

## Lusofonia and Eternal Empire

### Notes from the Sixteenth Century

---

**ABSTRACT:** Framed as love and commonality, as a shared patrimony, as the eternal spirit of empire, or as a “sad and ridiculous” attempt to exert influence long after the fact, the workings of Lusofonia may or may not have evolved over the past five centuries. What seems clear, however, is that the Portuguese language has been understood since at least the sixteenth century as not only the “companion” or tool of Portugal’s empire, but rather as its most enduring and ontologically *real* aspect.

**KEYWORDS:** Lusofonia and empire, neo-colonialism, Renaissance, grammar.

---

“Today,” Eduardo Lourenço has observed, “Lusofonia is our Pink Map, where all those empires can be inscribed, invisible and even ridiculous to anyone who looks in from the outside, but shining for us like a flame in the atrium of our soul” (1999, 177).<sup>1</sup> In this brief but densely poetic statement, Lourenço describes the existence of something akin to a metaphysics of empire within postimperial Portugal (the inhabitants of this Portugal being the “us,” one assumes, to whom Lourenço refers) that has somehow unmoored itself from the contingencies and embarrassments of history and found its ground instead within the seemingly limitless and explicitly prophetic promise of language. As Lourenço frames it, what has emerged since the collapse of the empire, and even seen itself formalized through the CPLP, is a more or less quixotic (and thus hardly innocent) belief in the promise of a global set of speech communities somehow joined, rather than divided, by a common language.

Looking in from the outside, the new map of empire that Lourenço describes—sketched out within and between the bodies and tongues of the formerly colonized—is anything but ridiculous or invisible; rather, there is something ominously Borgesian to this vision, as though all the caravels, *padrões*, churches, and trading forts of Portuguese empire had merely been transferred by cartographers (all with unimpeachable liberal credentials) to an image the exact size of the former empire and corresponding “point for point with it” (Borges 1974,

847). Miguel Tamen, speaking more recently on the questionable politics that underlies the latest round of orthographic accords and the broader issue of Lusofonia, has expressed this situation perhaps most succinctly: “In Portugal, the idea of lusofonia corresponds historically to a kind of liberal colonialism, the idea that with the disappearance of the Portuguese Empire, it might be possible to maintain its spiritual substitute” (Pereira 2012, par. 4).

Lourenço and Tamen are right to call attention to the inherently neocolonialist ideologies that support contemporary notions of Lusofonia from the Portuguese perspective; however, one wonders if these notions have really emerged over the past forty years as a “spiritual substitute” for Portugal’s lost global empire or if they were not understood from the very beginning to be the essence of the empire, that part of it that would endure, perhaps eternally, long after the rest had crumbled. My point here is not that Portugal’s overseas empire was in some objective sense not real (and certainly it was real for those who found themselves on the business end of its lances and grenades); rather, I am arguing that the earliest formal theorizations of Portugal’s language and empire, articulated by sixteenth-century humanists, reveal something akin to a belief in the ontological priority of the Portuguese language and its metaphysical possibilities even over the physical realities of empire. To give Borges another turn, so to speak, we might say that in sixteenth-century Portugal there existed a tendency to invert the conventional relation between “world” and “map” in such a way that the former became, in fundamental ways, the infelicitous simulacrum of the latter.

In this essay I examine the ways in which Portuguese humanists Fernão de Oliveira (1507?–1581?) and João de Barros (1496–1570) framed the question of language, empire, and immortality. Of particular concern is the special importance that these writers gave to the Portuguese language and the broader question of Lusofonia within their theories of empire. Focusing on selected passages from the grammars of Portuguese that Oliveira and Barros published within four years of each other (1536 and 1540, respectively), as well as the broader account of language and the divine found in Barros’s first volume of the *Décadas da Ásia* (1552), I argue that Lusofonia has served, from its earliest origins in the Renaissance, not as the “spiritual substitute” for empire so much as its metaphysical ground.

### **Oliveira’s Army**

Oliveira’s *Grammatica da linguagem portuguesa*, published in 1536, is the earliest known Portuguese grammar and, like other vernacular grammars produced in

the Iberian Peninsula during the period, it is also a self-consciously political project. Oliveira was born in Aveiro in 1507, and his active (if somewhat unfortunate) life placed him in close contact with the workings of empire and language. Entering the Dominican Order in 1520, he became a student of André de Resende while residing in the Dominican convent in Évora. In 1532 he left the Dominicans and moved to Castile, entering the lay clergy. He returned to Lisbon four years later, finding work as a private tutor for the children of figures such as João de Barros and Fernão de Almada. In the same year, he published his Portuguese grammar, which is dedicated to Almada.

After a few years of (mostly undercover) service to João III, Oliveira found work in 1545 as a pilot in the French navy and was soon afterward taken prisoner by the English. While imprisoned in England, Oliveira developed an affinity for ideas circulating around the court of Henry VIII. Upon his return to Portugal in 1547, he was imprisoned by the Inquisition. Oliveira was set free in 1551; in the following year, he participated in a naval expedition in North Africa. His bad luck holding, Oliveira found himself once again taken prisoner. He managed to return to Lisbon the next year, and in 1554 João III appointed him typographic editor at the University of Coimbra, where he also taught courses in rhetoric. In 1555 the Inquisition once again saw fit to imprison him; the events of his life become difficult to determine after this point. He seems to have once again obtained his freedom in 1557, and is thought to have died in 1581.

