so common from the later years of the last century to the present day, and initiate a more viable means of rethinking transcultural identities in/ between the Portuguese-speaking world and other cultures in Asia, as well as in the rest of the Global South?

Tabucchi's novelistic *Nocturne*: yet another European interlude?

Then again, this discussion of possible future “lusocosmologies” may constitute an equally speculative set of theoretical objectives on my part; I too, may be setting out from an all-too-common point of departure in an attempt to examine what remains for a contemporary Lusophone and Asian cultures.

But perhaps not: even if any doubt remains as to whether the Italian-born author Antonio Tabucchi unequivocally qualifies as “Portuguese” at this point, it is evident that it has become difficult if not impossible by now to subtract him from the Portuguese literary and intellectual scene. Not only because of his novel *Requiem*, originally written and published in Portuguese (1994), but also in the wake of his more politically engaged novels of the 1990s—his critique of press censorship at the heart of the 1994 novel *Sos-tiene Pereira*, or the condemnation of the ongoing traces of police brutality in Portugal that is the premise of his subsequent work, *La testa perduta di Damasceno Monteiro* (1997)—his work charts a course through the troubled zones of Europe’s all-too-recent political history, not only in Portugal but also in the post-Risorgimento, Fascist, and postwar “spectralities” of his native Italy, as explored at the start of his literary career in his 1975 novel *Piazza d’Italia* (Bouchard 174). Given his broad-ranging commitment to cross-cultural intellectual critique, it would be difficult to discuss his work exclusively from any one fixed point on a map of Europe, or anywhere else in the world for that matter, as Tabucchi’s work seems all too often to be set in that moment after departure, whether out into the Atlantic, as in his collection *Donna di Porto Pim e altre storie*, or towards other continents in a personal vision of transcultural interconnectedness that cannot but complicate the terms that predicate our cultural bearings: “dopo aver veleggiato per molti giorni e per molte notti, ho capito che l’Occidente non ha termine ma continua a spostarsi con noi, e che possiamo inseguirlo a nostro piacimento senza raggiungerlo mai” (*Donna di Porto Pim* 13).³

In the wake of Tabucchi’s own continual cultural and linguistic displacements, I wish to reflect upon the period of his work that explicitly engages a colonial thematic: that of the 1984 novel *Notturmo indiano* (as well as the 1989 film of the same title directed by Alain Corneau), and the short story “I treni che vanno a Madras,” included in the book that was to follow *Notturmo indiano* entitled *Piccoli equivoci senza importanza* (1985). This short story eventually becomes woven into the longer work as part of the French film version of the novel. By reconsidering these works within a context of

Portuguese, Indian, and other cultures in this way, I wish to plot out and reveal some of the potential difficulties of re-imagining Asia in terms of a singularly Lusophone cultural and intellectual identity.

Although, unlike *Requiem*, this work was originally written in Italian, it uses Portuguese characters and language as unavoidable points of reference on a literary passage to Goa. The narrative illustrates the challenges of venturing intellectually beyond the limits of the Portuguese linguistic and cultural enclave in Asia in order to re-imagine one's own continually shifting relationship with concepts of identity and alterity in an expanded context of postcolonial knowledge.

Perhaps part of the necessity of revisiting Tabucchi's work in connection to his ongoing cross-identification with, and outsider's representation of, a Portuguese culture by now made "his own"—even if continually tempered by the necessity for intellectual intervention, especially as part of a critique of the strictly conceived metropolitan borders of the nation-state and its official dependencies—serves precisely to complicate the presumed representative power of the enclave, that separately administered "space apart" and, by extension, any presumably immutable, internalized identity, whether cultural, linguistic, national, or otherwise, each broadcast outward by means of literature and its attendant cultural traditions and commonplaces.

The main character and narrator, who passes through the novel either anonymously or simply under the last name Roux, travels through India in search of a lost friend, the Indo-Portuguese businessman Xavier Janata Pinto, one who appears as barely more than a distant memory or name. His friend's name, however, may well suffice for a set of complex literary associations. Those most familiar with the Portuguese presence in Goa would immediately associate this first name with Goa's Christian saint, Francis Xavier, but others have gone on to suggest that his last name, Pinto, may also be a reference to the sixteenth-century explorer Fernão Mendes Pinto, author of the classic 1614 chronicle of his travels throughout Asia entitled *Peregrinação* (Strater 254-255).

