

## Narrativizing the Other-Empire in Silence

### On Portuguese Postimperiality/Postcoloniality

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper aims, within the theoretical framework presented by Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Paula Meneses—named *epistemologias do sul* (Southern epistemologies) and based on the working tool that the same sociologists called *sociologia das ausências* (sociology of absences)—to offer a complementary analysis proposed as the *sociologia pós-colonial das ausências* (postcolonial sociology of absences). This approach is inspired by the creation of an interventive methodology that aims to reflect, on the one hand, the state of Portuguese research in postcolonial studies and its sensibility toward realities thought to be marginal and, on the other, to identify the lines of dialogue and cooperation between such studies and the people who inhabit the space and time of this Portuguese postimperiality/postcoloniality.

**KEYWORDS:** identity, Southern epistemologies, postimperiality/postcoloniality.

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We have in ourselves a great excess of mythified memory, adding up to our centuries-old memory as Europeans. And above all we have this excess or overload of dream which, as with Baudelaire's albatross, prevents us from consenting or adhering to the demands of reality.

—Eduardo Lourenço

#### I.

Much has been written about the loss of the Portuguese African colonies, and what came out of it was not enough to rescue from silence and forgetfulness the lives and identities that the Portuguese empire forged and imagined on the other side of itself (Khan 52–53). Eduardo Lourenço, in his brilliant autopsy of the Portuguese identity, mirrored in his *O Labirinto da Saudade*, interprets this founding moment of postcoloniality in the following terms: “Strange was our ‘empire,’ and stranger still the people who, having suddenly seemingly lost their soul’s soul, appear to be mostly shocked with the invasion-flood of the living

stones of that imperialism, randomly stacked up at the Portela airport. What we had been as Portuguese from the metropolis, what we were as real or potential owners of distant lands, was severed, and remained severed almost until the end of one of the world's most unusual colonizing adventures" (Lourenço, 43–45).

Despite Lourenço's brilliance here, I would point out that what in the past remained severed is still reflected in the impossibility of dialogue or encounter between the imperial center in Portugal and the lived experience on the other side of the imperial divide. In line with this reality, I have seen in much recent fiction, autobiography, and journalism<sup>1</sup> evidence of this abyssal postimperiality and postcoloniality, as reflected in two nonintersecting strains: on the one hand, the celebration of a multicultural Portugal, picturing itself as a modern and European nation because of the presence of diverse peoples in the Portuguese territory; and, on the other, the walls of silence and forgetfulness that have been built between that discourse and that celebration and the individuals who participated in colonialism, who remain absent and peripheral in this great Portuguese postcolonial narrative. As for the profusion of published works on the return to Portugal proper of many Portuguese and the colonial Others,<sup>2</sup> we learn from these works the following the lesson: the Other, once the subject of the discourse defined and formed according to the colonizer's cultural and civilizational parameters (Mignolo 2011), is today, as I write, entirely marginalized. There is widespread ignorance of the Other's historical, cultural, subjective, and mnemonic trajectory. Indeed, this Other remains not only subdued by the sense of cultural and social inferiority with which he or she was tagged but also left out of a Portugal that claims to be postcolonial and multicultural. Like two sides of a bridge that cannot be crossed, today's "multicultural" European nation and its forgotten Other—and the corresponding sense of historical awareness—seem to be ununitable. I will not invoke here the various analyses of a few works that I mention on the first note: namely, the work undertaken by Margarida Calafate Ribeiro (2004, 2012) and Ana Margarida Fonseca (2010) clearly focuses on this fracture in public memory post-April 25, 1974. My task pushes me toward a more sociological framework, where a critical approach to considering the two sides of Portuguese postimperiality and postcoloniality are still missing. As I point out in another work:

If contributions, namely literary ones, show us with some degree of propriety and clairvoyance the impact of that overseas experience upon the lives and

social perceptions that the Portuguese built about themselves, the opposite is not as evident, tangible, or visible. We refer to those who, having participated in the social and political colonial and colonizing architecture, are nowadays the heirs of that steady presence of the Portuguese in Africa and about whom so little is known—or, in other words, there is very little curiosity to know how [their lives] are like, today, the lives of the ex-colonized. (Khan 49)

We now turn to observations drawn from a research endeavor titled *Portugal Híbrido, Portugal Europeu? Gentes do “Sul” mesmo aqui ao lado* (Hybrid Portugal, European Portugal? People from the “South” Right around the Corner) (Khan 2011).<sup>3</sup> It is one brief question that remains unanswered in the forgetful fog of postimperiality and postcoloniality (Ribeiro 1998). It is important to stress here that the simultaneous use of the terms *postcoloniality* and *postimperiality* converge in a sole analytical criterion, structured upon the idea that the colonies represented, both rhetorically and ideologically, the mirror image of the imperial center, which thought of itself as the source of civilization and progress. Thus, several “Portugals” were recreated on various continents: South America, with Brazil; Asia, with India and East Timor; and Africa, with Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, São Tome and Príncipe, and Mozambique. To enter the field of Portuguese postimperiality/postcoloniality, we must read both sides of the mnemonic and historical experience of the changes pre- and post-April 25, including the social and cultural awareness by those who were first subjected to, and then forgotten by (i.e., the human wreckage of), a Portuguese nation that now imagines itself to be European and multicultural. The narration of the past and the work of building the historical awareness of the present cannot simply mirror a country’s triumphs—it has a “memory duty” as well (Levi 2010). It has to constitute a gesture of historical humility toward everyone who helped build the Portuguese imagery upon the faith of an “empire as imagination of the center” (Ribeiro 3).