Apart from his Portuguese grammar, Oliveira also composed a series of works dealing with navigation and naval warfare. Among these are his *Livro da fábrica das naus* (Book of Shipbuilding; ca. 1580); *Arte da guerra do mar* (The Art of Naval Warfare; Coimbra, 1555); and the *Ars nautica* (Art of Sailing; ca. 1570). Near the end of his life, he also composed a history of Portugal that is extant in manuscript form.

Focusing on Oliveira's 1536 grammar, we see that he goes to great lengths to mix in a good deal of myth and political theory with his marginally systematic account of Portuguese phonology and morphology. In so doing, Oliveira persistently situates the Portuguese language, and the broader notion of Lusofonia, within a notion of empire that actively seeks a decisive break with Rome and Greece. He writes, for example, at the beginning of the book's fourth chapter:

The liberal arts extend the glory of the land in which they flourish. It is because of [the liberal arts] that Greece and Rome still survive; because when they ruled the world they ordered all of their subject peoples to learn [Greek

and Latin]; and in these languages they wrote many good teachings, and they wrote in them not only what they thought but they also translated into them all the good things that they read in other languages. In this way, they have compelled us even now to work to learn their language and forget our own. Let us not do this; rather, let us focus on ourselves now that it is our time to be masters, because it is better that we teach Africa than allow ourselves to be taught by Rome, even if the latter still had all of its prestige and merit. And let us not doubt the worth of our own language, as people make language and not the other way around. (7)<sup>2</sup>

Particularly striking is Oliveira's statement that as imperial "masters" in Africa (certainly an exaggeration in 1536), it is incumbent upon the Portuguese to shake off the continued cultural dominion of Rome. Unlike Antonio de Nebrija, who in 1492 had argued in his *Gramática de la lengua castellana* that one of the singular benefits of standardizing the Castilian language was that this would facilitate the study of Latin (Barros would argue something quite similar), Oliveira argues rather forcefully that the Portuguese should leave aside Latin, the continued study of which constitutes for him a form of continued, albeit "soft," Roman imperial rule.

A corollary of Oliveira's stance with respect to Rome and the Latin language is his truly striking argument that the Portuguese language can itself operate as a form of lasting, even eternal dominion in Africa and beyond. In this, Oliveira effectively goes beyond Nebrija's famous axiom, according to which language serves as the "companion of empire." For while Nebrija argues that language follows empire in all the stages of its formation, development, and decay, Oliveira instead places language—and particularly the Portuguese language—on a very different ontological footing from the physical empire on the ground. In essence, what emerges from Oliveira's argument at the start of the fourth chapter of his Portuguese grammar is a call not for a broader lusophone empire in Africa (with the latter understood to be a concrete geographical space) so much as an empire of Lusofonia within a metonymic Africa: "It is better that we teach Africa than allow ourselves to be taught by Rome." This, to be clear, is a vision of empire in Africa that sees Portugal operating and existing first and foremost not through but rather as the use of Portuguese. As Oliveira has it, the continued use of Latin and Greek—which is not wholly voluntary but rather operates within a strict economy of symbolic power and prestige—signifies the continued dominion of the Roman and Greek empires long after their fall. The

argument that underlies Oliveira's grammar is that, by the sixteenth century, it is Portugal's turn to establish a realm of shared linguistic practice—a "regime of language" (Kroskrity 2000) that might endure, as in Greece and Rome, long after the physical empire has ceased to exist.

Within Oliveira's grammar, the notion of a Portuguese regime of language is less suggestive of the institution of a common, standardized language within a group of territories under the control of a single supreme authority than of the idea that language itself can be the form or enduring spirit of that earthly authority. In other words, as the soul outlives the body, so will the Portuguese language outlive the other, more material elements of Portuguese rule. How does such a regime establish itself and operate? Oliveira provides a glimpse of his own answer to this question near the end of the fifth chapter of his grammar:

And let us focus our efforts on our language and people so that the memory of these efforts will be more enduring [*ficará com maior eternidade*]. And let us not work in a foreign language, but rather let us perfect our own with sound doctrines that we might teach to many other peoples; and in this way we will always be praised and loved, because similarity engenders love and all the more so with languages. For we see that in Africa, Guinea, Brazil, and India, those who are born among us but do not speak Portuguese do not love us owing to the difference in language, but those who grow up speaking Portuguese love us well and refer to the Portuguese as "their own" because they speak as we do. (10)<sup>3</sup>

Oliveira's explicit invocation of the eternal is significant, in that he consciously works to project a kind of afterlife for the actions of his contemporaries as well as for the Portuguese empire itself. He also speaks of how, through the dissemination of their language, the Portuguese will "always be praised and loved" by other peoples. The use of the term "always" is significant here, in that Oliveira is referring as much to actions and attitudes in a distant future as he is to habitual actions in the present or proximal future. Put another way, "always" (*sempre*) here can simultaneously suggest that the Portuguese will be both consistently praised and loved and forever praised and loved. In fact, given that this statement comes directly after another one that underscores the links that Oliveira wishes to forge between linguistic expression and eternity (*ficará com maior eternidade*), the issue of the distant future—potentially an endless one—seems to be paramount.

What of the question of praise and love? Oliveira argues that by teaching sound doctrines to other peoples in Portuguese (one infers here that Africans, Brazilians, and Asians are implied, before Oliveira removes any doubt in the following sentence, mentioning them by name), these “other peoples” will always praise and love the Portuguese. What underlies this potentially endless process of praise and love, and even serves as its cause, is nothing other than the common use of Portuguese: “those who grow up speaking Portuguese love us well and refer to the Portuguese as ‘their own’ because they speak as we do.” This is Lusofonia writ large and linked explicitly to imperial dominion, and it is noteworthy that Oliveira frames it not in terms of military conquest and forced submission but rather as a seduction—as a Lusotropical love affair induced through early socialization into (and through) a common language.

