

Introduction: “Say It Right”: On Luso-American Literatures and Cultures Today

*From my hands I could give you something that I made
From my mouth I could sing you another brick that I laid
From my body I could show you a place God knows (only God knows)
You should know this space is holy
Do you really wanna go? (Two, three, four...)
—Nelly Furtado, “Say It Right”*

On Listening to Nelly Furtado on WJFD 97.3 FM (And Thinking Seriously About Lusodiasporic Cultural Explorations)

One of the most enduring characteristics of Portuguese-American life, particularly here in southeastern New England, has been that of having a broad selection of local Portuguese-language media to choose from: local cable television networks like The Portuguese Channel, bilingual newspapers like *O Jornal* or *The Portuguese Times*, or the growing number of examples of internet media, from participating in bilingual exchanges on social media to watching locally-made amateur videos on YouTube.

Despite the ever-expanding access to a wide range of Portuguese-language books, cultural materials and media in diaspora communities, it may seem somewhat behind the times to admit that perhaps most important among these media offerings for me and many other Portuguese speakers in my region remains an analog local radio station, WJFD 97.3 FM in New Bedford, with its powerful 50,000-watt signal that can reach the majority of Portuguese speakers in the region, from the North Shore of Boston to the outer Cape and Islands to much of Worcester County and the eastern edges of Connecticut. Its eclectic mix of Portuguese-language programming combines news from RTP Antena¹ Açores with community programming from interviews to call-in shows, Portuguese soccer matches, advertising in Portuguese and Cabo Verdean Creole for local businesses, and, as always, a wide range of music from the Portuguese-speaking world

and beyond. In fact, sometimes when asked how I would define the borders of the part of southeastern New England that I call home, I have often responded by saying it is anywhere that I can turn on my car radio and listen to WJFD. Like so many others in this region, Portuguese-English bilingualism is as American as hot dogs and apple pie, or as the by now all-American Portuguese feast would counter, *linguiça* and *malassadas*; after all, our local Lusodiasporic cultures would no doubt be unrecognizable for so many of us if they did not maintain this continually alternating kind of cultural multiplicity.

So while it is not all that common that a song popular in the mainstream commercial media is also played on WJFD, there have been notable moments of overlap and crossover. For me at least, none is more emblematic in this way than the international hit song “Say It Right” by the Portuguese-Canadian singer Nelly Furtado, a song played so frequently on the air around the same time that I was hired to teach Portuguese-American literature and culture at UMass Dartmouth in 2007 that it came to symbolize that moment of translating myself, professionally and literally, back into Portuguese once again.

This recognition of Nelly Furtado as a virtually all-encompassing cultural icon should come as no surprise for teachers of Portuguese in North America, whether to heritage students or others, given that she is so often cited as somehow representative of the twenty-first century Lusophone diaspora, whether it is in Portuguese language textbooks as just one among numerous other well-known cultural figures, or in exhibits in museums alongside personalities of other ethnic backgrounds to underscore the cultural diversity of North American societies. I recall seeing a two-dimensional poster board cut out of Nelly Furtado in a provincial history museum in Victoria, British Columbia, the city where she grew up (even if such references as an exemplary representative of her community seldom engage with her music or other forms of creativity directly, much less in-depth). She is, of course, also celebrated on the Azorean island of São Miguel where, as she herself maintains, all of her lineage can be traced back centuries not only in the Azores, but also in mainland Portugal, where she was honored with the Order of Prince Henry the Navigator for her service to Portuguese culture in the diaspora (Blayer & Pacheco 2015).

What is encouraging, if not outright ironic, about this official embrace of Nelly Furtado as a recurrent representative example of ethnic identity (even if it may well be an overly simplistic understanding of cultural identity as largely ethnically determined, one that she has clearly never been exclusively committed to) is that not only is she far from being a traditional folkloric or fado singer,

much less a emblematic cultural navigator or explorer, she also does not make a particular point of singing in Portuguese (although she has done so on occasion, be it the refrain to the Euro 2004 anthem “Força,” or her own version of the song “Sozinho” by the Brazilian MPB icon Caetano Veloso). Furtado has always explored a wide range of musical genres and collaborated with a wide range of artists, all while collapsing the often arbitrary cultural distinctions between them: from other featured North American pop icons like Timbaland and Justin Timberlake to their Latin counterparts like Colombian pop sensation Juanes (“Fotografia,” 2009) and the Mexican La Mala Rodríguez (“Bajo otra luz,” 2010). Even in her own songs and solo videos, she has incorporated Mexican “Día de los Muertos” imagery into her visual aesthetic (“Waiting for the Night,” 2013).

It is in this way that Nelly Furtado, both as pop cultural figure and real-life artist, can be seen as continuing to rebel against any number of definitions, especially in terms of ethnic category or musical genre, unless, of course, if it is in the broadest terms possible, such as that of world music, as she collaborates with figures from a number of different musical styles and ethnic backgrounds, apparently more concerned with breaking the limits of musical categories than observing or obeying them. After what is now practically a two-decade career in the international spotlight, the words from her first single “Like a Bird”—the one through which her fans came to know her and for which she was awarded a Grammy—still ring true to some extent, ones so familiar at this point that they probably need no repeated quotation here: “I’m like a bird, I only fly away. I don’t know where my home is. I don’t know where my soul is.” Or one might even ask whether this affirmation of cultural homelessness or continual migration is not in fact a kind of home in and of itself. Yes, Lusodiasporic cultures, regardless of what we call them, have always been something like this: somewhere along a line of flight, a set of uncertain places in/between, but no less a place that one can still inhabit, even without knowing exactly where we are at any given moment, or even who “you,” “I” or “we” are in any certain and immutable terms.

