

In the Name of a Father: In Search of a Lost Name and Place

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Abstract: This study focuses on the narrative representation of a specific form of inability to adapt to Portugal's cultural reality in two of António Lobo Antunes's novels: *An Explanation of the Birds* and *O que farei quando tudo arde?* The author seems to be telling the reader that life in contemporary Portugal (after 1974) implies an on-going search for identity.

In António Lobo Antunes's novels all adults are unhappy. This unhappiness is not "uniform," however. The shape of each character's mental and emotional suffering varies, but they all share a relentless, aching pain that afflicts them throughout their lives. The suffering that Lobo Antunes describes in his novels has evolved from a more obviously collective or social (even political) discontent to a more intimate and personal kind. One might say that unhappiness in his early novels seems to be the result of the political context, which introduces important changes in the characters' lives, altering the landscape and density of their experience and forcing them to see themselves and the world around them in new ways which in turn are often the cause of unhappiness. In Lobo Antunes's more recent novels, the realm of unhappiness is limited to the arena of private experience. In our view, although they are not dealt with explicitly in these works, social and political issues are still pertinent to the characters' private experience. Because these issues lurk beneath the surface,

and because they relate to very recent events, they have not yet been clearly and adequately examined.

This study focuses on the narrative representation of that specific form of unhappiness caused by the characters' inability to adapt to the reality of adulthood. The two characters singled out—Rui S. (in *An Explanation of the Birds*), and Paulo (in *Que farei quando tudo arde?* [*What Can I Do When Everything's on Fire*])—are profoundly unhappy because in adulthood they no longer have a reason to be who they are. At an age when they should have some understanding of why they have become who they are (and consequently of the meaning of their names), they lose this knowledge and motivation and find themselves adrift amidst random, inexplicable events with which they are unable to identify.

This deep and irreparable failure to adapt on the part of the protagonists in these novels results in their mercilessly distanced and critical view of life. It reflects the estrangement experienced by those who inhabit the adult world as it happens to be organized but without taking an active part in it. This estrangement is of course the attitude of someone who stands *outside*, forging an emotional bond with the reader—as if the narrator made whoever reads the outsider's alienated and critical account of the adult world in which he lives an accomplice to it. In this respect the narrator and the reader generally become a *pair* that gradually merges into one, giving shape to a place and time that the promise of *another* time and place has rendered unfamiliar. This process gives Lobo Antunes's later fiction a utopian dimension.

The theme of failure incorporates the remains of that *other* past time and place that is usually associated with nostalgia for childhood and a vaguely utopian *otherness*. One example of this desire for *another life* is the theme of flight, which appears in both novels. In the first, it is the birds that fly, replenishing the narrator's stock of images that symbolize both the world's beauty (given the frightening ugliness of the world at ground-level, beauty must have wings) and the chance to escape its oppressiveness. Birds also represent that portion of the real world that, once comprehended, enables one to develop a satisfactory understanding of the reality that governs adulthood. The dream-like, emotional logic of Rui S., the main character, dictates that he can only be happy when someone manages to explain the birds to him adequately—that is, when someone finally loves him enough to take his question seriously and to answer it, no matter how absurd it may seem. The fact that no one has succeeded in explaining the birds to him is the equivalent

of what he imagines to be a “given” in his life, namely that no one loves him enough to legitimate his query by answering it. As he says, “I’ve been waiting for it to happen for thirty years” (186).

In the second novel, flight has a more linear meaning insofar as it relates to the main character’s drug abuse. On the one hand, it has less symbolic weight; on the other, it stands for an even greater distancing from reality, which is rejected because it is despised. Paulo flies when he gets high, and he gets high because he can’t stand how he sees himself and how others see him. In fact, he is searching for his name, which in this novel means looking for a voice that will give him an identity by making him a part of the world around him.

There is no question that the failure that inevitably characterizes the experience of these adults goes against conventional wisdom, which prescribes for them a stable, well-integrated and functional (if not actually creative) life that is the outcome of a decision-making process. Beginning with his first novel, *Memória de elefante*, António Lobo Antunes has created protagonists (usually male) who as adults do not identify with the person they have become. Their identity crises are not the principal concern of all of his novels, but in those in which they are, the crisis is the focal point of the narrative.

The thesis of this study is that these personal crises are connected to concurrent crises in Portuguese society. The main character’s failure to adapt has a negative equivalent in his perception of the reality in which he lives, a reality which, far from meeting his expectations, constantly frustrates his desire to lead a happy life.