Another significant aspect of Oliveira’s theorization of (Portuguese) language and empire is the question of human agency and action. When he calls on his readers to focus their scholarly efforts (*trabalho*) on the Portuguese language and people, for example, what is the notion of agency that underlies such effort? Turning once again to the very end of the grammar’s fourth chapter, we see that Oliveira argues forcefully that the Portuguese should not doubt the worth of their language, because “people make language and not the other way around.” What follows from this reasoning are two related ideas: the first holds that the Portuguese are not limited by their language any more than the Greeks or Romans were; and the second (a consequence of the first) maintains that Portuguese is in no way inherently inferior to Greek or Latin, in large part because the Portuguese are in no way inferior to the Greeks and Romans. Through the Portuguese language, Oliveira is once again arguing, the Portuguese may have a share of the enduring dominion—framed explicitly as the love and praise of the African Other—then still enjoyed by the Romans through Latin.

What is perhaps most interesting about Oliveira’s statement at the end of the fourth chapter of his grammar regarding human agency and language (which found common expression in sixteenth-century Portuguese chronicles and other texts of empire) is that he uses it as a kind of launching pad to move immediately into the realm of myth. In this case, the legend that he cites situates the origins of human speech itself in the Iberian Peninsula:

If you wish to hear legends, I’ll tell you how the people of the earth first learned to speak: Vitruvius says, in the second book of his *On Architecture*, that

people used to come together at a certain fire that, owing to strong winds, had ignited in the woods; conversing there with one another, people learned to form words and speak. Vitruvius does not tell us where this fire was, but Diodorus Siculus tells us in the sixth book of his *Library of History* that it was in the Pyrenees, which extend between France and Iberia.” (7)<sup>4</sup>

The second book of Vitruvius’s *On Architecture* does in fact include an account of a storm that ignites a certain forest, and Vitruvius goes on to tell how people gathered there and eventually learned to form words and communicate. Oliveira is also correct in stating that Vitruvius gives no hint regarding the location of this forest. One searches in vain, however, within the sixth book (or any book for that matter) of Diodorus Siculus’s *Library of History* to find a passage that links this fire, and the formation of human speech, to the Pyrenees. All that one finds in Diodorus, in fact, is the following brief passage in book five, chapter 35, of the *Library of History*, in which he discusses the richness of Iberian silver mines: “And since they contain many thick and deep forests, in ancient times, we are told, certain herdsmen left a fire and the whole area of the mountains was entirely consumed; and due to this fire, since it raged continuously day after day, the surface of the earth was also burned and the mountains, because of what had taken place, were called the Pyrenees.” There is a false etymology at work in this passage, according to which the Greek word for “fire” (*pyr*), rather than the Celtic word for “mountain” (*byrin*), is the source for the mountain range’s name, and Oliveira leaps on Diodorus’s creative misreading to situate the origins of human speech and verbal interaction within the Iberian Peninsula (Smith 1857, 687). In this way we come back to Oliveira’s concern with the “ancient and noble” (7) status of the languages of the Iberian Peninsula and the possibility of their primacy over Greek and Latin.

Beyond the more politicocultural concerns that run through Oliveira’s grammar, this text also reveals a pronounced concern on Oliveira’s part with questions of eternity and divine knowledge that seem to transcend the merely political. In this matter, too, Oliveira argues that the Portuguese language plays a central role, and in his approach we find, once again, a recognizable debt to at least the prologue of Nebrija’s Castilian grammar. The common idea, for example, that linguistic standardization and the liberal arts (Nebrija’s *artes de la paz*) can in some manner preserve the memory of a nation’s achievements is a conceit that runs through both texts. As Nebrija puts it in the prologue to his *Gramática*:

I have decided before all else to systematize [*reduzir en artificio*] our Castilian language, so that from now on all that is written in it may follow the same standard and so extend itself for all time to come, as has been the case with Greek and Latin. . . . Because if we do not standardize our language as was done for those languages, in vain will our chroniclers and historians write and entrust to immortality the memory of your praiseworthy deeds, and [likewise in vain] do we try to translate into Castilian foreign and strange things. Such a project can only be short-lived. In fact, one of two things will necessarily occur: either the memory of your deeds will perish along with the language or it will travel along through foreign nations, as it will not have its own home in which to reside. (15–16)<sup>5</sup>

While the specific link between linguistic standardization and the eternal is much more implicit in the body of Oliveira's grammar than in Nebrija's prologue, it nonetheless remains the case, at a very basic level, that both authors consider their respective grammars to be tools for systematizing their national languages, and believe that the success of this process, as with Greek and Latin, will confer a share of immortality, insofar as the accomplishments and learning of Castile and Portugal will live on in their languages even after these kingdoms' respective imperia have fallen into decay.

As I have suggested, however, there are also definite limits to any comparison between Oliveira and Nebrija. Some of these limits, as in the case of their treatment of Greek and Latin, are ideological, but there are also deeper philosophical differences between the two humanists' treatment of their respective national vernaculars. For example, while Nebrija justifies his grammar as an instrument for better executing Castilian laws in conquered lands and exhorts Queen Isabel I to help the liberal arts flourish in the wake of her kingdom's military conquest of Granada (the study of Greek and Latin presumably taking center stage in this program), Oliveira is much more focused on the deeper meaning of Portugal's role as both Africa's teacher and the object of its undying love. Put another way, if Nebrija is more or less narrowly concerned with linguistic standardization as a way to forestall political decline and oblivion within the culturally and politically diverse Castilian Crown (for Nebrija as for other fifteenth-century Castilian humanists, the term *imperio* still most commonly signified "dominion" or "rule" in a general sense, and not necessarily the more restricted modern concept of "empire"), Oliveira has his sights set

on the development of something much more deeply metaphysical, ambitious, and fraught.