If it is indeed the case that both the first and last name conceal some thinly veiled historical reference, then does not the middle name, or other last name, also merit interpretation? "Janata" means "people" in Konkani, Hindi, and a number of other South Asian languages: might this be yet another veiled reference to the author that Tabucchi has pursued throughout his literary work, the Portuguese poet and modern master of multiple identity Fernando Pessoa, who through his own heteronymic body of work appears as both one person and many people, as well as the poetic representative of an entire people?⁴ Setting aside this compound

name and the endless speculations that it may provoke on the assumed, fictional, and multiple nature of identity, the character Xavier is described simply as a man with a sad smile who has left few if any clues for an eventual re-encounter.

His only guide is an often-improvised itinerary lifted from the pages of a popular English-language guidebook, only one in an ever-expanding series of self-styled “travel survival kits” (Singh *et al.*) that have led the wave of unconventional travelers—whether “hippies,” “freaks” or simply self-styled “independent thinkers” like Roux—over a well-worn trajectory of Asian destinations from the 1960s to the present day.⁵ Oblique references to this and other guidebooks pop up in both the novel and the short story, with his experiences often confirming *a posteriori* what he has read, if not actually determining those experiences (*Notturmo* 13; “I treni” 107). With it, the narrator sets out from Bombay to Madras and finally to his final destination, the former Portuguese colony of Goa. Over the course of this journey, however, it soon becomes apparent that the only traces of a recognizably Portuguese presence are left neither by the obscured Indo-Portuguese figure he pursues nor by the remnants of an equally effaced colonial past.

What precisely is this colonial past that he is looking for, and where does it originate? Many of the Portuguese motifs that appear in the novel—above all, the inescapable reflections on the life and work of Fernando Pessoa—have little or nothing to do with India and are set in motion simply by the narrator’s European literary imagination as he interprets the multiple markings of his passage through this foreign continent by way of the recurrent cultural commonplaces at his disposal. These include: those European languages that in this context appear all the more foreign; points of cultural refuge such as Portuguese baroque churches and colonial libraries inhabited by the archival materials he calls his “topi morti” (“dead mice”); an amiable Portuguese priest who serves as its curator; and the ghost of the long-dead sixteenth-century colonial administrator Afonso de Albuquerque, second viceroy of Portuguese India, who haunts both the archive and Roux’s dreams. Other spaces evoke the last years of colonial presence in the mid-twentieth century, especially the string of European-style hotels that are the setting for much of the novel’s action. Even the constellations of stars in the night sky over Goa seem to point toward Portugal’s continuing history of navigation, even if it is one that apparently holds no clues for this latter-day explorer as to what his eventual direction might be. After all, at the end of the novel, the fate of Xavier is never revealed; the character himself is simply one more literary pretext for

this narrator's own experience and discovery, a dimension of the narrator's own assumed literary persona for the purposes of writing the novel, perhaps under yet another presumed literary heteronym.

The "Second Rail" of the novel: "I treni che vanno a Madras"

As I have mentioned earlier, one other narrative from Tabucchi's work that also recounts this voyage by train from Bombay to Madras was not included in the novel, although it does appear as part of the 1989 film version. The short story "I treni che vanno a Madras" ("The Trains that Go to Madras") seems to provide an overlapping narrative to the one in the novel. In it, a traveler preoccupied with finding "la vera India" (much like his archetypal counterpart Adela Quested from E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India*) meets a fellow European on the train from Bombay to Madras who introduces himself as Peter Schlemihl, a name already familiar to the narrator as that of the protagonist from German Romantic Adelbert von Chamisso's tale "Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte" (1813), who (interestingly enough as part of Tabucchi's repeating narrative of lost *Doppelgänger*) sells his shadow for a bag of gold. Despite the mistrust provoked by the use of such an obvious pseudonym, this fellow traveler's exhaustive knowledge of Indian art, culture, and customs so impresses the narrator that it leads him into an extended conversation, one that would take them far beyond a search for the real India and back to Europe, although to a much more brutal previous incarnation than the relatively prosperous postwar society from which this tourist has departed.