In the first novel under analysis, this failure takes the form of an insistent search for a place that will provide the character with a personal and social identity—in other words, a place and a name superior to those he currently knows, ones that will be a source of self-esteem and accomplishment. Although this search enables the character to imagine being another person living a different life, in reality he never discovers his new identity.

In the second novel under discussion, personal failure takes the shape of a name that is sought but not found until the main character takes another’s place, specifically, the place of his (possible) father. Both the protagonist and the reality in which he lives are therefore marked by a lack of personal substance so irreparable that it ends up warping both the individual and his society. In the first novel in question, this deformation leads to Rui’s suicide; in the second, it leads to Paulo’s decision to assume his father’s place by becoming a transvestite.

These acts are the culmination of a sequence of deformations. In *An Explanation of the Birds*, the most dramatic of these is the dream-like episode of the circus, which features members of Rui's family and is repeated throughout the novel. Through mockery and caricature his family members and a handful of acquaintances draw attention to Rui's failure. What he has been asking for, in his imagination, is an explanation of why birds exist: he has asked his father, the blind caretaker of his family's country house, and a certain Madame Simone with whom he has never spoken except through third parties. What the reader gets instead, in the circus episode, are cold, impersonal speculations as to why Rui committed suicide, a clear reflection of the other characters' lack of respect for him.

The dilemma of the main character's failure to relate to the rest of society becomes more acute in Lobo Antunes's more recently published novel. In his first novel, a series of progressively more interrelated sections describes the loss of continuity and the blurred outline of flashbacks; in *Que farei quando tudo arde?*, in contrast, there is no narrative thread at all: in its place there is a discourse of fragmentation, evidence of what Maria Alzira Seixo has called "the lateralization process" that punctuates the plot development. We see this in the ways the narrative focuses on the life and death of Carlos-Soraia instead of the narrator Paulo, his son. Speaking for his father, Paulo tells the story of a deeply troubled man with two names, one male and one female—for him not a sign of abundance or prestige but of disrepute. The juxtaposition of names effectively cancels out the father's gender, relegating him to an existence on the unstable margin of society.

The narrative revolves around the son's attempts to create an intimate portrait of a father whose name slowly changes from Carlos to Soraia without ever choosing one gender over the other. The strange combination of Carlos with Soraia points to transvestism, the result in turn of a shaky compromise intended to legitimate a kind of life that no one finds acceptable (including Paulo's father himself). This obviously undermines the son's chances of acquiring a name that identifies himself with his father in a way that is worthy of respect.

The dual nature of this name in *Que farei quando tudo arde?* stands for a greater problem: the generalized impossibility of acquiring an identity. Of all Lobo Antunes's novels this one goes farthest in charting the crisis—or the total loss—of identity. Maria Alzira Seixo calls it "a novel of defeat and death, of the loss of the 'other,' the family and the self." More than anything, she

adds, it is “a novel about the loss of the world in which one lives” (437). The constant repetition of Paulo’s name corresponds in particular to the son’s struggle to establish himself as an individual with his own personality.

The novel conveys the failure of his search for a complete name in sentence fragments, systematically interrupted scenes, and crucial words that are never spoken. These random bits of narrative speak of either one or three identities (Paulo, Carlos-Soraia, and Judith) shattered early on in the story, casting the characters adrift with neither self-esteem nor a definable place in society. This constantly punctuated narrative is well suited to the description of characters who acquire substance through successive identity shifts without ever becoming reconciled with themselves (Seixo 432). In this respect, the novel diverges markedly from the one discussed above, in which the identity crisis is framed in quite different terms. Rui S.’s crisis is brought on by an overabundance of references to his roots and to his past, which he represents in the present time of the narration as “bourgeois.” His drama is that he cannot free himself from his family’s “bourgeois” context in order to devote himself body and soul to the “revolutionary” lifestyle. He never succeeds in emotionally disconnecting himself from what he considers to be regrettable memories of a “bourgeois” name and place, even though his love for Maria, his political soul-mate, seems to demand it. Paulo’s dilemma is different. Because he was never given a secure, coherent identity to begin with, he is deficient as both a private and a social individual. This is what makes it impossible for him to relate to a structure—any structure—that might provide him with a stable identity.

