

## **“Escrever é para mim trabalho braçal”**

### **Cabral’s “O cão sem plumas” and the Brazilian Consulate in Barcelona, 1947–1950**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, I document the thematic parallels between João Cabral de Melo Neto’s landmark poem “O cão sem plumas,” published in 1949 while in Barcelona, and his contemporaneous diplomatic experience there. In my analysis, I consider the specific cases adjudicated by Cabral at the consulate alongside the author’s personal correspondence, conference addresses, interviews, and other primary source materials in order to further illuminate the enduring influence of this transitional period in his poetry. Specifically, I explore the correlation between the plight of many Spanish citizens and Brazilian expatriates facing the political oppression and economic destitution of Francoist Spain and the poet’s newfound awareness of similar social conditions in Brazil as confessed in interviews and manifest in “O cão sem plumas.”

**KEYWORDS:** João Cabral de Melo Neto, “O cão sem plumas,” diplomacy.

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*Esse troço ficou muito mal explicado. Mas tenho que escrever entre um telegrama a cifrar e passaportes a assinar.*

— João Cabral de Melo Neto, June 4, 1951

Cabral entered diplomatic service on December 15, 1945. Less than two years later, on March 24, 1947, after spending the previous year in Rio, Cabral posted to Barcelona. He remained there until he was transferred to London on September 27, 1950 (Brazil, Departamento de Administração, *Anuário* 369 [hereafter cited as *Anuário*]). After two years in London, Cabral was placed on administrative leave by the Vargas administration because of his purported Communist activities (*Anuário* 370), but once reconstituted Cabral returned to Barcelona on March 14, 1956, for a period of about two years (*Anuário* 369). In the 1960s, he

served in Seville, Madrid, and Cádiz (“Cronologia” 26–28), yet no diplomatic post was more crucial to the development of his poetry than his first. From 1947 to 1950, as Cabral adjudicated immigration visas for large numbers of Spanish citizens and facilitated the repatriation of many destitute Brazilians, these experiences helped reshape Cabral’s conception of the function of poetry in society.

The relevance of Spain to Cabral’s poetic transformation has been proposed by many literary critics. These critics have often emphasized Cabral’s exposure to Spanish poetic forms and visual arts as influential factors in the transformation of his poetry. To cite a few examples, Benedito Nunes in *João Cabral de Melo Neto* (1971) divides Cabral’s poetry into two broad phases: the period before his first post in Spain, ending with the poem “Psicologia da composição” (1947), and the poetry written afterward, beginning with “O cão sem plumas.” Similarly, Jon M. Tolman proposed that “João Cabral’s fascination with Spain is unique in modern Brazilian literature” (57). Even Cabral himself noted the influence of Spanish poetry in his work. In an interview with Tolman in 1972, he admitted that in *Morte e vida severina* he “jog[ou] com formas tradicionais espanholas e brasileiras” (Tolman 67). Cabral also dedicated a number of poems specifically to Spain as a subject. Compilations such as *Crime na calle Relator* (1985–1987) and *Sevilha andando* (1987–1993) stem from Cabral’s personal experiences in that country (Junqueira 474). Another work produced by Cabral that attests to his artistic engagement in Spain is his study of his friend Joan Miró, published in 1950.

Yet despite Cabral’s obvious connections with Spain, the traditional critical approach, emphasizing his association with the Barcelonan artistic scene or the influence of Spanish poetic forms on his work, elides the importance of the actual politico-cultural experience that took Cabral to Spain in the first place—that of being a diplomat. The relationship between Cabral’s diplomatic career and his poetry (as is the case with most Brazilian writer-diplomats) has over the years by and large escaped the critical eye. Thus by considering Cabral’s poetry in light of his diplomacy, this article will provide new perspectives while suggesting previously unexplored avenues of research for the analysis of Cabral’s and other writer-diplomats’ works. This cultural mode of inquiry (which I also recently applied to Vinicius de Moraes’s “Pátria minha”) explores the connections—thematic, theoretical, and otherwise—between writing and diplomacy through a discussion of certain authors’ works within the context of their diplomatic experience, conceiving of literature as not only a product of individual

