

Back to Nietzsche: The Making of an Intellectual/Woman Lídia Jorge's *A Costa dos Murmúrios*¹

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Moçambique está para a África Austral como a Península Ibérica está para Europa—estão ambas como a bainha está para as calças. E a culpa? E a culpa? perguntou o major também já sentado.²

Introduction

A Costa dos Murmúrios, first published in 1988, remains one of Lídia Jorge's best known and most successful novels. It confirmed her reputation among the leading writers of the post-revolutionary period and became closely associated with the remembrance and collective exorcism of the guilt and trauma surrounding Portugal's Colonial War in Mozambique (1964-1974/5). The novel contains two separate narratives of the same "events." The first narrative, "Os Gafanhotos," is a sentimental obscurantist short story that relates the suicide of a newly married lieutenant in the Portuguese forces in the late 1960s. The second account, the main body of the novel, is a conscious corrective to "Os Gafanhotos," told twenty years later by the lieutenant's bride, Eva Lopo, who refers to herself in her youth as one of the protagonists, Evita. She adds various items of new information, notably her realization that her husband has been transformed by his participation in a cruel and barbaric "dirty war." Closer to home, she also uncovers evidence of a campaign to poison the native black male population by planting methyl alcohol supplies in conventional bottles and containers. Most critical readings of this text work, at some level, from Eva's ostensible motivation to de-authorize the first telling, as her corrective text undermines and complexifies History as monolithic and "official." Somewhat more contestable, however, is the extent to which this de-authorization involves "setting the record straight."³ Helena Kaufman, for example, claims that:

The dual structure sustains a polemic view of History dependent on the subject who constructs it, the prevalent ideology, and the type of narration. The full story emerges only after the reading of both parts. (41)

While the type of narration and the prevalent ideology are certainly relevant factors in the “de-authorizing” project, it is debatable whether it is the “full story” that emerges from reading both parts, or merely a denser one. Eva’s narrative is certainly more detailed and more deconstructively incisive than “Os Gafanhotos,” but it is barely more stable than the text it displaces. Although Eva’s text serves to interpellate Eva herself as a more authoritative narrator, as Ana Paula Ferreira asserts in her conclusions to “History and the Postmodern She-Wolf,” she does not “replace one gender-based truth with another” (276). As a result, the novel’s apparent appeal to meaningful collective remembrance and national expiation is paradoxically enjoined through an anti-historicist exploration of narrativity, aesthetics, and, to employ Hayden White’s term, “emplotment.”⁴ I argue that this paradox is constitutive of the novel’s attempt to map out various problems and possibilities in the transition from a Portuguese “post-colonial” consciousness responding to the moment of immediate historical crisis to a tentative of “post-coloniality” as a mode of theoretical reflection. The tension between Jorge’s historical inscription of women in wartime and her assertion of the “feminine” as deconstructive figure affords my point of entry to the text.⁵

I

In his review for *Jornal de Letras* in 1988, António Bahia describes *A Costa dos Marmúrios* as “o romance da nossa culpa” (5) relating “a história de uma certa África no feminino,” but also “a imaturidade de um povo colonizador, que não será somente o português, mas antes [de] uma raça, a raça branca despótica e verde” (5). However, the narrative deviates significantly from the constructions of collective identity, the “nossa” which characterizes other post-revolutionary novels such as Olga Gonçalves’s *Ora Esguardae* and Teolinda Gersão’s *Paisagem com Mulher e Mar ao Fundo*. The first-person plural subject of “culpa” in *A Costa* proves labile and unfixable. In an interview with the Mozambican journal *Lua Nova*, conducted during a visit to Mozambique in 1994, Jorge herself defined her task as to show:

(...) a forma como as pessoas mais pacíficas são capazes de se transformar em seres agressivos perante circunstâncias agressivas, mas também como as

mulheres são cúmplices daquilo que se pensa ser apenas a natureza violenta dos homens. Não. As mulheres, à sua maneira são cúmplices da mesma forma. (9)

Jorge's pronouncement contains an interesting note of ambivalence, "à sua maneira" against "da mesma forma." Rather less ambivalent, however, is Bahia's view of woman as historical scapegoat, who slides seamlessly into the time-honored role of "representing" the guilt of a whole generation, a function potentially enhanced by the postmodernist eschewal of historical determinism to which he refers:

Essa "guerra" também foi feita pelas mulheres (...) que se queriam arredadas, não intervenientes, submissas (...) Mulheres que poderão *pura e simplesmente representar o silêncio cúmplice de toda uma geração*: a geração da guerra colonial portuguesa, embora já se saiba, não tenham sido objectivos da autora imprimir uma espécie de determinismo histórico ao romance. (5, my emphases)

In her contribution to *Men in Feminism* Rosi Braidotti argues, echoing traditional feminist distrust of postmodernism, that the feminine is symptomatic of dissolution and decline in anti-humanist philosophies, in a manner suspiciously continuous with woman's age-old scapegoat function in phallogocentric epistemology.⁶ According to Braidotti:

Ever since Nietzsche, passing through every major European philosopher, the question of woman has accompanied the decline of the classical view of human subjectivity. The problematic of the "feminine" thus outlined is nothing more than a very elaborate metaphor, a symptom, of the profound illness of Western culture and of its phallogocentric logic. (...) My argument is that this "feminine" bears no direct or even necessary relationship to real-life women. In some ways, it even perpetuates the century-old mental habit which consists in assigning to the "feminine" disorders or insufficiencies pertaining to the male of the species. (236)⁷