This is not to say that Nelly Furtado’s contemporary approach to music, her artistic persona, or ‘sex appeal’ are as appreciated in more conservative sectors of the Portuguese-American cultural landscape as they have been by other audiences. One cannot deny the potentially controversial move of performing a song with a title or lyric like those of the song “Promiscuous,” no matter how ironically the lyrics and its message might be interpreted, especially in the cultural context of a still firmly entrenched traditional culture of gender norms, one in

which many Portuguese-American women to this day still don't have the option of dating more than one guy (or gal, for that matter) without the very real possibility of being shamed by their families and friends.

Much of this resilience to adversity that Furtado sings of, however, is far from being merely some sort of self-absorbed response to the demands and vicissitudes of her own international stardom or reception from increasingly conservative mainstream audiences. To interpret a song like "The Spirit Indestructible" (2012), it might be important to be aware, whether as a listener or as a critic, that it was inspired by her visits to small and remote villages in Africa and contact with the realities of everyday human life there. To be fair, that is something that a good number of Western music critics, to say nothing of academic specialists in African cultures—Portuguese or North American, Lusophone or otherwise—have not taken as much time and effort to incorporate into their own lived experience as Nelly Furtado has.

While her work as an artist, musician, lyricist and performer may currently be subject to the volatility of a consumer market in a prolonged state of disruption caused largely by new reproduction and distribution technologies, her most recent album *The Ride*, released in March 2017, apparently sold only 1,814 copies in the first few days after it was released in the US. Such numbers are always relative, however; I imagine that most of my academic and literary counterparts would be overjoyed to sell 1,814 copies of one of their books over the course of their entire careers. Admittedly, it does not help matters when artistic vision and commitments are deemed less important than bottom-line sales and profit considerations, especially by massive media outlets like iHeart Radio (not coincidentally, the same sort of corporate conglomerate that, with the help of federal communications deregulation, threatens the range and long-term survival of local independent radio stations like WJFD).

The short promotional film that Furtado made to publicize the release of "The Ride" seems to point out at least two things: 1) how committed she is to being true to her own artistic vision, while 2) how relatively uninterested she appears to be in using the usual teasers to promote or sell herself to her potential audience in traditional ways. Instead, just to give one example, she recurs to black-and-white, *cinéma vérité*-style filmed conversations with other women, in which she expresses what artistic freedom means to her, not by speaking directly into a camera or being interviewed in the glossy, commercial way so favored by the entertainment industry and its promotion teams. In this overwhelming context of promotional

conformity, one of the most moving tracks on the album, “Phoenix,” still seems to speak to the idea that it is not only artists who play with fire; moreover, as they pass through it, they may find themselves rebuilding themselves emotionally, not once, but continually. In the end, this commitment to creativity just might end up bringing new life to an increasingly unforgiving environment, not just for the artist herself, but for all those in need of inspiration in community, or who simply need a sign of life in others to remain true to their own creative vision as well.

Ultimately, what some of us, even those of us who claim to focus on such things, may not have been sensitive enough to acknowledge, is that both her music and the messages it divulges, both in the more immediate community and beyond, are not just those of some superficial pop star, but at least for those who have taken the time and effort to listen and interpret them, from that critical space both beyond the limits of authorial intentionality and still within the range of possibility and good faith, they invariably become something new, if not something entirely different.

From this renewed critical perspective, they are those of an uncompromising and authentic musical and mixed-media artist, whose songs consistently challenge conventional norms and the notions of cultural propriety, something that in and of itself could well be considered the most critical of engagements with community:

It is clear and documented that the current problems facing our youth with regards to education are ideological and systemic. There are also socio-economic barriers. However, I believe that there is an old guard in our culture that we need to intentionally and consciously shake up.

As a youth, I was lucky to adopt a personal identity that I was “pan-ethnic”, that made me feel connected to many other first-generation peers beyond the Portuguese community alone. This saved me, as I never felt like I was only Portuguese, or only Canadian. I felt like I was part of a new and improved identity that belonged to the broader world, and this was key for me in finding my own voice.

Growing up, I visited my own Catholic Church community, but I was also open-minded about exploring other religions, identities and cultures, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Presbyterianism, Spiritualism, Taoism, Sufism, and beyond. I refused to believe that being Portuguese just meant being Catholic, or that being Portuguese just meant being heterosexual or that being Portuguese just meant belonging to a “traditional family” or a “traditional lifestyle.”

Throughout my life, I have chosen not to pigeonhole myself into the boxes and labels of my Portuguese-Canadian culture. Let's remember that a stifled Portuguese culture was imported to Canada and left to ferment at a time when Portugal itself was undergoing revolution and real change.

Overall, let's admit that our Portuguese culture sometimes still prescribes to the old-world fear of being outcast for being different. Our culture does not always honour individuality. Our culture still suffers from extreme gender bias. All of these ills can create a poverty of the mind for young people that is excruciatingly difficult to overcome.

