

(Lost) Love, Eros and Metaphor: Colonialism, Social Fragmentation and the "Burden" of Race in *Portagem*

by Orlando Mendes

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Abstract. Orlando Mendes's 1965 novel *Portagem* traces the tragic life of the bi-racial protagonist, João Xilim. Using the metaphor of frustrated and empty human relationships, Mendes illustrates the socio-political fragmentation of colonial, Mozambican society on the eve of the war for independence. Racial, economical and educational divisions introduced by Portuguese colonialism are the factors that contributed most significantly to Mozambique's pre-independence state of affairs. The poor education of rural Mozambicans not only prevented their ability to articulate their grievances but also undermined the anti-colonialists' attempts to unite the colonized against Portuguese hegemony.

[João] não tem mulher, nem filhos, nem amigos. [...] Foi sempre ele, o mulato, um homem clandestino [...]. Por toda a parte ele encontrou gente que anda à toa, rejeitada pelos brancos e pelos negros. Deserdada pelas duas raças puras.
(*Portagem* 169-170)

In the mid-nineteenth century, the French philosopher and racial theorist Count Arthur de Gobineau stated in *The Inequality of the Races* that "[It is impossible] that the civilizations belonging to racially distinct groups should ever be fused together. The irreconcilable antagonism between different races and cultures is clearly established by history [...]" (179). Known for his often-paradoxical racist theories, Gobineau proposed that miscegenation is useful only in order to achieve civilization but once attained, continued mis-

cegenation will cause civilizations to degenerate (Gobineau 179). Although Gobineau's apprehensions regarding sustained miscegenation did not deter him from marrying a Creole, his polemical theories illustrate the racial and social problematic that Mozambican author, Orlando Mendes, wished to deconstruct and criticize in his 1965 novel, *Portagem*. Born to Portuguese émigrés, Orlando Mendes was one of Mozambique's most notable literary figures, primarily as a poet and as a writer of fiction. Having rejected an opportunity to pursue a brilliant scientific career in Europe, Mendes opted to return to Mozambique in order to pursue scientific research in the countryside on behalf of the government (Araújo Medina 166-167). *Portagem* reflects the period in which Mendes's work in rural Mozambique exposed him to scenes of racial oppression, poor education and abject poverty.

Originally written in the 1950s, *Portagem* gained considerable repute as a realist critique of socio-racial injustices attributed to colonialism. The bi-racial protagonist, João Xilim, is the illegitimate offspring of a Portuguese coalmine owner, Campos, and his African mistress, Kati. Written in the tradition of the *bildungsroman*, *Portagem* traces the socio-economic and race-related hardships that João must endure from childhood to young adulthood. Throughout the text, Mendes portrays a cross-section of Mozambican society by deploying a heteroglotic variety of authentic-sounding voices. Nevertheless, it is frequently obvious that these voices, and indeed the characters, are contrived in order to advance Mendes's socio-political agenda. His strident criticism of the marginalization of some sectors of Mozambican society due to racial and class constructs surfaces throughout the novel and the ambiguous *dénouement* intentionally leaves the reader with a sense of a tragic and uncertain future not only for the characters but for Mozambique as well. The themes of tragedy and solitude resonate throughout *Portagem* and arise primarily out of the failure of all intra- and inter-racial relationships. It is my contention that these frustrated relationships function as a metaphor that signals the fragile and fragmented state of Mozambican society on the eve of the struggle for independence.

Since Mendes developed an early interest in Marxism and anti-fascism, an intellectual affinity shared by many of his anti-colonialist compatriots, it stands to reason that the majority of the relational conflicts in *Portagem* originate in the racial and class structures established by colonialism. Mendes deploys the metaphor of troubled human relationships in *Portagem*, particularly those that ultimately fail or are thwarted due to discrimination and