Jorge's inscription of Braidotti's "real-life" women into war history, in the form of the officers' wives who inhabit the Stella Maris promises to work, then, in creative tension with the inscription of Woman as figuratively symptomatic of the decline of classical human subjectivity in philosophy. Eva and Helena, as figures, symptomatize History as teleology, Helen of Troy

being the archetypal end of a civilization and Eve the beginning of the history of man's sufferings on earth.⁸ *A Costa*, therefore, traces a shifting and contingent frontier between the figure of the feminine in deconstructive (or as Braidotti more broadly implies anti-humanist) criticism and what Gayatri Spivak terms woman's "minimal predication as indeterminate [which] is already available to the phallogocentric tradition" (82). As we will see, the historical invisibility of women's minor or insignificant war experiences thus functions as cover story for interrogating humanist historical emplotment in terms of the exclusions of phallogocentricity. In precise, formal terms, this means that Eva's critical rewriting of "Os Gafanhotos" questions the nature of the relationship between the singular event, the "smallness" of history as a minimal unit here emblemized by women, and the general conceptual framework or, in Hayden White's terms, "metahistory" to which the singular event relates.

This historiographic focus on the relationship between event and concept echoes the preoccupations of New Historicist criticism as exemplified by Joel Fineman in *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition* where he poses the question how:

to find some way to introduce into the ahistorical historicity of Hegelian philosophy of history some break or interruption of the fullness and repletion of the Spirit's self-reflection, so as thereby to introduce to history the temporality of time. (57)

This sense of "ahistorical historicity" in *A Costa* is arguably common to both Christian Imperialism and, by extension, Marxist-Leninism as the teleological discourse of progress and "civilization" which succeeded colonialism in the Lusophone African context.⁹ When Eva ironically describes as "progress" the image of a black woman framed by the window of a half-built, already crumbling apartment block, she could equally be referring subtextually to post-independence Mozambique in the late 1980s when the Marxist-Leninist government, beleaguered by destabilization and war, was spiraling into crisis:

Lembrava um postal que ilustrasse uma ideia especial de progresso, de abraço entre as raças, feito nos andaimes duma casa a construir já em escombros. O tempo falava por si com uma veemência enorme de princípio e fim em simultâneo. Nada melhor para ilustrar a sociedade sem tempo. (174)

According to Joel Fineman, the specific narrative form of the anecdote as “historeme, i.e., as the smallest minimal unit of the historiographic fact,” (67) enables it to act as a device for reintroducing the temporality of time to history. It is:

the literary form that uniquely *lets history happen* by virtue of the way it introduces an opening into the teleological, and therefore timeless, narration of beginning, middle, and end. The anecdote produces the effect of the real, the occurrence of contingency, by establishing an event as an event within and yet without the framing context of historical successivity, i.e., it does so only in so far as its narration both comprises and refracts the narration it reports. (72)

The women, the children, and the black Mozambican servants in the “espaço eunuco” (85) of the *Stella Maris* protagonize a series of minute, singular events for which Eva is at pains to find an appropriate narrative description, as she remarks:

Quando não chegavam a ser episódios com seu drama, sua intriga, seu enigma, e desfecho, havia pelo menos descrição de caracteres, ou sinuosidades deles com os nomes, as aneddotas, as gargalhadas. (108)

An example of how anecdotes operate in the text occurs with the death by methyl alcohol poisoning of Bernardo, the hotel’s black receptionist and switchboard operator. He occupies a central, symbolic position within the closed history of divinely inspired conquest. One could see:

como nele vinham confluir as vontades indomáveis dos Príncipes de Avis, com sua mãe severa, seus retratos trocados, seus barretes polêmicos, empurrando os barcos até ao último ponto da esfericidade da Terra. Lá, no último porto, fora encontrado o Bernardo. O Bernardo podia representar sozinho a conquista que, a partir desse impulso uníssono duma só família, tinha sido perpetrada através da História, precisamente para que os povos entendessem que a salvação estava além da História, se acaso rezassem. (86)

The metaphor of the “impulso uníssono” connects the telephone network to the national foundational “impulse” of the “ínclita geração,” making

Bernardo's switchboard the symbol *par excellence* of teleological connectivity. Bernardo's story is thus *within* imperial history as a dynastically inspired totality, but also *without* it when the singular event of his unexpected death becomes the material of anecdote, placing him outside the "framing context of historical successivity" (Fineman 72). When asked whether Bernardo's death had any consequences, Eva replies with reference to the narrative of "Os Gafanhotos," "Teve, mas nada que fira o som duma palavra da sua narrativa tão conforme. Coisa simples que durou dois dias" (88).¹⁰