genius, but also a cultural artifact whose meaning is in part interrelated with the social circumstances in which it was created.<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1930s, approximately a decade prior to Cabral's arrival in Barcelona, Francisco Franco (1892–1975) had emerged from the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) as the head of a newly organized authoritarian state. Franco's dictatorial policies had already caused considerable political and economic difficulties for Barcelona by the time Cabral arrived in 1947. In Franco's authoritarian Spain, Catalanian autonomy, officially established in the early 1930s as the Second Republic of Catalonia (1931–1936), was vanquished. Franco had also imposed oppressive measures in Catalonia as well as in the Basque region in an attempt to secure the sovereignty of his regime. Thus to the poor postwar economic situation that affected Spain generally, in Barcelona, was added the imposition of strict policies, negatively affecting the lives of thousands in the region. In his interview with Tolman, Cabral comments on how “O cão sem plumas” was born from this desperate reality: “Em Espanha aprendi que em Pernambuco, minha terra, o nível de mortandade infantil estava mais alto e a renda per capita estava abaixo da da Índia. Abalado com a consciência da situação e vivamente impressionado com a miséria da Espanha de pós-guerra, comecei a elaboração de uma expressão poética que tomasse em conta a realidade regional brasileira. As semelhanças entre as mesetas centrais espanholas e o Sertão brasileiro facilitavam o ressurgimento do Nordeste em minha poesia. O resultado foi ‘O cão sem plumas’” (67). Similarly, in an interview with Vinicius de Moraes, Cabral spoke of his new perspectives gained in Barcelona and his subsequent rejection of previous work: “Depois, compreendi que aquilo era um beco sem saída, que poderia passar o resto da vida fazendo dêsses poeminhas amáveis, requintados, dirigis [sic] especialmente a certas almas muito sutis. Foi daí que resolvi dar meia-volta e enfrentar esse monstro: o assunto, ou tema. ‘O cão sem plumas,’ meu livro seguinte, escrito em Barcelona, foi a consequência” (Moraes).<sup>2</sup> In these interviews, Cabral clearly conveys a strong connection between his international experience in postwar Spain and his resultant poetic transformation. This epiphanic moment was catalyzed not only by the discovery of startling information regarding his home state, but also by the similarities in living conditions and geography between Spain and the sertão.

In earlier poems, such as “Psicologia da composição” (1947), Cabral had neglected any intersubjective perspective of reality in favor of the inanimate solitude of metapoetical composition, articulated as “a fria natureza da palavra escrita”

("Psicologia" 96). Prior to "O cão sem plumas," Cabral was only seeking to express the ideals of "uma poesia sem espontaneísmos ou rompantes de sensibilidade" (Castello 50). Maintaining his writing a safe distance from the temptation of what he considered facile recourse to ego-bound "inspiration," he exchanged inspiration's muse for an imposing narrative point of view, molding reality to an omniscient consciousness (Tolman 57). In an exemplary verse from *Psicologia da composição*, Cabral communicates his surreal metapoetics with a metaphor typical of his pre-Barcelonan work: "São minerais / as flores e as plantas, / as frutas, os bichos / quando em estado de palavra" ("Psicologia" 96). Through the power of the poet's pen, "Psicologia da composição" converts organic "flores," "plantas," "frutas," and "bichos" into inorganic, minable, and inanimate "minerais."

On the other hand, "O cão sem plumas" proposed a much more organic process. "O cão sem plumas" creates a "paisagem de anfíbios / de lama e lama" (108) and the river region in which the poem's subjects live becomes indiscernible from the subjects themselves. The metaphorical procedure in "O cão sem plumas" is thus no longer strictly metapoetical as it boasts a psychology that is immensely social, becoming no more a "psychology of composition," but a psychology of humankind. As the river and the inhabitants along its banks fuse together, "lama" becomes as much the ecological life-force of the former as it is the protean origin of the latter. The organic is no longer reduced to the mineral-like "estado de palavra"; rather, it attains, through an endless series of metaphor, a state of constant flux: "Um cão sem plumas / É quando uma árvore sem voz. / É quando de um pássaro / Suas raízes no ar. / É quando alguma coisa roem tão fundo até o que não tem" ("O cão" 108). As the poet relinquishes control over the object poeticized, composition is no longer a perfectly impersonal process. The exchange created by this approach reinforces the dialogical aspects of Cabral's poetry. It is in this indeterminate state "entre o que vive" ("O cão" 114) that the individual and the national as well as the universal and the regional begin to "roer."

