

Lusofonia

From Infancy to Necrology, or The Peregrinations of a Floating Signifier

ABSTRACT: Between 1926 and 1933, the Portuguese regime enacted legislation defining Africans as a separate element of the colonial population, as “natives” or *indígenas*. Those who learned to speak Portuguese, took commercial or industrial jobs, and conducted themselves as Portuguese citizens were labeled *assimilados*. The colonial administration stringently applied the conditions for assimilation. However, the logic of assimilation demanded the wholesale rejection of indigenous religions and cultural practices. This article analyzes the contradictions in this situation.

KEYWORDS: assimilation, colonial administration, Mozambique.

L'institutionnalisation de la CPLP [Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa] s'est faite dans la douleur . . . césarienne.

—Francisco Santana Ferra

Subtil mas constantemente, sente-se perpassar na atmosfera política nacional um sopro gélido, muito necrofilico, que à força de exaltar o passado, compromete o presente, e ainda mais o futuro.

—Alfredo Margarido

It took me nearly half a lifetime to get back home. Unlike Odysseus, however, I returned not to violently reclaim a legacy of patriarchal rule but, in a half-intuited way, to relinquish any lingering notion of rightful appurtenance to my estranged and largely imagined homeland. In a sense, I came home in order to leave it. Or at least that is the story I now like to tell myself. I was born in Nam-pula, Mozambique, in the year when the hackneyed winds of change were sweeping across the African continent. I left colonial Lourenço Marques (present-day

Maputo) for Boston, Massachusetts, by way of Lisbon in early 1975, twelve days before my fifteenth birthday and about three months before Mozambique achieved its independence. Unbeknownst to me at the time, thirty-five years would pass, almost to the day, before I was to fly back to Maputo on a Fulbright grant. Driven no doubt by a vocational proclivity to look for “deep meanings” even in the most anodyne practices of everyday life, when I was kindly invited to contribute to a special issue on Lusofonia, the putatively Odyssean cast of my deferred homecoming appeared to me as exemplary of the construct that Eduardo Lourenço has famously designated as a “lusophone mythology” (2001, 176). For, what ultimately defines Lusofonia—according to its critics, at any rate—is a return as well.

Michel Cahen, for example, calls it a nostalgic (*saudosista*) discourse, still haunted by mythic caravels (*caraveliste*) and harking back to Lusotropicalist theories positing the Portuguese colonizing enterprise as exceptional, predisposed to miscegenation and the formation of affective ties among the peoples it allegedly brought together (quoted in Ferra 2006, 161). This assessment is echoed by Manuel Villaverde-Cabral, who considers it a dream shared in common by Portugal’s elites, a democratized version of a hoary yet resilient Lusotropicalism (*ibid.*, 162). By the same token, Francisco Santana Ferra regards a certain dominant strain of Lusofonia as “the last avatar of the Portuguese ‘dream’ of an empire and greatness that have disappeared forever” (163),¹ while Maria Manuel Baptista deems it a sort of return of the colonial repressed (2006, 102). Alfredo Margarido, on the other hand, in a renowned rebuke of the concept, which Onésimo Almeida describes as “a forceful and bitter tirade” (2005, 3–4), identifies Lusofonia’s underlying purpose as “to recuperate at least a fraction of the former Portuguese hegemony so as to maintain colonial domination, albeit having renounced the vehemence or the violence of any colonial discourse” (2000, 76).² Whatever links the truncated and roughly parabolic trajectory of my own return journey may have with this complex symbolic structure are likely incidental rather than metonymic (let alone metaphoric), but I should like to sustain my opening conceit for a while longer (under erasure, as it were) as an expedient means of broaching the brief and rather personal analysis of Lusofonia that follows.