The anecdotal articulation of a "within and yet without" seems to provide the narrative format *par excellence* for locating the Stella Maris women's insignificant, personalized histories on the margins of war. The problem with the anecdote, however, as Robert J. C. Young puts it in his critique of Fineman, is that it is apt to spill over into "the metonymic status of the example (...) in which the relation of the part is to illustrate and comprise the whole" (173).¹¹ This is demonstrated in *A Costa* when the birth of Zurique's child goes unexpectedly wrong, his wife's anal sphincter is torn in a miscarriage and the child subsequently dies. Rather than remaining disruptively anecdotal, the event becomes exemplary of the stereotypical colonial fiction of "native incompetence" at the hospital and also metafictionally illustrative of the narrative organization of history in terms of cause, effect, and explanation. Eva announces didactically, "Agora explico-lhe finalmente como os músculos invisíveis podem ter um desempenho especial na organização dos factos históricos" (189). From being a contingent event the anecdote becomes an illustrative micro-teleology or "teiazinha," with the power to "comprise the whole" of the larger, metahistorical schema, or "teia." Eva is thus able to predict:

A imagem desses anéis rotos e inchados é tudo o que sobeja dessa viagem quando se vê o tenente Zurique [...] Triste, não é? Só que nesse momento ainda nenhuma parte dessa teiazinha entrou na teia da História. Mas entrará. (185)

Just as the anecdote is formally reassimilable to teleology by way of the non-contingent "exemplary," so too are the events in the women's lives, always liable to re-appropriation by History. The very instability of the anecdotal format "within and yet without," the framework of historical successivity, marks their capacity to be re-enmeshed in Historicist totalities under certain

exemplary rubrics and conditions. Living under the sign of the Virgin Madonna at the Stella Maris, the officers' wives embody precisely those roles that are traditionally available to patriotic women in wartime. According to Elisabetta Addis et al., in their sociohistorical study of women soldiers, the patriotic woman might be:

a mother prepared to bear sons and sacrifice them to the motherland, or a housewife prepared to follow her military husband in his various shifts of location, maintaining his honour through grace, fidelity, order and other domestic virtues. (...) Despite historical exclusion from regular armies, it is incorrect to assert that armed conflict was alien to women and that women had no part in wars. (xvi-xvii)

The women of the Stella Maris do not, therefore, emerge from Eva's retelling as empowered agents of their own history or as subjects of resistance to a particular version of history as hegemonic. Indeed the conclusion of the novel reduces them to an undifferentiated "sebe de costas" (257), affording a pun on the novel's title. Rather, they serve to highlight the formal terms on which certain traditional inclusions of the feminine in war history are already negotiated. The semi-permeable membrane which the anecdote/exemplum slippage sets up between "teiazinha" and "teia" mirrors Jorge's ambivalent description of female complicity in war, compared to male, in terms of "à sua maneira" but "da mesma forma" (*Lua Nova* 9). It also provides the alibi for a more fundamental, epistemological analysis of Woman at the level of metahistory.

II

Distancing herself from the sacrificial "mothers" of the Stella Maris, Eva gradually assumes discursive authority in relation to the "fathers" of the western philosophical tradition, which is grounded in the negation of Woman (Eve and Helen of Troy) and which, in Hayden White's terms, furnishes the conceptual frameworks and narrative emplotments of history. As Ana Paula Ferreira has suggested,¹² a case might be made here for analyzing Eva according to Jane Gallop's hypothesis of the daughter's seduction.¹³ Gallop's readings of Julia Kristeva in "The Phallic Mother. A Freudian Analysis" are certainly apposite as regards Ev/ita's self-imposed "exile" from patriotic society. According to Gallop, "A woman theoretician is already an exile; expatriated

from her *langue maternelle*, she speaks a paternal language; she presumes to a fraudulent power” (126-27). Eva self-consciously represents herself on several occasions as being still a daughter, unable to identify with the other women’s birth experiences. Although she seems set to re-enact a classic narrative cliché of colonialism, that of the inexperienced European woman who explores her sexuality in the relative freedom of the tropics, her journey from “naiveté” to “promiscuity” is more intellectual than sexual.¹⁴ The power of knowledge in the novel is circulated and negotiated in terms of Evita’s ambivalent sexual identifications and the undecidable physical encounters these produce. Helena’s homologous, narcissistic position leads to silence and mortality while, in a move which retraces Kristeva’s gestures to normalize heterosexuality even in her more radicalized invocations of it,¹⁵ Evita does not pursue the possibility of lesbian revenge.¹⁶ Although the relationship between the two women proffers the fantasy of a radical feminist variant on the traditional ploy of disrupting the patriarchal military economy by heterosexual adultery, its force is effectively re-territorialized and diverted in the direction of Eva’s self-constitution as a philosophical woman who exerts narrative authority over the author of “Os Gafanhotos.” Through her complicit conversations with the journalist (who treats cross-racial paternity as a form of genetic revolution) and her responses to the author of “Os Gafanhotos” (whose textual paternity rights are systematically undermined), Ev/ita is afforded a series of intertextual dialogues with the “fathers” of western philosophy, most significantly with Platonic mimeticism and the subversive counter-pull of Nietzschean anti-humanism. Her most common self-identification initially, however, is with cynicism, here restored to its narrow sense in ancient Greek philosophy.