The poem "O cão sem plumas" is the first of many poems, such as "O rio" (1953) and *Morte e vida severina* (1954–1955), which evoke the imagery of the Capibaribe River. In these poems, Cabral traces the river's course flowing from Pernambuco's hinterland to the capital Recife as he also navigates sociopolitical questions such as those of citizenship and identity. Specifically, in "O cão sem plumas," Cabral represents an oppressed minority—the poor inhabitants of the Capibaribe—within the broad politico-cultural panorama of Brazilian identity.



As he does so, the nationalist projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries come to the fore. These projects in the democratic West proposed that theoretically the enfranchisement of the citizenry was defined by “competitive interactions between free, individual citizens” (Valente 13). But, for centuries, the Brazilian reality of citizenship, instead of emphasizing free interactions among constituents, had posited a stratified paternal system with the white European as the head (Valente 13). Such stratification inevitably resulted in the social and economic exclusion of darker-skinned lower classes; these are Cabral’s “homens plantados na lama” populating the banks of the river. As Cabral deals with the exclusion of these lower classes in “O cão sem plumas,” the juxtaposition of the nation’s liberal ideals (embodied by the diplomat) with the realities of life for its impoverished and disenfranchised citizens becomes apparent.

Curiously, as “O cão sem plumas” was taking shape in Cabral’s mind, Cabral dealt daily with these same questions of poverty and exclusion as a diplomat in Spain. One such notable case is that of Octavio Medeiros. When Cabral first came in contact with him, Medeiros was a Brazilian expatriate born in Rio who had resided in Spain since 1919. He was married to a Spanish woman and had four children, all born in Spain (Brazil, Letter, January 19, 1947 [hereafter cited as “Letter” and by date]).<sup>3</sup> On July 24, 1947, three months after his arrival, Cabral’s consulate sent a telegram to Medeiros in Madrid. This telegram, kept in a volume of the Barcelonan *ofícios* from 1947 in the Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty, marks the inconclusive end to months of communication: “Cinco passagens reservadas Osbohornos [sic] partindo Barcelona quatro agosto queiram apresentar-se este consulado munidos passaportes devidamente autorizados” (Telegramas 1). At this time, Medeiros was seeking repatriation, since he, along with all other non-Spanish employees of the Patronato Nacional de Turismo (PNT), had been dismissed from his job for not accepting Spanish citizenship. The prospect of abandoning his Brazilian citizenship had not been appealing to Medeiros. In a letter sent six months prior, Medeiros writes: “Como me repugnava a idéia de trocar uma Pátria frondosa e pujante por outra já velha, desgastada e de duvidosas perspectivas, resolvi abandonar aquele emprego e continuar a ser cidadão brasileiro” (Letter, January 19, 1947). Hinting at the internal conflicts plaguing Spain during the period, Medeiros explains in the same letter that he would rather remain Brazilian than to be gainfully employed as a Spaniard. But, after losing his job of eleven years with the PNT as an *informador turístico*, Medeiros was, in January 1947, only meagerly employed. Even though he spoke six

languages; had been a professor in Rio (a job he hoped to resume upon his return); and had published a dramatic poem in Spanish entitled "El Portal de las Índias," of which all three thousand copies had been *esgotado*, he was practically destitute. His economic woes were due to the scarcity of tutoring opportunities available to him, especially in the summer months, when school was not in session (Letter, January 19, 1947). At the end of this letter, Medeiros reveals the main reason for writing the Brazilian consulate: "Perdidas totalmente as esperanças de levantar cabeça na Espanha, o único caminho lógico que se me apresenta é o da repatriação, já que no Rio se me abrem inúmeras facilidades" (Letter, January 19, 1947).