We need to push past generalizations about our culture for the sake of our youth. We should not be limited by religion, gender, sexuality, race, or lifestyle. Our doors need to be wide open for opportunity. Inflexible viewpoints on how to be a "real Portuguese" will only limit us in our achievements. We should focus on what makes us unique and revel in what I believe is our true nature - unbridled creativity, adventure, passion and inventiveness! These are the ingredients of a truly potent and rich sense of identity - not an identity limited by the categories of antiquity. (Furtado, in Blayer & Pacheco 2015).

Who could the author of these ideas on cultural identity possibly be? Are they of an academic specialist in migration and ethnic history with an advanced degree, a tenured university professor of literature, or a renowned novelist or literary/cultural critic? No, these too are the words of Nelly Furtado, offered to her transnational diasporic listeners after revisiting Portugal and receiving yet another honor from her country of ancestral origin.

So ultimately, who really is the most far reaching, audible and immediately identifiable (if not firmly entrenched and canonical) among Lusodiasporic voices today, whether on the radio or elsewhere? With so many of the arbitrary distinctions between high and low culture swept away long ago (this age of authoritarian reconsolidation notwithstanding), and with even our own Portuguese language megastation WJFD undergoing its own set of recent challenges to its geographic limits of transmission,¹ these may be the years that we look back on as those of an intensity, brilliance, originality and diversity impossible to repeat or return to, much like the ones invoked in Nelly Furtado's 2001 hit "On the Radio (Remember the Days)"?

It might quite possibly be only then, in a future that looks back on this present, albeit one already transformed into a irrevocably lost past, that we will be fully

able to hear Furtado's musical lyrics as literary as any other literature, to say nothing of her cultural viewpoints, just as incisive and necessary as those of our most sophisticated cultural theorists. Hopefully we as a community will one day arrive at a more appreciative place from which to view her multifaceted contributions, with not just her globally broadcast visual and sonic image, but also the thoughts behind them, deemed as worthy of consideration as those of any other philosopher or transcultural explorer of the Lusophone diaspora.

Ultimately, all that remains for us as Luso-American cultural workers is to incorporate these words into our research and writing, and then perhaps, like Furtado herself, to encourage others to be true to one's own cultural vision; that, in the end, is what it might mean, more than anything else, to "say it right," if not necessarily to "say it all."

Our Disparate (Yet Confluent) Luso-Diasporic Moments

So what does it really mean for us, as scholars in contemporary Luso-American literary and cultural studies, to back up Furtado's lead vocal, and with our own voices, also "say it right"? What we propose in this issue is to offer a variety of possible answers to that question, not with a presumably unified vision of culture led by a set of well-known voices, much less by relying on the same cultural models, approaches and methodologies that others have turned to in order to identify and interpret in any definitive or all-encompassing way, or to determine what is considered truly significant for one and all in what remains an admittedly diverse set of diasporic cultural communities.

Whether in southeastern New England, a quickly expanding global metropolis like Toronto, a Caribbean island nation like Trinidad and Tobago, or elsewhere in this far-flung Lusodiasporic archipelago (the San Joaquin Valley of California, the Big Island of Hawai'i?), living between Portuguese, Cabo Verdean and indigenous or other locally represented cultures remains an indisputable fact of life, with its transnational implications ever more complicated, especially when juxtaposed alongside other European immigrant and indigenous cultural traditions; the particularities of North Atlantic archipelagos, as well as Brazilian, Cabo Verdean and other African diaspora communities; cultural elements from Spain, Latin America and the Caribbean where European languages are spoken alongside Papiamentu and other Creole languages to further complicate the picture. One need only reference the longstanding presence of Cabo Verdeans alongside Azoreans and Madeirans, or the more recent arrival of Spanish-speaking

and Mayan-language Central Americans who have joined the Portuguese on Acushnet Avenue in the North End of New Bedford, to find nearby examples of this ever-expanding transnational context.

One might find countless other instances in the culturally diverse cities of Western Europe, East Asia, or southern Africa, where Lusophone cultural heritage is cut and configured differently according to the enduring presence of indigenous and African cultures, as well as the continual flux of contemporary postcolonial transmigrations and other demographic shifts. It is, however, against this comparative global and transnational backdrop that understanding cultural identity becomes increasingly possible and necessary, in order to gauge the depth of potential intercultural communication as this increasingly interconnected environment for literary and cultural production continues to develop.

Any number of authors might point us in the direction of this Lusodiasporic perspective that has never been, and can never be, anything other than fundamentally transnational: whether from established canonical voices, to lesser-known or more obscure historical, literary and cultural figures. Here in southeastern New England, one by-now recognized example of this perspective can be found in the work of Portuguese-American poet and novelist Frank X. Gaspar, whose work seems to be in continual search of ways to escape the ethnic *cul-de-sac*, even as he probes its most intimate depths. In his novel *Leaving Pico*, this cultural counterpoint might be best personified by the gay men from New York City who come to his still largely Portuguese-American Provincetown to spend the summer together, and in so doing, leave behind used books that eventually come to assist in providing his Portuguese-American characters with alternatives to the more traditional or culturally specific ways of understanding their own cultural identity, above all those that rely on continued identification with Portuguese maritime explorers from the so-called Age of Discoveries.