Ev/ita and the journalist repeatedly strike the detached pose of the cynic. On various occasions Ev/ita describes herself as a dog, recalling the etymology of the word cynic in the Greek for dog, and affording a humorous resonance with the Latin “Cave Canes” sign on Helena’s house (“Beware the dog” or “Beware the cynic”?) which has been left abandoned by Italians (78).¹⁷ Helena, on the other hand, is the ultra self-caressive, narcissistic woman, the “narciso com uma mosca no meio” (223), traditionally associated with the female sexual economy.¹⁸ Ev/ita’s stock response to Helena’s melodramatic, over-mimetic posturings is correspondingly over-intellectualized as she watches Helena and thinks, “Eu receava esquecer o que aprendia, e tudo o que tinha no momento era vontade de fixar e aprender” (97). Although Helen exaggerates her role to the point of parody, it is significant that she does not

do so knowingly.¹⁹ Rather, she is an oxymoronic “Minerva inocente, sem memória” (93). As Gallop puts it, “Knowingly, lucidly to exercise *and* criticize power is to dephallicize, to assume the phallus and unveil that assumption as presumption, as fraud” (122).²⁰ The concentric circles which Helena draws around herself are themselves encircled and appropriated by the gaze of Eva, whose assumption of the phallus is a potentially disruptive unveiling because it is lucid.²¹ However, Gallop’s call for woman to “exercise *and* criticize power” (122) necessitates, in Kristeva’s formulation, an “impossible dialectic of two terms” (121). Kristeva’s privileging of woman as *uniquely* appropriate to command this “dialectic of self and self-loss, of identity and heterogeneity” (122) risks re-erecting woman, so Gallop argues, into the role of the “phallic mother.” This is the constant risk of Eva’s project wherever her comparative intellectual lucidity attains a commanding height that is cynical without the self-irony that would divide this phallic uniqueness against itself. As Gallop claims, “Any position can become assimilated into the symbolic order as a codified, fixed representation. No ‘experience’ or ‘identity’ can guarantee one’s dissidence” (123).

According to Gallop, Evita’s dialectic of “self and self-loss, of identity and heterogeneity” (122) is played out through her oscillation between Helena and the journalist. Her rejection of Helena is bound up with desire for the (binary) oppositional mortality of heterogeneity as she says/thinks, “O que amo em ti não tem enterro nem aspiro a isso. Os homens sim, fazem-me feliz porque me enterram e me tornam mortal. Quero que um homem se ponha em cima de mim para me sentir mortal” (226). Evita’s subsequent meeting with the journalist leads to a sexual encounter underwritten by the promise of phallic uniqueness. Expressing her desire to seduce the journalist, Evita thinks, “Espero sentir sob o robe o inchaço do seu quinto membro. Com essa vela içada, ele pode conduzir-me onde eu sozinha não posso entrar” (227). She echoes her own valedictory words/thoughts to Helena as “o jornalista desnudou-se e fez-me mortal” (227). Evita thus re-enters the cycle of life and death, asserting a self in self-loss that re-affirms the symbolic order. If Helena is the principle of a decadent, sterile morbidity of sameness, Evita’s desire for heterogeneity as “mortality” principle is effectively a life-affirming gesture in which both she and her masculine “other,” the journalist, enjoy the play of dephallicization and the power of shared laughter. The dominant narrative tense of Eva’s text is the present. The journalist’s survival is paramount to her aesthetic project as the following citation with its focus on performative speech indicates:

Gosto que o jornalista, vinte anos depois, *se declare sobrevivente* numa cadeira vermelha. A teoria tem uma força vital que ultrapassa a vida. A teoria e o conto. (258, my emphasis)

Eva's critique of "Os Gafanhotos" in terms of a celebration of life evokes the Nietzschean call for a life-serving historical consciousness that clearly informs the novel's anti-mimeticist, anti-humanist poetics.²² According to Hayden White's reading of Nietzschean anti-historicism in *Metahistory*:

Nietzsche's interpretation of the spirit of Tragedy (...) consists of a conflation of the conventional conception of Tragedy with that of Comedy, so that the two truths separately taught by each of these are now combined into a single multiplex acceptance of life and death. (345)

In its resolutely anti-mimetic aesthetic, *A Costa* reveals events proper to the horror of tragedy, but Ev/ita and the journalist are "comediantes" (97). He refers to her as "sua farsante" (126), and their complicity is most commonly expressed through laughter. According to White, Nietzsche's original Greek Tragic spirit reacts against the morality and mimeticism of the Platonic in favor of a truly Tragic art which is both "realistically illusionist" and "creatively destructive of its own illusions" (338). Ev/ita recalls her mother's Platonic entreaties as the voice of morality, but Ev/ita is not a woman who listens to mother. Who was the mother of Eve, anyway? "Lembrava-se da mãe, da fina voz da mãe—'As almas boas são atraídas pelas paisagens grandiosas, como os grandes prados, os grandes rios, porque são grandiosas como elas!'" (138). As Evita reacts to the photographs of atrocities which Helen has shown her, she remarks, "Não se deve deixar passar para o futuro nem a ponta de uma cópia, nem a ponta numa sombra" (136). The concept of constructive erasure affords Eva's most direct engagement with Nietzsche in terms of his dialectic of remembering and forgetting, contrasting animal incapacity for memory with human inability to forget. Ev/ita ponders, with a hint of wistful longing for the impossible, the burning of the library at Alexandria: "estimo os países de vocação metafísica total, os que não investem na fixação de nada" (131).²³