One month after this letter, and still with no reply from the consulate, Medeiros sends another message, "rog[ando] uma resposta" (Letter, February 11, 1947). In reply to this second letter, Osório Dutra (1889-1968), then acting as the Cônsul Geral in Barcelona, responds: "Estou estudando minuciosamente o seu caso" (Letter, February 19, 1947). But after another month passes with no further news, an even more desperate and diffuse Medeiros writes: "O verão de 1946 foi para minha família horripelmente trágico. Sem lições, único esteio que me mantem, a situação agrava-se de tal maneira que não me vai ser possível vencê-la outra vez com certo decoro porque este ano já não tenho absolutamente nada que vender para resistir até a abertura dos novos cursos . . . Por tanto espero de sua salvadora intervenção o remédio eficaz e o ponto final de tantos males" (Letter, March 16, 1947). Even though, judging by the correspondence, Medeiros's situation was dire, as we compare it to others found throughout the 1947 *ofícios*, his story becomes less the extraordinary tale of one stranded Brazilian seeking readmission into his native country and more the tale of an entire era in Spanish emigration to Latin America. Similar to hundreds of others in Catalonia desiring to reenter or emigrate to Brazil, Medeiros was floundering in a region plagued by joblessness, drought, and political uncertainty. Of the many cases of immigration and repatriation that presented themselves for Cabral's adjudication during this period, on November 5, 1949, there was a request for immigration visas to Brazil by a group of 732 Spanish citizens, all residents of the Barcelona province, registered in a letter signed by the post's new Cônsul Geral Argeu Guimarães (Brazil, *Proposta*). In September 1949, near the end of Cabral's stay in Barcelona, another group of 63 Barcelonan families inquired into the possibility of a mass departure to the Brazilian state of Goiás. These Spanish families had heard news that Goiás was anxious to receive immi-

grants who were willing to form farming communities there. Along with a list that states the name, age, and occupation of each family member requesting a permanent visa in Brazil, the letter sent by the consulate to the Ministro das Relações Exteriores conveys other specifics of the group's request: "As famílias em questão desejam ser informados . . . quais as facilidades que o Governo de Goiás está disposto a conceder-lhes e, sobretudo, se o mesmo Governo lhes podem fornecer uma garantia coletiva de manutenção e hospedagem até definitiva instalação no local que for indicado para sede da futura colônia, condição indispensável para obterem o 'visto de saída' por parte das autoridades espanholas" (Brazil, *Imigração*). Many expatriates, finding themselves in duress, also sought repatriation. The situation of Iracema and Clara Araes Vicente in April 1947, described by the consulate as "sem recursos e passando provas," was not out of the ordinary (Brazil, *Repatriação*, April 29, 1947). Similarly indicative is the case of Manoela Altero Crespo and her three children. In a letter written on April 24, 1950, the Cônsul Geral confirms the family's repatriation: "Seguiu ontem para Santos, repatriado por este Consulado Geral, a brasileira Manoela Altero Crespo e três filhos menores, que aqui se achavam em estado de indigência" (Brazil, *Repatriação*, April 24, 1950). All of these people desired to relocate or return to Brazil in hopes of a brighter future, fleeing the stagnation of Spain.

Beyond political and financial hardships, meteorological hardships also plagued Catalonia during the period in question. When Cabral states in his interview with Tolman that "as semelhanças entre as mesetas centrais espanholas e o Sertão brasileiro facilitavam o ressurgimento do Nordeste em minha poesia" (67), one can only imagine that the extended drought in Catalonia witnessed by him in 1949 as he was composing "O cão sem plumas" was one of these *semelhanças*. In a letter dated February 10, 1949, the consulate in Barcelona submitted a report to the Ministério das Relações Exteriores titled *Situação Hidro-elétrica de Catalunha*. This report discloses that Catalonia's hydroelectric energy reserves had been severely diminished, causing a number of blackouts in the region. Included in the letter is a cutout of an article from the *Diário de Barcelona*. The article verifies that "as reservas atuais são praticamente nulas, contando-se somente com a energia fluente dos rios, cujos caudais se acham reduzidos à mínima expressão" (Brazil, *Situação* 1). This observation that the rivers in Catalonia were "reduzidos à mínima expressão" (Brazil, *Situação* 1) not only recalls Cabral's comment to Tolman but also brings to mind one of the opening stanzas of "O cão sem plumas": "Aquele rio / era como um cão sem plumas. / Nada sabia da

chuva azul, da fonte cor-de-rosa, / da água do copo de água, / da água de cântaro, dos peixes de água, / da brisa na água" (105).

The relevance of drought to both Catalonia and the Brazilian Northeast becomes increasingly more important when we consider the river as poetic metaphor. The Capibaribe is not only metonymic of, but also inseparable from, the way of life of the men and women who inhabit its shores. This metaphor helps us understand how "O cão sem plumas" is not merely an important poem in Cabral's canon that just happened to be written while in Barcelona, but rather a poem whose imagery and thematic content directly parallel the author's experiences there.