As far-ranging as my travels may seem at first blush, they never strayed far beyond the confines of the symbolic space that Fernando Alves Cristóvão, one of Lusofonia’s more prolific proponents, terms the first of “three concentric

circles” encompassing the values of a common language. Mozambique is of course one of the eight nation-states whose official language is Portuguese, and the particular corner of New England where I ended up (around twenty miles outside of New Bedford, Massachusetts) constitutes one of those regions that belong to non-lusophone nations and cultures but share a language and history with “lusophone reality,” which Cristóvão likewise locates within Lusofonia’s first concentric circle.³ I should concede at the outset that my initial encounter with Maputo was marked by estrangement rather than identification, by difference rather than identity.

I recall walking the shabby, dilapidated streets that were once the epitome of colonial chic (“the mortal remains of colonial Lourenço Marques,” as a Portuguese expatriate would later describe them) in the first days following my arrival. I recall trying to gather up the scattered shards of what I could remember of my former life in Lourenço Marques and arrange them in a seamless sequential narrative. I remember trying hard to will this jumble of memories to line up obligingly in chronological order against the uncanny and yet familiar world that now unfolded before my eyes. I remember trying to coax a smile of recognition from the face of the decidedly foreign homeland that the tourist brochures proclaimed *O País dos Sorrisos*. And I recall trying in vain. At the same time, however, there was some portion of that reality that I insisted on claiming as my own. The roots of the man I have become lay somewhere under that red dust—or so I stubbornly wished to believe—and those roots could not but remain visible beneath the deceptively alien surface of things. Yet this sense of identification was probably little more than a soothing fiction. Indeed, it was during the years I spent away from my homeland that I commenced inchoately to measure the immense cultural distance separating the former colonizer from the colonized in Mozambique. Only after I left the colony did I begin to glimpse what Eduardo Lourenço calls the Other’s “unimaginable” modes of living, perceiving, and feeling that the Portuguese colonizer had for centuries refused or neglected to recognize (2001, 190).

As Alfredo Margarido asserts, it was always the colonizing nation that bestowed historical meaning upon the colonized. The latter became, as a result, mere footnotes in a multisecular epic of expansion and conquest (2000, 52). The colonized signified only insofar as they ratified the conqueror’s will to conquer. As Frantz Fanon memorably puts it, “the colonizer makes history; his life is an epic, an Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning” (2004, 51). This epos, to

paraphrase Margarido, cannot heal the colonial wound or mask the harrowing stench of death (2000, 54). It is graven in blood (52) upon native bodies rendered inert and “almost inorganic” by this very violent inscription (Fanon 2004, 51). It is pertinent to question, therefore, whether my alleged identification with an “imaginary” that, although expressed in a common language, derives from a radically different culture (Lourenço 2001, 188, 192), was a product of my colonial upbringing or of a cultural and historical knowledge that I acquired only after my departure.

My insistence on tracing a line of continuity between the colony I left and the nation I returned to may well have been cut from the same cloth as the exclusively Portuguese myth of Lusofonia that “imagines” the “community” of Portuguese-speaking countries (CPLP) as “an ideal totality compatible with the cultural differences that characterize each one of its members” (Lourenço 2001, 179). In this context, the question Mozambican scholar Lourenço Rosário raises about Lusofonia becomes critical: “African countries, including those whose official language is Portuguese, being in general colonial in origin, but exhibiting a bipolar socio-cultural reality by virtue of their ethno-linguistic adversity, how legitimately will we be able to designate them as lusophone?” (2007).⁴ To put it in alternate but perhaps equally compelling terms, the key question concerning Lusofonia is whether it can, as Eduardo Lourenço solemnly proposes, ever emerge as the world of the Other, of a subject who shares “our” language but not “our” cultural memory, who has become Other precisely by refusing, transforming, or resignifying the cultural legacy with which the Portuguese language has been historically linked (2001, 189).

The historical memory in question here pertains to the violent imposition of the Portuguese language during the colonial period. Language, as Margarido remarks, functioned as an agent of domination during the empire (2000, 66) and, despite evident differences, it maintains a dominant role in the era of Lusofonia as well. As even a cursory glance at the pronouncements by high Portuguese officials will attest, the promotion of the Portuguese language on the international scene is invariably upheld as one of the principal tasks of Lusofonia. At the same time, the scholarly production of its academic proponents, habitually suffused with reverential citations of the obligatory line by the Pessoa heteronym Bernardo Soares (“A minha pátria é a língua portuguesa”), often advances the correlate claim that Portuguese serves as a coalescing cultural factor across a plural, heterogeneous lusophone space (Cristóvão 1995, 99).