Nietzsche's life-serving historical consciousness turns on the notion that history must become a life-serving form of art which would place an emphasis on objectivity in Nietzsche's specific sense of the term (cited from *The Use*

and Abuse of History) as “composition’ in its highest form, of which the result will be an artistically, but not historically, true picture” (White 352). Eva’s commentary on “Os Gafanhotos” constantly draws attention to competing conceptualizations of “artistic objectivity,” opposing to the author’s reliance on “verdade” and the illusionism of “verosimilhança” (42) her own aesthetics of reality, or “correspondência,” the non-specular sense experience of “o cheiro e o som” (42). Reflecting on the horrific events which she has just “witnessed” via Helena’s purloined photographs, *Ev/ita* thinks relativistically, “Entre o bem e o mal uma mortalha de papel de seda” (141), concluding, or apparently concluding, “Sendo assim, tanto faz—tudo é idêntico a tudo’—pensou transitoriamente” (141). The discontinuity of this “transitoriamente” (141) is the defining poetic mode of Eva’s intellectual counter-odyssey. Uncoupling cause and effect in a process recalling Nietzsche’s set of “retroactive confiscations” (White 363), Eva draws instead on densely interwoven patterns of metaphor that echo Nietzsche’s “return of historical thought to the Metaphorical mode [which] will permit liberation from all efforts to find any definitive meaning in history” (White 372).

The process of deserting the various “housings” of metahistorical consciousness which Eva’s narrative undertakes belongs to a systematic intellectual clearance programme borne out through the novel’s dominant metaphorical patternings in terms of space and spatial interrelations. From the beginning of the novel, it is evident that “locations” are less permanent than their occupants might believe them to be. The *Stella Maris* is described by the Luís Alex as an “acampamento de ciganos sem burro” (77). *Ev/ita* foresees the hotel’s immanent ruin as the war ends, the Europeans flee, and nature reasserts itself. The monuments to an era will be reclaimed by matter and space. We learn that as a young history student *Evita* had abandoned her course because her concept of time as relative was arrogantly dismissed by a Salazarist clerical professor who believed only in the absolute time of God. Dislodged from the academic foundation, her subsequent play with philosophical intertexts and dialogues constitutes a string of nomadic “camp-cites.” She distances herself from the *Stella Maris*, refusing to live in Helena’s house by the sea, refusing to escape and go to live with the journalist, meeting him only in places that are more and more remote and finally being exiled entirely from the community of wives, who “faziam uma sebe de costas no meio do hall” (257). One of *Evita*’s favorite spaces for philosophical dialogue and reflection turns out to be the bathroom. Almost at the end of the novel, to the mocking

chorus of a Sebastianic intertext, “é agora,” Evita wonders when to reveal her affair, only for Eva to interrupt with the curious observation, “sim, sempre foram importantes as banheiras” (239). This brings full circle Eva’s assertion in the first chapter of her text, “claro que teve a sua importância, a banheira” (45). Metaphors of water and washing, fluidity, and flow accumulate throughout the novel, evoking the ablation of guilt in terms of dirt or matter that may be dissolved temporarily, only to be transported and deposited somewhere else. Evita’s decision to discuss the poisonings with the journalist follows a fluid metaphorical route that meanders through her consideration of African and European civilizations in terms of relative sedimentation:

O choque das nossas civilizações parecia tão banal e tão lento quanto o feito pela sedimentação dum rio. (...) Era bom e definitivo imaginar que tudo iria embrulhado no novelo escorregadio do esquecimento—Essa é uma ideia onde se mergulha como num banho tépido para passar os dias. Há momentos, porém, que agitam o banho tépido como uma vaga. (164)

Bathrooms, hosepipes, rivers, tears, canals, estuaries and, of course, the sea, are connected through metaphor in a process whereby flow is regulated, cut off, re-distributed, and decanted as Evita thinks, listens, and talks to people by rivers and seashores, in bathrooms and under showers, developing significant correspondences between water and sound/silence, between dispersal and return (108, 137-38, 144, 201, 216, 219). Following the return of the soldiers, she remarks, “Mas depois dos banhos e de todas as águas correntes, do rumor intenso do regresso, o Stella Maris mergulhou no silêncio” (243).

These cumulative, metaphorical patterns of connecting and disconnecting flow are resonant with the Nietzschean-inspired poetics of radical displacement and deterritorialization of desire²⁴ propagated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and subsequently popularized in Euro-American academia via various reinterpretations of their concept of the “nomadic subject” as the ultimate symbol of “displacement and dispersion” (Kaplan 87). Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of deterritorializing and reterritorializing desire as a force for destabilizing oedipalized institutions such as family, the army, the State, and the church, have been debated and contested by feminist and post-colonial schools of criticism alike.²⁵ I choose here to focus on the latter, as it relates to subjective interest investments, through Gayatri Spivak’s classic engagement with *Anti-Oedipus* in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Spivak argues

that Deleuze and Guattari's failure "to consider the relations between desire, power and subjectivity renders them incapable of articulating a theory of interests" (68). The western radical intellectual, whose "sovereign subject" (66) is not so easily banished or dispersed through the choice of "becoming minor" from the hierarchically empowered center, is called upon by Spivak to examine more effectively the investments implicit in her/his own intellectual positioning. The task is all the more urgent where a western radical philosophy seeks euphorically to dissolve an unexamined subjectivity, which continues none the less to depend on Othering in the very constitution of the "nomadic" movement it declares.