Not unlike the many Brazilian *retirantes* from the Northeast seeking better lives in the nation's urban centers of the Southeast, the Spanish envisioned emigration to Brazil as an escape from diverse hardships. Yet, for the thousands who had applied, as an expatriate or an immigrant, the situation was bureaucratically complex. Whereas we know that at least 795 people applied to immigrate to Brazil in 1949 (Brazil, *Proposta*), according to the final "Quadro Estatístico" that year, only fifty-six "vistos em passaportes estrangeiros" were given in December, contributing to a total of just 487 for the year. Likewise, the "Quadro" reports that only nine repatriations were granted in 1949 (Brazil, "Quadro"). A letter from the Brazilian consulate in Barcelona to the Ministério das Relações Exteriores in Brazil further characterizes the difficulties of immigration. Written on August 13, 1948, the letter reveals that, "de fato, é bem grande o numero de trabalhadores espanhóis desejosos de fixar-se no Brasil e impossibilitados de fazê-lo" (Brazil, *Emigração*). Both potential immigrants and repatriates were challenged by the complex politics of both nations. On one hand, Brazil had severely limited the number of permanent visas available for Spanish citizens. And, on the other, Spain had further encumbered the process by requiring a "visto de saída" (Brazil, *Emigração* 2).

On the March 17, 1947, as Osório Dutra continued to study Medeiros's case, the consulate received further information from the Brazilian embassy in Madrid. "Octavio de Medeiros reside em Espanha como cidadão brasileiro, sendo filho de pai português e mãe brasileira" (Letter, March 17, 1947). Yet Dutra deemed the information insufficient to authorize Medeiros and his family's passage to Brazil. From the start, Dutra had been skeptical of Medeiros's claim to citizenship. On March 22, 1947, he writes to Medeiros requesting more documentation, "afim de estudar devidamente seu caso, rogo a V.S. informar-me . . .



qual é o documento existente em seu poder, comprobatório de sua nacionalidade” (Letter, March 22, 1947). The letter also requested to know if “o certificado de matricula lhe foi dado regularmente e anualmente renovado, como é obrigatório, para que lhe fosse possível conservar os seus direitos à nacionalidade brasileira” (Letter, March 22, 1947). Medeiros responds in a letter dated March 28, 1947, that “documentação suficiente com retratos, assignaturas, impressões digitais e demais dados [sic]” was located at the Brazilian embassy in Lisbon (Letter, March 28, 1947). Then Medeiros demonstrates his obvious frustration with the situation: “Então, um brasileiro que não tomou carta de naturalização noutro país ?deixa [sic] alguma vez de ser brasileiro? Si é assim, ?de [sic] que me serviu renunciar ao cargo de informador do Turismo espanhol para não desprezar [sic] a minha nacionalidade de origem? Bastaria esse facto indiscutível para reforçar os meus direitos de brasileiro, mais valioso, creio eu, ante o nosso governo, que uma simples inscrição em qualquer Consulado” (Letter, March 28, 1947). Medeiros, choosing to maintain his national identity, could not feasibly remain in Spain and still secure the financial means to provide for his family. But the Brazilian consulate was unwilling to immediately accept him as a citizen because of his lack of proper documentation. For this reason, Medeiros was being impeded from exercising his full rights, and his return to Brazil was in serious question.

In the poem, the Capibaribe is depicted as it flows through Recife until it arrives at the Atlantic Ocean. Throughout this journey, the poem offers a bird’s-eye view of the many life-forms, human and otherwise, that surround and inhabit the river. This “kind of omniscient eye” (Tolman 57) binds the organic entities together through a series of metaphors. While speaking with Vinicius de Moraes, Cabral proposed the importance of these metaphors in the poem:

- “O Cão sem Plumas” já é o rio Capibaribe, não é, João?
- É o Capibaribe visto de fora. Mas a existência do assunto é clara.  
Evidentemente a linguagem é ainda cifrada. A verdade é que naquela época eu não me tinha libertado ainda do preconceito de que poesia é a transplantação metafórica da realidade. Grandes trechos do “O Cão sem Plumas” são construídos com metáforas. (Moraes)

Understanding the poem as “a transplantação metafórica da realidade,” these marginalized individuals are similar to Medeiros. They are not only trapped by the physical margins of the river; they are also incapacitated by their social cir-

cumstances ("O cão" 107). Similar to the river, Brazil gives Medeiros his cultural identity while denying him his concomitant political right of repatriation. In both cases, there is a sense of deterministic failure and frustration since the river possesses "algo da estagnação do hospital, / da penitenciária, dos asilos, / da vida suja e abafada / (de roupa suja e abafada) / por onde se veio arrastando" ("O cão" 107). These "homens plantados na lama" are, like the infirm of the "asilos" and the inmates of the "penitenciária" on the outskirts of society, unable to find admission. Furthermore, like Medeiros, if they chose to uproot themselves and move to some other region of Brazil in search of better possibilities, they would inevitably leave some intrinsic part of their identity behind: "Porque é na água do rio / que eles se perdem / (lentamente e sem dente)" ("O cão" 109).