A crucial aspect of these two identity crises is the way in which the characters conceive of themselves. In each case the self-image is foreign to the actual person, rather than consistent with it—that is to say, it lacks the autonomy that properly characterizes individuals who see themselves as they actually are. The narrative of *An Explanation of the Birds* rests entirely on this perception, not in an obvious way but interwoven with the development of the character and the narration itself. A bold example of a self-image fabricated for someone else’s benefit rather than one’s own (even though that “someone” remains unidentified) is the phantasmagoric scene of the circus in which Rui S.’s life story is publicly ridiculed in a flow of words interspersed with product endorsements. This version of the main character clearly competes with that part of the narrative which presents his self-questioning of his life—a point of view which has already internalized other people’s damaging opinions about him, opinions that in the end categorically damn his actions.

These other characters only acquire substance, in fact, by reference to a point of view or opinion that is foreign and deeply antagonistic to them. In this respect each one's failure comes from being displaced from the center of his life, as if they were all crying out for someone quite alien to them to tell them who they are (there are hints of unconscious masochism in this). This alien *other* is the antagonistic, judgmental, hounding voice that becomes a kind of *negative* human condition that the conscience nurtures in secret (because it cannot be brought to consciousness easily or directly). One might say that in Portugal this voice or point of view is the outer layer of the collective unconscious: it is, unfortunately, part of what it means to be Portuguese. It is an anonymous, amorphous imperative that is present everywhere, afflicting all people in the name of an unrealistic, inhuman perfectionism. It imposes the notion of a conventional, conformist, homogeneous adulthood, the product of an ideal of perfection that is best understood as a state of profound childishness. It is created in the name of some father who neither recognizes us as his own nor wants to adopt us, a father who condemns us to being his children *abstractly*, without mutual recognition.

The manifestations of this diffuse voice are therefore indirect and difficult to recognize. In Lobo Antunes's novels, the unhappiness it causes is on the other hand quite tangible and persistent, although as we said at the beginning of this essay it comes in different forms. Its antidote can sometimes be found in defenses against the failures of the present. One of these is childhood, as seen with particular clarity in *An Explanation of the Birds*. The title refers to the novel's key scene, in which the main character walks around the family's property in the country with his father, who tells us in detail about the birds they see—a moment that is emblematic of and synonymous with the happiness of childhood, forever lost. In the main character's mind this personal, emotionally charged time with his father was the "place" that gave him a name charged with positive connotations, that brought with it a positive identity.

The expression "explanation of birds" labels this moment of childhood happiness of mythic proportions. It also indicates a typical kind of emotional ellipsis, since in fact we know that no one can provide a rational, literal explanation of birds unless the explanation is the equivalent of or takes the place of an expression of love. On this emotional level it can fill in the blank spaces and bridge the gaps that are apparent to reason. Indeed the expression "explanation of birds" implies a coherent subjective or emotional meaning in which a "leap" of the poetic kind takes place. In Portuguese the expression betrays an

omission: because its semantic core is grasped by approximation, its meaning is centrifugal. In order to avoid lapses and ellipses, one would have to add to it, creating an expression like "an explanation of certain aspects of birds." For these reasons "explanation of birds" conforms to a child's linguistic logic, according to which (despite lapses) parents always understand what the child wants to say, that is, they are able to translate their child's unique language into the common tongue.

The son's request to his father, "Explain the birds to me," has two implications: the first, that emotional bonds transcend barriers to communication (as we have already seen, as a matter of fact no one can explain birds to anyone else: all he can do is speak about birds and explain certain things about them); the second, that children's requests to their parents are sometimes exorbitant, as children expect a great deal (perhaps everything) of their parents. The fact the parents appear to be *able to handle* their children's questions is part of the emotional game that the family plays. If the game doesn't take place, the family's emotional communication is disrupted.

This is the rich life that Rui S. loses when he becomes a grown-up. The father forgets about the birds, which is the same as saying that there is no longer any communication between them. Another detail of this key scene: the mother, who was waiting for the son and his father after they established the emotional bond of the "explanation of birds," called them "my men." Rui S. loses this harmonious communication between the three members of the family triangle forever when he becomes an adult. Such a moment can never occur again: in its stead, there will be acrimony, miscommunication, distance, coldness, and conflict. In Lobo Antunes's fiction it is also common for the parents to lose respect for the child.