## II.

To think about the abyssal sides of this Portuguese postimperiality/postcoloniality would imply recognizing that the “South” as a metaphor on which to base a hegemonic occidental posture, as well as its colonial and imperial adventure of the worlds of Others, was not obliterated with the effective and political denial of the unfit occupation by the colonizer, that same colonizer who, while

abandoning the colonized territories in the territorial sense, did not do so either ideologically or culturally: the virus of the coloniality and the rhetoric of Western superiority have thus been transformed into a division into global North and global South. In the Portuguese sense, for which an interior global South exists right around the corner, the lack of memory, dialogue, recognition, or historical and social participation is especially pronounced. As noted by the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos:

Western modern thought is an abyssal thought. I argue that this is as true today as it was during the colonial period. Modern thought continues to operate with abyssal lines which divide the human and the subhuman world, in such a way that the principles of humanity are not jeopardized by inhuman practices. The colonies represent a model of radical social exclusion which subsists nowadays in Western modern thought and practices, in the same way it did in the colonial cycle. Today, as before, both the creation and the denial on the other side of the line are a part of hegemonic principles and practices. (Santos 23–31)

Coloniality and power, as ably put forth by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000), are not just a long permanence of hegemonic thought cultivated in the past; on the contrary, that very epistemological posture is multiplied by the colonization of being, knowledge, and thought (Lander 2000; Walsh et al. 2002; Schiwiy and Ennis 2002; Maldonado-Torres 2008). Alongside this statement, Walter Mignolo (2007) uses the concept of *colonial difference* as an analytical and interpretive tool, so as to better contextualize the colonial and postcolonial sides at issue. In Santos's opinion, the colonial difference is not so much embodied in epistemological, ontological, and gnoseological hegemony but rather in the denial of history, of time, of the Other's space, and, as a consequence, in the absence of a cognitively accurate vision of the Other (Santos 2007, 2008) as a source from which spring other, pluri-diversified versions of reading, organizing, and interpreting the human world. The acting, living, and ethical horizons are thus polarized according to this rhetoric of labeling the Other as human "damage," with no time or place to which the assets of modern and Western thought would be, on the one hand, a way of salvation and, on the other hand, and insidiously, an instrument of racism, exploitation, and subjective, identitarian, and cultural degradation. The colonial difference, as a construction and a reflex of the power and being of coloniality, and of the rheto-



ric of Western epistemological hegemony itself, cannot be separated from this trap that imprisons every one of those who are not understood by the Western vocabulary and not recognized in the space and time of their criteria of modernity, civilizational maturity, and progress. As a consequence of this duplicity, the abyssal thought (Santos 2007) is also a thought whose human reality is felt and internalized unevenly, as we can see from this very enlightening description by Walter Mignolo: “A lake looks different when you are sailing on it than when you are looking at it from the top of the mountains which surround it. Different perspectives on modernity are not only a question of the eyes, then, but also of consciousness and of physical location and power differential—those who look from the peak of the mountain see the horizon and the lake, while those inhabiting the lake see the water, the fish and the waves surrounded by mountains, but not the horizon” (Mignolo 466).

As a result of this epistemological and cultural extremism, the “universe on this side of the line,” a herald of progress and of technical, economic, and historical development, neither sees nor assumes the existence of the other side, since “the division is so strong that ‘the other side of the line’ disappears as a reality, it becomes nonexistent, it is actually produced as nonexistent. This means it doesn’t exist in any relevant or comprehensible form” (Santos 3–4). What the coloniality of power and being, hand in hand with the rhetoric of modernity, has once presented to us as an abyssal world remains—in the Portuguese case of postimperiality/postcoloniality—a reality frozen in time, surviving every effort for emancipation and liberation of Others and holding captive their political and historical autonomy. In Portugal, the historical difference has become constituted as a postcolonial difference, in the sense that the present matrix still thinks and interprets the world of Others as “nonexistent,” or produced as invisible, absent, and marginal, aside from the new architecture of Portuguese postcolonial imagery. The theoretical efforts to overcome this cognitive and human handicap are many, and they assume various conceptual and methodological formulations (Smith 1999; Chakrabarty 2000; Connell 2007; Burawoy 2008; Mignolo 2009; Santos and Meneses 2010),<sup>4</sup> but they all converge in the same intent: to eliminate from the human world the arrogance of Western thought, and to bet on the diversity of other knowledges, other experiences, other wisdoms wrongly set as peripheral in the grand frame of world thought. In order to serve its scope, this reflection will be based, on the one hand, on the theoretical systematization set forth by Santos and Meneses in *Epistemologias do*

sul, or Southern epistemologies, and, on the other, on the postcolonial sociology of absences (Khan 2011b), which uses as an inspirational, epistemological model the methodological efforts from the sociology of absences (*sociologia das ausências*) (Santos 2002, 2008), which have been used as a guideline for the analysis of reality on the various working and research projects of the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

The Southern epistemologies as a theoretical system and a lever for change, when compared to the Western and hegemonic thought paradigm, try to rescue the “South” and to translate it beyond an elementary and fixed conception, in which the South is the context of incomprehensible human knowledges and realities, with a meek possibility of dialogue with the modern logical and scientific practices of reflection and action of the Western world. As a first gesture of rupture, the Southern epistemologies are based upon the work of challenging and questioning the validity of this universal arrogance of a thought that sees itself as the center, as the only parameter for analysis and understanding toward the human grammars that it accepts as existing, while validating, at the same time, knowledges and expertises that, as alternatives to this monolithic knowledge, coexist with and are recognized by this theoretical frame as valid knowledge that contributes epistemologically to a better understanding of the global world. If “on the field of knowledge, the abyssal thought consists of conceding modern science the monopoly of the universal distinction between true and false,” and, thus, “on the other side of the line, there is real knowledge; there are beliefs, opinions, magic, idolatry, intuitive and subjective understandings” (Santos 5), then the Southern epistemologies bring with them tools that try to break down, to weaken, and to contradict this postulate, while remaining alert and sensitive to the infinite and manifold copresence of other cultural, historical, and social experiences, based on the willingness to create an epistemological equity among knowledges that are different in space and time. From that point of view, the sociology of absences, as a tool for observation, recognition, and valorization of these other knowledges, is a part of a process of identification and utilization of these other knowledges, with the aim to “[transform] impossible objects into possible ones and, from there, to transform absences into presences. This is done by focusing on the fragments of social experience that were not socialized by the metonymic totality” (Santos 246). Complementary to this methodological praxis, the postcolonial sociology of absences that I have derived (Khan 2011b) aims to transform silences and