Re-considering *A Costa* in light of Spivak's pronouncements, what are the implications of Eva's poetics of "displacement and dispersion" for the evocation of "nossa culpa" which furnished the point of entry to my analysis? The closing lines of the novel suggest a sense of gradual erasure:

A pouco e pouco as palavras isolam-se dos objectos que designam, depois das palavras só se desprendem sons, e dos sons restam só os murmúrios, o derradeiro estádio antes do apagamento.

However, Eva's disruptive laughter in the closing lines also implies a circling of the text and a gesture of return: "disse Eva Lopo rindo. Devolvendo e anulando 'Os Gafanhotos'" (259). "Anular" here means to annul, but it is also cognate with anular, suggesting a ring or circle. The conclusion of the novel is dialectically poised between dissolution of history as narrative (mimetic) emplotment and the circularity of an anular (or anal?) return, the irreducibility of material suffering to narrative emplotment, such that the material and the somatic have a peculiar capacity to remain. The novel's gesture toward "collectivity" is not therefore represented in terms of the conscious or the reflective. Rather, it is metaphorized in terms of the endurance of physical matter. Thus, the universalization of fear as transhistorical human commonality is ushered in through images of corporeal flow, linking the anal tear of Zurique's wife to the journalist's loss of anal control in the Russian roulette game, to the terror of the Wiriyamu victims whose monument should be a "caldeirão de fezes reais" (251), to the ultimate, human incarnation of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane who "sentiu que os esfínteres do seu corpo se delassavam e saía, pelo seu ânus carnal, a matéria que define o nosso medo" (251). Although this movingly demonstrates that

the absence of definitive historical *meaning* can never eradicate suffering as definitive historical *experience*, the metaphors of materiality risk merging the particular dirt of “a nossa culpa” into the universal “dirt” of “o nosso medo” (251), effectively levelling the relations between “desire, power and subjectivity” (68) which in Spivak’s terms would allow for a theory of interests. Perhaps, as Spivak claims, “It is when signifiers are left to look after themselves that verbal slippages happen” (70). But how far are the signifiers of *A Costa* left to look after themselves?

Caren Kaplan’s review of nomadism productively reformulates one of Spivak’s central prevarications as follows:

In making recourse to the metaphors of marginality and displacement, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to displace the sedimented bulk of European humanist traditions. Their antihistoricism seeks to deconstruct classical lineages even as it may tend to homogenize or blur the kinds of differences upon which contemporary identity politics insist. (88)

And yet a central contradiction of *A Costa* is that this antihistoricist deconstruction of “classical lineages” does not wholly homogenize “the kinds of differences upon which contemporary identity politics insist” (88). Through the specificity of Portuguese colonial historical referencing in relation to an international context,²⁶ Jorge effectively draws attention to semiperipherality as a distinct geopolitical and cultural concept which is none the less not quite reducible to the categories of difference privileged by identity politics. Boaventura de Sousa Santos²⁷ provides a classic working definition of semiperipherality in the Portuguese context:

Since the demise of the empire in 1974, Portugal has been renegotiating its position in the world system. It seems that a semiperipheral position of some kind will be maintained, this time based on the terms of Portugal’s integration in the European Economic Community and on its privileged social relations with Portuguese-speaking Africa. (34)²⁸

Caren Kaplan’s distinctions between the free choices implicit in a romanticized nomadism and the enforced dislocations of migrancy become particularly relevant in the context of semiperipherality as the basis for new modes of “identity formation.” Kaplan objects to the conflation of modernity

and postmodernity²⁹ into “undifferentiated cultures” such that:

European gypsies and Third World immigrants share the same theoretical space not through structural relations of historically specific diasporas but through a kind of generalized poetics of displacement. (87-88)

The key to *A Costa* is that it does not pursue a totally *generalized* poetics of displacement. Historically indexed referents (the Wiryamu massacre, the war zones of the Nó Górdio campaign, Eduardo and Janet Mondlane, the Moulin Rouge club in Beira, and the Portuguese exodus from Mozambique) and the dominant discourses of Portuguese colonialism (the Fifth Empire, lusotropicalism, miscegenation, the war propaganda) inflect the transhistorical generalizations of displacement poetics with the specifics of Portuguese empire and its collapse. Thus, returning to Spivak’s phrase, the signifiers are not entirely left to look after themselves. Kaplan claims that Deleuze and Guattari’s “mappings” make “the Third World function[s] as a metaphorical margin for European oppositional strategies, an imaginary space rather than a location of theoretical production itself” (88). I would argue that *A Costa* does not resolve, but does significantly complexify, the oppositional duality behind Kaplan’s critique. The feminine identity dialectic which structures the novel may be taken to configure the double movement of Portuguese semiperipherality between *migration* from “Third World” metaphorical margin (of Europe) to a European oppositional strategy which would be differently predicated as a result, and the possibility of a *nomadic* dispersion that would not feel uniquely (phallically) positioned to avoid projecting oppositional European strategy onto the real Third World as metaphorical margin.³⁰ As *A Costa* effectively asks, how does the “bainha” of Europe’s trousers set about unstitching itself?

Notes

¹ I am indebted to Till Geiger for his comments on this article and for affording some very productive debate on historiography.

² *A Costa dos Marmúrios* (Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 1988) 28. All subsequent references are to this edition and are abbreviated to *A Costa*.