social mores, in order to illustrate the unstable and fragmentary state of colonial Mozambican society. Creating a metaphor out of human relationships is not a new idea. Some scholars, such as Latin Americanist Doris Sommer, typically understand the successful union of otherwise incompatible literary characters as a metaphorical amalgamation of regional, economic and political differences. In her book *Foundational Fictions* (1991), Sommer focuses on a canonical corpus of nineteenth-century Latin American “national romances,” a term that she defines as “[...] a cross between our contemporary use of the word as a love story and a nineteenth century use that distinguished the genre as more boldly allegorical than the novel” (5). Sommer further posits that both the authors and the readers of these national romances assume an allegorical relationship between the personal and political narratives (41). Moreover, the ever-present erotic element serves simultaneously as a literary mechanism to unite the characters as well as a hook to maintain the readers’ interest. Although Mendes also includes in *Portagem* the same elements that are representative of Latin American foundational romances, he approaches concepts such as nation and unity as an unattainable goal given the social and political conditions resulting from colonialism. On the literary level, the reader senses this pessimism through failed human relationships. If, as Frederic Jameson has stated, all third-world texts are necessarily allegorical and should be read as national allegories, then *Portagem* certainly portrays a bleak image of colonial Mozambique (Jameson 69). Mendes does not hesitate to reveal his preoccupation with Mozambique’s lack of direction as a national community.

The novel opens with signs of fragmentation within the family unit with a combative exchange between Alima, an elderly black woman who refuses to leave the land of her birth, the Ridjalembe, and Kati her daughter. Alima represents a traditional Africa that resists European colonialism. Kati, who symbolizes the betrayal of African culture, visits the poor and ailing Alima in order to bring her food, keep her company and ultimately to convince her to abandon Ridjalembe in order to live in the newer settlement of Marandal. In this relationship, Alima berates Kati for embracing the language and culture of the colonizers: “Tu só gosta de falar língua de branco, não é?... E aprendeste a mim a falar também, não é? [...] Vocês gosta de branco mas branco só quer a preto só pra gastar o corpo de ele” (8). The reference to the language of the colonizer while defending the language of the colonized suggests the binary opposition “europhone elite / noneurophone populace” proposed by

Kwame Appiah (143). On the one hand, Kati's acceptance of the colonizer's language and her move to the Marandal signal the necessity of adapting to the status quo in order to survive, yet it also indicates a betrayal of her people and her great-great grandfather, a former slave. This binary opposition of the resistant mother Alima and the acculturated daughter Kati is an oblique reference to the *Regime do Indigenato*, a policy instituted by Salazar, which, according to Allen and Barbara Isaacman, legalized the racial, economic and cultural subordination of most Africans (39). Furthermore, the Isaacmans add that:

The tiny minority who could read and write Portuguese, had rejected "tribal" customs, and were gainfully employed in the capitalist economy were classified as *assimilados* [assimilated]. In principle, they enjoyed all the rights and responsibilities of Portuguese citizens. Africans and mulattoes who could not satisfy these requirements had to carry identity cards, fulfill stringent labor requirements, and live outside European areas. These persons, known as *indigenas* [indigenes], were not considered citizens, and they remained subject to customary law. (39)

In addition, by referring to the Portuguese material interest in the African "body," Alima is not only alluding to the forced labor practices of colonialism (*chibalo*), she is also hinting at the sexual alliances between white men and African women, and the bi-racial offspring that these unions will generate.

Alima's negative opinion of interracial relationships reflects the opinion of literary characters in other Mozambican narratives such as Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa's *Ualalapi* (1987). In this anti-historical parody of official Portuguese discourse, the protagonist King Ngungunhane prophetically reveals the contempt that will be directed at the offspring of interracial relationships: "E por todo o lado, como uma doença que a todos ataca, começarão a nascer crianças com a pele da cor do mijo que expelis com agrado nas manhãs. Serão crianças da infâmia" (119). Although Ngungunhane is speaking to Africans, he also implies that even whites will reject these "crianças da infâmia." Similarly, in José Craverinha's poem "Ao meu belo pai ex-emigrante" (1974), the bi-racial subject acknowledges his Portuguese and African roots but notes that he will never be white enough for the European:

E na minha rude e grata
sinceridade não esqueço
meu antigo português puro

que me geraste no ventre de uma tombasana
 eu mais um novo moçambicano
 semiclaro para não ser igual a um branco qualquer
 e seminegro para jamais renegar
 um glóbulo que seja dos Zambezes do meu sangue.
 (Ferreira 329)

Given the period of political and social turmoil in which Craverinha wrote the poem, it comes as no surprise that the author only emphasizes the marginalization of the bi-racial by the Portuguese and not that by Africans. However, when applied in tandem, both *Ualalapi* and “Ao meu belo pai ex-emigrante” effectively demonstrate the unenviable, middle position in which the bi-racial resided in Mozambican society.