absences, socially produced as nonexistent, into social presences by bestowing upon them, thus, visibility, recognition, and validity toward an interpretation that is more transparent, concrete, and interventive regarding what is today the postimperiality/postcoloniality of Portuguese expression, based on the social, human, and ontological contributions of these people from the “South,” this South right around the corner. I will try, therefore, using this new methodological vocabulary and syntax, to strengthen my argument: The global South is not just a remote and unattainable reality, or at least it does not elude our ability to look, think, and act. Quite the opposite, it becomes, to all those who consider this judgment legitimate, rightful and reliable, a field of infinite possibilities that has consisted hitherto of voices that are absent and socially mute, since they are surrounded by a social and historical blindness and inertia. The postcolonial sociology of absences is inspired by the creation of an interventive methodology that aims to reflect, on the one hand, the state of Portuguese research in the field of postcolonial studies as well as its sensibility toward realities thought to be marginal and, on the other hand, to identify the lines of dialogue and cooperation between these studies and the people who inhabit the space and time of this Portuguese postimperiality/postcoloniality.

### III.

How to narrativize the Other-empire in silence? The way I see it, we face a disturbing aporia in applying this question to Portuguese postimperiality and postcoloniality. This is because if, on the colonial past, according to Nelson Maldonado-Torres, there is “the idea that people cannot survive without the theoretical or cultural conquests of Europe” (Maldonado-Torres 77), this very obstacle and cognitive limitation are heirs to an epistemological imperialism and colonialism that label the Other as marginal and invisible within a logic of Western and abyssal thought (Santos, 2007). Therefore, in the case at stake, we have an Other-empire or, to be more accurate, an Other-post-empire whose prefixes are still rooted in practices of social exclusion, social blindness, and a meek historical awareness. This is the global South that is no longer a geographically distant South, since the presence on Portuguese territory of these Other-people brought along our very own interior South, which goes against walls of silence, abyssal ignorance (Lourenço 2001), and a meek historical humility on the part of those who once built and fed the imagery of a nation as an imperial center.

Over two years, 2007–2008, I directed a documentary aimed at bringing to

light the reflection, be it academic, subjective, or interpretive, of postimperial and postcolonial Portugal. In order to do so, I filmed interviews of immigrants from Mozambique, all of whom had Portuguese nationality (Khan 2009), and also researchers, thinkers, and writers, so as to understand today's sense of our own social South. The witnesses, the voices, the subjective and analytical records that will be presented and analyzed in this essay are a result of my post-doctoral project (Khan 2011b).

One of the questions raised by this social sample, and according to the theoretical and methodological framing just explained, involved a possible relationship between what I defined as *research or interpretation postcolonialism* and *everyday postcolonialism*. For the reader who is less familiar with these terms, what I call *research or interpretation postcolonialism* is the scientific knowledge produced by universities and research centers, including the literary contributors who undoubtedly have engendered not only Portuguese-speaking postcolonial studies but also postcolonial studies in general. Meanwhile *everyday postcolonialism* should be understood as daily practices, life routines, the ways in which individuals incorporate memories and identity narratives into their way of being, and the ways in which these cultural and identitarian assets are represented in people's strategies of interaction with Portuguese society. Thus, the programmatic and methodological use of a *postcolonial sociology of absences* has become a tool that is both effective and critical toward the Other-post-empire and postcolonial in silence (Cruzeiro 2004). Therefore we can say, as the researcher of Portuguese postcolonial studies Margarida Calafate Ribeiro has noted so opportunely, that bringing the past to the place of the present is a necessary step, since those who shared and still share a given life experience, be it colonial or postcolonial, apart from that subjective and interpretative evocation, assume an active role as builders and narrators of this postimperiality/postcoloniality: "[From] a work of remembering the past that was [which] imposes [itself] whatever its position is, until they realize the true dimension of their own experience—because only by narrating do they realize fully the personal and collective dimension of their own experience—[from] a work of search[ing] for the amplitude of truth and the nature of the power that supported it so as to build a possible representation and, thus, [is] deniable or questionable" (Calafate 138).

These dimensions, both the personal and the collective, given that the post-coloniality of power and knowledge can be denied and questioned and that it boasts of its multicultural aspect, are clearly inscribed in the way in which many



Mozambicans I interviewed enunciate and narrativize the state of play of postcolonial Portugal. Florinda Pott, a Mozambican with Portuguese citizenship who is retired from public service, when invited to reflect on this postcoloniality, states that little is known on the life experience of those who, in the times of Mozambique's political independence, chose to carry on with their life projects in the ancient imperial metropolis. She said as follows: "I think there is little, we have very little information on that. I have no information whether there is anything, any institution that does this kind of work, I don't know. I was never approached by anyone until now, by you; nobody every questioned me. Nothing. I know nothing. If there is, if there is something, I know nothing about it; I have no knowledge of an institution that ever cared to know how do people from Mozambique live here in Portugal" (Khan 74).

Adriano Malalane, a Mozambican and a lawyer who once practiced at the cultural center known as the Casa da Moçambique, assumes, in his interview, a rather critical position toward Mozambicans' confrontation with Portuguese society, given the evident social blindness of the host: "Portuguese society doesn't seem to me to be interested in knowing the Mozambican as such. As an autonomous entity, as a separate group, I don't think there is such a sensibility" (Khan 72). Actually, in his opinion, the very small size of this Mozambican community could be promoting its invisibility; however, according to his understanding of the everyday reality, this criterion cannot justify the notorious divide between the scholarly and interpretational world of research/reflection postcolonialism and everyday postcolonialism. The lines that mark this divide can be identified, on the one hand, with the rapid evolution of the daily reality and, on the other, with the way in which Portuguese society positions itself toward that everyday reality, including the logic of assimilation and absorption of the Other applied to postcolonial immigrants:

It could be a source of inspiration for the scholars, the daily life, the things that go on. But I don't think so. The Portuguese society has not taken [a] position; it hasn't, so to speak, it has not built the foundations on how to look at those realities. Because, for a certain period, the people who came from the ex-colonies were supposed to integrate and to lose their identity, until they were considered, in a way that is less than accurate, Portuguese. It didn't make sense, in those first years, to consider that there were Mozambican, Guineans . . . they were Portuguese from the colonies. Little by little,