It is clear from the outset that this visitor's knowledge of the real India cannot compare to that of his traveling companion, one who appears to have more than a passing interest in Indian mythology and art. In comparison, the narrator can only sum up what little he knows about India in abbreviated form, by way of the following short list of historical events: "le mie conoscenze della penetrazione europea sulle coste dei Tamil; parlai della leggenda del martirio di San Tommaso a Madras, del fallito tentativo dei portoghesi di fondare un'altra Goa su quelle coste, delle loro guerre con i reami locali, dei francesi di Pondicherry" (110).⁶ Immediately apparent in this succession of historical details is how each example of the narrator's presumable knowledge of India is invariably linked to the European colonial encounter; when it comes to details of native dynasties, however, it is here that his knowledge falters, that is, when it comes to approaching India on its own terms and not as merely a chapter of European colonial history.

As the story continues, it becomes clear that his travel companion has other business in Madras than simply viewing religious artifacts such as a statue of a dancing Shiva in a Madras museum. His initial encounter with this statue, however, was not in India at all, but in Europe, more specifically, in a doctor's office in a Nazi concentration camp:

[...] il mio sguardo fu attratto da una statuetta che il medico teneva sulla scrivania. Era la riproduzione di una divinità orientale, ma io non l'avevo mai vista. Rappresentava una figura danzante, con le braccia e le gambe in posizioni armoniche e divergenti iscritte in un circolo, piccoli vuoti che aspettavano di essere chiusi dall'immaginazione di chi la guardava. Il medico si accorse del mio rapimento e sorrise. Aveva la bocca sottile e beffarda. Questa statua rappresenta il circolo vitale, disse, nel quale tutte le scorie devono entrare per raggiungere la forma superiore della vita che è la bellezza. Le auguro che nel ciclo biologico previsto della filosofia che concepì questa statua lei possa avere, in un'altra vita, un gradino superiore a quello che le è toccato nella sua vita attuale. (113-114)⁷

The encounter with this dancing Shiva or “Nataraja” (Kramrisch 115-118; Fig. 1) appears to provoke not only a *darshan*, or transcendental vision, in which Peter becomes aware of his own existence within a extended cosmic cycle of life and death, but through this image he is also drawn into an intense experience of humiliation created by the doctor's examination of Peter's naked body in a seemingly interminable line of other anonymous bodies, all unwilling patients in the name of “German science.” As part of this institutional mechanism of mass extermination, the doctor re-interprets an image of this deity in a dance of bliss (*anandatandeva*) through the distorted lens of Nazi ideology and the Holocaust. No doubt this doctor has already gotten used to playing God with his patients, although a much more merciless one than the statuette on his desk; yet it is this doctor who eventually will be destroyed first, as Peter carries out his own vision of justice. After all, what is the real reason that Peter is on his way to Madras? To finally track down the doctor who explained to him the meaning behind this deity so many years before, and then shoot him dead.

Such complex contemplations of the cycle of life and death may even give insight upon a transfer back to *Notturmo indiano* to examine the inconclusive way that Tabucchi's novel ends—or better yet, dissolves. The final scene is set in the restaurant at Goa's Oberoi Hotel, over a dinner conversation with

Christine, a fellow European traveler and photographer recently arrived from Madras and Calcutta (by way of the formerly French enclave Pondicherry, predictably enough). Christine's curiosity about Roux's work leads to a series of probing questions; in his responses, the protagonist appears to admit that the man he has spent the entire novel pursuing is in fact a hypothetical character: a shadow figure in a novel not yet written.

So what, ultimately, to make of this rapidly unraveling, somewhat anticlimactic, yet no less provocative reflection on the ephemeral or transcendental nature of literary fiction that culminates at a hotel in Goa? As the final conversation between two European artists may suggest, the Western subject may well be further from Goa, Pondicherry, and the rest of colonial Asia than previously imagined. This is exemplified above all in the title Christine gives to one of her photographs of police brutality from apartheid South Africa: "méfiez-vous des morceaux choisis" ("Don't trust the choice bits"). This image, accompanied by such a slogan, cannot but operate as a critique of those choice morsels, whether in culinary or literary form, selected as those most suitable for the palate of the mainstream public, whether to confirm established tastes or prejudices, to maintain official ideologies of cultural identity and hegemony, if not as a perhaps dubious yet still inescapable part of the project called literary and cultural critique.