Nonetheless, such historical identifications naturally have their limits: not only in the amount of understanding they can impart on the historical realities of cultural encounter between Portuguese explorers and other peoples and communities in the Early Modern World, but also in the limits of the relevance of such navigational exploits and imagined discoveries of usually already inhabited lands to our own present-day understandings of cultural identification, as we attempt to navigate a much more complex set of transnational reference points, to say nothing of the always possible yet often unexpected discoveries of others we might encounter (and perhaps even come to identify with?) along the way.

Perhaps we find those moments in Gaspar's collections of poetry like *A Field Guide to the Heavens* and *Night of a Thousand Blossoms*, where the cultural commonplaces, his "paper routes," are juxtaposed alongside his travel experiences in East Asia during the Vietnam War, his readings of poetry and prose outside the Portuguese, US and Western canons, and his contemplation of constellations, the stars above and their lines of imaginary connection, both to each other and to us, one that might even lift us up and give us greater meaning in the process (Larkosh 2011).²

Other points of departure, however, may offer equally illustrative examples; one that stands out from recent literary production is the Portuguese-Canadian author Erika de Vasconcelos, whose two well-known novels also deftly and provocatively combine Portuguese cultural elements in English with those from other cultures and languages. Her best-known book, *My Darling Dead Ones*, was so successful that it was later translated into Portuguese; it not only revisits the memories of women from the main character Fiona's family who are gone but not forgotten, but also integrates poetic voices in French from her childhood in Montreal, thus creating one of the most concrete and practical incorporations, however unintentional and uncommon, of Canada's official French-English bilingualism into that Portuguese-Canadian literature written primarily in English. Like most if not all Anglophone Canadian literature, it departs from the assumption that the language it uses to articulate a tradition or identity is somehow common or representative of all those within that national grouping, but the fact that French speakers using their own official language can also claim to be Canadian and thus be writing Canadian literature even when it cannot be considered part of the same literary tradition as that written in English, might make those distinction of identity and community that separate Portuguese-American, Portuguese-Canadian and Portuguese-Caribbean literature seem minimal in comparison.

For my part, I remember that after reading the novel, I found these pages fascinating, and ended up asking de Vasconcelos about them at an academic conference. Apparently she didn't find my curious question all that pertinent to her work, probably because it was the kind of question many academics like me are prone to have, one that focuses on a particular detail, sees meaning in it, an important point of concentration that might contribute to a broader discussion. But then again, this is often the kind of comment or question that authors can come to resent, as it means that the reader has read and understands something about the work that was not necessarily understood by the author in the same way, and thus something that may not be intended to be understood a certain

way. Who knows why my curious questions from a U. S. American about how she expressed being Canadian through this particular use of language seemed almost out of place. Then again, why should it matter or not that the reading a novel by another reader might allow the novel to mean something different, something new, something more?

Such considerations are important for those who continue to read and see things in the works of others, and in the work of de Vasconcelos, I too continue to reread and see new things. Her second novel from 2001, *Between the Stillness and the Grove*, incorporates an even more complex transnational premise, that of an Armenian immigrant in Portugal in the early 90s, the years following the end of Soviet Communism and the Nagorno-Karabakh War, and provokes even more curious questions about Lusodiasporic writing as fundamentally and immutably transnational writing. While this transnational connection between Portugal, Canada and Armenia may at first glance be considered a rarity, might it not be in fact de Vasconcelos' own lived perspective on language and cultural transit between Montreal, Toronto and Lisbon that makes such transnational narratives not only possible, but natural, basic, obvious, even unavoidable? Maybe that is why my question to her on the transnational elements in her writing seemed so uninteresting to her. And if that is the case, perhaps it was within the realm of reason not to give it much thought, much less offer a response to it.

And yet, against the complex and varied fabric of narrative and transnational reference that de Vasconcelos has undoubtedly succeeded in weaving in this novel, how to reconcile the fact that in recent years she has reportedly set aside her literary aspirations to more practical ambitions as a Toronto real estate agent? Here a whole new set of irrepressible, curious, if not overtly impertinent questions arise: What led de Vasconcelos to make such a definitive break with the literary world? Was it just a simple question of sales, or of promotion and marketing? Was some sort of formal statistical analysis done—in the downtown office of a Toronto publisher, no doubt—conclusively showing that, say, her work was considered to be too Portuguese for mainstream audiences, or not Portuguese enough for Portuguese-Canadian audiences? At any rate, this real (e)state of things, at least as we perceive it, continues to intervene in culture, in ways increasingly difficult to grasp. Even if one might wish only success to the influential agents and brokers of our cultural reality, success is always predicated on a shifting set of terms and conditions, and there might well be nothing about this pragmatic recognition of the role of material necessities in the making of

what we call success that could be said to make more sense, above all in today's economic and political context.

The vicissitudes of acceptance and artistic freedom, security and precarity, exemplary and not-so-exemplary behavior both within and outside the community, are far from being common and recurrent themes in Luso-American literatures and cultures alone; one need only compare these first two books by de Vasconcelos to those of her Portuguese-Canadian counterpart Anthony De Sa to recognize how the second novel is all too often the repository of what is suppressed or elided in favor of the closer-to-home themes of the semi-autobiographical memoir that brings their work to the attention of their ethnic community. While de Sa's first book from 2008, the collection of short stories titled *Barnacle Love*, appears overall to take a more traditionally nostalgic approach to Toronto's Little Portugal neighborhood, his 2013 novel *Kicking the Sky*, based on his short story "Shoeshine Boy," included in *Barnacle Love*, seems to expand upon its themes of sex and murder, religion and corruption that have also preoccupied other ethnic communities, above all in the riskier moments of their migratory journey, perhaps as inescapably so as those many of us consider to be more familiar (B. Davis, 2013).