Portuguese society began to gain consciousness that not everybody was Portuguese. And the scholars, those, it wasn't until much later, I think, that they looked at this reality as a possible study subject. And it is notorious, from the papers I have read, interviews, conferences, that they don't have a very deep knowledge of the daily life of those communities and their relationship with the Portuguese society. (Khan 72-73)

Eugénio Lisboa, an essayist and literary critic, takes a very strong position in his interview concerning the way in which the human experiences of Portuguese colonization are clearly underestimated and undervalued within a rhetoric of modern and *europaic* "Portugality." In his opinion, "The Portuguese, since they began thinking of joining Europe, they became blond. But they became blond both physically and spiritually, as if, all of a sudden, they became Europeans who had nothing to do with Africa" (52). Within this argument, the additional contents of his answer strengthen his position: "I think there is a great lack of attention toward everything that came from overseas. I mean, people here[,] I have the impression that they see the overseas [areas] with the eyes of that period of fourteen years of war" (52).

This lack of attention that Eugénio Lisboa talks about is, in the opinion of Inocência Mata, a scholar who specializes in African literatures in the Portuguese language, explained by Portuguese society's inability to see the Other, with its vision distorted by a coloniality of memory and being (see Maldonado-Torres 2008) that remains very much present in Portuguese society. If Portugal "decolonized" its African territories and, over that historical continuity, has lost its image as an imperial and colonial power, this does not imply a deep and complete decolonization of the minds, of the core of Portuguese identity, and this core is always itinerant, in an inconstant and oscillatory production of a dignified image of a center. Hence, understanding the blurring of the social, cultural, and historical languages of the Other is also an exercise of deconstruction of Portuguese society, as well as of the state of its abyssal postcoloniality. Still, according to this scholar and to her reading of this postcoloniality, it is a priority to understand the following:

The Portuguese people have never learned how to deal with the Other, and that learning [is] thirty years old, let's not forget that the Portuguese colonialism was an assimilatory one. It is a way of colonialism in which the Other could only be integrated in the Portuguese society if he were like the ones

in the Metropolis. And, even being like them, it depended on where he was born, because there was the underdog white man, so imagine the black man. It is necessary as well, when we analyze these matters, we need to bear in mind some realities. The truth is that the Portuguese never learned to deal with the difference, and this learning is thirty years old. From this point of view, he is a good student . . . above all, for someone who is in Portugal for twenty years, like myself, it is possible to see how the relationships changed, there was a change in the relationships—truth be told, for us it is always very little. *The independence of the colonies took place thirty years ago . . . and it didn't happen in a democratic situation [my emphasis].* (53–54)

The learning that Inocência Mata refers to in her reflection is due, in the opinion of the other interviewees, to a clear attempt at homogenizing the human differences in the Portuguese social fabric. In that sense, underlying this homogenization is not only an effort to formalize the abyssal lines but also a need to ghettoize these human margins into a place where the Other becomes both invisible and culturally distant. In addition, there is a localization that is socially deprived of civilian tools, without which these peripheries become anodyne, passive, and thus incapable of reaching a space of confrontation that is critical and prominent in Portuguese society because, as explained by Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, a specialist in postcolonial studies, “the Other is always someone who we know where he is, we even know where he lives, we think they all live in ghettos” (Khan 54). As a consequence, the abyssal walls that have been built are not only places of invisibility but, more important, the universe of production and formation of acritical social margins. In the opinion of Ana Mafalda Leite, a researcher of African literatures in the Portuguese language: “What I think, and I may be wrong, I cannot make radical statements, but I think that, generally speaking, even though Portugal has a very strong capacity of absorbing the Other, it has a great inability to see him as different. This capacity of absorption is, at the same time, an ability to make the Other invisible. I can't explain this theoretically, why this happens; or, on the other hand, what I think that seems to be happening lately is that there is a worry about the Other in the sense of understanding his difference, more than recognizing his difference and his importance” (54–55).

In the Portuguese context, the overcoming of these abyssal lines remains inalterable if we compare it with its rhetoric of modernity and coloniality along

its colonial past. To some of those who took part in this study, overcoming that epistemological limitation might include recognizing that the sense of continuity and historicity of this very context is inescapably intertwined with the Other's inherited life experience. However, that reality seems to be, for some interviewees, always postponed, always in retrograde motion, always delayed, when read in the light of a proposal of postcolonization that would involve breaking the link with old and retrograde ways of being and thinking that once served an empire "as imagination of the center." The denial of the existence of a culturally polysemous and polyphonic reality is then the defense of a monoculture of a knowledge and a way of being that "sits" on and asphyxiates other knowledges, other wisdoms, and other voices, perceived as blank pages of a history of which they are undoubtedly a part. Another property of this postimperiality/postcoloniality "on this side of the line" in Portugal brings us to an idea that the journalist Jorge Araújo defines as territorial limbo or, put differently, "nobody's land." The following excerpt from this journalist's interview is a good illustration of his thought:

I think it is something that doesn't draw enough attention, and which is of the utmost importance, it concerns this generation born of Mozambicans, Cape Verdians, who were born in Portugal, and who live in nobody's land. This is what worries me. These kids were born in Portugal, and the Portuguese don't see them, so to speak, unless they win the triple jump, they don't see them as Portuguese; but they are no longer Mozambican, no longer Cape Verdian. The case of Cape Verde, that I know best, people that have an almost mythical idea that Cape Verde is but coconut trees, which isn't true, but [people] who are here, in the Cova da Moura neighborhood, and whom the Portuguese think are not Portuguese. And they live in a *nobody's land*, a *place where anything goes*, and I think the academy doesn't pay much attention to this [my emphasis]. (56)

Another question I set out as a challenge to think critically about this side of the line was (a) Do you think the Mozambicans have visibility in Portuguese society? About this question the answers are mostly unanimous concerning a total invisibility of the Mozambican in the space and time of the present moment of Portuguese postcolonialism. Once again, the discussion covered the inability of the Portuguese to engage in critical self-analysis, on the one hand, and, on the other, their inability to view knowledge as horizontal—that is, to view not the Mozambican, the Angolan, the Cape Verdian as polyphonic and subjective but rather



as part of a monolithic Other. Sónia Polanah, a librarian who was born in Mozambique, reflects on this matter, associating the lukewarmness with a vision of a Portuguese society that is socially uncommitted and uncaring toward its Others:

They don't even realize that they, themselves, have that mixture. But they think, I suppose they think they are a bit pure. I tell you this because sometimes it happens that someone comes along with kinky hair and I say—"Wow, you must have black blood." "Oh no I don't." "Like hell you don't!" I mean, I think they don't actually realize, but then again they don't care to know. I think we have, we were brought up to understand our generations, we were taught that our grandmother is black, who she lived with, what came from there. . . . Here, I think they're pretty proud of being the white ones. Here, in the university, I never realized any of that, quite honestly. Of course, there are a whole lot of meetings of African literatures, and it's all very nice, very pretty indeed, but I've never seen the preoccupation of wanting to understand who he actually is, the African, or the Mozambican, or the Angolan, or the Indian, or the Chinese. I've never seen that, to be quite frank. I've honestly never seen that, what I do see is that it is very nice to talk about multiculturalism, and all that stuff, it's all very nice . . . (Khan 57)

Margarida Paredes, a writer, also points out this detachment toward the Others, in this case Mozambicans living in Portugal, by recalling a vision that tends to choke out other cultural dynamics and idiosyncrasies. In this writer's opinion, making visible this or that one cannot occur, because the Other, or the Others, is almost always labeled under one single designation and automatically "swallowed" by that "dead sea" with no other cosmology and no chance of a concrete identification as Mozambican. Of course, as pointed out by the Mozambique-born lawyer Adriano Malalane, this analysis must necessarily encompass the numeric element, since the number of Mozambicans who live in Portugal is not very expressive, in the sense that, statistically, they are always counted as Portuguese, because they adopted Portuguese citizenship (e.g., Khan 2009). However, in Margarida Paredes's opinion, this lack of visibility has to do with the following:

I wouldn't isolate the Mozambican, I would say Africans, generally speaking. I think the Africans, who represent Portugal in sports events, have plenty [of] visibility, but not as African people. It goes like this, they are depicted as

Portuguese, and I have the impression that this visibility depends on the fact that they are victors; as soon as they are losers, they become African and are no longer Portuguese. This is how I see it. About the African communities, generally speaking, they are always very ill treated. . . . The immigrant African communities, when there are, for instance, crimes involving African people, there is always the need to say that the person is of African origin, so they identify the race, and I think they are not well treated. (Khan, 58–59)

In her essay “Estranhos em permanência: A negociação portuguesa na pós-colonialidade,” of undeniable importance for critical thought regarding Portuguese postcoloniality, Inocência Mata writes as follows:

It is undeniable that Africans brought to the Portuguese “civilization” new values, new habits and cultural traditions. . . . However, in that process of enrichment of the Portuguese culture the people who bring along the cultural signs of that celebrated contribution are not always valued and understood, and they have been often omitted in the “great account of the Portuguese nation.” Thirty years after the colonial empire has been politically dismantled, the nation’s speech . . . continues to textualize the Africans who live here, as well as their descendants, as the Others!” (Mata 289; see also Fonseca 2010)

Even if ours continues to be a country of immigrants, we have no literature or cultural tradition of trying to understand who they are, what they feel, and how they live, these people who inhabit, from that abyssal cartography of postcolonial Portugal (see Fonseca 2010), the other side of the line. Even if my following remark may contradict what I just said, I think that, in these last few years, the only novel that testifies to this internal abyssal cartography of Portuguese post-imperiality/postcoloniality is António Lobo Antunes’s *O Meu Nome é Legião* (My Name Is Legion) (2007), in which the author, beginning with the allegorical description of a supposed neighborhood—which could be any of the peripheral neighborhoods in greater Lisbon—also enacts a metonymic construction of all those who are not on this side of the line but who inhabit it as invisible and absent social actors. In that sense, this novel draws our attention to the question of whether there is a continuous, decent, and lucid dialogue between research/reflection postcolonialism and everyday postcolonialism (for an example of the everyday version, see Antunes 2007). The positions on this question call for attention because, if in some testimonials we see an auspicious and optimistic

vision, others converge in a space in which there are still insecurities and a few expectations regarding the future of the relationship between these two post-colonial worlds. In the opinion of Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, that relationship exists and establishes itself through metaphorical language, since “the social does not speak scientifically” (Khan 69). Clearly against this opinion, the essayist Eugénio Lisboa states that “there is often in the scholarly speeches a great dose of alienation. It is another world. There is a great deficit of attention toward everything that came from overseas [emphasis added]” (69). This deficit emerges from a certain Portuguese tendency of not knowing how to face and accept the Other as their neighbor and, in a way, as part of a historical, social, and cultural parcel. In many ways, as Eduardo Lourenço (2001) puts it, we forget the past and, indeed, we actually wanted to set loose our African past. Immediately, within that huge imagination of ourselves as center, we, in turn, direct ourselves toward another center of self-representation and identification, which has now concentrated itself on the European continent. To the researcher Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, who specializes in postcolonial studies, this is a complicated matter, because it will not be possible to beat around the idea of a “divorce of sorts” between everyday postcolonialism and that of research. In a similar sense, we might say that this divorce is contemporized, slowly, through the acknowledgment that a growing number of studies are dedicated, so to speak, to the everyday life on the other side of the line. However, in Sanches’s opinion:

Well, that is a complicated question. On the one hand, I think that very little has been made, but there are very meritorious things that, fortunately, are appearing [and] these questions are beginning to be discussed in a perspective that is different from the one that was in use immediately after April 25. I would say that it is a perspective that is still, let’s put it this way, very anti-colonial. Therefore it is a reaction, a militancy, that is fully legitimate and justified after all the experience of the colonial war, of the independence of the colonies. Nowadays, I think there are two things, people’s inability, that I think is general, and I am not talking just about scholars, to speak openly about these issues. On the other hand, it is blatant that there are everyday experiences that testify [to] that reality. Now, to what extent does the academic theory encompass or bear in mind these experiences, I think in some cases it does. I would say, for example, namely, the field of anthropology, or even sociology. Now, obviously there is always some kind of divorce. (Khan 70)