This graphic evidence of South African police repression thus assumes the function of a Barthesian *punctum* within the novel, i.e., an unexpected interruption in the larger scheme of representation as a solitary, yet explicit representation of late colonial brutality. As Barthes affirms in *La chambre claire*, "ces blessures, sont des points. Ce second element qui vient déranger le studium, j'appellerai donc *punctum*; car *punctum*, c'est aussi: piqûre, petit trou, petite tache, petite coupure—et aussi coup de dés. Le *punctum* d'une photo, c'est ce hazard qui, en elle me point (mais aussi me meurtrit, me poigne)" (Barthes 1126). Here, however, it is the allusion to the photograph itself that exercises the same function within this novel, a jarring mark of injury that pops the bubble of a scene set in the restaurant of a Western-style luxury hotel. Such an irruption suggests that, through this unexpected hole, the narration has navigated not toward the gates of India but rather back into a discussion of those literary and intellectual strategies that guard entry into many of the contemporary debates on postmodern subjectivity and aesthetics. Nonetheless, the insertion of Christine's photograph between this novel's final pages may also serve to ensure that such strategies of writing do not completely suppress

other urgent questions on the lingering repressive nature of state institutions, both in Europe and elsewhere.

In this discussion of “Lusophone” Asia, then, it may well be not these literary depictions of Goa, India, or Asia that must be interrogated but the background points of cultural departure—whether from Portugal or elsewhere in Europe—that call them into being. By way of this literary form of self-inspection, the commonplaces of Portuguese subjectivity are drawn into a literary dead end. All the same, perhaps there is still a way out, albeit not one explicitly elaborated upon in the final pages of this novel. It prefigures a different form of sequel: one that each reader, writer, or critic must elaborate individually, one that points toward a renewed transformative, transcultural exchange that projects the self and cultural identity into the future by way of one’s own intellectual self-critique. These supplementary readings are perhaps the most difficult dimension of any philosophical inquiry, as they involve an inventory of where our present understanding, linguistic expertise, or for that matter, to arrive (once again, unintentionally) to those obscure places where no preexisting travel guide can take us.

A Future for Luso-Asian Studies, through Translation

That said, any study of Portuguese culture in Asia today must naturally extend beyond European colonial languages, and even beyond current official state languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Chinese or Bahasa Indonesia, but also towards those local languages one might encounter both within and at the officially delineated margins of any colonial stronghold. In this expanded continental linguistic and literary context, the pivotal role of translation becomes all the more impossible to ignore, especially when accompanied by the critical analysis of contemporary translation studies scholars and the translators themselves. Simply put, the more comfortable option of limiting oneself to the colony’s epistemological enclave must eventually be recognized for what it is: a selective cultural and linguistic politics that implicitly limits access to a number of lesser-known narratives that often present a quite different picture of native cultures and anti-colonial struggles, whether in Asia or in the rest of the Global South.

Such subsequent investigations along these lines would no doubt lead toward those Indian literary texts now being translated from Konkani and other Indian languages into English (and perhaps eventually even into Portuguese) for the first time. Perhaps the most notable example is Pundalik N. Naik’s 1977 novel *Acchev*, translated by Vidya Pai in 2002 with the English

subtitle *The Upheaval*. The story revolves around the disastrous transformation of traditional life in a rural Goan community by the arrival of mining interests in the years immediately after the departure of the Portuguese. Despite the patently postcolonial setting of the work in the 1970s, it is perhaps telling that little or no traces of the Portuguese colonial presence appears in this narrative, apart from a brief mention at the beginning of the novel: “is there anything left of the past? The *firangis* [Westerners] went away and so did everything that was connected with them ... those loaves of bread, that easy life. Today even men are measured by money” (5). Despite the unavoidable implication that it is not just Portuguese colonial rule but in fact the postcolonial arrival of industrial capitalism in the form of a mining enterprise that brings about the downfall of this community’s prosperity and traditional social structure, one might respond that there were and still are cultural spaces such as these that remain to a great extent disconnected from the language and institutional mechanisms of both the colonial system and the postcolonial nation-state. When this definitive contact with “modernity” does arrive, however, it takes on the most brutal of depictions: the son is buried under a pile of sand, the mechanical shovel is called in to dig him out. His mother arrives and attempts to embrace the corpse of her dead son: “one of the workers caught hold of her trying to draw her back when horrifyingly, everyone screamed as Nanu’s head slipped into her hands, severed neatly from his body” (138-139).⁸

As gripping as the images in the literary text itself, however, is the story of the novel’s passage into English, especially through the use of those strategies that attempt to bridge cultural gaps and facilitate the publication and circulation of lesser-known literary traditions among unfamiliar readers both in India and beyond. Maria Aurora Couto’s extensive introduction on the history of the Konkani language and literature, with its detailed elaboration of the novel’s cultural context, gives insight into the wide range of postcolonial literary activity in the region, both in Konkani (whether written in Devanagari, Roman, or even Kannada script) and in other languages, especially Marathi and English (xxi). There is also what has become practically a requisite for Indian novels published in English, the ever-recurrent glossary of site-specific Indian terms at the back: while many are familiar terms also found in other South Asian works, others are of less common, Portuguese origin, such as “patrao” [“boss”] or “tiatr” [a local genre of musical theater] (143-144).