In *Portagem*, João Xilim is the bi-racial product of the type of interracial relationship to which Alima alludes. While waiting for the arrival of his legitimate, Portuguese wife, Laura, Campos arranged for Kati to satisfy his sexual needs as well for “simples entretenimento” (Mendes 34). The result of the sexual relationship between Campos and Kati is, of course, João. For Kati, there is no possibility of a legitimate, long-term relationship with Campos since her skin color and social class present an insurmountable obstacle. Frantz Fanon, quoting from Mayotte Capécia’s *Je suis Martiniquaise*, affirms this problematic encountered by women of color: “[...] a woman of color is never altogether respectable in a white man’s eyes. Even when he loves her” (42). Despite knowing *a priori* that marriage with Campos is out of the question, Kati believes their sexual relationship to be advantageous for her despite the obvious imbalance of power in terms of race, class and gender. In her essay on race and film, Dina Sherzer addresses the issues of imbalance of power and the exploitation of the native woman:

Sexual policies were really about maintenance of power and domination, the inheritance of White property, and the threat to the homogeneity of the social group. But, though mixed marriages were discouraged, the sexual exploitation of the native woman was a common practice in colonial society, as native women were frequently used as concubines, servants, and playthings for Europeans. (230)

Kati undoubtedly has few choices but to acquiesce to Campos’s advances. Her service to him is perversely reminiscent of the *chibalo*, which was a colo-

nial system of quasi-slavery or forced labor. The relationship is further complicated by Kati's untimely pregnancy and subsequent arranged marriage to Uhulamo, whose silence Campos purchases with the foremanship of the mine. Despite the appearance of legitimacy, this marriage is simply a front to conceal João's illegitimacy. Furthermore, since Laura is homely and lacks "quaisquer encantos para seduzir o marido" it is understood from the text that Kati will continue to serve as Campos's mistress (Mendes 34).

Two important aspects of Portuguese colonialism are at play in these and subsequent scenes in *Portagem* where the racial and relational dynamics between Africans and white men are concerned. First is Gilberto Freyre's concept of lusotropicalism, which proposed that the Portuguese colonizer was particularly suited to adapt to his environs and to effect the colonizing process through miscegenation with women of color (*miscibilidade*). Lusotropicalism also implies that these colonized women of color passively and willingly entered into sexual relationships with the Portuguese colonizer. In *Casa-grande e senzala* Freyre indicates that "Quanto à miscibilidade, nenhum povo colonizador, dos modernos, excedeu ou sequer igualou nesse ponto aos portugueses" (83). Freyre later adds that all Brazilians bear the influence:

Da mulata que nos tirou o primeiro bicho-de-pé de uma coceira tão boa. Da que nos iniciou no amor físico e nos transmitiu, ao ranger da cama-de-vento, a primeira sensação completa de homem. [...] Já houve quem insinuasse a possibilidade de se desenvolver das relações íntimas da criança branca com a ama-de-leite negra muito do pendor sexual que se nota pelas mulheres de cor no filho-família dos países escravocratas. [...] Conhecem-se casos no Brasil não só de predileção mas de exclusivismo: *homens brancos que só gozam com negra*. (343, emphasis mine)