Moreover, what authors, academics and cultural agents experience today as economic precarity, lack of recognition, pushing the envelope, or all of the above, cannot but allow for comparison with historical and contemporary figures from a wide range of literary traditions. One that comes to mind, especially as we continue to construct this transnational Lusodiasporic perspective on literature and culture, is the Luso-Trinidadian author Alfred Mendes, whose first two novels from the mid-1930s, *Pitch Lake* and *Black Fauns*, established him as one of the most recognized West Indian authors of his generation. At this point, however, what may prove to be even more transformational than a rereading of his best known work on its own is the renewed cultural and historical context to it provided by literary scholar Michèle Levy, who has edited and finally published his autobiography as well as three collections of his short stories and more, many of which approach the topic of mixed-race relationships between people in one of the most ethnically diverse societies in the Americas, if not the world—to be fair, with a dedication to speaking of race and racial difference that many contemporary Lusodiasporic authors still have not developed to the same degree.

In her introduction, Levy provides valuable biographical information not only in order to understand the lesser-known collected works of short fiction

in connection to the numerous causes for his precarious existence as a writer, but to also showcase the longstanding friendship that Mendes had with other Trinidadian cultural figures; not just Albert Gomes, the editor of the journal *The Beacon* where Mendes published many of his short stories in the 1930s, but most notably his intellectual dialogue with the man considered to be the West Indian intellectual *par excellence*: the Afro-Trinidadian novelist, historian and social critic C. L. R. James, author of *The Black Jacobins*, the classic history of the Haitian Revolution; *Beyond a Boundary*, perhaps the definitive book on cricket, social stratification and racism; and the equally influential *History of Pan-African Revolt*, the book that, especially when its updated editions and reprints are taken into account, seals his reputation as a leading figure in the Black and pan-African movements of the mid-twentieth century.

Seen in the shadow of this more prolific and influential intellectual contemporary, one can only wonder what Mendes' literary legacy would be if he had found a way to balance more equitably his undeniable literary gifts with the material demands placed upon him; even so, Levy's critical contribution of reintroducing and publishing both his autobiography and collected short stories does much to reposition Mendes as a significant point of reference on the kind of expanded Lusodiasporic literary map we are charting here, and leads us to ask about the kinds of conversations this expanded comparative approach to literary studies could resume at this point with other ethnic literatures, and not just those of European origin, but perhaps more importantly with African-American literature, Asian-American, and US Latina/o/x literatures: especially on the precarity that continues to characterize our literary and cultural lives, as well as the enduring importance of questions such as ethnic identity, racialization and class consciousness in movements for political, social and cultural change.

Our Current Issue

It is out of this increasingly interconnected transnational and global context that this latest issue of PLCS, with its topic of Luso-American Literatures and Cultures Today, now emerges. After so much has been published in the field of Luso-American literature and culture at Tagus Press, especially in the Portuguese in the Americas series, I am happy to be able to edit the first issue of PLCS—an internationally recognized academic journal based at a public university situated at the center of one of North America's largest Portuguese-speaking communities—dedicated to Portuguese-American and other Lusodiasporic literatures and cultures.

And now that the time has finally come for such an issue, it is a transnational approach that prevails, drawing on materials not only from communities of Portuguese origin in our local region or elsewhere in the US, but also the cultural production of Cabo Verdean or Brazilian migrant communities who often came to live alongside them, as well as those Portuguese communities who settled in Canada and the Caribbean.

Our clearly stated objective was that this was to be an issue on newness, diversity and difference, on those marginalized and unexpected elements hidden both within and just outside of that which might already appear conventional, normative and familiar. Despite the fact that the field all-too-often remains dominated by the usual interpretations of familiar themes (e.g., family, arrival, the old neighborhood) from we might call the hard core of Portuguese-American writing—i. e., autobiographical memoirs all written by Portuguese-Americans, most of them men—we were still able to attract submissions that highlight the new directions featured here.

So it is at times: what might be considered the most immediate of our cultural concerns, whether in the sense of being local, evident, or urgent, are all-too-often precisely those that established modes of academic research and scholarship has often ended up either neglecting, or even ignoring altogether. But, as this issue demonstrates, there is room for change.³

The idea of a transnational approach to Luso-American culture that encompasses not only the US and Canada but also the Caribbean was developed largely during a lecture visit I made while I was serving as Director of Tagus Press in January of 2017, after a Trinidadian friend of mine now working in the Cayman Islands, Steve Ali, provided me with contacts and suggested that I get in touch with University of the West Indies senior lecturer and linguist Jo-Anne Ferreira. I did, and she invited me to give a talk there on contemporary Goan women's literature in English. I donated some of our publications to their university library on behalf of our press and university, and mentioned that I was about to edit an issue on PLCS on Luso-American Literatures and Cultures Today. When asked by PLCS Co-Editor Mario Pereira to invite outside guest editors, Jo-Anne, with her seminal study on the Portuguese in Trinidad and Tobago about to go into reprinting, was a natural choice.