Russell Hamilton argues cogently that the history of the Portuguese language in Africa has been ambivalent. Its violent inception notwithstanding, Portuguese played a significant role in the liberation movements, not only in mobilizing and politicizing, and indeed building a “national culture” across ethnolinguistic lines, but as the idiom of “cultural revindication, primarily in the form of literary expression,” during both the protracted anticolonial struggle and the postindependence period (1991, 325). As Hamilton appositely observes, for Amílcar Cabral, for instance, the only thing Africans should thank the Portuguese for is having bequeathed them their language (325), which the nationalist leader famously considered not just the incontestable language of written communication but the single means of improving the Guinean people’s well-being as well as securing scientific progress. Unlike Hamilton, though, I would hesitate to relegate Lusofonia to “a moot point” because at present “most lusophone African writers and intellectuals” have shifted beyond a resigned accommodation to their dependence on the language of Camões and come fully to accept “the place of the former colonial language in their own political sovereignty and cultural autonomy” (334).

The imperial specter that continues to haunt Lusofonia cannot simply be laid to rest because lusophone writers have, to borrow Mia Couto’s well-known rejoinder to Pessoa, ingeniously claimed *their own* Portuguese language as their homeland: “Minha pátria é a minha língua portuguesa . . . a minha língua portuguesa que estou inventando para mim” (2009, 195, 196). As Couto himself is quick to add, Portuguese is merely one of Mozambique’s multiple languages (one of its many “nations,” as he writes), which a scant 3 percent of the population speak as their mother tongue. It is of course this tiny minority, composed of urban blacks, mulattoes, Indians, and whites, who wield political and cultural power. Perhaps, to cite Couto again, Portuguese was adopted “not as a legacy but as the most valuable war trophy” (191). Perhaps, as Cabral insisted and as Mozambique’s liberation movement (Frelimo) decided at its inception, adopting the colonizer’s language was the inescapable condition of possibility for the emergence of a single nation out of an unwieldy ethnic plurality and linguistic heterogeneity. Yet it remains an open question whether this colonial genealogy can be stricken with the wave of the pen.

Wole Soyinka has memorably impugned the nation-state in Africa as “an artificial creation . . . which did not take into consideration either the wishes or the will or the interests of the people who were enclosed and lumped together

within [its] boundary" (1993, 33). The question, then, pertains not only to the selection of a national language but to the nation's form itself, which is neither natural nor inevitable but always provisional, contingent, and performative. Along with Partha Chatterjee, we should thus inquire into the ways in which the "regulative logic" of the postcolonial nation derives from colonial structures, into the modes in which emergent national discourses reproduce an order of knowledge "whose representational structure corresponds to the very structure of power nationalist thought seeks to repudiate" (1993a, 38). Couto is keenly aware of the irony that the Mozambican government has done more to foster the growth of the Portuguese language than five hundred years of Portuguese colonialism (2009, 192–93). In the same vein, Lourenço writes that "even in their imperial hour, the Portuguese were far too weak to 'impose' their language" (2001, 123), while Margarido mordantly adduces that the Portuguese themselves never considered "the Portuguese language a suitable, or even indispensable means of ensuring colonial operations" (2000, 64). As Couto recalls, Portugal's colonial enterprise in Africa was geared in part toward the formation of a social stratum (the *assimilados*) that would be able to run the "colonial state machinery" and reproduce colonial institutions (2009, 187, 188).