From a philosophical standpoint, Oliveira's approach to the Portuguese empire and the Portuguese language emerges from his broader understanding of language itself. At the beginning of the first chapter of his grammar, Oliveira speaks of language in terms of Thomist notions of cognition and understanding embedded (albeit superficially) within an Augustinian framework of understanding, memory, and will. Seeking to define language, he argues, "Language is a figure of understanding [*entendimento*], and it is true that the mouth says what the heart commands it to say and nothing else; and nature creates no more deformed monster than those who say something other than what is in their will, because words are the proof of the man. As the greatest Truth, our Lord Jesus Christ says: 'Words are the image of works'" (4).<sup>6</sup> Here Oliveira speaks explicitly of understanding, memory (with the heart as its recognized seat), and will; but what exactly does he mean to say by juxtaposing the axiomatic statement that language is a "figure" of understanding with an account of human praxis encoded within a paraphrase of Jesus's claim that "each tree is recognized by its own fruit" (Luke 6:44)? What of his monster of dissimulation? Where does he situate understanding (and action), and what do his ideas on this issue mean for his arguments regarding the Portuguese language, the Portuguese empire, and the eternal? One way to answer these questions is to approach them as aspects of the broader philosophical project that informs Oliveira's grammar, namely, to link particulars to universals and thus the temporal to the eternal.

In the first place, we might say that for Oliveira language exists as the shape or form of our understanding (*entendimento*)—that which brings the workings of the passive intellect (Lat. *intellectus possibilis*; Gr. *nous pathetikos*; Ar. *al-ʿaql al-hayūlānī*) and active intellect (Lat. *intellectus agens*; Gr. *nous poetikos*; Ar. *al-ʿaql al-faʿāl*) into view and presents them as objects for analysis and judgment. The compound structure of understanding and its link to universal reason find perhaps their clearest and most influential exposition (especially in the immediate context of the Council of Trent) in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, who had argued that the active intellect serves as the cognitive power, linked to the eternal *logos*, by which we form general concepts (in language and even language itself) from sense experience: "[The active intellect] confers generality upon the thoughts (*species expressa*) of the passive mind. Without the work of the former no concepts would be available; and without these cognition could not take place,

for the sensuous presentation of the environment could not be ordered. The active intellect is thus not something separate and external to the subject—neither a common storehouse of ideas nor a metaphysical ‘starting-handle’ pushing forms into the mind or jerking it into action. Rather it is a power of deriving intelligible forms from experience” (Haldane 1992, 205). In other words, for Aquinas, in our sense experience particulars (presented before the imagination or *passive intellect* as phantasms) become general concepts through the power of the active intellect, which is linked to the mind of God through the principle of universal reason. Our understanding is thus a composite of the images that our passive mind derives from sense experience and the generation of general concepts linked to the universal and eternal through the work of the active intellect.

As the figure of our understanding, language is thus itself a generalized concept linked to divine knowledge; however, it is also instantiated through words (*palavras*) that we experience as images (phantasms, as Aquinas puts it) linked to our actions, through both intentionality and use. Put another way, if Jesus’s parable of the tree and its fruit is largely concerned with intentionality and ethics, Oliveira seems more concerned with deriving abstract principles from concrete forms and instances of language use and praxis. It is through these abstract principles, embodied in language as a system of signification linked both to universal reason and to particulars experienced through sight and sound, that Oliveira seeks to join the Portuguese language to the imperial project and so imbue the latter with something akin to an immortal soul.

### **Barros and the Eternal Spirit of Empire**

João de Barros was both a towering figure in Portuguese humanism and Oliveira’s contemporary (Oliveira even served for a time as the tutor of Barros’s children), and his theories of language, empire, and the eternal intersect with those expressed in the 1536 *Grammar* in many respects. Educated in the royal court in Lisbon, Barros led an active life in the service of three successive Portuguese kings: Manuel I, João III, and Sebastião I. In 1532 he was put in charge of the Casa da Índia in Lisbon, the administrative center of Portugal’s Asian empire, a post he held until 1568, two years before his death. Barros was also an active writer over the course of his life, composing chivalric, philosophical, and didactic works.

Barros’s early chivalric work is *Crónica do Emperador Clarimundo, donde os reys de Portugal descendem, tirada da linguagem ungara em a nossa portugueza* (Chronicle

of the Emperor Clarimundo, from Whom Are Descended the Kings of Portugal, Translated from Hungarian into Portuguese; 1520). His best-known philosophical and didactic works include *Rhopicapnefma, ou mercadoria espiritual* (Rhopicapnefma, or Spiritual Merchandise; 1532), *Cartinha para aprender a ler* (Epistle for Learning to Read; 1539), *Gramática da língua portuguesa* (Grammar of the Portuguese Language; 1540), *Diálogo em louvor da nossa linguagem* (Dialogue in Praise of Our Language; 1540), *Diálogo da viciosa vergonha* (Dialogue of Corrupted Shame; 1540), and *Diálogo de preceitos moraes com prática delles em modo de jogo* (Dialogue of Moral Precepts with Their Practice in the Form of a Game; 1540). Barros also composed four volumes of his vast history of the Portuguese empire in Asia (the last of them published posthumously) before Diogo do Couto picked up the project and produced nine more volumes (not all of which have survived). While Barros's *Décadas da Ásia* was overshadowed in terms of popularity by Fernão Lopes de Castanheda's much less detailed (and less accurate) *História do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos portugueses* (History of the Discovery and Conquest of India by the Portuguese), it has remained a central source for piecing together the history of early modern India and east Asia even to the present day.