The same inability to become sexually aroused by white women not only occurs with Campos but also with the aging and unappealing, white bar owner, Esteves, who not only steals away João's legitimate, mulatto wife, Luísa, but also later marries his first love, Campos's daughter Maria Helena. Although doubly legitimate in that Maria Helena's marriage to Esteves is legal and socially acceptable, the relationship is unfulfilling and unhappy. Esteves's penchant for women of color apparently causes frequent bouts of impotence that prevent a healthy, intimate bond with Maria Helena. The desire for women of color while seeking legitimacy in marriage with a white woman suggests Freyre's reference to an old Brazilian saying: "Branca para casar,

mulata para f..., negra para trabalhar" (85). Esteves's lust for women of color, particularly bi-racials such as Luísa, actually leads him down a slippery path to a kind of emotional and sexual enslavement similar to that which director Carlos Diegues portrays in his cinematic rendition of the legendary slave-woman Xica da Silva of colonial Brazil. Although Luísa initially resists Esteves's amorous advances because she wishes to remain loyal to João, she ultimately acquiesces primarily due to the influence of her mother, Esteves's persistence, and his willingness to support her financially in return for sexual favors. This is now the second instance where a white man and a woman of color have betrayed João. This cycle of betrayal is curiously Freudian in that it mirrors the disappointment, and perhaps the jealousy, that João experienced when he discovered his mother's intimacy with Campos. Esteves, a paternal figure, competes with João for the attentions of Luísa who, in many ways, is a mother to João. In fact, Luísa supports João financially since discriminatory hiring practices prevent João from securing steady and compensatory employment. This longing for the mother while simultaneously desiring to kill the father looms large in the relationships that João experiences with Kati and Luísa and metaphorically suggests the desire to abolish colonial patrimony in order to restore Mamana Africa to her original purity.

The second important aspect of Portuguese colonialism is the powerlessness of both the woman and the man of color, although the (desired) body of the former can prove to be an important manipulative tool. As Robert Young states in *Colonial Desire*, "Colonialism was a machine: a machine of war, of bureaucracy and administration, and above all, of power [...]. Colonialism [...] was also a desiring machine" (98). In the first case, the women of color are the objects of desire for both the white, Portuguese men as well as for African men. This is evident in all of the love triangles present throughout the novel. Furthermore, in all of these love triangles, not only is the woman of color the object of desire but the man of color, particularly the bi-racial, is the object of rejection and betrayal. As Fanon asserted in the case of French colonialism in the Caribbean, the objective of the woman of color was to become "whiter" through sexual relationships with the white man and to avoid returning to her blackness through a union with a man of color (47). This cycle of rejection and solitude begins in the first chapter of *Portagem* when Alima reveals Kati's betrayal of her African roots in order to undergo the process of acculturation.

Although the first love triangle involving a white man (Campos) and an African woman (Kati) produces the most profound and long-lasting effect on

the bi-racial protagonist, the other relationships that João either observes or directly experiences also leave indelible scars on his psyche. Before proceeding further with the interracial, heterosexual relationships, it is important to point out that even the majority of the homosocial relationships that João and other characters experience ultimately end in failure. The term "homosocial," explains Eve Sedgwick, "is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex" (1). In *Portagem*, all of João's relationships with white men center on mutual contempt and on competition for the affections of African and bi-racial women. Homosocial relationships between other African men are equally disastrous, often ending in death or estrangement of some variety. João never experiences a father-son relationship with Campos nor does Mendes elaborate on any details relating to the relationship between João and Uhulamo. While serving on a cargo vessel after initially abandoning the Marandal, João befriends Jaime, a black sailor who does not know the identity of his father and whose mother is a prostitute. This homosocial relationship is short-lived as Jaime simply disappears and never returns to the ship. Furthermore, while in prison for attacking Luísa for an affair with a Portuguese soldier, João meets Izidro, a violent black prisoner who hates and mistrusts João because of his racial impurity. The homosocial bond transforms from animosity to friendship only when João proves his loyalty and Izidro is mortally wounded during a prison riot. Perhaps the most intimate and promising homosocial relationship that João experiences is with the bi-racial fisherman Juza, who later commits suicide upon learning that his mulatto girlfriend, Beatriz, has betrayed him with his white rival, Borges. As we shall see later, the amorous relationship between Juza and Beatriz closely parallels that of João and Luísa.