In effect, between 1926 and 1933, the Portuguese regime enacted legislation defining Africans as a separate element of the colonial population, as "natives" or *indígenas*. Those who learned to speak Portuguese, took commercial or industrial jobs, and conducted themselves as Portuguese citizens were labeled *assimilados*. The colonial administration stringently applied the conditions for assimilation. According to a 1950 official census, for instance, *assimilados* represented less than 0.01 percent of the total population in the colonies. Male *indígenas* were required to carry identification cards and pay a head tax. If unable to raise the tax money, they were compelled to work for the colonial government for up to six months out of each year without wages. This compulsory labor system remained in force until 1962. Although the 1951 constitutional amendments officially abolished the distinction between *indígenas* and *assimilados*, reclassifying Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea as provinces with the same status as those in metropolitan Portugal, and attributing Portuguese citizenship to all their inhabitants regardless of status, most of its degrading and discriminatory aspects remained firmly in place until independence.

Couto reminds us that the logic of assimilation demands the wholesale rejection of indigenous religions and cultural practices (2009, 187–88). It establishes

concomitantly that the process of assimilation remains perforce deficient, asymptotic. The citizenship assimilation ascribes is, therefore, “second rate” as well (188). In his overview of the paltry efforts of the Portuguese colonial regime to disseminate the Portuguese language, Margarido posits, as one of the main reasons for this failure, the racist conviction that Africans are incapable of grasping the phonetic and syntactical subtleties of the Portuguese language, a conviction that, he notes, metropolitan literary production has historically reflected (2000, 60). Thus, for example (and to limit ourselves to theater), until the waning years of Portugal’s colonial rule, the roles of black characters in Portuguese plays are, with few exceptions, generally restricted to “naïve and devoted servants” who express themselves in some variety of a largely invented “Guinea Portuguese” or *pretoguês*, harking back at least to Gil Vicente’s early sixteenth-century farces (Cruz 2006, 41). To cite Margarido again, in the course of the expansion, the Portuguese continually “discovered” peoples who had already forged coherent and lasting social structures, peoples whom they invariably proceeded to transform, upon discovery, into “more or less infantile objects of human history” (2000, 54).⁵ As the politicocultural by-product of this perdurable colonial domination, Lusofonia inescapably arises out of an enforced linguistic and cultural silence, an infantilization, as it were. For a colonized subject to adopt the Portuguese language in these circumstances, then, is ineluctably to consign her native language to infancy (in its original, etymological sense: an early developmental stage characterized by the inability to speak). Infancy represents, in this specific historical sense, Lusofonia’s condition of possibility.

If, as Couto intimates, the “colonial order” persists in the national phase (2009, 188), then it behooves us to ask whether the promotion of Portuguese in the name of national unity plays a fundamental role in perpetuating the hierarchical social structure that has been in place since independence, whether in the end the postindependence adoption of Portuguese as a national language discloses, in the last instance, a continuity between colony and nation. Couto mentions that it is Mozambique’s urban, Portuguese-speaking minority that comprises “lusophone Mozambique” (187). It is the privileged, lettered few who wield the power to make decisions and issue official proclamations about Lusofonia. “The other Mozambicans of the other Mozambican nations run the risk of remaining outside, removed from decision-making processes, excluded from modernity” (187).⁶ But it is not merely from debates about Lusofonia that those who belong to Mozambique’s “other nations” risk being excluded. The

central issue underlying this sociolinguistic divide concerns the relationship that the centralized state, subscribing to authoritarian modernization, establishes not just with local or “national” languages but with local forms of community and authority (both prior to and after Frelimo’s official abandonment of Marxism-Leninism).

Ironically for a movement whose success stemmed to a large degree from its ability to mobilize large segments of the rural population, the first generation of Mozambican nationalist leaders proved themselves astonishingly incapable of imagining the nation without expunging “the concrete historical heterogeneity of the social groups which they wished to unite and integrate under the sign of a single national identity” (Geffray 1991, 15). Geffray and other historians of Mozambique have maintained that one of the major causes of the postindependence civil war was the exacerbation of the urban-rural divide by the administrative enforcement of development. In this way, and despite their radically different aims, the nature of power exerted by Mozambique’s independent nation-state (during the revolutionary and neoliberal democratic periods alike) resembles that of the former metropolis. As Mahmood Mamdani asserts in reference to “radical African states,” the conviction that social revolution can be imposed from above builds on the legacy of colonial power (1996, 135). Hence, by abrogating local forms of authority and instituting Portuguese as the national language, by effectively refusing to “recognize within its jurisdiction any form of community except the single, determinate, demographically enumerable form of the nation” (Chatterjee 1993b, 238), the Mozambican state revealed itself as one of “the true inheritors of the colonial tradition of rule by decree and rule by proclamation, of subordinating the rule of law to administrative justice so as to transform society from above” (Mamdani 1996, 135). In the years since Mozambique’s aggressive and often brutal insertion into the neoliberal global exchange circuit, this reproduction of the structural logic of colonial power becomes even more striking.