In the introduction to the first volume of his *Décadas da Ásia*, Barros speaks directly to the Portuguese king João III, offering the ailing monarch a dense and complex theorization of empire, human works, language, and immortality. At the start of the text, Barros gives his king a brief lesson on the principle of reproduction as a means of achieving a form of immortality through the body and within nature:

All things, very powerful king and our lord, are so committed to the preservation of their being that they work as much as possible, and however they can, to give themselves perpetual life. Natural beings, upon which humans have no influence, have in each of them a generative capacity; and when they are divinely disposed, although they are menaced by their own corruption, Nature itself renews them in the form of a new being, through which they remain alive and preserved in their own species. (xiv–xv)<sup>7</sup>

Barros here begins with a philosophical commonplace about the desire for immortality before moving into a discussion of the question of generation and corruption.<sup>8</sup>

For Barros (as for Aristotle), human actions are denied even the distributive immortality achieved through reproduction. As Barros puts it (borrowing in part from a historiographical conceit that dates back to Herodotus), because

human actions (*feitos*) lack any sort of regenerative power, and die with the individuals who perform them, it has been necessary for humans to develop some sort of instrument by which their actions might approach at the very least the sort of mediated immortality achieved by natural beings through reproduction. Barros speaks of this instrument as a “divine artifice”:

And other things, which are not the work of Nature, but rather human achievements and actions, these die with their author due to both their lack of any animate ability to generate something like themselves and the brevity of human life. These same humans, in order to conserve their name and memory, sought out some divine artifice that might represent in the future that which they did in the present. This artifice, although its development has been attributed to various authors, seems more likely to have been inspired by God than invented by some human intellect. (I, xiv)<sup>9</sup>

According to Barros, the means—that is, the artifice or system—by which humans might collaboratively resolve this seemingly intractable conflict with human mortality, action, and the process of forgetting that accompanies individual death is language. As Barros presents it, language, framed explicitly as verbal practice, is a system with roots not in human industry but in divine intellect. Perhaps more radically, Barros goes on to suggest, following the thirteenth-century Mallorcan polymath Ramon Llull, that the human capacity for verbal practice is itself a sense, like hearing, sight, touch, taste, and smell, but superior to all of these.

Barros seems to accept Llull’s account of the embodied physicality of speech, but he also takes this idea in a new direction. In essence, Barros seeks a kind of compromise between the dictates of universalist reason and morality and the wholly contingent features of verbal interaction and human being-in-the-world. Barros’s notion of language as both “divine” and an “artifice” (or “system”) designed to mitigate the undesired effects (in this world and the next) of human mortality essentially allows him to walk a thin line between the idea, on the one hand, of verbal discourse as an intra- and intersubjective tool and the Llullian concept, on the other, of its status as an innate human sense linked in some direct way to the divine and the moral finality of our existence.

Having presented language as an inherently pragmatic and embodied system of signification linked to the divine order (a “divine artifice”), Barros quickly points out the limitations of verbal communication for any attempt to overcome

the durational and ontological challenges that language in general is called on to resolve. Having thus established both the promise and the limitations of verbal language, Barros moves on to the powers of written language. As Barros puts it, written letters, because they are not animate, do not suffer the sort of corruption that affects natural beings and phenomena such as verbal language use. As inanimate, artificial things, letters endure and, in addition, do not cause the corruption of the elements from which they are composed. What complements this freedom from corruption and imbues written language with force and meaning, however, is the “living spirit” (*espírito de vida*) that nonetheless resides within writing:

And written letters, being inanimate characters, yet contain within them the spirit of life, given that they speak to us of all things. They are elements that provide assistance to nature and make things last into the future, with the multiplication of the years, in the most excellent way that Nature can achieve; for we see that Nature, in order to generate something, corrupts and alters the elements from which it is composed; and written letters, being the elements from which the form and meaning of things are composed, corrupt neither these things nor human understanding. (I, xv–xvi)<sup>10</sup>

Here Barros extends the Llullian theory of *affatus* in important ways. Most significantly, he argues that written language serves as a mediating means or instrument by which speech, an embodied faculty or sense linked to the *logos* of creation and salvation, does not die with the body or degenerate over time but endures in uncorrupted form. Barros goes on to argue that “the fruit of human actions is very different from our natural fruits, which are made from semen through the innate mortality found within all humans (for whose use all things were created). The fruit of human actions is eternal, given that it proceeds from the understanding and the will, where all actions are produced and received and, given that the understanding and the will are components of the soul, they make these actions eternal” (xvi–xvii).<sup>11</sup> Like Oliveira before him, Barros moves into Augustinian territory here (speaking of will, understanding, and memory—and all linked to the individual soul), though he also retains a strong link to Lull, Aquinas, and Aristotle (by way of, most probably, some version of Avicenna’s metaphysics). For Barros, written language offers to human beings an approximation to divinity, expressed both as a form of immortality/permanence and as a means of moral perfection within the social sphere of action and interac-

tion (with origins in the soul). This idea departs in marked ways from Marsilio Ficino's more ambivalent treatment of writing, elaborated in his commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus* (as well as Jacques Derrida's much later, deconstructionist reading of the dialogue). Glossing Socrates' story of the Theban king Thamus's rejection of writing on the grounds that it would make people forgetful and convert them into sophists who "seemed" to have wisdom but did not, Ficino says that "writing would make them negligent in their learning [*ad inventionem*], given that they would rely on the talent [*ingenium*] of their superiors and not on their own" (Allen 1981, 211). In this and other passages, it becomes clear that for Ficino (and Neoplatonists working in both Italy and Portugal), writing is decidedly lacking in the *espírito da vida* with which Barros seeks to imbue it.