The theme of failed and/or complicated, unhappy heterosexual relationships continues after the first chapter in which Kati's strained relationship with her mother, Alima, reveals the former's acquiescence to the exigencies of Portuguese colonialism and miscibility. Campos calls João, whom the former knows to be his illegitimate son, to the big house in order to be a playmate for his legitimate daughter, Maria Helena. Childlike innocence initially ignores racial differences until Maria Helena's mother, Laura, delineates them clearly: "Este moleque parece-me esperto demais. Além disso, é mulato. E não gosto nada desta raça. São mais falsos que os pretos. —Os moleques pretos são tão estúpidos, mãe!..." (13). It is initially evident that Maria Helena

has learned to mimic her mother's racial prejudices but her childhood innocence continues to see João in a somewhat egalitarian fashion. Maria Helena and João soon begin to share a mutual attraction despite the racial and socio-economical barriers that separate them. Nevertheless, since the narrator only seems to know João's thoughts at this point in the novel, the reader gets the impression that Maria Helena is less infatuated than João. The reality of João's subordinate status in the big house returns as Campos sends him to work in the mine with the other black workers. Circumstances will continue to impede reconciliation between João and Maria Helena whose innocent romance is temporarily thwarted by fate for several years.

When Campos's death and the fate of the mine finally reunite João and Maria Helena in an ephemeral, erotic encounter, Maria Helena is unable to escape her mother's racial indoctrination. Circumstances once again force João to abandon the Marandal for the city. Maria Helena's rejection of João suggests not only her conformity to social mores relating to class and to race but more particularly to the unwritten but well-established rules governing interracial, erotic unions, especially to those between a man of color and a white woman. Undeniably, unions between a white woman and a man of color contrast markedly with the inverse scenario. In a footnote relating to *Je suis Martiniquaise*, Fanon indicates that the former scenario has a romantic aspect and is based upon an act of giving whereas the latter is often understood as violence against the woman of color (46).

Although Mendes decries the marginalization of all Africans, the fact that he does not develop this brief, sexual encounter with the degree of depth that he employs with the novel's intraracial relationships betrays a subconscious fear of African male sexuality. The fear of the sexually potent Other who is capable of seducing the white woman was often a fear in the European metropolis during the colonial period (Scherzer 230). Furthermore, Sander Gilman asserts that the nineteenth-century, European mindset perceived black sexuality as "[...] a corrupted and corrupting sexuality. [...] Blackness evokes sexuality, and sexuality (*pace* the late Freud) evokes death" (124). Although *Portagem* is a twentieth-century novel, the social constructs relating to race and class reveal a mindset that had remained unchanged for nearly a century. For Maria Helena this brief sexual encounter is much more negative and personally and socially shameful than it is for João. Though Maria Helena faults herself for her weakness, she places the majority of the blame on João who, in her view, has doubly disgraced her. She is now unworthy of

a legitimate marriage, which is to say with a white man of her class. Consequently, after the mine goes bankrupt she has few options but to marry Esteves. Though not specifically stipulated in the text, the general theme of the novel, the metropolitan fear of the sexuality of the Other, and the previous discrimination of Africans and bi-racials strongly suggest that Maria Helena attributes her unworthiness not simply to the loss of her virginity, but more particularly to the loss of her virginity to a man of color.

In the failure of João's relationship with Maria Helena, Mendes is not simply exposing the hypocrisy of lusotropicalism but is also referring to the economic interests of the Portuguese colonists. In the seventeenth century, the Portuguese crown instituted the system known as the *prazo*, which was a tract of land given to settler families in Mozambique that they would govern in a feudalistic fashion. The legal heir to the *prazo* was the eldest daughter who would then have to marry a Portuguese subject born in Portugal. The purpose of the *prazo* system was to ensure the permanence of the settler community in Mozambique and to hinder the accumulation of capital by the Mozambican indigene (Mittleman 24). Although the *prazo* was a feature of early Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique, the feudalist mentality that it created endured for centuries and greatly influenced Mozambican social formation. In *Portagem* it is clear that social factors such as race, class and feudalistic tradition play a key role in preventing the realization of a successful relationship between Maria Helena and João.