Despite the lofty rhetoric issuing from the presidential office about the “battle against poverty,” both poverty and social inequality have been steadily rising in Mozambique for the past seven years, at least. Thirty-seven years after the country gained its independence, and notwithstanding the record economic growth it has been posting since the end of the civil war in 1993, the overriding majority of Mozambicans continue to be excluded from the benefits and privileges of Mozambique’s dominant social order. I glimpsed the signs of this social divide

on the night I arrived in Maputo, as I drowsily watched an amalgam of tumble-down shanties unfurling like some peri-urban equivalent of Hegel's bad infinity from behind the window of the late-model, air-conditioned U.S. Embassy van that drove me from the airport. I was to become better acquainted with the meanders of those suburban precincts in the course of my research in 2010. Yet they remained, not just for me but probably for most of those who dwell in the urban zone of economic privilege, citizenship, and sociability, largely a foreign country. As Mozambican sociologist Carlos Serra asks in a recent interview: "What do we know of our compatriots' lives in the suburbs? What do we know of their dreams, their sorrows, their ambitions? We talk about them and make projects that involve them without ever contacting or listening to them" (Ricardo 2011).

In a study of social vulnerability, Serra argues that the inhabitants of what Mia Couto calls "the other nations of Mozambique" constitute a hybrid "counter-society" that produces new rules, new values, new identities, and new forms of social representation. While those who live in the urban centers enjoy full citizenship rights, the rural populations and shantytown dwellers engage in a grueling and unremitting struggle for daily survival, forever poised "on a knife's edge," immured in a kind of "infra-citizenship" (Serra 2003, 19). Ironically, not only has a kind of avatar of the rapacious "comprador bourgeoisie," against whose emergence early nationalist leaders solemnly pledged to struggle, returned in full force, but so has a particularly overreaching form of financial "neocolonialism."

As Mozambican economist Carlos Castel-Branco points out, dependence on foreign aid and investment represents a "fundamental characteristic" of Mozambique's economy at the turn of the millennium (2010, 64). In 2007, for instance, 22 percent of the country's gross national product stemmed directly from development aid, a figure that is five times greater than the average for sub-Saharan nation-states, making Mozambique the eleventh-most foreign-aid-dependent country in the world (69). As it happens, foreign "donors wield immense and detailed power, and are at the very heart of decision-making and policy formulation, from the conception of issues and options through to writing the final policy. There is a real sovereignty question here: 'to what extent should non-Mozambicans be playing such a central role?'" (Hanlon and Smart 2008, 131). Concomitantly, as Castel-Branco emphasizes, Mozambique's emerging capitalist class uses its control over natural resources (obtained via its stranglehold on the state apparatus) to facilitate the largely unregulated pen-

etration of foreign capital and thereby ensure its own unrestrained "primitive accumulation" (77–78). Most of the country's professed "liberators," who also happen to make up "lusophone Mozambique," according to Couto, have, in sum, aggressively embraced neoliberalism, while the majority of their fellow citizens can hardly eke out a living.