I wanted to choose someone from Canada as well, someone who not only knew the scene, but also was able to synthesize critically what was new and dynamic in Portuguese-Canadian cultures and bring it into a productive conversation with what is going on here south of the border. I remembered Emanuel da Silva

from conferences in Toronto, then a recent PhD working at the cutting-edge Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and asked him to participate as well. Unfortunately, however, tragic personal circumstances in his family ultimately came to limit his eventual involvement in the project. This loss experienced by a colleague, far greater than the mere loss of an article or any co-editor's participation in an academic journal, served to remind us nonetheless that what is most important in these projects is not always our level of academic achievement or professional engagement, intellectual brilliance or practical commitment, but our deceptively simple capacity to affirm our own all-too-human vulnerability and fragility in the company of others. Luckily I was also able to count on my capable collaborator Maggie Felisberto, a PhD candidate in Luso-Afro-Brazilian Studies and Theory at UMass Dartmouth, editorial assistant at Tagus Press, and a Luso-American author in her own right. Her work in the final stages of this project, especially in the sections for reviews and short fiction, has done much to provide an even more diverse and inclusive perspective to our topic. It is with this fundamental sense of compassion, grounded in the spirit of our own shared humanity and community across cultural, ethnic and political borders, that we present this issue of *PLCS* 32.

The issue's contents were chosen with the main criterion in mind of how they provoke a discussion on the current challenges to Luso-American literatures and cultures. As a fitting lead article to this issue, Carmen Ramos Villar not only provides an incisive study and analysis of the work of one of Portuguese-American Literature's best-known authors, the novelist and nonfiction writer Katherine Vaz, but also offers a renewed and more comprehensive narrative of both literary and critical activity in this ever-emergent literary discipline. Ramos Villar departs from an extensive overview of current anthologies and existing research to consider some of this literary tradition's most salient new directions as it continues to develop in nuance and complexity, characteristics that are articulated most visibly in Vaz's most recent fiction.

In contrast, Daniel Silva takes a more theoretical approach by discussing the recurring questions of global Lusodiasporic cultural subjectivity by way of the concept of the translingual sign; he engages an impressively multifaceted and theoretically complex methodological model, one that combines a wide range of intellectual approaches, from linguistics and literary cultural theory to points of reference from twentieth-century intellectual history that include points as disparate as Gramscian political theory, Russian formalism, Lacanian psychoanalysis,

and perhaps most importantly, examples of material culture such as Espírito Santo festivals and ceramic statuettes of the Galo de Barcelos found in homes and public spaces throughout the Portuguese speaking world.

Naturally, sociological concerns still come into play here; Fabio Scetti's article on the Portuguese community in Montreal explores both its historical origins and current cultural manifestations such as popular festivals and personal testimonies of cultural identity, set within concentric or overlapping political, cultural and linguistic contexts: the officially French-speaking political entity called Quebec that enjoys an exceptional, perhaps even exemplary degree of cultural autonomy in comparison with other Canadian provinces and within the broader context of an officially bilingual and multicultural Canada, and one whose points of reference are relevant far beyond any single ethnic enclave, as other recent research on multidirectionality in Quebec literature and culture has shown (Larkosh 2017).

Clearly, reaching out beyond the boundaries of any one ethnic community is essential to this volume if it to be considered to be providing a new methodological paradigm. Ben Legg's innovative study of transcultural affinities between the Cabo Verdean diaspora of southeastern New England and recent trends from the vibrant Angolan music scene encourage a reconsideration of how cultural identities can never be imagined as static objects, but rather are subject to influx from directions that may come to challenge the very foundations of our understanding of cultural and ethnic identity. Furthermore, Legg's scholarly expertise combined with a deep familiarity of local iterations of a broad range of Lusophone cultures, despite his putative cultural status as an ethnic outsider to Luso-American identity, however broadly we may come to imagine it, ultimately compel us to revisit fundamental questions on the terms of Lusodiasporic cultural belonging in North America and beyond, be it local or transnational.

In the final analysis, literary and cultural critique at its best should always be an in-depth interrogation of a culture's myths of origin and belonging, not an unquestioning validation of them. Bonnie Wasserman's broad-ranging study of Portuguese Jewish presence in the New World is an emblematic example of this kind of destabilizing critique, upending the conventional and totalizing myths of origin away from official narratives of exploration and colonization under the signs and symbols of Roman Catholicism in order to restore a Luso-American historical narrative that has, in fact, always been subject to divergent understandings of belonging, belief, and cultural survival.

Also included in the volume is a forum discussion by recent participants in special events at UMass Dartmouth on the possibilities of decolonizing the field of Luso-Afro-Brazilian Studies, confronting anti-black racism, and recognizing the important role of students of color in the intellectual life of the public university. There are also two interviews with contemporary authors, the aforementioned Katherine Vaz and the emerging Cabo Verdean American poet and activist Jarita Davis. Poetry from Bobby Martinez, a Californian queer poet of Luso, Latino and Native American descent, is juxtaposed with poems from Portuguese American Millicent Borges Accardi, someone also recognized for her work in promoting community among contemporary Portuguese American authors. In addition, two authors also known for their work in academic settings contribute their creative work, which not surprisingly engages the challenges of teaching in the current confluence of often troubling political and institutional trends. Antonio's Ladeira's short story "O professor" from his recent collection *Os monocidistas* is a thought-provoking consideration of the effects of the Internet on literary creativity: when it is translated into English by a group of Portuguese-English translation students under the supervision of their teacher, it takes on yet another layer of meaning. Luso-Canadian poet and Toronto resident Irene Marques rounds out our selection with her unique perspective on living between literatures, languages and cultures.