The final series of failed relationships in *Portagem* occur in the second half of the novel. The primary factor that causes these relational failures is the white fisherman, Borges, who goes by the appropriate moniker "Coxo." As with the aging and unattractive Esteves, whom, because he is white, society considers superior to João, this word-picture suggests the implementation of the blueprint of the physical imperfection of the white rival who succeeds in stealing the woman of color from the African male. After his release from prison, João manages to rediscover his love for Luísa despite her previous unfaithfulness. Once reunited, Luísa becomes pregnant—a symbolic event that testifies to the sincerity of her contriteness. However, circumstances, unemployment and forced relocation by white developers trigger the premature birth and subsequent death of their infant daughter. This "bocadinho de esperança perdido" foreshadows subsequent tragedy with respect to João and Luísa's relationship and further serves as a metaphor of unrealized national unity (Mendes 124). João then takes up commercial fishing as an apprentice

to the mulatto, Juza, whose mulatto lover, Beatriz, reminds the reader of Luísa before forsaking her lascivious and wanton lifestyle. It turns out that Juza becomes the only real friend that João has ever known while Luísa and Beatriz share a relationship that could be considered homosocial. During this time, João and Luísa have a second child, this time a son whom they name Zidrito, after the black prisoner, Izidro. Names are often symbolic in *Portagem* as we have already seen with Coxo. This is also the case with Izidro and Zidrito. According to Terry Jones's website *Patron Saint Index*, in the Catholic tradition there are many Isidores (Izidro in Portuguese) who have been canonized as saints by the church. It is quite interesting to note that most were martyrs and one of these was an African convert from the Congo whom white colonists beat to death. This African Isidore corresponds appropriately to Mendes's Izidro in that after the latter is fatally shot during a prison uprising, he takes the blame for the murder of a white prison guard committed by João. Even João treats Izidro, his former enemy, as a saintly figure. When Izidro dies, João leans down and piously closes Izidro's eyes: "E o velho sentenciado [Izidro] olha para o mulato [João Xilim] com uma tão angustiada súplica, que este de novo se debruça sobre o seu corpo, agora acabado, para lhe fechar os olhos piedosamente" (Mendes 77). Although João's gesture in naming his son Zidrito is an effort to pay homage to the deceased prisoner, the subliminal suggestion here is that hope for a better future will most likely be unrealized given that Izidro's life was tragic and ended in prison.

Tragedy is ubiquitous in *Portagem* and it looms on the horizon when Borges initiates his conquest of Juza's bi-racial companion, Beatriz. She already has questionable motives for staying with Juza and she thus is a likely candidate for relational betrayal. Only Luísa knows the truth and, ironically, it is she who advocates informing Juza of the betrayal while João cautions her to remain silent. João's silence is particularly disturbing since one would think that he, of all people, would wish to inform his friend of Beatriz's infidelity. It is apparent that João's desire to maintain the economic status quo gets the better of him at the expense of Juza's dignity and well-being. When Juza discovers the truth about Beatriz's infidelity through another bi-racial who also happens to be a friend of João, he plans to avenge himself. After purchasing a new fishing boat, appropriately named "Esperança da gamboa," Juza takes Beatriz out for the maiden voyage, scuttles the boat and drowns them both. As with other symbolic events interspersed throughout the plot,

the act of scuttling the boat foreshadows the inescapable trajectory toward personal and universal tragedy in unrealizable relationships.

The death of Juza and Beatriz marks the end of João's brief period of economic stability and relative happiness. Without the new skiff and Juza and Beatriz, João and Luísa are unable to turn a profit in their fishing venture. Furthermore, Luísa once again becomes pregnant, which soon limits her participation in the fishing business. Since the economic outlook is dire, João and Luísa consider the most drastic of measures: an abortion and possible financial assistance from Luísa's former, white employers. This latter suggestion infuriates João who retorts: "À gente branca tu não pede nada! [...] Que é que teu pai fez por ti? O meu nunca me fez nada!" (157). Once again, Orlando Mendes addresses the economic effects of Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique. Forced relocation by white developers, commercial competition with white entrepreneurs and exploitation of all varieties leaves people of color completely at the mercy of the colonizers.