In Barros's hands, however, written language (and especially historical writing) emerges as a hybrid inanimate/animate construct that offers the possibility, through the use of cultural tools, of an unending and progressively perfect life. But where does Barros's syncretic theorization of language, written history, immortality, and progress take us as we work to understand the ideologies that informed both the development of the Portuguese empire in Asia and the evolution of Iberian humanism during the sixteenth century? One crucial place to begin, as was the case with Oliveira, is with the implicit theories of the Portuguese language that underlie Barros's broader theorization of language and immortality. It is, after all, in Portuguese that Barros writes his *Décadas da Ásia*, and it is in that language that the histories of Portuguese achievements that he describes will also presumably be written. How do Barros's ideas on language and immortality intersect with his understanding of the Portuguese language, its link to empire, and the broader concept of Lusofonia?

Four years after the publication of Oliveira's Portuguese grammar, Barros published his own *Gramática da língua portuguesa*, which was bound together with his *Diálogo em louvor da nossa linguagem*, a conversation between a father and son on the virtues of the Portuguese language in relation to other European languages. Barros begins his Portuguese grammar, which is shaped in significant ways by the grammars of Priscian and Nebrija, with a brief definition of grammar itself. It is a short passage, but it presents many of the elements that he would include in his 1552 introduction to the *Décadas da Ásia*:

Grammar is a Greek term that means the science of letters. According to the definition that the grammarians have given it, it provides a certain and just

mode of speaking and writing, collected from the usage and authority of wise men. We can call it a system of words put in their natural places in such a way that, in speech and writing, we might come to know the intentions of others. Because written letters enter through our sight just as spoken words enter through our ears—the instrument with which our understanding receives the majority of things. (293)<sup>12</sup>

This paragraph, at its most basic level, is an application of Thomist notions of the active and passive intellect. As Barros sets things up, our understanding (*intendimento*) receives utterances as sense impressions (whether through our ears or, in the case of written texts, through our eyes), and grammar serves as a systematization or “art” of utterances (quite literally framed as “acts of speech”) that allows us to determine meaning—in essence, to extract general concepts from particular impressions left upon our imagination. Insofar as it is seen to be the fruit of the active intellect, grammar is thus linked to the universal and the divine.

Building upon an understanding of language and grammar rooted in philosophical conceptions of knowledge and the eternal, Barros moves into more openly political and ideological territory in his *Diálogo em louvor da nossa linguagem*. Mirroring and even expanding Oliveira’s arguments regarding the role of Portuguese in the workings of the empire, the father in the dialogue makes the following claim:

With respect to material things, we say that which endures possesses greater excellence, just as in matters of honor we consider things retained in the memory to have greater glory. We find examples in all kingdoms, and while [the Romans] inevitably saw political decline owing to the variability of time and fortune, they left the Latin language as a sign of their empire, which will endure forever. The arms and *padrões* of the Portuguese, established in Africa, Asia, and in more than a thousand islands beyond the three known parts of the earth, are material things, and with the passing of time they might deteriorate, but what will not deteriorate are the teachings, customs, and language that the Portuguese left in these lands. (404–5)<sup>13</sup>

What emerges from this statement is that the Portuguese language, like Latin before it (as well as many other imperial languages), can serve as that part of the Portuguese empire that will never decline or end. Barros frames it, in a

very explicit sense, as the eternal soul of empire, embedded forever within the bodies and minds of the colonized and their descendants. In his response to the father, the son presents this idea as axiomatic: "It is certain that a good custom and word can outlast a *padrão*" (*é certo que mais pode durar um bom costume e vocábulo que um padram*; 405).

Barros's framing of language and Lusofonia as the eternal spirit of empire becomes even more apparent in the father's next statement regarding Portugal's language socialization and evangelical efforts within its colonies. In a statement that adds the full weight of Portugal's perceived missionary responsibility in Africa, Asia, and Brazil to Oliveira's account of Portugal's regime of language in those regions, the father in Barros's dialogue argues that "there is certainly no glory that compares to the fact that, through our grammar [*a nossa arte*], Ethiopian, Persian, and Indian children—living on this and the far side of the Ganges and within the jurisdiction of their temples and pagodas, where the word 'Roman' had never been heard—have learned Portuguese and may thus become instructed in the precepts of our faith, which are written in that language" (405).<sup>14</sup>

Here the achievements of the grammarian outstrip those of the explorer and conqueror, and Barros opens up yet another path by which the concept of Lusofonia—here linked not just to philosophical accounts of universal reason and knowledge but directly to processes of Christian conversion—serves the empire even centuries after the decay of *padrões*, outposts, forts, and other such monuments of worldly dominion.

## Conclusions

In the linguistic work of Oliveira and Barros, the notion of Lusofonia—articulated in its infancy as the spread of Portuguese throughout Portugal's colonized territories—emerges as something akin to the eternal spirit of empire. This occurs on many levels. First, on what one might term the historico-imperial level, both Oliveira and Barros discuss the spread of Portuguese as a means of following and even exceeding the example of the Greeks and especially the Romans, who had achieved through their languages a form of lasting power and even immortality. On a second, more deliberately philosophical level, we see the elaboration of theories regarding the Portuguese language, and language in general, in terms of a somewhat sophisticated discussion of theories of cognition and immortality current in the Iberian Peninsula at the start of the sixteenth

century. On a third, more ideological level, the Portuguese language emerges as an instrument of language socialization by which the Portuguese might carry out Christian conversion and initiate a kind of perversely reciprocal love affair with their colonized subjects—an emotional bond with all the characteristics of a transhistorical form of Stockholm syndrome.