To complete the volume is a short prose piece from a new voice in Luso-Canadian culture, Angela Ferreira, perhaps precisely the kind of work that tends to evade the often imperfect academic attempts at comprehensive categorization discussed earlier. This text is an experiment in semi-fictional narrative and stream of consciousness, one that incorporates both fictional imagination and actual lived experience as its narrator returns once again to the traditional neighborhood of Luso-Canadian culture in East Vancouver centered around Commercial Drive. In this ethnic neighborhood supposedly in decline, there are still possibilities for unexpected encounters, a possibility that hopefully also extends to all the other spaces that we still inhabit, imagine ourselves belonging to, however complicated that belonging may be, and yes, to the places we still call home.

Some Final Thoughts on Luso-American Literatures and Cultures (And Other Stories We Are Part Of)

And so, as we put the final touches on this latest issue of PLCS, another summer begins. In the local region of southeastern New England, that means the unavoidable start of the still varied and vibrant Portuguese feast season, one that

still stretches across from East Providence (pictured on our cover) and Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard, to Frank Gaspar's Provincetown and virtually everywhere in between (from my home in East Providence, I have already heard the festivities from at least two feasts going on nearby, and it is only the end of May). Like the broadcast range of WJFD, wherever there is a festa within earshot, there is also a palpable example of this culture both living on and reinventing itself in new and unexpected ways at the same time (Larkosh 2008). In spite of any sudden changes or unforeseen disruptions, this culture is one that so many of us remain a part of and emotionally and personally invested in, especially when such cultural shifts make access to cultural activity more immediate and convenient, or the conventional terms of identity and belonging, which were always relatively fluid to begin with, even more inclusive.

As mentioned earlier, there has never been a shortage of traditional male role models around which to shape conventional constructs of Portuguese-American cultural identity; while that of the Portuguese navigator, explorer and discoverer still retains a powerful symbolic hold over many cultural historians as they attempt to provide a suitable historical backdrop for contemporary cultural activity, there are a few more examples from more recent sets of events that one would hope we could discuss before arriving at any definitive conclusions as to the usefulness or relevance of the explorational model of Lusodiasporic cultural identity.

One of the most elaborate examples of this, if one not entirely grounded in proven historical fact, was the narrative of Dighton Rock promoted by the late Dr. Manuel Luciano da Silva, a medical doctor turned community historian, who claimed that a rock in the Taunton River appeared to have a set of inscriptions on it, including the date 1511, which proved the arrival of the Portuguese explorer Miguel Corte-Real on these shores long before the arrival of other Europeans (da Silva 1971/1974).⁴

While the controversy over the origin of the inscriptions has died down over the years, the historical debates it provoked still serve a purpose in realigning the discussion alongside a series of other questions. First, does the Corte-Real foundational narrative or any other narrative of this kind ever need to be fully verifiable in order for so many of "The Portuguese Around Us" to believe it to be so? Beyond whether the evidence of Portuguese here over 500 years ago is true or not, are these explorational narratives, whether real or imagined, really the most important historical and cultural facts on which we base our sense of self? And if so, why do they still matter to us so much?

In the absence of the good Doctor, beloved by so many in the local community, and now departed (and perhaps with him, his amazingly resilient historical thesis), it might now be time to take a serious look elsewhere for alternative models, perhaps back once again to our radio station to think of Edmund Dinis, the founder of WJFD, a man who, years before his decades-long foray into Portuguese-language broadcasting, also held public office as a US District Attorney. On the national stage, he is famous not so much for his radio station, but for the national incident that occurred one summer in the late 1960s during his period of service, one that culminated in his role as prosecutor for the Chappaquiddick trial. For many of us, the cast of characters in this historical event central to US political culture is not just a list to be found in a historical archive, but those names recurrent in our own memories and lived experience: to complete the picture, I often think of Leslie Leland, the local pharmacist in Vineyard Haven, who was not only the lead juror for the Chappaquiddick trial, but who was also the man behind the counter whenever I bought a magazine or filled a prescription at Leslie's Drugstore. In this region, one need not be a Kennedy to be recognized as an identifiable figure in a continually developing local or national portrait, as most if not all of us find an individual entry in the archive somewhere on some forgotten page of a local newspaper or academic journal, and thus perhaps become, at least to some extent, a cultural protagonist in our own right in some time and place, however limited.

And to those who question the academic relevance of any of these minute, perhaps trivial, cultural phenomena, historical remnants, or personal anecdotes, I say: as one of the few ever hired specifically to research and teach the literature and culture of the local Portuguese-American community where I both grew up and am currently situated, and to place it in a transnational and global context, I would consider myself not only entitled, but actually obligated to examine this dispersed collection of cultural activity and historical detail in what I consider to be its proper context: i.e., alongside other forms of literary narrative, both literary, journalistic, cinematic, and yes, personal. And if they are to be subjected to a sustained and rigorous critique, perhaps conventional canons, traditional research methodologies, the styles of academic writing they endorse, and the identifiable politics of strategic quotation they reproduce could also be given the same degree of critical attention, in the recurrent critical interest of making it new, or as our title suggests, today. Hopefully this responsibility to culture, in all of its variegated forms of transit and connection, will not be lost on anyone here.

