Introduction: Money and Personalism in the Lusophone World

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Triste Bahia, oh, quão dessemelhante
Estás e estou do nosso antigo estado!
Pobre te vejo a ti, tu a mi empenhado
Rico te vejo eu já, tu a mi abundante

A ti tocou-te a máquina mercante
Quem tua larga barra tem entrado
A mim vem me trocando e tem trocado
Tanto negócio, e tanto negociante

Caetano Veloso's song *Triste Bahia* starts with these quartets of Gregório de Matos. In other poems grouped in the same section, *Santos Unhates*, de Matos complains about the privileges of (Portuguese) foreigners over Brazilians,[1] denounces the hunger in the city while the fleet takes all the food supplies,[2] and questions the monetary policy of depreciation[3] and the unequal exchange between colony and metropolis.[4] We can see that inflation in Brazil is not a recent phenomenon; and the awareness of the dependent situation of the country in world trade is not new either. The problem of Brazil has never been its backwardness; on the contrary, the "merchant machine" of capitalism has always been central to its formation. During Gregório de Matos's time (these

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verses are dated in 1686) the policy of depreciation of the currency was part of a strategy of the Portuguese crown to stem the outflow of domestic coins—and the gold and silver they were made of—to northern European countries. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, it was clear that this outflow was a result of an unfavorable trade balance, and that devaluation had done little to stop it (see Macedo, Silva, and Sousa, and Almodóvar and Cardoso). As Brazil was dependent on Portugal, so Portugal was becoming aware of its dependence on the new and powerful northern European economies.

In order to understand the discourses and narratives around money in the lusophone world, it may be useful to start by acknowledging the centrality of the "merchant machine" that has constituted it, so poignantly described by de Matos both as its living force and its curse: his beloved and loathed city of Bahia is founded on money, but this same money keeps her captive of foreign powers.[5] The promise of wealth is the motor of colonization, but it also brings affliction—because it is dangerous to be an enthusiast of money "sem real autoridade"—without being in command over it. De Matos questioned the enthusiasm of Bahians for a measure of value, the Real, that they did not coin or control, but that was made far away, by El-Rey in Portugal. And yet, the Portuguese court was also unable to manage its outflow; despite the pro-active policies of the court to keep it under control, limiting its circulation, the Real was running away from their hands, and their country. Money is unpredictable, volatile, and tricky.

"Money does not bring happiness" ("O dinheiro não traz felicidade"). For Roberto DaMatta, this saying embodies the mistrust of money in Brazil. Brazilians are suspicious of money in contrast to personal relations: what brings happiness is friendship, not material wealth. In Georg Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, money is the ultimate tool of individualization. Through money, people become autonomous individuals; all social interactions can be transformed into impersonal services, in which no personal acquaintance is required, because money becomes a universal mediator. For DaMatta, this model of absolute individualism is precisely what Brazilians resist in their suspicion of money; Brazilians don't want to be autonomous *individuals*, but gregarious *persons* (where a person is defined in relation to other people, not in relation to his/her objectives, like the individual). Brazilian culture privileges personal relationships over impersonal commoditized exchange.

What are the origins of this "personalism" of Brazilian society for DaMatta? The Catholic religion and a general lusophone or even Iberian cultural framework seem to be at its roots. In any case, DaMatta always counterpoises the Brazilian cultural model to that of the United States, the more accomplished example of individualist modernity.

The objective of this collective volume is to question the limits of this model. Is this "personalism" something really specific of lusophone cultures, as opposed to, say, Protestantism or Anglo-American cultures? Isn't it also a common saying in English that "money doesn't bring happiness"? In more general terms, does money stand in contradiction to personal relations? Is that the reason why money doesn't bring happiness? The papers in this volume address these questions at several levels, bringing different insights from the fields of literary criticism, cultural studies, history, and anthropology.