It may be elucidatory, at this point, to pose once again Lourenço Rosário's question regarding the legitimacy of the epithet "lusophone" to classify former colonized countries in which this level of extreme inequality and ethnolinguistic heterogeneity prevails. In the light of such strikingly inequitable socioeconomic relations, produced and sustained, to a substantial degree, by an enduring legacy of colonial power, the question of Lusofonia's legitimacy assumes a more definitive scope. According to Eduardo Lourenço (as we saw), if Lusofonia is to retain any meaning and efficacy in a postcolonial epoch, it must be enunciated by the Other; it must unequivocally unmoor itself from its colonial provenance and forsake once and for all its imperial home: "The lusophone imaginary has definitely become one of plurality and difference, and it is from this actuality that it suits, or behooves us to discover the community and brotherhood inherent in a fragmented cultural space whose Utopian unity, in the sense of something shared in common, can only exist through the increasingly deeper and more serious study . . . of that plurality and that difference" (2001, 112).⁷

It is difficult not to concur readily and wholeheartedly with this "pious wish" (*voto piedoso*), as Lourenço himself queringly designates it. At the same time, I cannot but wonder if the path leading to a rigorous and profound inquiry into the plurality and difference that now arguably define the "Utopian unity" posited by "lusophone mythology" can, in the end, bring us back to Lusofonia. Does the "dialogue and exchange" between the Portuguese language and the other languages and cultures of Portuguese-speaking nations and regions (the reciprocal cultural and linguistic transaction that allegedly defines Lusofonia's "second concentric circle," according to Cristóvão) ever occur in the indicative mode, or is it always inevitably expressed in the imperative?

Is there space within Lusofonia for the Other who cannot "speak Portuguese like us" (Lourenço 2001, 189), or for the plural "nations" that must be either silenced or expunged so that "the single, determinate, demographically enumerable form of the nation" (Chatterjee 1993b, 238) may arise? Is there room within the "lusophone imaginary" for a protean community in which inter-ethnic distinctions as well as those between the rural and urban spheres will

"be more fluid than rigid, more an outcome of social processes than a state-enforced artifact" (Mamdani 1996, 301), for a Mozambique where indigenous or "national" languages will play as key a role as Portuguese in the nation's political life, where literacy in Portuguese will finally cease to be one of the unwritten and yet fundamental requirements for inclusion in civil society and political decision making? Whether or not it is enunciated by the Other "who speaks Portuguese like us but does not share our cultural memory" (Lourenço 2001, 189), can Lusofonia ever become anything other than a dream shared in common by elites not just within Portugal (as Villaverde Cabral asserts) but within the sovereign nation-states that now occupy the lingeringly affective territory of its lost empire?

Given its close affinity with an economic and political order that seeks precisely to erase cultural and linguistic heterogeneity in the name of national unity, an order that deliberately relegates the majority of the population to unrelenting indigence and the outer rim of citizenship and civility, it remains an open question whether Lusofonia can ever be fully commensurate with the plurality and difference that Lourenço "piously" invokes. As a full-fledged account of the political and sociocultural complexity and contradictoriness of "lusophone" African nations, Lusofonia seems destined to fall irremediably short.⁸ To borrow Soyinka's definition of the nation-state in Africa, Lusofonia, too, is apparently "an artificial creation . . . which did not take into consideration either the wishes or the will or the interests of the people who were enclosed and lumped together within [its] boundary" (1993, 33). It seems at best a polysemic term that its proponents tend to fill with whatever content they most ardently desire (Ferra 2006, 151), a contemporary "rose-colored map where all . . . empires can be inscribed . . . glowing like a flame in the atrium of our [Portuguese] soul" (Lourenço 2001, 177). At worst it resembles "a myth and a mystique" (Margarido 2000, 15), comparable in scope and content to the derisory wish-fantasy of Lusotropicalism or the discredited fable of Portugal's imperial exceptionalism.