The paradox of citizenship is that nations are not able to grant total individual autonomy while also maintaining communal stability. The marginalization of some, to a degree, ensures an acceptable status quo for others. As a result, certain individuals or groups are unavoidably marginalized—whether explicitly by the law, as in the case of Medeiros, or by socioeconomic forces, as in the case of the impoverished of the Capibaribe. Cabral compares this social interconnectedness configured in Brazil through its rigid paternalism with the imagery of a river, wherein the fate of one is inevitably tied to the fate of others and the environment: "Na paisagem do rio / difícil é saber / onde começa o rio; / onde a lama / começa do rio; / onde a terra / começa da lama; / onde o homem, / onde a pele / começa da lama; / onde começa o homem / naquele homem" ("O cão" 110). As it becomes impossible to decipher the metaphorical point where the river ends and its inhabitants begin, it likewise becomes impossible to understand these river dwellers without inscribing them within the parameters of their subaltern position within the nation.

Further developing the metaphor, Cabral summarizes the existential aspect of his compositional philosophy, which connects individual struggles to those of entire communities, regions, and nations. He describes the philosophical aims of portraying the archetypal realities of these destitute inhabitants: "Para mim, a realidade pernambucana, com toda sua angústia, não é um problema que se propõe estudar e sim uma expressão individual que se tenta encaixar dentro da problemática filosófica universal, numa linguagem poética individual" (Tolman 67). Without question, "O cão sem plumas" captures the harsh social realities of the poor inhabitants of the shantytowns found along the shores of the Capibaribe. Looking beyond these shores, however, "O cão sem plumas" is

the reading of an existential dilemma, seeking a common thread that courses through humankind while also profoundly echoing the author's experiences in Spain. In the words of the poem: "Junta-se o rio / a outros rios" (113). For Cabral, "O homem, / porque vive, / choca com o que vive. / Viver / é ir entre o que vive" (114).

On April 9, 1947, the consulate in Barcelona decided Medeiros's case was far too complex for them to come to a decision on their own concerning his repatriation. The consulate turned it over, with all pertinent correspondence, to the Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores in Brazil. Enclosed as part of the package to the Secretaria is a copy of the letter to Madrid, dated April 2, 1947, in which Osório Dutra confessed his misgivings about the case: "Como poderá verificar Vossa Senhoria, o interessado gastou muita tinta para nada me dizer de concreto ou de positivo. O que se deduz das suas explicações, é que não tem ele em seu poder atualmente nenhum documento comprobatório da sua nacionalidade . . . Tratando se de um caso extremamente complexo . . . penso que o mais acertado será levá-lo ao conhecimento da Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores" (Letter, April 2, 1947). In the cover letter to the Secretaria, the consulate continued to display its misgivings by describing Medeiros as a "pessoa suspeita, cuja longa permanência em Espanha foi sempre um tanto misteriosa" (Letter, April 9, 1947).

One month after turning the case over to officials in Brazil, Cabral confirmed the receipt of a letter written on May 8, 1947, from the Lisbon consulate, communicating that "o Senhor de Medeiros não está inscrito na matricula deste Consulado Geral, onde também nada consta a seu respeito" (Letter, April 9, 1947). With this communiqué, it appeared that Dutra's suspicions had been confirmed. But on May 27, 1947, Cabral confirmed the receipt of yet another letter from the Lisbon consulate, rectifying the previous letter by including Medeiros's middle name: "Octavio Gonçalves de Medeiros está aqui matriculado desde 23 de dezembro de 1915, tendo sido expedido em seu favor três passaportes brasileiros em 1919, 1926 e 1935 . . . Fica, pois, esclarecida e justificada a situação do Senhor Octavio Gonçalves de Medeiros perante este Consulado Geral" (Letter, May 27, 1947). Whether Medeiros and his family did in actuality board that ship on August 4, 1947, is not revealed in the Barcelona *ofícios* of the period. Yet such information is of little importance to the study at hand. What is important is that Medeiros's Brazilian identity becomes the mechanism for trapping him in an intense conflict between physical necessity, national identity, and

citizenship. His case is, as demonstrated, not unlike that of Cabral's "homens plantados na lama."