Framed as love and commonality, as a shared patrimony, as the eternal spirit of empire, or as a “sad and ridiculous” attempt to exert influence long after the fact, the workings of Lusofonia may or may not have evolved over the past five centuries. What seems clear, however, is that the Portuguese language has been understood since at least the sixteenth century as not only the “companion” or tool of Portugal’s empire, but rather as its most enduring and ontologically *real* aspect.

#### NOTES

1. The “Pink Map” (*mapa cor-de-rosa*) was a nineteenth-century document that represented Portugal’s claim to sovereignty over Angola, Mozambique, and the wide strip of land between the two (modern-day Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). The Portuguese government discarded the Pink Map in 1890, in the wake of a British ultimatum that laid claim to the territory between Angola and Mozambique. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

2. “Esses estudos fazem mais durar a glória da terra em que florecem. Porque Grécia e Roma só por isto ainda vivem: porque quando senhoreavão o mundo mandarão a todas as gentes a elles sogeytas aprender suas línguas: e em ellas escrevião muytas boas doutrinas e não somente o que entendião escrevião nellas: mas também trasladavam parellas todo o bo que lião em outras. E desta feyção nos obrigarão a que ainda agora trabalhemos em aprender e apurar o seu, esquecendo-nos do nosso: não façamos assy mas tornemos sobre nos agora que he tempo e somos senhores porque melhor he que ensinemos a Guine ca que sejamos ensinados de Roma: ainda que ella agora tevera toda sua valia e preço. E não desconfiemos da nossa lingua porque os homens fazem a língua, e não a lingua os homens.”

3. “E com tudo apliquemos nosso trabalho à nossa língua e gente; e ficará com maior eternidade a memória delle. E nam trabalhemos em língua estrangeira, mas apuremos tanto a nossa com boas doutrinas que a possamos ensinar a muytas outras gentes e sempre seremos dellas louvados e amados porque a semelhança he causa do amor e mays em as línguas. E ao contrayro vemos em África, Guiné, Brasil e Índia não amarem muytos os Portugueses que antrelles naçem so polla diferença da língua: e os dela nacidos querem bem aos seus portugueses e chamanlhes seus porque fálão assi como elles.”

4. Vitruvius’s text, found in the first chapter of the second book of his *On Architecture*, reads as follows: “Mankind originally brought forth like the beasts of the field, in woods,

dens, and groves, passed their lives in a savage manner, eating the simple food which nature afforded. A tempest, on a certain occasion, having exceedingly agitated the trees in a particular spot, the friction between some of the branches caused them to take fire; this so alarmed those in the neighborhood of the accident, that they betook themselves to flight. Returning to the spot after the tempest had subsided, and finding the warmth which had thus been created extremely comfortable, they added fuel to the fire excited, in order to preserve the heat, and then went forth to invite others, by signs and gestures, to come and witness the discovery. In the concourse that thus took place, they testified their different opinions and expressions by different inflexions of the voice. From daily association words succeeded to these indefinite modes of speech; and these becoming by degrees the signs of certain objects, they began to join them together, and conversation became general."

5. "Acordé ante todas las otras cosas reduzir en artificio este nuestro lenguaje castellano: para que lo que agora y de aquí adelante en él se escriviere pueda quedar en un tenor: y estenderse en toda la duración de los tiempos que están por venir. Como vemos que se a hecho en la lengua griega y latina. . . . Porque si otro tanto en nuestra lengua no se haze como en aquellas: en vano vuestros cronistas y estoriadores escriben y encomiendan a inmortalidad la memoria de vuestros loables hechos: y nos otros tentamos de passar en castellano las cosas peregrinas y estrañas: pues que aqueste no puede ser sino negocio de pocos años. I será necessaria una de dos cosas: o que la memoria de vuestras hazañas perezca con la lengua: o que ande peregrinando por las naciones estranjerias: pues que no tiene propria casa en que pueda morar."

6. "A lingoagem é figura do entendimento e assi é verdade que a boca diz quanto lhe manda o coração e não outra cousa; antes não devia a natureza criar outro mais difforme monstro do que são aquelles que falão o que não tem na vontade, porque se as obras são prova do home. Como diz a suma verdade Jesu Christo nosso Deus: e as palavras são ymagem das obras." The source for this idea is Luke 6:43-45: "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

7. "Todas cousas, muito poderoso rey, e senhor nosso, tem tanto amor á conservação de seu proprio ser, que quanto lhe he possivel trabalham em seu modo por se fazerem perpétuas. As naturaes, em que sómente obra a Natureza, e não a industria humana, cada huma dellas em si mesma tem huma virtude generativa, que quando Divinamente são dispostas, ainda que periguem em sua corrupção, essa mesma Natureza as torna renovar em novo ser, com que ficam vivas, e conservadas em sua propria especie."

8. See, for example, Aristotle's *De anima* (2.4): "The acts in which [the nutritive soul] manifests itself are reproduction and the use of food—reproduction, I say, because for

any living thing that has reached its normal development and which is unutilized, and whose mode of generation is not spontaneous, the most natural act is the production of another like itself, an animal producing an animal, a plant a plant, in order that, as far as its nature allows, it may partake in the eternal and divine."