Drawing on Roberto DaMatta's argument, Ruben Oliven explores the contrasting relationship to money in everyday life in Brazil and in the United States. Looking at Brazilian and American proverbs and at *samba* lyrics, Oliven shows how money in Brazil is described as polluting, while in the US it is poverty that is filthier. Although the Biblical root of the connection between money and sin is common to both countries ("The love of money is the root of all evil" [1 Tim. 6.10, KJV]), Oliven shows how the sinfulness of money has been ironically subverted in everyday American sayings such as "Money is the root of all evil—but has anyone ever discovered a better route?" In the same way, "money doesn't bring happiness" has been transformed into "happiness doesn't bring money." This subversion of the sinfulness of money is partially a result of the embrace of capitalism by Weber's famous Protestant ethic, which is hegemonic in the US, as opposed to the Catholic aversion to money in Brazil. Oliven shows how Franklin and Emerson describe money as an expression of human power over time and nature. But he also qualifies this historically: there are different relations to money in northern and southern states in the US. According to Oliven, the cultural heritage of slavery is common to Brazil and the "Old South": the negative attitudes towards work and money are partially an inheritance of a landed gentry with aristocratic ideals, who despised work and the accumulation of money, as opposed to leisure and the liberal expense of wealth in social events. Oliven presents a Brazilian tradition of social thought, from Buarque de Hollanda and Vianna to DaMatta, for whom Brazilians would have a pre-capitalist mentality, in spite of the fact that materially the country is fully capitalist. This pre-capitalist mentality would not just be a patrimony of the elites but would also be predominant in the popular classes: the former slaves would reject work because it was associated with slavery and aspire to a life of leisure, like their masters. This would be the origin of the mythological figure of the *malandro*, the rogue, wonderfully described by Antonio Cândido and DaMatta.

Therefore, Catholicism and slavery would be keys to understanding the Brazilian—and perhaps more generally lusophone—contradiction between a capitalist economy and a pre-capitalist culture. But several papers in this volume question these assumptions. In his article on work, fortune, and the mobility of blacks, creoles, and mestizos in Brazil in the eighteenth century, Eduardo França Paiva questions the "slave mentality" that would generate an aversion to work and a "rogue culture" in the Brazilian popular classes. By looking at the trajectories of freed slaves in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais, Paiva shows how many of them, after attaining freedom—most of the time not by an act of grace but by buying it themselves with their own work—would not fall into idleness, as the myth of the rogue "malandro" would presume, but instead became entrepreneurs and business owners. In many of these cases, their predisposition and ability to save and capitalize money is unquestionable. This contradicted the discourse of the political elites, who described the freed slaves as "dangerous" anti-social elements. For Paiva, this concern of the establishment was a reaction against the social and economic success and adaptation of their former slaves, which questioned their own authority. The myth of the freed slave as an idler and a rogue, *vadio* and *malandro*, finds its roots in the venomous denunciations of a traditional elite that was afraid of being overcome by their former slaves in their own system: a capitalist economy in full expansion. This myth, however, survived the end of slavery and acquired the status of historical and sociological truth in the twentieth century, when many historians, anthropologists, and sociologists described the unsuccessful adaptation of "blacks" to the new class society as a result of their "slave culture" (Fernandes 1965).

The eighteenth century provides a good counterpoint to the presentism of certain approaches. The discovery of gold in Minas Gerais at the end of the seventeenth century gave a boost to the Portuguese Empire and a second chance to take control over its economic growth. John Russell-Wood's paper on "Brazilian Gold and the Commercial Sector in Oporto (1710–1750)," which follows the trajectories of the gold bullion, shows how the city of Oporto was not just a stopping place but an active participant in a European trade network that greatly benefited from this trade, both culturally and socially: not all the gold was pouring out of the empire. The Portuguese Empire was always involved in the emerging world-system of trade that would later be defined as "capitalism." As we know, this "second chance" of the eighteenth century did not finally shake the Portuguese Empire from its dependency on northern European powers. The "Reformas Pombalinas" are the first case of a self-conscious program of "modernization," a recurrent obsession of the elites in the next two centuries (what Faoro called the "impetus de modernização"), and which in all cases will only be partially successful. These modernization programs seemed inevitably destined to fail since they do not acknowledge that the problem is not just the *reform* of the State as much as the renegotiation of its relations with the world-system, as dependency theorists showed some time ago.[6] The discourse on the "backwardness" and "pre-capitalist" culture of the lusophone world also finds its roots in these reformist programs. But how can the lusophone world be pre- or anti-capitalist if the "merchant machine" is at its foundations?