Perhaps even more fascinating for translation studies scholars, however, is the brief translator’s note by Vidya Pai, which narrates the complex personal

and institutional process that led to the eventual publication of this novel in English:

Years passed. Goa was liberated. The government recognized Konkani as an independent Indian language and her writers found themselves in the Sahitya Akademi's annual honors lists. Yet, at a workshop for the award winners of a national translation contest in 1994, while others spoke of regional writers and books that had been translated from their languages, we the Konkani remained tongue-tied. We could boast of no organized attempts to translate Konkani writing into English to give it a wider readership. We had no translated titles to display. (viii)

The difficulties of literary translation and publishing are all the more palpable when one is, as Pai describes himself, "an unknown translator trying to place an unknown book in an unknown language" (viii). Given that Indian scholars have noted for some time the growing trend toward translation from Indian languages, or *bhasha* literature, into English (Mukherjee 109), Konkani literature may also be poised not only to "untie its tongue," but to develop a more globally audible voice by way of future translations. Whether the process will extend to the Portuguese language is a question that must ultimately be decided by Lusophone translators themselves, whether those translating from English (above all in the case of Goan literature originally written in English and not yet translated into Portuguese), or those working directly out of Konkani and other Indian languages.

Such an expanded project of cultural translation may well provide alternatives to cultural perspectives predicated by officialized monolingualism or, for that matter, the promotion of any standardized and single language and culture above others, and allow for a reformulation of translational identity that extends beyond present conceptions of both self and "our selves." In this transcontinental context of an exchange towards a multiple and ever fluctuating sense of self, even the words of metropolitan thinkers such as the contemporary Portuguese philosopher Eduardo Lourenço may begin to allow for radically different interpretations of concepts such as "lusocosmology" and "futuraity":

De qualquer modo, nós podemos falhar o Futuro, onde mais ou menos americanamente, já estamos. Mas falhá-lo-emos, como nosso, se não levarmos ao seu encontro e não inscrevermos na sua órbita imaginária aquela espécie de vontade de existir, de ter um destino, uma missão singular por ser então a do Ocidente

inteiro. Como foi a nossa quando éramos a imagem antecipada de todos os futuros. Anacronismo? Se se quiser, mas futurante. (31)

How might a reading of the possibilities of this future “we” be transformed by a reconfiguration of language, literature, thought, and culture beyond the arbitrary, if not imaginary, confines of a “Western” tradition and its presumably “American” present?

In this presumably postcolonial moment, the Portuguese language appears to be redefining its place in Asia once again, ironically enough: whether in China’s newly-returned “casino colony” of Macau as a vehicle to facilitate trade with the emergent economies of Brazil and Lusophone Africa (Liu); in East Timor as an official language alongside Tetum after more than a quarter-century of neocolonial rule by Indonesia (Anderson); or even among the hundreds of thousands of diasporic Japanese-Brazilians who bring the Portuguese language with them as they provide Japan with a supplementary source of labor. In this light, might there be still other linguistic routes by which to arrive at a shared transcultural future? And if some of them indeed pass through Asia, might there still be a chance to prove them to be more familiar than any of us had ever imagined?

Notes

¹ Two anthologies from the last years of the Portuguese colonial era exhibit this tendency to limit representation to those that help maintain the illusion of an overwhelming Portuguese cultural identity in the colonized spaces of Asia and Africa. First, there is Manuel de Seabra’s *Goa, Damão e Diu*, published by the Lisbon-based Livraria Bertrand shortly after the occupation of Goa as part of a more extensive series entitled *Antologia da terra portuguesa*, highlighting the literature of the regions and major cities of metropolitan Portugal, as well as the Portuguese colonial possessions euphemistically renamed “Overseas Provinces” in 1951.