Let us turn now to the particular kind of unhappiness that stems from the failures and insufficiencies of adult life which, as we have seen, correspond in some way to life in society. An analysis of Rui S. and Paulo's particular varieties of unhappiness sheds light on the evolution of António Lobo Antunes's novels, in terms of how they portray the way in which a considerable percentage of the Portuguese population views the society in which they live. We will take into account two hallmarks of Lobo Antunes's fiction, namely the deceptive nature and *disfemismo* of their description of people and landscapes and the relationships between them.

The evolution of these novels, beginning with *Auto dos danados* (1985), is seen in the displacement of themes related to the "politicization" of Por-

tuguese society as the center of attention. Beginning with his next novel, *As Naus* (1988), the narrative shifts to a preference for plots about the “individualization” of characters. Rui S. and Paulo are cases in point: in very broad terms, Rui S.’s dilemma has a social and political dimension that is lacking in Paulo’s, which is determined, first, by his disfunctional family and, second, by his drug addiction. In this sense the character Rui S. stands for the political upheavals of 1970s Portugal, when the April 25, 1974 revolution ripped apart the social fabric of the nation and also disintegrated the (apparent) unity of the Portuguese family. The different nature of each character’s failure is bound with changes in Portuguese society between the mid-1970s and the closing years of the twentieth century.

The most noteworthy change is in effect the shift from the centrality of political issues to the dominance of private life. This does not mean that the two arenas have ceased to coexist but rather that they have a different weight; each has a different importance. The cultural and political dimensions of issues related to private life can also be made out, as they appear in the 2001 novel, but they are not of equal significance.

From the 1980s on, Portuguese politics moved from the streets to public institutions like the Parliament and governmental departments. In other words, politics became professional and came to be accepted as a constellation of power structures that was able to govern the country without being constantly interrupted by the so-called “power of the street.” Until 1976, the revolution had indeed been in the street, weakening whoever was in power at the time and corroding political structures that had been organized as such (with the exception of the unions). Administrations came and went in response to calls for political purity from the ongoing revolution that grew less effective in the wake of 25 November 1975. The sharp polarization of the right- and left-wings gradually weakened and social and political battles were restricted to their proper political and unionist arenas, shedding the uncompromising nature that had characterized the political process in the 1970s. As a result, both the right and the left became less argumentative and more tolerant of each other—an outgrowth of an extended process that began when politics was first handed over to the institutions of governance and power.

As political upheaval lessened, the disintegration of the individual and the family became more apparent. This is a crisis that is less easy to describe but nevertheless persistent. As Maria Alzira Seixo has correctly affirmed, *Que farei quando tudo arde?* is the story of an identity in crisis and an inquiry into the

nature of the self (449). We would add that the crisis afflicting both the individual and the family is present in Lobo Antunes's work from the beginning, which in turn coincides with the April revolution and the serious questioning of private life—until then organized along very traditional lines—that it provoked. The individual crises described in Antunes's 2001 novel is of a different sort, however, due to the absence of a specific set of values reflective of the new social reality and capable of replacing the old values suddenly on the wane. Instead of a well-defined substitute, a plurality of possibilities present themselves in a scattered, disconnected, and vague fashion.

Let us look again at the difference between the two protagonists. Rui S. belongs to a family that collaborated with the old dictatorial regime in Portugal: he breaks with it to embrace the ideology of the Left (the word is also capitalized in the novel). His trademark inadequacy, weakness, is the effect of this break, which in subjective, emotional terms is ineptly and incompletely executed. By contrast with Rui S., Paulo has always stood on the outskirts of a society that does not acknowledge his existence, in keeping with his own family background and the collective reality to which it belongs. Insofar as the changes undergone by his most immediate family members (such as his father's turn to transvestism) drive him repeatedly to a marginal state of non-existence that inevitably ends in the extinction of personal identity, he is just one more piece of both his family and the collective. His answer to this crushing anonymity and to society's humiliating indifference is drug addiction.

As with Rui S., the process by which he becomes a person is a function of his relationship with these two realities, the familiar and the collective. In this respect neither character succeeds in creating an autonomous reality to which he fully belongs: on the contrary, they are dependent on the vagaries of their environment. Each is a model son whose adolescence goes on indefinitely; in each the reluctance to become an adult has to do with the father, who in some way betrayed him when he was a child. This common element appears in the first novel in the traumatic scene of the "explanation of birds" which as we have seen signals the sudden end of communication among the family members; in the second novel, it appears in the ongoing, self-repeating uncertainty whether the father's name is Carlos, Soraia, or Carlos-Soraia. This uncertainty goes to the heart of the question of paternity, which thus becomes problematic, a constant source of anguish for both father and son.