Rosa Cabecinhas, a researcher, concurs by showing a common dichotomization in language describing Portuguese society, as revealed by her studies with respect to Africans as Others. From this linguistic tendency stems a poor and precarious production of theoretical and methodological proposals. These proposals tend to prioritize the knowledge of the life experiences and identity dynamics of these people who continue, in her opinion, to be set aside in a place of forgetfulness and invisibility and whom postcolonial studies ends up mirroring with a near absence of careful and zealous incorporation of those life experiences into reflections and work projects: "I don't think so, they are little reflected. I think that sometimes there is that divorce between the academic community and the researchers and, let us say, common sense, I mean people in their daily lives, in their everyday lives. And, often, the researchers involve themselves in reflections and don't consult or question the Others enough to bear in mind these elements of reflection, which can be somewhat dissonant regarding the paradigms that are established" (Khan 71).

To some of the Mozambican immigrants who were interviewed, the search for a new identity by Portuguese society during postcolonization has demonstrated an unequivocal lack of interest in recognizing in these Other African, these Other-post-empires, human centers that irradiate knowledge, expertise, and practices that in many ways reflect the cultural crossing that started with the project of Portuguese colonization overseas. However, paradoxical as it may seem, these cultural crossings are held and kept on the margins in the way Portuguese society convokes new narrative dimensions—on the one hand, as a multicultural and European country and, on the other, as a nation that still depends on this grand imagery with which it instrumentally celebrates its link to Africa, supposedly through lusophony—in short, with its old and labile lusotropicalism.

#### IV.

If Portugal once turned its back on Europe so as to be able to imagine itself as an imperial center, with the loss of its empire and its colonies, Portugal has needed to remodel its own image before itself and before other European countries and, thus, by turning toward Europe, it has placed in a less dignified and visible place its colonial memory. Yet it has turned that memory less into a source of a critical self-knowledge than into an impulse to celebrate and, thus, hide its historical weaknesses. Suffering from a hesitant and fragile self-expression, Portugal



sometimes stands by revitalizing its lusotropicalist rhetoric, and other times by picturing itself as European just as well. This identitarian reshuffle is not, as it is easy to understand, isolated from the postcolonial context of the present. On the contrary, this imagery compulsion stands, as the writer Lúcia Jorge points out, beside “a long tradition of that need [of the Portuguese] to hide from themselves” (Khan 42). A foundational question of the documentary therefore asked: (b) Do you think that Portugal and, somehow, Portuguese society in general are aware that their history was made from the crossing with other cultures, other people? In your opinion, is Portugal aware of its cultural hybridism?

This question raised a clear problem associated with the identitarian fluctuation from which Portugal suffered and suffers still, given the need to make up for the loss of its imagery concerning its last imperial project in Africa. Consequently, it became urgent and imperious, with Portugal inevitably adjusting its “position” in the space of the European postimperial puzzle, and recreating a new cultural, geopolitical, existential, and global disposition. Going back to its peripheral position, it begins a new journey and a new process that is no longer territorial, but rather symbolic and ontological so as to, once again, imagine itself as the center of a project called Europe. In the opinion of high school teacher and poet Delmar Gonçalves, a Portuguese citizen born in Mozambique: “I think they don’t realize, some pretend they don’t. Because there are many people who know and prefer, simply, to ignore, to play ignorant and, above all, among the decision makers, those with political power, people who work at the universities, they prefer to set that matter aside, because they think it will prevent many things. . . . Portugal is a country that aspires, actually, to be a European country, a modern and modernist one, and it’s aware of its own limitations, mostly on the economic level” (Khan 43).

However, that Africa, even if marginalized and silenced, is a reality from which Portugal cannot escape, be it culturally or epidermically. To deny or to forget the contaminations of other peoples, other knowledges, enormously perplexes both Helder Macedo, a professor and writer, and Maria João Seixas, a journalist. For these two individuals, Portugal weaves a total and blunt ahistoricity when it “hides” the Others from itself, and by “hiding” from itself its own trajectory and the wellspring of culture that underlies it. They echo the thought formulated by Maria Manuel Cruzeiro, who, in her 2004 essay “As mulheres e a Guerra Colonial: Um silêncio demasiado Ruidoso” (Women and the Colonial War: A Silence That Is Too Noisy), explicitly highlights the following structural

formulation of Portuguese society: “We pretend that everything is OK. We are exquisite managers of silence, even when we speak. Particularly when we speak. On this, said Adolfo Casais Monteiro: ‘the Portuguese are not the least bit inclined toward their self-knowledge. They like very much to talk about themselves, but that’s very far from actually knowing oneself’” (Cruzeiro 31). It could be said that there are many blank pages in the self-representations that Portuguese society builds, and also that there are plenty of other stories, other presences, other narratives that certainly complete and complement these noisy silences of the postcoloniality “from this side of the line”; let’s hear, then, these precious noises in the words of Macedo and Seixas:

What is strange, as well, another thing the Portuguese forget, and shouldn’t forget, in general, is that the Portuguese, the Portuguese are mestizos, we are, we, Portuguese, are mestizos from everything there is out there, including Africans. You know as well as I do that—statistics are precarious—in the 16th century it is estimated that 10 to 12 percent of the population of Lisbon was black. In Évora, it went up to, it is thought to have reached around 18 percent. Well, these people weren’t eaten [interviewee laughs], the Portuguese weren’t cannibals, I mean, they were integrated: the Moors were integrated, the Jews were integrated. We are a mixed race, there is no such thing as the Portuguese race, there is a mixture.” (Khan 44–45, filmed interview with Helder Macedo)