This initial volume covers the four-and-a-half centuries of the history of the Portuguese presence in India, from Gil Vicente’s *Auto da Índia* to the work of the contemporary writer Vimala Devi (born Teresa de Almeida, and also Seabra’s spouse). A final note from the author recognizes the coincidence of the work’s publication with the occupation of Goa in December of 1961 (Seabra 205), an event that allowed for the inclusion of short pieces such as that by Maria Ondina (Braga) that refer directly to the Indian occupation and the end of Portuguese colonial rule, albeit strictly from the point of view of the colonial administration. Ondina would continue to chronicle the loss of Portuguese territory in Asia through her later writings from Macau from an ambivalent point between colonial privilege and critique (Brookshaw 151). Although the self-evident limits of such critique might seem to suggest an apt moment to mark an end to imagining Goan—and, by extension, other Asian cultures formerly under Portuguese colonial rule—by way of a primarily Lusophone literary corpus, Seabra’s collection on Goa would nonetheless be followed by a subsequent two-volume edition in 1971 entitled *Literatura indo-portuguesa*, this time compiled by both Devi and Seabra. In spite of the potential importance of such literary compilations to scholars interested

in the Portuguese presence in Asia, problems arise, perhaps unavoidably, when one considers how inadequate such select anthologies can be in providing a truly diverse perspective on literary and cultural activity beyond the officialized discursive limits of the Portuguese colonial enclosure.

To give one example: a recent article published in a Japanese academic journal, "A poesia de Vimala Devi," quotes almost exclusively from the 1971 anthology in conjunction with Devi's other publications in his reconstruction of the literary history of Portuguese India. Such a limitation in critical sources thus appears to impact the potential range of the author's eventual conclusions: "só esperamos que anos de construção de uma cultura própria não venham a ser completamente apagados e possam ser aos poucos resgatados e conservados, nem que seja longe do seu local de origem, como ocorreu em grande parte com a literatura indo-portuguesa" (Neves 110). Though her later perspectives on the colonial experience as expressed in her 1963 book *Monção* would no doubt complete the picture, such hopes for the preservation of colonial cultures such as that of Portuguese India might be taken more seriously if the literary critic had allowed for at least a minimal recognition that Indian languages and cultures, whether Konkani or even more established literary languages, have had more serious challenges to their survival in the face of centuries of colonial rule. Such calls for the "cultural preservation" of colonial spaces in India and elsewhere might do well to concede, first and foremost, that such projects can only be realized in a transcultural context that comes to terms with the cultural and linguistic diversity that cannot be subsumed within a single linguistic, literary, or cultural canon (European or otherwise).

² The Indian historian Partha Chatterjee provides an important Indian counterpoint to colonial narrative of the Goan occupation, simultaneously shedding light on why the occupation of Goa often receives such short shrift in Indian narratives of decolonization: "To come to the main events [of the Nehru era], the one most easily disposed of is Goa. It has always been a mystery why Nehru took such an interminably long time to decide on what to do about the wholly anachronistic obduracy of Salazar's government on the subject of Goa. [...] Specifically, Nehru was worried about what 'the friends of India' would say if she was to use force in liberating Goa. [...] After the Goa operation was finally over—with, it turned out, virtually no bloodshed at all—these 'friends' came back at him with a vengeance, accusing him of hypocrisy and jingoism" (26). For Chatterjee, Goa is a relatively insignificant chapter in the story of decolonization, at least within an Indian context, a sentiment echoed in a later account by Maria Ondina Braga of the Indian invasion of Goa focusing this time not on the Portuguese women awaiting evacuation but on her Indian pupils who stay behind: "E se o meu derrotismo quanto ao futuro de Goa não passasse afinal de um erro? Ainda que párias, elas iam tornar a fazer parte de um dos mais vastos países do globo terrestre. Mais vastos e mais velhos. Nem nós, com certeza, lhes faríamos grande falta (92). In spite of the perceived insignificance of Goa within the extended narratives of Indian cultural history, when viewed in the longer chain of transcontinental events of decolonization, especially in connection with Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia, the events of December 1961 can still be seen to assume a much greater significance, namely, as "the beginning of the end" of the Portuguese colonial empire.

³ "After sailing for many days and nights, I understood that the West has no end but rather continues to move with us, and that we can pursue it at our leisure without ever reaching it" (my translation).