³ As Ronald W. Sousa points out, “Criticism written on *Costa* has uniformly seen the interaction between its two constituent parts and the gesture of negation in the text’s concluding pages as a composite critique of traditional history: critique, that is, of the notion that there somehow is a single ‘history’ to be revealed” (“The Critique of History” 135). See also Ferreira

270n for references to the debate in Portugal concerning the uncertainty and undecidability of history in *A Costa*.

⁴ According to Hayden White, “Emplotment is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind” (*Metahistory* 7).

⁵ See Isabel Moutinho, “A Collapsing Empire: Cultural Decay and Personal Transformation in the Recent Work of Portuguese Women Novelists,” *Romance Languages Annual* 5 (1993): 484-90. Moutinho considers *A Costa* alongside female-authored colonial war novels by Wanda Ramos and Joana Ruas. For a similar feminist angle, see Isabel Allegro de Magalhães, *O Sexo dos Textos e Outras Leituras* (Lisboa: Caminho, 1995) 29 and 33-35. For a Foucauldian feminist reading of *A Costa*, see Ana Paula Ferreira, “Lídia Jorge’s *A Costa dos Murmúrios*: History and the Postmodern She-Wolf.”

⁶ Ana Paula Ferreira refers to “a number of critics [who] have denounced the phallogocentric bent of postmodernism” (274), though her own “History and the Postmodern She-Wolf” argues persuasively that Eva’s “deconstruction of the myths that have sustained the will to know and represent a univocal historical truth perhaps did not need any intellectual ‘Fathers,’ after all” (276). My reading is indebted to Ferreira, who develops the concept of Eva as “reader, critic and theorist” (270) who sweeps away the “metanarrative” of Enlightenment (271) so that “*A Costa dos Murmúrios* invites also a critical consideration of ‘the postmodern turn’ not only within the conjuncture of contemporary Portugal, but specifically in relation to women’s writing” (272).

⁷ See also Gayatri Spivak’s comparison of the subaltern and the feminine as “deconstructive figures.” “The ‘subject’ implied by the texts of insurgency can only serve as a counterpossibility for the narrative sanctions granted to the colonial subject in the dominant groups. (...) It is well known that the notion of the feminine (rather than the subaltern of imperialism) has been used in a similar way within deconstructive criticism and within certain varieties of feminist criticism. In the former case, a figure of “woman” is at issue, one whose minimal predication as indeterminate is already available to the phallogocentric tradition. Subaltern historiography raises questions of method that would prevent it from using such a ruse” (82).

⁸ Ferreira describes woman, following Eve, as traditionally held “responsible for the beginning of History” in the Judeo-Christian sense “conceptualized as the teleological process of Man’s struggle and sufferance” (274).

⁹ In his critique of Marxism’s implication in Enlightenment processes, Robert Young contends that “the dominant force of opposition to capitalism, Marxism, as a body of knowledge itself remains complicit with, and even extends, the system to which it is opposed” (1990, 3).

¹⁰ The concept of sequentiality is constantly parodied in *A Costa* with punning on the words “liga/ligar” (variously evoking links, garters, leagues, etc.) and their failure to hold fixed “ligações” in place. See, for example, 63, 67, 83 and 88-89.

¹¹ Robert J. C. Young usefully elaborates on this as follows: “(...) its somewhat precarious status as anecdote—[which] lasts only so long as it avoids sliding into the metonymic status of the example (...) in which the relation of the part is to illustrate and comprise the whole. For Fineman, the anecdote must work in a non-metonymic excessive relation to a history formulated as a historicist totality” (1996, 173).

¹² See Ferreira, 272n.

¹³ António Bahia tellingly refers to History itself as being “seduced” by the novel. “E se o romance não se rende à História, esta deixa-se seduzir indubitavelmente pelo livro” (5).

¹⁴ Mineke Schipper describes the continued importance of this trope in anglophone post-colonial African novels. “The Western woman is depicted in African novels by male

writers—especially those set in colonial times—as the dangerous, frivolous, adulterous type (European marriages are generally unhappy and infidelity is more of a rule than an exception)” (42).

¹⁵ Eva refuses the temptation of lesbian revenge, with the justification that it is not the Church fathers who have instilled this taboo, but rather it occurred at some point in the process of separation from the mother: “Seria necessário voltar à mamada inicial para corrigir este defeito” (226). This is interestingly resonant with Jane Gallop’s critique of Kristeva’s “Sorcières” and “Des Chinoises” in which she claims that homosexuality appears on occasion to be treated as “a defense, a short-circuiting of the relation to heterogeneity, a ‘safety belt’ (...) a rigid, fragile phallic stand on identity, a fearful refusal of the mother, the vagina and the semiotic” (128).

¹⁶ See Ronald W. Sousa, “‘I was Evita,’” for an insightful, close reading which uses Evita’s highly ambivalent encounters with Helena to interrogate Laura Mulvey’s “canonical gaze paradigm.” Sousa complexifies Mulvey’s rather rigid framework whereby the object of the gaze is feminine, the desiring/possessing subject masculine, and the identifying subject feminine.

¹⁷ For example, Eva remarks, “A minha mãe me pôs no mundo tendo-me dado por invólucro um couro de cinismo. Ela não teve culpa de me oferecer esse bafeiro de cachorro com o qual revesti o rosto” (101).