Cabral's philosophies on writing had much in common with his approach to his professional vocation. Unlike other poets who had "uma certa repulsa ao sentido profissional da literatura" ("Poesia" 730), Cabral openly associated writing to the exercise of a skilled profession in which the quality of his poetry was directly related to the amount of physical effort applied: "O artista intelectual sabe que o trabalho é a fonte da criação e que a uma maior quantidade de trabalho corresponderá uma maior densidade de riquezas" ("Poesia" 733). In his interview with Vinicius, Cabral explained this relationship: "Outra coisa: escrever é para mim trabalho braçal, e se eu não tiver um estímulo exterior qualquer, não levo o meu trabalho ao fim. Já me tem acontecido ficar dois anos sem escrever uma só linha e sem sentir a menor necessidade de escrever poesia" (Moraes). Cabral's writing process, whether thematically concerned with the poet or the impoverished, consisted of intense analysis and study, sparked by an intellectual curiosity in existent phenomena, leading to the guarded construction of a tangible product—the poem.

The daily grind of exercising his diplomatic profession coincided with the author's methodical approach to writing. In fact, at the consulate, Cabral was specifically in charge of all repatriation issues and correspondence in Portuguese as well as overseeing all general adjudication duties. In an official letter to the Ministro das Relações Exteriores sent on May 16, 1947, Dutra clearly delineates Cabral's duties: "Ao Vice-Cônsul João Cabral de Melo Neto, conforme determinam as instruções de serviço em vigor, passei a direção de todos os trabalhos de chancelaria. Além disso, ficaram a seu cargo, o controle das verbas de 'Aluguel' e 'Expediente,' repatriação e correspondência em língua portuguesa" (Brazil, Distribuição). Thus Cabral was responsible for drafting all the previously cited letters concerning immigration and repatriation and had firsthand knowledge of each case. These duties, especially those of "repatriação e correspondência em língua portuguesa," not only indicate the prominence of literal dialogue in his profession, but also provide experiences to be used for developing a poetic dialogue between the newly found social concerns of his artistic pursuits and his diplomatic duties.

In a conference address given in 1954 at the Congresso Internacional de Escritores, Cabral further emphasizes the relationship between his poetry and diplomatic profession with his retort to what he perceived was a misinformed



eurocentric perspective of Latin America proposed by the French anthropologist and Universidade de São Paulo professor Roger Bastide (1898–1974). Cabral criticized Bastide's depiction of a homogeneous view of the New World by Europeans: "Pode-se dizer que, apesar de ter tido o cuidado de distinguir as [duas] Américas vistas pelos europeus," described by Cabral as "América Saxônica" and "América Latina," "Bastide desprezou as diferentes espécies de europeus que vêem essas Américas" ("Como a Europa" 759). Then Cabral proposed that he had encountered at least two different European perspectives of the New World while working in Spain: "Nos meus anos de Espanha—primeira fase da minha vida na Europa—, tive oportunidade de conhecer melhor as duas classes de indivíduos: os intelectuais, com os quais convivia por força de preferências comuns, e os trabalhadores, operários e gente do campo, com os quais estava em contato diário, por força de minha função consular" ("Como a Europa" 762). While Cabral explained that those individuals whom he considered to be intellectuals had, as a general rule, a limited vision of Latin America, he proposed that the common workers he interviewed at the Brazilian consulate had "uma visão muito mais realista da América Latina" ("Como a Europa" 762). For Cabral, the Spanish intellectual, despite pretensions to worldliness, was unaware of the real issues facing his continent: "Com exceção daqueles que, por força de sua atividade profissional, mostravam conhecer aspectos especiais da vida americana, a regra geral me parecia a ignorância e a indiferença por tudo quanto nos diz respeito" ("Como a Europa" 762). Such "ignorância e indiferença" demonstrated that "no intelectual . . . persiste aquela visão aventureira dos primeiros séculos do descobrimento, em que a América valia como o continente do enriquecimento rápido" ("Como a Europa" 762). To the contrary, Cabral considered those whom he interviewed on a daily basis to possess a more realistic perspective: "Nos trabalhadores, candidatos à emigração para o Brasil, a quem entrevistei e dei vistos em passaportes durante anos . . . Encontrei, sim, uma atitude consciente, nascida de uma visão realista e informada da realidade brasileira . . . uma visão concreta que a muitos pode parecer limitada e superficial, mas que existe indiscutivelmente e com a qual é indispensável contar" ("Como a Europa" 762). Lying at the root of the dichotomous relationship that Cabral constructed between the Spanish intellectual and his more "common" counterpart, one encounters the crux of the author's transformation in Barcelona. As he consolidated, along with his methodical approach to writing, a new thematic perspective that represented not only an intellectual stance but also the voice of the poor