Within the triangle of father, mother, and son—the third side—lurks in fact Paulo's identity. It is a profoundly eccentric and disjointed trio, because

all meanings hypothetically attached to it turn out to be ambivalent. This is because the father is first bisexual, then becomes a homosexual and a transvestite and because, in order to deal with her conjugal heartbreak, the mother gives herself over more or less unconsciously ("sonâmbulo") to prostitution, which in turn causes her to lose her son Paulo's respect. Paulo is someone who must search for a name—that is, an identity—and when he does not find it in sado-masochism (as happens to many of Antunes's characters), he decides to become a transvestite in sudden, false, and *second-hand* imitation of his father.

Although it is true that this is no longer a nuclear family ruled by patriarchal-bourgeois authority, in keeping with the narrative logic of *An Explanation of the Birds*, the means by which it changes is in no sense positive, as it does nothing to enhance the happiness or success of its members. One way to understanding the role of negativity in Lobo Antunes's novels is therefore to assume that the revolution of April 1974 failed to create new values that would enable the Portuguese people to have *another, better lifestyle*. This may well account for the note of frustration in Lobo Antunes's narrative voice: although in the end it is not completely assimilated by that voice (it is always held at arm's length), this frustration is surely shared by many of his readers.

The lesson, repeated all too often, is that the center is condemned to pass away. While it is in the process of disappearing, disparate, scattered remainders of the unassailable traditional order offer themselves as substitutes, as despite everything they have survived the slow but inexorable onslaught of modernity. One of the most original aspects of Lobo Antunes's character Paulo is how he mirrors the problematic relationship of the center to the margins, which is recognized in turn to be one of the principal concerns of fiction of the post-modernist type.

One way in which the passing away of the center is manifested is by the absolute exclusion of feeling ensuing from the social processes that lead to the depersonalization of the individual. This exclusion is apparent in Lobo Antunes's novels prior to *Que farei quando tudo arde?*, but in this work it is plainly accentuated and taken to its logical consequences. Everything that actually happens in the novel is anonymous: the action is located in an imprecise, impersonal place that is synonymous with a character who has been completely drained by randomness, entirely meaningless events. As there is no intrinsic personal appropriation of feelings, no one in the novel claims the feelings that are expressed for his own. They become impersonal realities maintained by internal attentions, personal-

ized but incapable of personalizing. In a context with parameters like these, personal identity has no place, and actions have no consequences. The specific places described in *Que farei quando tudo arde?* are accordingly commonplace, lacking in character, tawdry, ugly. They are in the part of Lisbon where those who have become slowly and irreparably poorer live. On the map they are in the middle of the city, but in recent decades they have been ignored and left to fester. They are places of shadow, old-age, and oppressive silence.

Whereas from novels like *An Explanation of the Birds* the reader has the impression that Portuguese society is small enough that everyone knows everyone else and all have common values, the author's latest novel gives us a "stretched" society, which has extended itself by means of the anonymity and disintegration of the individual. This "stretching" is entirely negative, as is fitting for an overview of the margins, which is where the novel's characters live. They are marginalized by transvestism, prostitution, and drug addiction, and there is no solidarity among them: as in the case of "ghettoization," the margins are roundly despised by their own inhabitants. This being the case, despite the weakening of the center the margins continue to be despicable: rejected, as if reduced to nothingness, alive only in reminiscence or simulation. The center only exists in the creation of fantasies, more of a symbol than an actual place. For this very reason it freezes the moves in the social game, depriving it of any hint of dialectic.

The relationship between the center and the margins must be taken into account if we are to understand the failures of the characters who are the objects of this study. In Rui S., the flight from the center takes the form of his rejection of bourgeois family values, specifically, his agreement to the separation suggested by his wife and the distance this puts between him and his children. His subsequent loveless and superficial marriage to a colleague who is a militant Communist and his unenviable, devalued job as university professor can only be viewed as marginal with respect to the center defined as his family, traditionalists and supporters of the old regime to which Rui S. is connected by his very origins.