In her meticulous and enlightening reading of Machado de Assis's *Dom Casmurro*, Bluma Waddington Vilar shows the complexity with which Assis was approaching the topic of "money doesn't bring happiness." At one level, Vilar shows how in many of his novels, reproduction and familial well-being are contradictory to material wealth, or better, material wealth is tarnished by sterility. And yet, at another level, the reversibility between economy, religion, and kinship as systems of value is based on an economic logic, the logic of debt, which is common to all of them, what Vilar calls a "moral accountability." Like the economy, the ritual exchange of the religious *promessa* is sarcastically described in terms of accountancy, and so is the relationship between fathers and sons. In that, Machado is a wonderful example of how the nineteenth-century "realist" bourgeois novel contained what in the twentieth century would become "realist" sociological theories that would describe the social man essentially as a bourgeois accountant, always seeking to accumulate capital in different forms—not just economic, but also cultural, religious, or symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1972). And yet Machado, through his use of multiple voices (is Dom Casmurro's cynical vision of moral accountability Machado's view, or just one aspect of it?) shows a much more complex picture than any critical sociology could have, by presenting characters who in all their complexity try to reduce and control the world through numbers, and yet are always overcome by emotions that cannot be accounted for: love, hatred, rage … which is precisely what "accounting" is all about in *Dom Casmurro*: hiding your real thoughts and emotions. The scene in *Dom Casmurro* where he pays his "son's" trip to the Near East, hoping to "pay for his leprosy," so that he dies on this trip, gives a sad and shocking impression of the misery of this "accounting man" that, curiously enough, has become the model of the social man for many contemporary social theorists.

Catholicism is the other factor that seems to forge an irredeemable contradiction between lusophone personalism and capitalist attitudes toward money. What to do then with the uses of money in traditional Catholic festivals like the procession of *Nosso Senhor dos Passos da Sapataria*, celebrated in Lisbon up to this day? In her article, Maria Mascarenhas shows how the procession's commission capitalizes the remains of the procession's expenses in a bank account, reinvesting the interest for the next year. This practice could be justified because the commission is constituted by secular members of the congregation and not by ordered priests; yet, one has to acknowledge the relevance of secular brotherhoods in the popular Catholicism of the lusophone world, and the centrality that the accumulation and display of material wealth have always had in these brotherhoods. In wider terms, Mascarenhas shows the centrality of money in everyday rituals like the *promessas*, inscribed in a dialectics of reciprocity.

In his paper about *axexé* funerary rituals, Brian Brazeal also shows the diverse ritual uses that money can have in the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé. In these rituals, money in the form of coins is used to "pay off" the spirit of a deceased person. This ritual indexes the passage from the particular living person to the generic dead spirit (*Egum*). According to Brazeal, "The coins for the dead work on the principle of the universal equivalence of money to transform a particular relationship into a generalized one": the members of the cult "purge themselves of their personal relationship to the deceased" by rubbing their body with coins and then throwing them into a clay bowl (*alguidar*). The money then becomes sacralized and may only be used for paying ritual services (although, as we see in this particular case, this can be interpreted rather generously). In another ritual, in the sacrifices to the gods (Orixás), money is distributed in a ceremonial manner (on the floor) amongst the participants, but in very different terms: "Unlike the coins for the dead, which sever kinship relations, the ritual transaction of money on the floor reaffirms them."

Both Mascarenhas and Brazeal show how money can acquire a ritual value, both in Catholicism and Candomblé. Both authors emphasize reciprocity and redistribution as central to the uses (or at least the discourses) of money in these ritual events. By looking at these religious practices with money, we can see that the discourse of "personalism" is in fact not contradictory in terms of money, but that money can be used to constitute and reproduce personal relations. However, we could also argue that money in these ritual uses loses one of its fundamental qualities: its universality and impersonality as a measure of value, because it becomes attached to the reproduction of a community and cannot be used out of this ritual context. Moreover, we could say that the values of these rituals are pre- or anti-capitalist, because their object is to reinforce communities and not to increase the wealth of single individuals.

But aren't there money rituals that aim to increase the wealth of individuals, formalizing the magical capacity of money to reproduce itself, the "magic of capitalism"? Michael Taussig's *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in Latin America* (1980) described the production of new money rituals and mythologies of wealth with the arrival of new forms of capitalism. This is also one of the issues that Roger Sansi deals with in "Religion and the Everyday Life of Money in Brazil." One of the points that Sansi makes is that these ritual practices of "money magic" are not particularly new in Brazil or the lusophone world; rituals that seek the multiplication of money can be found in popular Catholic practice as well as in African rituals, and in the diverse inter-penetrations of the two, beginning in the early stages of colonization. This argument is a necessary prelude to discuss the practices of the Neo-Pentecostal churches in the lusophone world. The astonishing expansion of these churches in the last few years has been interpreted by many anthropologists and sociologists of religion as a result of the encounter with capitalism in its late phase: neo-liberalism. These new churches would incorporate this foreign "magic of capitalism" into their ritual practices, promoting a Gospel of Prosperity. In contrast, Sansi argues that, on the one hand, there is nothing foreign or new to this magic in the lusophone world; on the other hand, he proposes that there is something more than the pursuit of material wealth behind the Neo-Pentecostal ritualization of money: there is also a project of political and religious hegemony. This statement has to be understood in the context of the "authoritarian monetarism" that Brazil has suffered in the last decades, in which the State has kept the circulation of money under rigorous control, since the strength of the country is closely associated to the strength of its currency (the "Brazil risk"[7]). By sanctifying money, the Neo-Pentecostals are actually proposing to build a Christian economy anchored to the only truly stable "standard of value," one much better than the dollar: God himself.