Their economic difficulties force João to go to the city to find employment. Luísa's solitude puts her in a vulnerable position, one that the sexual predator, Coxo, cannot resist. In their first encounter, Luísa begs Coxo to help them, which he agrees to do. Shortly thereafter, Coxo visits Luísa in her seaside shack and seduces her despite her advanced state of pregnancy. The text is particularly interesting at this juncture in that it superimposes João's fatalism on Luísa who seems physically, but not mentally, paralyzed to resist Coxo's sexual advances. On a subsequent occasion, Coxo once again attempts to seduce Luísa but this time her guilt forces her to resist and cry out for João. Like a scene from a soap opera, it is at this precise moment when João returns home from the city and discovers what is happening. After giving Coxo a thrashing, João insults Luísa, accuses her of betraying him again and he abandons her for the last time. In his absence, Luísa gives birth but both she and her baby soon die from starvation. When João's anger finally subsides and he returns to the shack, he finds Zidrito alive on his bed, Luísa dead on the floor and his infant daughter buried. This tragic ending bears some resemblance to the nineteenth-century Brazilian novelist José de Alencar's *Iracema*, despite the absence of the hopeful expectation of a new race and national destiny embodied in João and Luísa's son, Zidrito. In *Iracema*, Moacyr, the product of miscegenation between the Tabajara princess Iracema and the Portuguese *conquistador* Martim Soares, retains his Otherness but must undergo a process of acculturation in Portugal in order to be acceptable. In *Portagem*,

Zidrito and João will continue in a “destino comum,” one marked not by the hopeful expectation of a new nation but rather one hobbled by discrimination against the African.

Because the metaphor of failed relationships points the reader to a fragmented, Mozambican society marked by the marginalization of the African, it now becomes necessary to explore the reasons behind Mendes’s emphasis on the negative in his allegorical work. Though its presence is somewhat subtle throughout *Portagem*, the role of education is an integral aspect of Mendes’s concern with the fragmented and illiterate working class. According to Allen and Barbara Isaacman, after the implementation of Salazar’s *Estado Novo*, the colonial regime in Mozambique presided over the second highest illiteracy rate in Lusophone Africa (52). For Mendes, then, education is the main ingredient necessary to achieve political consciousness and, hence, to successfully implement a united front against colonial hegemony. For, as Benedict Anderson appropriately states, a sense of nationness and national community cannot be separated from political consciousness (135). Without a sense of social and political union, any attempt to articulate a sense of nationness will be thwarted. Anderson’s assertion echoes the sentiments of nineteenth-century Cuban independence leader José Martí who, in his essay “Mi raza” (“My Race”) forcefully and articulately confronted the white and black racism that prevented the unification of the Cuban people against Spanish colonialism. Cuba, like Mozambique, was a settler colony in which the colonizers not only occupied all of the positions of importance within the socio-political framework but also exploited the African population. Spanish colonization in the Americas, like its Portuguese counterpart, produced a variety of social and racial divisions that prevented, in Martí’s words “[...] la ventura pública, y la individual” (Martí 100) (“[...] public and individual happiness”). Similar to Martí’s project of social unification, in *Portagem* Mendes intends to suggest that poor education and the marginalization of the African underclass will prevent social and political integration and thus will diminish the likelihood of the successful eradication of Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique.

In *Portagem*, the uneducated, Mozambican underclass constitutes what Marx described as “[...] an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition” (17). However, Mendes correctly understood that since the vast majority of Mozambicans were, at best, poorly educated, they would be unable to coherently and uniformly articu-

late their grievances against Portuguese colonialism. Therefore, it was necessary for the anti-colonial intelligentsia to act as a spokesperson for the marginalized underclass. In addition, the substandard level of education among the predominantly African underclass also proved to be an obstacle for the anti-colonialist intelligentsia. Because of this, Orlando Mendes did not direct his literary work at the uneducated masses but rather at the Portuguese colonists. In an interview with Patrick Chabal, Mendes affirmed:

Para quem é que nós escrevíamos? Temos uma população moçambicana com 95 por cento de analfabetos. Portanto, ao povo moçambicano nós não podíamos dirigir directamente. Escrevíamos evidentemente para os colonialistas. Porquê? Porque era uma maneira de nós marcarmos uma posição em nome do povo moçambicano, que não era capaz de se exprimir, nem era receptivo às nossas propostas e às nossas mensagens. [...] Éramos uma espécie de transmissor do pensamento que nós julgávamos que o povo moçambicano tinha, primeiro pela sua resistência e depois pela luta [armada], pela situação a seguir. (76)

It is further likely that Mendes directed his work at the literate minority of Africans who not only had the ability to speak to and for the uneducated populace but who also possessed the intellectual skills necessary to advocate reform in political, economic and social policy in Mozambique. Mendes's work, therefore, served to give a voice to the marginalized, uneducated masses that were incapable of redressing their grievances to the colonial regime.