The tension that informs the diegetic fabric of the narrative is expressed through the polarization of left and right, although the tension is mitigated, as always in Lobo Antunes's work, by the failure of either side to win: on the contrary, everybody loses. The Left, which emerged victorious from the April revolution, cannot find its way: politics in the early '80s is clearly retrenching, while private life has not formulated new rules, being still governed by traditional notions of the family, marriage, middle-class women, masculine

privilege, etc. Rui S.'s suicide makes the metaphorical claim that it is impossible to live differently. He finds the life of the typical leftist to be a hodge-podge of leftovers and needs, a squalid, childless, comfortless life of boredom, indifference, isolation, and emotional deprivation. In this sense António Lobo Antunes's fiction seems to be telling us that life in today's Portugal is an ongoing search for an identity. On a more intimate scale, his characters are looking for an identity that always escapes them.

There are, then, many routes in the search for identity. Another identifying feature of the evolution of António Lobo Antunes's fiction is the disappearance from his most recent novels of autobiographical themes like the colonial wars, psychiatry, and the narrative voice of a grown man. The narrator and focal point of the plot in *Não entres tão depressa nessa noite escura* (2000) is a woman, Maria Clara. The intimate tone is also present in his next work, *Que farei quando tudo arde?*, broadening the range of the doubting, indecisive, anguished conscience and locating it discursively just this side of expression, and just beyond subjectivity. On the one hand, the characters' own discourses are cut off from any semantic set that might provide them with the meaning they seek; on the other, these same varieties of the unsayable are feeling their way *in the darkness of utterance*. In this sense, everything is said: nothing is forbidden. The act of saying can even be seen to speed up: an undirected but overdetermined transparency and nakedness actually take shape with the complete immobility of individuals-objects, that is, individuals made into "objects" to which these characters give substance. These are the discourses of hollowed-out names where inert, inconsequential words dwell in the place of subjectivity.

The endless, obsessive repetition of Paulo's name indicates the impossibility of providing an integrated, focused, human label for this young man who has been given the name "Paulo." In fact the more he speaks—the more he becomes an "object" inhabiting a petrified reality—the less he actually exists. Since subjectivity no longer has any worth at all in the "social" game, Paulo's quest, which lacks substance even though it is uniquely his own, cannot rescue him from the namelessness that afflicts him. This namelessness stems from his personal insignificance in the eyes of others; in their opinion, an insignificance that contaminates his opinion of himself.

Although the characters in all of this author's novels experience identity crises, none are as violent as this last one. Unlike Rui S., Pedro has no family memory in which to anchor or root himself, and to that extent he is the rootless person *par excellence*. His entire life has lacked a center. This is why

the relationship between the center and the margins is a clear indicator of the aporia typical of the way in which contemporary Portuguese society deals with its recent past (that is, the old, traditional, patriarchal order).

The passing of the old order made it possible to think in Portugal that this relationship would somehow change. António Lobo Antunes's fiction tells us that change has taken place only on the surface (it is important to remember that his first works date from after April 25, 1974, so that all of his novels reflect the social and political changes it brought about). The only truly profound difference is that the absence of a center, created by the effacement of the status quo without anything to take its place, has made his characters orphans.

With the passing of the center, one can imagine that the margins will occupy a number of central spaces, doing away with its one-dimensional character. But such a hypothesis is unfounded, as there is no way to determine what the changes that have taken place in Portuguese society actually mean. They are referred to in negative terms, like divorce, drugs, dropout rates, homosexuality, promiscuity, deviancies of the depressed. They are changes labeled by the previous order: they are not autonomous because the center could only be occupied if the subject (if anybody) were equipped to assume the role of subject—subject of power, of knowledge, of history. The sad fact of our state at the moment is that, as Jean Baudrillard remarks, "the subject's position has become simply and purely unsustainable" (96).

The center is a place of fantastic creation: even when it is empty, it emanates the patriarchal order at its most castrating and oppressive. The emptier it becomes, the more powerful it is, self-silencing but active, sacralized and quietly observant in the absence of any current, effective opposition. This interpretation of events might very well explain why the disappearance of the old order in Portugal has not led to a new basis for social unity. The margins have multiplied, from homosexuality to bisexuality, greater promiscuity, different kinds of cohabitation, life-styles, communities of foreigners, etc. At the same time, they have not received any kind of effective recognition. They are perceived as existing in a place and time without worth or importance, even deserving of ridicule. What happens in them is of no consequence, because the margins do not represent a challenge to a reality that is *neither dead nor alive*, although it is still nevertheless painfully "installed."

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