One of the central questions that these papers on religion raise is the personalization of money—how it becomes an index of particular persons, networks, or communities, and a tool for their reproduction. But that is of course not an issue limited to religious practices. João Estêvão's paper describes the introduction of the colonial currency in Cape Verde. The process of monetarization of the economy in the archipelago did not result in a growing impersonalization of social relations; on the contrary, it was constituted by (and was constitutive to) kinship networks of migrants. These migrants sent remittances in foreign currencies that were then exchanged into Cape Verdean *escudos*, stabilizing the currency as a result. This transfer from the kinship network to the colonial state occurred through complex processes that involved formal and informal instances, mainly the relationship of local merchants with families of migrants. The local merchant would act as a mediator between the family and the bank, receiving the remittances from the migrants and transforming them into groceries and cash in the local currency for the family. "The personal and economic relations were thus complementary with each other."

John Collins describes a rather less successful story: the expropriation of the inhabitants of the historical center of Salvador de Bahia, the Pelourinho. The population of that neighborhood was seen as *marginais* and *malandros*, dangerous crooks. Many years after the eviction in 1992, Collins describes how the former neighbors reconstituted their lives from that second start, when they found themselves in the street and with an indemnification: "the exchange of money for dwellings has both destroyed a neighborhood and reconstituted a somewhat different community in its place": a community of memory. The stories of this second start—stories of success or, in most cases, failure—deal with the ability of these *marginais* to transform money into a new life.

How to avoid wasting money? How can we transform impersonal money into a personal value? How can we capitalize to build a better life, to build people, social relations, and communities? The theme of the personalization of money is relevant to many papers in this volume, and is also addressed in the concluding article by Keith Hart. Money is always both impersonal and personal; there is no such a thing as absolutely abstract, impersonal money because, first, many monetary transactions involve credit, which implies a social relation of recognition, a personalization of the participants in the exchange. Personal credit is becoming one of the dominant forms of economic transaction in our society (through cards, telephone and internet payments, loans, and, of course, mortgages). Money becomes more personalized: the credit we have depends on who we are; we pay with our individual signatures, IDs, and passwords; we need endorsers. But that does not imply so much a "re-personalization" of the economy as a re-negotiation of its personal and impersonal aspects, in which nation-states, as issuers of "impersonal" national currencies—and guarantors of their value—seem to lose pace. The result, Hart predicts, could be a new "feudalism," in which what you have depends on who you are—your wealth is related to your "fame"—your good reputation or good credit record.

Portugal, since its integration with the Euro, apparently has managed to overcome uncertainties and monetary fluctuations; yet, after the last credit crash, its integration with the Euro has begun to appear as a mixed blessing, and rumors about Portugal "defaulting" and "being kicked out" of the Eurozone were constant by the time this introduction was written (March 2012). Portugal is being cast aside with other European PIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain), poor countries that seemed to become rich thanks to the European Union, but apparently had only become heavily indebted. The media discourse on the PIGS (even in these same countries) is often astonishingly moralistic, rather than economic: the PIGS are often defined as "unreliable," not being "serious," not "doing their homework," needing to be supervised by "serious" Germany as a kind of father/mother figure, because they are unable to manage money … perhaps because of their "culture," and their religion? Because they are not Protestants? What and who generated the debt crisis in the first place—the credit crunch perpetrated by essentially Anglo-American (and therefore Protestant?) banks seems to be totally forgotten in these highly moralistic, and sometimes even racist narratives.