9. "E as outras cousas, que não são obras da Natureza, mas feitos, e actos humanos, estas porque não tinham virtude animada de gerar outras semelhantes a si, e por a brevidade da vida do homem, acabavam com seu author: os mesmos homens por conservar seu nome em a memoria dellas, buscáram hum Divino artificio, que representasse em futuro o que elles obravam em presente. O qual artificio, pero que a invenção delle se dê a diversos Autores, mais parece per Deos inspirado, que inventado per algum humano entendimento."

10. "E as letras, sendo huns caracteres mortos, e não animados, contém em si espirito de vida, pois a dam ácerca de nós a todas as cousas. Cá ellas são huns elementos, que lhe dam assistencia, e as fazem passar em futuro com sua multiplicação de annos em annos per modo mais excellente do que faz a Natureza; pois vemos, que esta Natureza pera gerar alguma cousa, corrompe, e altera os elementos de que he composta; e as letras, sendo elementos de que se compõe, e fôrma a significação das cousas, não corrompem as mesmas cousas, nem o entendimento."

11. "[O] fruto destes actos humanos he mui differente do fruto natural, que se produz da semente das cousas, por este natural fenecer no mesmo homem, pera cujo uso todas foram creadas; e o fruto das obras delles he eterno, pois procede do entendimento, e vontade, onde se fabricam, e acceptam todas, que, por serem partes espirituas, as fazem eternas."

12. "Gramática é vocabulo grego; quer dizer ciência de letras. E, segundo a definição que lhe os gramáticos deram, é um modo certo e justo de falar e escrever, colheito do uso e autoridade dos barões doutos. Nós podemos-lhe chamar artefício de palavras postas em seus naturaes lugares, pera que, mediante elas, assi na fãla como na escritura, venhamos em conhecimento das tenções alheas. Porque bem assi entram as letras pela vista como palavras pelos ouvidos—instrumento com que o nosso entendimento recebe as mais das cousas."

13. "E quanto, antre as cousas materiais, é de maior excelência aquela que mais dura, tanto ácerca das cousas da honra, sam de maior glória as que a memória mais retém. Exemplo temos em todas as monarquias, cá, se perderam com a variedade do tempo e fortuna das coisas humanas, pero deixou a língua latina este sinal de seu império, que durará eternamente. As armas e padrões portugueses, postos em África e em Ásia, e em tantas mil ilhas fora da repartição das três partes da terra, materiaes sam, e pode-as o tempo gastar, pero não gastará doutrina, costumes, linguagem, que os portugueses nestas terras deixarem."

14. "Certo é que nam há glória que se possa comparar a quando os mininos etíopas,

persianos, indos, d'aquém e d'além do Gange, em suas próprias terras, na força de seus templos e pagodes, onde nunca se ouviu o nome romano, per esta nossa arte aprenderam a nossa linguagem, com que possam ser doutrinados em os preceitos da nossa fe, que nela vam escritos." For more on the use of Portuguese missionary grammars in Africa, Asia, and Brazil, see Zwartjes 2011.

## WORKS CITED

- Allen, J. B. *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer: Introduction, Texts, Translations*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981.
- Aristotle. "On the Soul." In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, 535–606. New York: Random House, 1941.
- Barros, João de. *Da Ásia de João de Barros*. 24 vols. Lisboa: Sam Carlos, 1973.
- . *Gramática da língua portuguesa*. Ed. Maria Leonor Carvalhão Buescu. Lisbon: Faculdade de Letras/University of Lisbon, 1971.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Obras completas*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1974.
- Haldane, John. "Aquinas and the Active Intellect." *Philosophy* 67.260 (1992): 199–210.
- Kroskrity, Paul V. "Regimenting Languages: Language Ideological Perspectives." In *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity, 1–34. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2000.
- Lourenço, Eduardo. *A nau de Ícaro seguido de Imagem e miragem da Lusofonia*. Lisbon: Gradiva, 1999.
- Nebrija, Antonio. *Gramática de la lengua castellana*. Barcelona: Lingkua, 2009.
- Ochs, Elinor, and Bambi B. Schieffelin. "Language Acquisition and Socialization: Three Developmental Stories and Their Implications." In *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Alessandro Duranti, 296–328. Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.
- Oliveira, Fernão de. *Grammatica da lingoagem portuguesa*. Lisbon: Galhardo, 1536.
- Pereira, Nelson. "Miguel Tamen: 'A lusofonia é uma espécie de colonialismo de esquerda.'" iOnline, 24 April 2012.
- Siculus, Diodorus. *Library of History*. Ed. Bill Thayer. Lacus Curtius.
- Smith, William. *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*. 2 vols. Boston: Little, Brown, 1857.
- Vitruvius. *On Architecture*. Ed. Bill Thayer. Lacus Curtius.
- Zwartjes, Otto. *Portuguese Missionary Grammars in Asia, Africa, and Brazil, 1550–1800*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011.

VINCENT BARLETTA is an associate professor of Iberian and Latin American cultures at Stanford University. His research tends to focus, within a comparative framework, on the literature of Iberian empire in Africa and Asia. Dr. Barletta is also concerned with

broader anthropological and philosophical questions that arise out of readings of this literature. His current book project focuses on these philosophical issues, examining theories of rhythm as ethics from fifth-century-BCE Greece through to the end of the (Iberian) sixteenth century. His most recent book is *Death in Babylon: Alexander the Great and Iberian Empire in the Muslim Orient*. He is also the author of *Covert Gestures: Crypto-Islamic Literature as Cultural Practice in Early Modern Spain*, and editor/translator of Granadan Morisco Francisco Núñez Muley's *A Memorandum for the President of the Royal Audiencia and Chancery Court of the City and Kingdom of Granada*. He may be reached at [vbarletta@stanford.edu](mailto:vbarletta@stanford.edu).