¹⁸ Gallop describes this self-referential economy as follows: “According to the classic psychoanalytic view, female sexuality is narcissistic. (...) Female sexuality can be characterized by continual reference to the self and the body, a continual drawing attention back to the body/self, an economy that Grunberger [in *Female Sexuality: New Psychoanalytic Views*] calls concentric” (118-19). See Ferreira, for an enlightening discussion of the sexual connotations of “pomba” and “pombinha” which Eva uses with reference to Helena, and which the journalist adopts as a nickname for Evita (275n).

¹⁹ Similarly, Sousa suggests that “while Helen plays her role when it is necessary and does otherwise when it is not, Ev/ita is fascinated by Helen as a sign of her-self (Ev/ita) and is involved simultaneously in both the role-playing *and its examination*” (“‘I was Evita,’” my emphasis 21).

²⁰ The exhortation to movement and oscillation is central to Jane Gallop’s transformative synthesis of Kristeva and Irigaray, which calls on women to “exercise *and criticize* the power” (121) to avoid “the paralysis of an infantile, oceanic passivity” in the former case and to stave off “the opposite paralysis of a rigid identity” in the latter (121).

²¹ The journalist, significantly, initiates Eva into the usurption and corruption of the paternal symbolic when they are stranded near a church in the middle of a rainstorm, and the priest “expels” them (from paradise?) thinking they are young lovers engaged in sexual misdemeanors. “O jornalista diz que é assim mesmo, que nas sociedades disfarçadas todo o entendimento é um crime, se possível um crime sexual. (...) o sexo é como Deus—o sítio secreto da expressão secreta a que se atribui tudo o que não tem explicação. (...) Sob aquela intensa chuva, o jornalista acha que qualquer entendimento pode ser entendido como um crime” (146). Having unveiled as fraud the “sítio secreto da expressão secreta” which typifies “veiled” societies or “sociedades disfarçadas,” their motor car, the aptly named “fiat” of divine creation, stalls and refuses to move forward. “O Fiat não anda” (146).

²² The affinity with Nietzschean, or more specifically Foucauldian, concepts of history in *A Costa* has been commented upon by Ana Paula Ferreira, with reference to Foucault’s “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” She remarks, “Proposing an alternate, non-humanist concept of History, such an advice [Eva’s to the author of “Os Gafanhotos”] reveals a close affinity to Nietzschean or, in any case, Foucauldian thought” (272).

²³ On Nietzsche’s dialectic of remembering and forgetting, see Hayden White, 356.

²⁴ Mark Seem usefully summarizes deterritorialization in his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*: “Against the Oedipal and oedipalized territorialities (Family, Church, School, Nation, Party), and especially the territoriality of the individual, Anti-Oedipus seeks to discover the “de-territorialized” flows that have not been reduced to the Oedipal codes and the neuroticized territorialities, the *desiring-machines* that escape such codes as lines of escape leading elsewhere” (xvii). See Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, for a recent and detailed discussion of Deleuze and Guattari’s collaborative work and the challenges it poses for a politics of location.

²⁵ For a feminist critique of Deleuze and Guattari, see Rosi Braidotti, “Discontinuous Becomings: Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman of Philosophy,” *Nomadic Subjects*, 111-23. Her attempt to synthesize a feminist politics with the Deleuzian position on “becoming-woman” leads her to contend that “what is at stake is how to make ‘woman’ the referent of the intensity of becoming of all, but especially of women and not the necessarily self-effacing servant at the banquet of the Socratic club. For me it is unthinkable that the question of the deconstruction of phallogocentrism could be disconnected from the concrete changes taking place in women’s lives” (115).

²⁶ For further discussion of the international contextualization of the events in *A Costa*, see Sapega, “No Longer Alone and Proud,” 182. Sapega reviews this work and other post-revolutionary novels in the context of a move beyond discourses of Portuguese historical uniqueness, typified by Eduardo Lourenço and the concept of “hybridity.”

²⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein’s concept of “semiperipherality,” originally developed in the context of world system theory, was the starting point for Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s detailed reworking of the term in relation to Portugal. See “State and Society in Portugal,” *After the Revolution. Twenty Years of Portuguese Literature, 1974-1994*. Eds. Helena Kaufman and Anna Klobucka (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1997) 31-72.

²⁸ Responding to Fredric Jameson’s categorizations of First and Third World literature in “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 65-88, and drawing on Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s analyses of the Portuguese semiperipheral, Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos asks, “se, nos países ‘centrais’ se perdeu o sentido social, político e nacional na representação estética, e se, pelo contrário, nos países ‘periféricos’, alegoria e a sátira políticas são, designadamente no romance, o modo de representação privilegiado, que se poderá esperar encontrar nas culturas ‘semiperiféricas?’” (65)

²⁹ For discussion of location and Portuguese national identity in relation to modernity/post-modernity tensions, see Sapega and Lacerda Cabral.

³⁰ Margarida Ribeiro places Portuguese colonial war novels, including *A Costa*, at an historical and epistemological crossroads, as “importantes elementos de reflexão sobre o modo europeu/português de estar em África (particularmente no crepúsculo do império) e simultaneamente peças indispensáveis para entender o modo de estar hoje em Portugal. Que Portugal se pode imaginar a partir daqui?” (149)

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