inhabitants of the Capibaribe River, he valorized the plight of the common Brazilian in the same way that he appreciated the Spanish workers' "visão realista e informada da realidade brasileira" ("Como a Europa" 762). In this way, the themes contained in "O cão sem plumas" not only make space for the intellectual hovered over a desk in existential angst, but also include the poor, "plantados na lama . . . como cães sem plumas" ("O cão" 108).

In a letter written to Cabral in 1951, Manuel Bandeira recognized almost immediately the novelty of "O cão sem plumas." After characterizing Cabral's poetry prior to "O cão sem plumas" as "exercícios, estudos como são em música os de Chopin, Debussy, e outros," Bandeira observes: "No 'Cão sem Plumas,' você já sentiu habilitado a fazer a técnica servir ao seu sentimento e não, como antes, pôr ao seu sentimento no aperfeiçoar a técnica" (Sussekink 126). Certainly, no one was more aware of this transformation than the author himself. Just before the poem's publication, Cabral confessed to Bandeira:

Ando com muita preguiça e lentidão trabalhando num poema sobre o nosso Capibaribe. A coisa é lenta porque estou tentando cortar com ela muitas amarras com minha passada literatura gagá e torre-de-marfim. Penso em botar com epígrafe aqueles seus dois versos:

Capiberibe

—Capibaribe. (Sussekink 114)

The two distinct spellings of the word *Capibaribe* in the would-be epigraph of "O cão sem plumas," similar to the dual perspectives of Latin America he encountered while in Barcelona, further evoke a dialogue between the intellectual and the colloquial. The former spelling of the river with an *e*—"Capiberibe"—was its proper orthography at the time, while the latter with an *a*—"Capibaribe"—was the written expression of its popular pronunciation (Sussekink 115). Just as Cabral proposed two different ways of perceiving the Capibaribe, he also attempted, for the first time, in "O cão sem plumas" to bring together the intellectual with the social. This new dialogue in "O cão sem plumas" is its most important element, leaving an indelible mark on the author's subsequent poetry.

Literature and diplomacy both often embody a call to represent specific social groups and identities and both likewise facilitate communication across borders, real and imagined. For Cabral, diplomacy provided the experience through which his writing could begin to articulate universally recognized themes of poverty and the disenfranchisement of groups and individuals before their respec-

tive nations and cultures. As poverty marginalizes the inhabitants of the river, their rights to full-fledged citizenship are severely limited. Yet these sociopolitical limitations confronted by those inhabiting the river find their parallel not only in Cabral's diplomatic experience in Spain, but also on an existential plane to the degree that Cabral expresses an "experiência da miséria" as a "problemática filosófica universal" (Tolman 67). As demonstrated by the overwhelming evidence found in his conference addresses, interviews, correspondence, *ofícios*, and the poem itself, Cabral's diplomatic experiences in Barcelona offer unexplored avenues for better understanding the transformation in his poetry that took place with the publication of "O cão sem plumas" in 1949.

## NOTES

Süssekind, 238

1. See Joshua Enslen, "Vinicius de Moraes and 'Pátria minha': The Politics of Writing in Post-war Brazil," *Hispania* 94.3 (2011): 416–428.

2. This crucial admission by Cabral is quoted (but left undocumented) in an engaging essay by Ivan Junqueira titled "João Cabral, um mestre sem herdeiros," published in *O Itamaraty na cultura brasileira* (2002). Through my research in the Casa de Rui Barbosa, I was able to locate the original quote in an interview of Cabral by Vinicius de Moraes.

3. In a letter Medeiros wrote in January 1947, he states there are six members of his family (Medeiros, his wife and four children). But the telegram proposes that there are only five tickets awaiting Medeiros for the trip to Brazil. The reason for this discrepancy is not accounted for in the available documentation.

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