I began this brief meditation with a personal anecdote. I should like to close with another autobiographical vignette, upon which I shall also seek to impose, by "vocational proclivity" (so to speak), a tropological reading. The episode I now turn to took place in late April 2011, during my second return to Maputo. I had been invited to participate in the Maputo Book Fair and, as always, had unrealistically taken along work with me: a preface I was asked to write (and that would never be published) for the Portuguese translation of *Da Gama, Cary*

Grant, and the Elections of 1934, a coming-of-age novel by Portuguese-American writer Charles Reis Felix. As George Monteiro indicates in the book's English edition, Felix's novel belongs to the same genre as Hemingway's Nick Adams stories or Sherwood Anderson's stories about George Willard in Winesburg, Ohio (Felix 2005, x). The interwoven but self-sustained episodes that compose the novel re-create the variegated experiences of an immigrant community living in a small corner of the city of Gaw, the fictional equivalent of New Bedford (decidedly the most "Portuguese" of North American cities) during the Depression years. *Da Gama* is thus a novel of initiation, in the course of which Seraphin, the young and naïf ("angelical"?) protagonist gradually forsakes his illusions about the minuscule, self-contained universe he inhabits. In this way, each of the title's nominal syntagmas ([Vasco] da Gama, Cary Grant, the elections) relates to a distinct phase in Seraphin's ambiguous learning process; or rather, each one of these illusions will have irremediably crumpled by the end of the novel. The world the novel portrays, although arguably lusophone, could not contrast more sharply with the tropical setting of my colonial upbringing, or indeed 1930s Portugal, which Salazar had only recently minted as *estadonovista*.

I read the last pages of the novel on the terrace of a cultural center in the Mafra borough of Alto Maé, about a block away from the modest, third-floor flat where I grew up. When I looked up, I saw the corner where I used to play cowboys and Indians with shotguns fashioned from wooden slats ripped out of beer crates, and the broken sidewalk where I learned to ride my bicycle. As I tried to reconstruct the sense of despondent estrangement I experienced when I first saw New Bedford, another, classic bildungsroman came to mind: Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, in particular the well-known first epilogue, in which the protagonist Frédéric Moreau encounters, several years after their initial meeting, the woman he had desperately loved as a young man. And it occurred to me that the street scene unfolding chaotically below me, compared to my childhood memory of it, was like the frail and aged body we meet by chance decades later compared to the object of our overpowering adolescent desire. Nevertheless, if there was one figure that linked 1930s New Bedford to *estadonovista* Portugal and colonial Lourenço Marques, it was that of Vasco da Gama—also, in large measure, a mythic or imagined entity—whose inaugural landfall in Mozambique happened only a few hundred miles up the coast, according to Álvaro Velho's *Roteiro*.

Before I turn to this slightly odd emergence of a hero of the Portuguese ex-

pansion in Depression-era New England, I should like to reproduce, as a matter for reflection, Lourenço Rosário's closing question regarding Lusofonia: "why have Mozambique and India not commemorated along with Portugal [the voyage of] Vasco da Gama, symbol par excellence of the Portuguese saga . . . of Maritime Expansion?" (2007).⁹ In Felix's novel, the celebrated navigator's presence relates to Seraphin's painful and gradual comprehension of the irrevocably subaltern status of the inhabitants of the tiny ethnic enclave of Heap Square. During the eponymous (mayoral) elections of 1934, the contestants line up in strict accordance with their ethnic affiliation, and it is in the thunderous stump speech that the Luso-American candidate, Secundo B. Alves, delivers to an obscure audience of credulous Portuguese immigrants that the intrepid sea captain makes his inaugural appearance:

I see a ship plowing bravely through the unknown sea, a sea full of peril and danger. And in the dark of night comes a violent storm. . . . The ship groans in the ferocity of the storm's attack. And on the storm-drenched deck I see Da Gama at the helm. His grasp is firm. And when so many on the voyage have lost hope, I hear his calm voice—"Do not despair, my countrymen. I shall take you to a safe harbor."