The practical applications of the poor education of the rural African and bi-racial population do not escape Mendes's attention in *Portagem*. The novel presents the reader with convincing evidence of this inferior level of education in the grammatically incorrect discourses of João and his grandmother Alima. In fact, Mendes novelizes the people's resistance to the anti-colonialists' message due largely to discriminatory educational practices advocated by Lisbon. Of course, the result of the resistance and suspicion is social and political fragmentation among the non-elites, both acculturated and non-acculturated.

Despite the disproportionate number of uneducated Africans and bi-racials in *Portagem*, one of the novel's most interesting characters is Abel Matias, who makes only a brief appearance during the latter half of the novel. When Matias realizes that his new friend, João, is unemployed, his discourse turns political, highlighting the injustices of the white, colonial regime:

"Os brancos fazem o que querem com a gente. E a gente é que estamos na nossa terra. [...] Eu moro na cidade. Só converso com gente dali. Mas, aqui, fora da cidade, as pessoas ainda têm vida pior. E há de haver gente que está farta e anda a pensar que é preciso os negros e os mulatos mandarem na sua terra." (128-129)

Matias's standard Portuguese serves as an identifiable sign that he is one of the few educated, acculturated Africans. Furthermore, the fact that Matias lives in the city underscores the binary opposition city / countryside nurtured by Portuguese colonialism. One of the many unfortunate features of this system was to force Mozambican rural dwellers into a subordinate position (Saul 43). Matias's reason for befriending João becomes apparent when he asks João to gather some of the other unemployed locals for a political meeting. Although he agrees to do so, João's lack of education and his unconscious resignation to his subaltern caste cause him to completely misread Matias's noble motives. Furthermore, João's equally uneducated acquaintances remain cynical and suspicious, and rather than listen to Matias's socio-political ideas and become active in the anti-colonial momentum, they simply rob him. Additionally, since João set up the meeting in the first place, these men are also suspicious of him and they consequently tell him to leave and never come back. This seemingly disconnected meta-plot is particularly significant in that it presents colonial realities as well as Mendes's preoccupation with the rural masses whose lack of education hinders the anti-colonialists' attempts to unite them against the colonial regime.

What then can the reader conclude from *Portagem*? As a national "romance," *Portagem* does not offer the hope of a unified Mozambique as the voiceless and uneducated masses advance slowly toward revolution. Rather, as a neo-realist novel subtly accentuated with Marxist overtones, *Portagem* purports to expose and condemn social injustices inflicted by the Portuguese colonizers upon rural, colonized Africans. In Orlando Mendes's opinion, colonialism in Mozambique has little to show except social fragmentation along educational and racial lines. In order to illustrate his well-delineated ideology and pessimism regarding Mozambique's future, Orlando Mendes employs the metaphor of failed intra- and inter-racial relationships, both amorous and homosocial. Rather than implementing a literary strategy of a hopeful future marked by social and political unity through what Doris Sommer calls "cross-over" relationships, Mendes's intent is to focus on unrealized love and friendships as well as on other negative aspects of Mozambican social reality. This

approach stresses upon the reader, who was more than likely one of the colonizers or an educated *assimilado*, that discriminatory practices that marginalized an enormous sector of Mozambicans must be eradicated. To unite the voiceless underclass that consisted primarily of the poor and uneducated Africans against the minority bourgeoisie required a minimum level of education that would lead to the political and social consciousness necessary to confront the colonial hegemony. Despite the institution of a socialist state following independence in 1975, the relics of colonialism nevertheless continued to haunt Mozambique's future as the nascent nation plunged into civil war. Similar to the myth of Sisyphus, Mozambique was doomed to repeat the cycle of social and political fragmentation inherited from Portuguese patrimony.

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