The fate of other countries in the lusophone world, like Brazil and Angola, seems to have been radically different: both Brazil and Angola have grown exponentially in the last decade thanks to their powerful exportations of raw materials and commodities. Nobody seems to remember today the "backwardness" of these countries, or their "culture," by the same token. They appear as perfectly proficient "capitalist" economies. But is their situation stable now? Do they have "credit"? By March 2012 Brazil has become the world's seventh largest economy, surpassing the alpha and omega of capitalism, the UK. But still today, in Brazil, credit operations have excruciatingly high interest rates (9.75 percent in Brazil as opposed to 1 percent in the Eurozone in January 2012), a result of decades of authoritarian monetarism and uncertainty over the future of the currency and the economy in general—the "Brazil risk." Since the nineties, these high interest rates have attracted international banks, which have generated an expansion of credit that could eventually result in an extremely violent local "crunch" because of the excruciatingly high interest rates. Angola, on the other hand, after the brutal hyperinflation of the nineties, a result of the war and of the Russian crisis, is booming, thanks to the construction sector and exportations of raw materials, especially oil, in particular to China (which buys 40 percent of its exports). In fact Angolan business is heavily investing in Portugal, in a process that inevitably has the sentimental undertones of a "reverse colonization." But still, the interest rates in Angola are also excruciatingly high, higher than in Brazil (10 percent), and its economy is very dependent on the fluctuations of the world market; a crisis in China could have devastating effects for Angola.

All these considerations bring us to a more general question: to what extent is the distrust of money in lusophone countries not just the result of a "personalist" culture but of the dominated position of these countries in the world-system? At this point we need to re-frame the problem of the "personalization" of money in relation to its "impersonalization." What does it mean that money is "impersonal"? It means that it is a means of exchange, that it can be used to buy anything in a market, but also that money is a standard of value, that it is "a token of society," as Hart says: "it must be impersonal in order to connect each individual to the universe of relations to which they belong." This "standard of value," in the last centuries, was issued by the State, as the embodiment of "society." This double character of the impersonality of money, what Hart called its "heads or tails" (*Cara ou coroa* in Portuguese), makes of money the embodiment of a perhaps more fundamental dichotomy than the "personal" and the "impersonal": the dichotomy of markets and states. This dichotomy is not necessarily a contradiction—markets can work for the benefit of states and states can ensure the conditions of development of markets: such is the fundamental principle behind classical liberal political economy. But the fact remains that "all markets are in a sense world markets, in that they link specific places to a proliferating network of universal scope." By participating in a market, persons, communities, "societies," States take the risk of being unable to control the standards of exchange. This is probably one of the central questions behind the suspicious character of money, not just its impersonal character but its ambiguously key position in the dialectics of the global and the local, its identity as a token of the world-system, its uncontrollable otherness. The lusophone world, in the long run, has had a subaltern and dependent role in the distribution of this world-system, and money has been one of the more powerful tools of its compliance with international markets. This subaltern dependency has produced extreme hardships in the everyday lives of people in lusophone countries, who have had to suffer the consequences of depreciation, hyperinflation, and economic crises from 1686 to 1986, and beyond. In these conditions, there is plenty of proof that "money does not bring happiness," or better, that money cannot be easily controlled; it is difficult to plan one's future happiness by counting on it. Still, nowadays, the "merchant machine" is both the driving force and the curse of the lusophone world.

Notes

[1] Senhora Dona Bahia, / nobre, e opulenta cidade, / madrasta dos Naturais, / e dos Estrangeiros madre.

[2] Toda a cidade derrota / esta fome universal, / uns dão a culpa total / à Câmara, outros à frota: / a frota tudo abarrota / dentro nos escotilhões / a carne, o peixe, os feijões, / e se a Câmara olha, e ri, porque anda farta até aqui, / é cousa, que me não toca; / Ponto em boca (from pt.wikisource.org, last visited 18 February 2008).

[3] Tratam de diminuir / o dinheiro a meu pesar, / que para a cousa baixar / o melhor meio é subir: / quem via tão alto ir, / como eu vi ir a moeda, / lhe prognosticou a queda, / como eu lha prognostiquei: / dizem, que o mandou El-Rei, / quer creiais, quer não creiais. / Não vos espanteis, que inda lá vem mais.

[4] Virá a frota para o ano, / e que leve vós agouro / senão tudo a peso de ouro, / a peso tudo de engano: / não é o valor desumano, / que / a cada oitava se dá / da prata, que corre cá, / pelo meu fraco conceito, / mas ao cobrar fiel direito, / e oblíquo, quando pagais; / Não vos espanteis, que inda lá vem mais.

[5] Bem merece esta cidade / esta aflição, que a assalta, / pois os dinheiros exalta / sem real autoridade: / eu se / hei de falar verdade, / o agressor do delito / devia ser só o aflito: mas estão tão descansados, / talvez que sejam chamados / nesta frota, que esperais; / Não vos espanteis, que inda lá vem mais.

[6] See for example Cardoso and Faletto. For an interesting interpretation of Cardoso's later conversion to "modernization," read Rocha.

[7] Concerning the "Brazil risk," see Garcia and Didier.

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