⁴ In spite of Pessoa's continuing imprint upon global culture, especially in translingual and postmodern contexts, it may seem puzzling that many scholars in India still insist that a preoccupation with multiple identities is inherently more common among intellectuals in India than with their counterparts in Europe and the Americas. In a 1994 interview with the Indian intellectual Ashis Nandy, conducted by Vinay Lal, Nandy elaborates upon such models of intellectual identity: "Many Indian intellectuals [...] are genuinely bicultural, and move in two or more worlds. This is the characteristic feature of the intellectual scene in the southern part of the world of which we have not taken adequate account. It allows you a lot of freedom, a lot of elbow room. Right within you are these multiple identities which are constantly challenging your academic sensitivities or even your sharpened intellectual sensitivities" (Ashis/Lal 24). Later

in the interview, Lal even goes as far as to say that, “in the West, living with multiple identities in considered to be problematic” (25). While there may indeed be a wide range of examples to support such a general statement, Tabucchi’s continual return to Pessoa, this time in an Indian context, may thus serve to remind scholars of all cultural backgrounds of our innate potential of imagining “our selves”—regardless of their cultural or linguistic origin—in the plural, and even across the perforated boundaries of “East” and “West.”

⁵ Indeed, it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to speak of Goa in the late twentieth century without at least one oblique reference to the wave of Western counterculture that descended upon it over the course of the past forty years, a transcultural encounter that in many cases, though certainly not in all, has eclipsed any memory of preceding Portuguese colonialism. To give one anecdotal example: at a recent luncheon talk on Portuguese Early Modern models of globalization held at a nearby university, I sat with a well-known Indian scholar specializing in postcolonial studies. When I told him that I was writing on Goa, his reaction was not on how I approached, say, questions of postcoloniality or indigenous culture; rather, he assumed from the outset that as a Westerner I must be researching the Goan hippie scene! All the same, for self-styled postcolonial theorists seemingly interested in doing some vicarious explorations of their own, I would refer them to the detailed first-hand memoir by Cleo Odzer with the provocative title, *Goa Freaks: My Hippie Years in India* (1995), to the Angolan José Eduardo Agualusa’s 2000 novel *Um estranho em Goa* or to David Tomory’s *Hello Goodnight: A Life of Goa* (2000). The latter appears, perhaps all too tellingly, as part of a series of travel narratives published by the same editors that brought us the “travel survival kit” that guides Tabucchi’s narrator in his nocturnal wanderings through India.

⁶ “My knowledge of the European penetration of the Tamil coast; the legend of the martyrdom of Saint Thomas in Madras, the failed attempt of the Portuguese to establish another Goa on those coasts, their wars with the local kingdoms, and the French of Pondicherry” (my translation).

⁷ “[...] my gaze was drawn toward a statuette that the doctor kept on his desk. It was a reproduction of an Oriental deity, but I had never seen it before. It depicted a dancing figure, with its arms and legs in harmonious and divergent positions placed inside of a circle. There were only a few empty spaces in that circle, tiny holes waiting to be closed up by those who gazed upon them. The doctor became aware of my entrancement and smiled, softly, mockingly. ‘This statue represents the circle of life,’ he said, ‘into which all the scum of the earth must enter in order to attain that higher form of life called beauty. I hope for your sake that, in the biological cycle envisioned by the philosophy that created this statue, you might ascend to a higher level in another life than you did in this one’” (my translation).

⁸ As far as this act of violence may seem from the works of Tabucchi, one cannot help but be reminded of the central image of *La testa perduta di Damasceno Monteiro*, that of a tortured and decapitated body that also *points* both toward his murderer and the long line of other victims of institutional violence captured in literature, in a picture or, in this case, on tape. The barely audible recording near the end of the novel splices together references not only to the details of the murder but also to Kafka’s seminal story on colonial violence, “In the Penal Colony,” most notably, its by-now archetypal apparatus for corporeal inscription of the criminal sentence, as well as the French Surrealists who gave a name to it (and others like it): “machines-célibataires [...] macchine che sono la negazione della vita, perché la trasferiscono sul letto di morte” (218) [“machines that are the negation of life, because they transfer it onto its deathbed”] (my translation). As such mechanisms multiply and reappear in a series of presumably postcolonial spaces at the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, it becomes more difficult than ever to ignore how the literary text is accompanied into the space of translation by a number of other translated institutions, bloodied machines and “punctured” bodies. This brief glimpse of bodies through the previously obscured perforations in literature may also eventually reflect back onto a reconfigured image of “our selves”; Barthes’ “point” is perhaps best made at that moment when

an anonymous dead body is rendered identifiable and nameable by means of a thorough investigation that combines the theoretical, the textual, and above all, the critical.

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