The spirit of Da Gama lives in each of you, my dear friends. He sailed off into the unknown. So did you. He sailed through storms. So did you. He was a man of great courage. So are you. . . . To your sons, tell them—"Never forget! You are Portuguese! Be proud of it!" (102-3)

The image is of course well known: Portugal as harbinger of new worlds, as Atlantic exception. Yet even the demagogic Alves appears tacitly to concede that the exceptionalism he invokes here is destined to be consigned to oblivion, to the irrevocable anonymity of a pebble cast into the ocean. As Alves himself will demonstrate, when he replicates the very same speech in support of the French-American candidate, who now replaces Vasco da Gama at the helm of the storm-tossed ship, the exceptionalism he calls upon is ultimately exchangeable, artificial, and polysemic, second-rate, in sum, as his first name (Secundo) and middle initial (B) perhaps suggest. This may well be Seraphin's most painful discovery and, in my estimation, it is a revelation worth underscoring. Like the figure of Vasco da Gama in Felix's novel, Lusofonia, too, has become a sort of floating signifier whose elusive referent is consistently displaced, always deferred, reappearing endlessly in the guise of a nostalgia for the lost empire. If, as

in a Lacanian structure of desire, the place of the empire (desire) always remains unchanged, then Lusofonia operates alternately as one in a chain of signifiers (Lusotropicalism, exceptionalism, etc.) that always remit us to the same meaning: the void that was once the empire. I believe the time may be ripe for us to begin understanding it as an illusion of home that we must learn to forsake once and for all.

NOTES

The epigraph from Francisco Santana Ferra may be translated as, "The institutionalization of the CPLP was done in . . . Caesarean pain"; the epigraph from Alfredo Margarido as, "Subtly but constantly, one feels a chilly and very necrophilic wind that, by dint of glorifying the past, compromises the present, and the future even more."

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

1. "Le dernier avatar du 'rêve' portugais d'un empire et d'une grandeur à jamais disparus."

2. "Recuperar pelo menos uma fracção da antiga hegemonia portuguesa, de maneira a manter o domínio colonial, embora tendo renunciado à veemência ou à violência de qualquer discurso colonial."

3. As Cristóvão defines it, Lusofonia functions on three interrelated levels (or in terms of "three concentric circles"). The "first circle," or more restricted definition, refers to the eight nation-states, including Portugal, Brazil, and the so-called CPLP (Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa), in which Portuguese is the official language. It also encompasses the other nations or regions within other countries and cultures "with whom [Portugal] shares its Language and History," as well as territories where Portuguese-based Creole languages have been or are currently spoken. The second level or circle comprises the other languages and cultures of Portuguese-speaking nations and regions that "remain in contact through a common language, which, through dialogue and exchange, promotes and enriches each one of these languages and cultures." To the third and broadest level belong institutions and individuals who are not from Portuguese-speaking countries or regions but "maintain a learned and friendly dialogue based on affinity ties and various other interests with the common [Portuguese] language and the cultures of the eight Portuguese-speaking countries and regions" (Cristóvão et al. 2005, 654–55).

4. "Sendo os países africanos, na sua generalidade, incluindo os de língua oficial portuguesa, de origem colonial, mas com uma realidade sócio-cultural bipolar, pela natureza da adversidade etno-linguística, com que legitimidade os poderemos designar de lusófonos?"

5. "Coisas mais ou menos infantis da história humana."

6. “Os outros moçambicanos das outras nações moçambicanas correm o risco de ficar de fora, afastados dos processos de decisão, excluídos da modernidade.”

7. “O imaginário lusófono tornou-se, definitivamente, o da pluralidade e da diferença e é através desta evidência que nos cabe, ou nos cumpre, descobrir a comunidade e a confraternidade inerentes a um espaço cultural fragmentado, cuja unidade utópica, no sentido de partilha em comum, só pode existir pelo conhecimento cada vez mais sério e profundo, assumido como tal, dessa pluralidade e dessa diferença.”

8. In a recent interview, Mia Couto argues that “even though Mozambique is a lusophone country, it must construct its own Lusofonia, even if it bears another name” (mesmo que Moçambique seja um país lusófono, tem que construir a sua própria lusofonia; Lopes 2012, 26). The question I am asking is essentially whether this Lusofonia bearing another name remains Lusofonia.

9. “Por que razão Moçambique e Índia não festejaram com Portugal Vasco da Gama, símbolo maior da saga portuguesa no que toca à epopéia da Expansão Marítima?”

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