. . . I think the Portuguese are, in the best case scenario, prudish toward their own History and, in the worst case scenario, indifferent to it. And, in that sense, the answer to your question is, mostly, no. I think that hour has not arrived yet, if it ever will. No, I don’t think so. But what I do think is that the Portuguese lack the curiosity concerning their own History. It’s very common, not about the negritude, or African people, or those from India, but it is very common to say that we all have Jewish blood; we are all Jewish. It’s frequent, it’s common, everyday. But it doesn’t cross anybody’s mind to say we all have African blood. And it obviously doesn’t happen in the same scale. But, just the other day, I was listening to Helder Macedo, and he always says that, back in the 15th and 16th century, 10 percent of Lisbon’s population was black. Ten percent is a lot, and it leaves a trace. Lisbon was a wonderfully libertine town, very open to miscegenation. And, therefore, many of us have black blood, from that time. However, when we say “we all have Jewish blood in our veins,” most people don’t know the History of the Jewish people in Portugal, and what the Jews in

Portugal, what the Jews had to go through, to suffer, either those who left or, mostly, those who stayed. And by saying this we are minimizing the recognition of the Jewish people in Portugal. I mean, when people say “but there is no antisemitism in Portugal,” there isn’t. But it isn’t consciously that there is no antisemitism. We don’t give a damn, and we should [my emphasis]. (45, filmed interview with Maria João Seixas)

Strangeness, prudishness, lack of knowledge about its own historicity, and the various identitarian formulations all add to the critical debate the awkwardnesses of this postcoloniality, as well as the historical absences that constitute it. Recalling Lúcia Jorge’s remarks, the prudishness of a self-knowledge that is clear, multifold, and critical brings us, generally speaking, toward other structural and structuring weaknesses of the Portuguese as a whole. According to Jorge: “I think the Portuguese have a complex about themselves, that is, I think the Portuguese know they occupy one small space, so to speak, of the world’s territory and, at the same time, they are aware that they did something that they can’t quite define. And one thing that characterizes us is a sort of fear of looking ourselves in the mirror, I think we are ill put before ourselves, we don’t know very well who we are and we are afraid of knowing who we are. Mostly, I think we don’t like to theorize about ourselves [my emphasis]” (46).

This impossibility or inability to theorize, to rationalize, the Portuguese identity is clearly consonant with the remarks of Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, in whose view this prudishness stems from an awareness, meek as it may be, of subalternity, which is anchored to the fixation and the concretization of the stages of Portugal’s imagination of itself as a center, even if a minor center, when compared to the other European centers. According to Sanches, this subalternity locatable in the speech of the Portuguese identity is the explicit result of a continuous effort, of a search, and, simultaneously, of a denial between being hybrid and being European, between being a mestizo culture and attempting to disguise the idea, as Lúcia Jorge writes, that we “do not transport a superior culture, and, if we can put it this way, a cultivated culture, and this is bad for us. I mean, it is bad because we didn’t elevate ourselves, and we didn’t elevate the others, and by not doing so, with that fear, I mean, a kind of prudishness . . . I think we lost, precisely, that notion of perspective that makes one say ‘I am a mixture’ or ‘I am not a mixture.’ . . . But what the Portuguese do mostly is not wanting to be aware, not wanting to rationalize who they are. . . .” (Khan 47).

Along the same lines, Sanches expresses her thought based on two vectors of Portuguese identification:

There is a very curious moment going on here, a certain ambivalence, which is, on the one hand, [that] we [are] wanting to be hybrid but in certain contexts we don't, we want to become European. But what is it to become European? To become European is, many times, as well, also to abandon what we think is the delay, the living in another time, stop being primitive, become whiter. Of course here the whiteness I refer to is, let us say, metaphorical. And so it is very complicated, because, often, we think, "How can Portugal-ity be defined?" It cannot be defined as *mestizo*. It can be defined as an heir of the discoveries, as the people who gave the world new worlds, hence, the Portuguese expansion, a word that keeps being used in a more generous mission, that is milder, theoretically, than other colonial stories. I think it is a complicated issue in Portugal. (47)

A reading that diverges from this twofold notion of Portuguese identity appears in the interview with the anthropologist João Pina Cabral, for whom Portugal can no longer be characterized though rhetoric that celebrates the past that is an heir of the discoveries and, in turn, the belief and imagery of a country that "gave new worlds to the world." Quite the contrary, he says, there is no space or cultural platform that allows a retrospective vision of the current Portuguese time, because "Portugal has reconstructed its identity, from the end of the eighties, as a European nation and, therefore, with a geostrategic position that is not compatible with the colonization efforts" (Khan 48). However, these colonization efforts continuously return within the postcolonial narrative, in the sense that, without that glorified past, there cannot be, according to the lawyer Adriano Malalane, the possibility for Portuguese identity to refine and retouch the image of itself before a Europe in which Portuguese society is still in a semiperipheral position, as well as a contrasting one. These contrasts issue from matters of economic, social, and cultural development and impel Portugal to inevitably reclaim and evoke its link, be it historical, cultural, or linguistic, with the colonized African territories—with the corresponding logic involving affections, continuities, and hybrid human experiences:

There are moments in which Portugal turns toward Brazil, and it being a product of Portugal, the link is very strong. Then there are times in which



Portugal forgets Brazil, and wants to turn toward other European countries, and then again it feels it isn't Europe, Portugal never assumes itself as a European country, for example, it never does. It is interesting that Portugal, in my opinion, only assumes itself as a European country in its relationship with Africa, or with Brazil, in its relationship with the other European countries, Portugal is always out of Europe, it looks like a foreign body inside Europe. So I think Portugal hasn't found its identity yet [my emphasis]. (Khan 49)

Rosa Cabecinhas, meanwhile, stresses an inclination to create nostalgic scenarios and to praise them according to an exponential rhetoric focusing on the contributions the Portuguese left to the people, on the gestures, on the common language, on the former colonial possessions:

I think Portugal continues to have the structural problem of being, simultaneously, a center and a periphery. We continue to see ourselves as the center of a great empire, and I think that is still very much present. Even this nostalgia for Africa that we see in people nowadays, the Portuguese jet set stating it is going back there to cure a kind of homesickness, that kind of idealism from the time in which we were there . . . But people talk about Africa with a lot of nostalgia, a lot of idealism, and I ask myself—why is that? Is it the fascination of Africa or is it the fascination of our Africa, “our,” in quotations. But, on the other hand, we have another reality as well, as a member of the European Union. And as a member of the European Union, we look at the statistics and we can't but feel depressed, right? And I think that is what explains that which many talk about regarding that manic-depressive character of the Portuguese mentality: we are either euphoric or depressive. It depends on whom we compare ourselves to: if we look at our ex-empire we even feel a little comforted because “we left and it became a whole lot worse than it was, so it means that, after all, we were doing something over there”; I see this speech over and over again. When we look at our European colleagues, we become depressed, we see the statistical data . . . And, of course, we are always doing this back-and-forth motion, according to the group to whom we compare [ourselves]: this or that one [my emphasis]. (49–50)

Prudishness, apprehension, fear of theorizing and rationalizing who we are, identity swings around a symbolic construction of a center—all these characteristics, assumed as historical deficiencies of the Portuguese society's self-

gnosis, constitute a perfect menu for understanding what is postcoloniality “on the other side of the line.” In fact, if postcoloniality “on this side of the line” offers us a heterogeneous and manifold portrait regarding what concerns the various precarious dynamics of the Portuguese identity, the other side of the line, on the contrary, can be reduced, for many interviewees, to a space that is homogeneous, silenced, and formed according to a criterion of an abyssal epistemological line, in which the Other ceases to have specific cultural and social characteristics, where the postcolonial differences remain heirs of the coloniality of power, of being and of knowing (and here I recall Walter Mignolo’s 2000 and 2007 reflections on *colonial differences*), and where there is no visibility or dialogue on other side of the line, but just the need to strategically absorb the Other as a way of building invisible social walls that, however, are dialogically and historically insurmountable. This side of the line is not only the other face of postimperiality/postcoloniality but also of a postimperiality/postcoloniality that idly creates itself, as the journalist Seixas remarks, an introverted and restrictive window in its vision of the copresence of other human landscapes, other cosmologies, other narratives that are, in fact, a part of the Portuguese postcolonial tissue (Khan 2006). In that sense, according to Seixas, we are speaking about a look that is not outward but rather inward: from a “window [which] didn’t open, but not outward, it would be open inward and it hasn’t yet. Because we need to know how to look inward so that we can, afterward, be completely and fully in the outside. I think we don’t know how to look at ourselves. And we can’t, without understanding our own core, get to the core of others” (Khan 51). To many individuals with whom I talked and reflected on the social and cultural landscape of the postcolonial/postimperial Portuguese context, the search for a new identity narrative after decolonization and the influx of immigration from the former colonies has been accompanied, undoubtedly, by a lack of interest in recognizing, on the one hand, these African Others and, on the other—and I repeat—of accepting them as subjects of the Portuguese African experience and as sources of other knowledges, theorizations, and historical and cultural explanations that legitimately merit a space to be heard in the interest of a just historicity of Portuguese society, from both a synchronic and a diachronic point of view.

Finally, and as a conclusion, this paper has tried to be a polyphonic narrative to which I invited not only people from the “South” but also thinkers and researchers of Portuguese postimperiality/postcoloniality. After all, the South of this journey of mine is still just around the corner, but this project concerns

a South that I tried to listen to, and to learn from, with new ways of looking at the landscape of this everyday life that belongs to all those who are a part of Portuguese history and who are not unwritten pages but rather human pages to be read and imprinted on our minds and ways of living. The answer to the central question of my postdoctoral manuscript—if I may restate it, “People from the ‘South’ Right around the Corner”—lies, I think, in the encounter and recognition of other narratives and other knowledges that will indeed complete the puzzle of Portuguese historicity, because, as the postcolonial studies scholar Manuela Ribeiro Sanches puts it:

It is not just the work of mourning. It is, as well, to know that the memories are not only our own, they are the memories of all the others that we still don’t know how to listen to. Because the question, as it is usually said in postcolonial studies, is not only knowing if the subordinate can speak, the question is also whether we are willing to listen. I also think that sometimes we are so worried about our own mourning, with our own stories, with our war, which is normal, that sometimes we forget a little about the other stories that are still to be told. I mean, I don’t really know what postcolonial Portugal is, but it has to be this constant questioning. . . . (Khan, 126)

#### NOTES

1. In this list of publications on the return, the following titles can be pointed out: António Lobo Antunes’s novel *As Naus* (2002), which in my opinion inaugurates this narrative urgency of breaking public forgetfulness regarding the painful return process, accompanied more recently by Margarida Paredes, *O Tibete de África* (2006); Júlio Magalhães, *Os retornados* (2008); António Trabulo, *Os Retornados—O Adeus a África* (2009); Manuel Acácio, *Balada do Ultramar* (2009); Leonel Cosme, *O Chão das Raízes* (2009); Isabela Figueiredo, *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* (2009); Aida Gomes, *Os Pretos de Pousaflores* (2011), and, finally, Dulce Maria Cardoso, *O Retorno* (2011).

2. It is important to refer to the three novels that allow us to enter the space of the colonial-Other in the postcolonial/postimperial period: Lúcia Jorge, *O Vento Assobiando nas Gruas* (2002); Joaquim Arena, *A Verdade de Chindo Luz* (2006); and Raquel Ochoa, *A Casa-Comboio* (2010).

3. This book was a result of my postdoctoral project, originally titled *African Mozambican Immigrants in the Former “Motherland”: The Portrait of a Postcolonial Portugal*. This manuscript of the book, finished in 2011, has been submitted to the Almedina publishing house under CES/Almedina.

4. This epistemological effort to “decolonize Europe” is not an isolated attempt, since other recent reflections have attempted to concretize this critical examination of the hegemony of Occidental thought (see Hountondji 2002; Encarnación 2010; Bhabra 2010; Cassano 2010; Mignolo 2011). In the wider frame of present research, other proposals have been put forth concerning an operational plurality of designations, such as “epistemologias do Sul” (Santos and Meneses 2010), “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo 2009), “Southern theory” (Connell 2007), “subaltern global sociology” (Burawoy 2008), “provincializing Europe” (Chakrabarty 2000), and “decolonizing methodologies” (Smith 1999).

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