So of course, this inescapable lens of personal reality, that of each and any one of us, extends naturally, perhaps inescapably, to interpretations of mass media and popular culture in the here and now. I think of two boys from among the countless Portuguese-Americans who lived alongside me as a child on Martha's Vineyard, Chris Rebello and Jay Mello. They were chosen by Hollywood director Stephen Spielberg to play the sons of Sheriff Brody in the summer blockbuster *Jaws*, to this day one of the highest grossing Hollywood films of all time. Each summer I am taken back to that film, more or less involuntarily, as it is replayed on screens and on television, no matter whether I am back on the Island or wherever else I might happen to be in the world, even when teaching or researching something others might consider completely unrelated (Larkosh 2015).

Once again I find myself before these two faces once so familiar from my childhood now up on the screen again, sitting at a kitchen table in a seaside house on East Chop chosen as their home for the film. Or, perhaps more disturbingly, in the pivotal scene of a shark attack, with Chris' frightened expression visible at the surface as he treads water off State Beach, the shark circling him invisibly underwater, and then, miraculously, sparing him once again. This image is now over forty years old, and even now, with Chris Rebello himself having passed away years ago, already an adult with a child of his own, yet still at an age far too young to die as abruptly as he did, it is still difficult to separate these fictional characters from the very real local people chosen to play them.

And so, what of the frightened face of a young Portuguese-American boy in the water, as a by-now legendary Hollywood shark endlessly threatens to devour him? This recurrent iconic image, preserved forever in celluloid, is perhaps as emblematic an image for where we are today, in some inescapably recurrent way, as much as any other we might identify from our own vantage point as we look out over the rich and varied panorama of contemporary Luso-American diasporic identity today in its constant struggle to the death with a mainstream mass media culture that seems destined to devour it. After all, each of us will invariably return to our own undeniably symbolic images and stories like this one, even if they are not yet critically recognized as such, but in which the image we insist on identifying with is always endangered to some extent, at risk, yet still treading water, escaping death for now, even if their fate remains to die, suddenly and inexplicably, on another day in real life years later.

But then again, this is a fact that perhaps only either a diehard fan or a local could ever begin to know existed, much less see the sadly ironic cultural significance in. Perhaps that is one reason why cultural critics and literary theorists are

here: not only to remember and write down such obscure details, but to try to interpret their overarching significance for myself and anyone else in this community who wishes to listen in and respond, much like a weekend radio call-in show broadcast from across the Sound in another language. Yes, it may be late, the show almost over, but at least for now, we are still here, and the lines are still open.

And as this endless and repeating New England summer wears on, it will also no doubt be difficult to ignore, say, how Cabo Verdean Independence Day celebrations come only a day after the Fourth of July, thus underscoring the ways in which there are always things happening on the day after any cultural celebration that extend its field of signification and add yet another dimension to it. Such is the case of recent Cabo Verdean-American literary activity as well, perhaps most notably in the work of another cultural neighbor, also from across the water if you will: the Falmouth-based poet and prose writer Jarita Davis.

While her poems from the 2016 collection *Return Flights* focused on her exploration of Cabo Verdean culture, both in southeastern Massachusetts and back in Cabo Verde, a recent short prose piece takes us on a markedly different tack. Titled, perhaps somewhat ironically, “Creating a Positive Self Image,” Davis opts to reference here not the members of her local Cabo Verdean family or extended community, or related elements of Cabo Verdean language or culture she rediscovers in a voyage home, but of all things, a series of black characters from US television shows:

not some monkey eating bananas in public not waiting on the corner like a prostitute not leaning out the window shouting like in the projects not poking out those liver lips til they're thick enough to chop off & fry up for dinner not rollerskating in the house like Tootie—not on the linoleum!! not brushing up your eyebrows all thick and bushy to look tough or somethin not a thousand braids sticking up all over your head, runnin around like a little pickaniggy, not my child, not nappy headed like your cousin Felicia if you stay under that dryer & leave those rollers alone til I say so not all that wild hair in your face so the boys hardly get a good look atcha not Vanessa Williams' fake light eyes that look like somebody just pucked right in em not with your head always stuck in some book ruining your eyes til you have to wear bottle thick glasses & no boy will marry you not Sanford & Son not Good Times not What's Happening not What's Happening Now (J. Davis 2019)

Here the models for cultural identity are not positive ones to be emulated and followed, but ones considered best avoided: among the identifiable references to

anyone familiar with the television of the last thirty to forty years is to the character Tootie, played by the actress Kim Fields on the 1980s TV series *The Facts of Life*. She was the youngest and only black character living in Mrs. Garrett's otherwise all-white boarding house, and as we see here, she was usually characterized on the basis of her misbehavior. Not just for those in the United States, but also for so many people living and consuming culture on the edges of the US empire, whether the random fragments and racialized characters of US television shows, films and music, no matter where we lived in the last days of the twentieth century. These were also unavoidable "facts of life," whether as part of mainstream mass media, or now as part of Cabo Verdean-American cultural critique, on the unavoidable simplifications of race and its impact on one's sense of cultural belonging and yes, one's "positive self image." As Davis so deftly points out, our literary and cultural traditions have not always produced models for creating this kind of self-image to the same degree for everyone, and in such cases where racism is still clearly an issue, a healthy dose of sarcasm, satire or even anger may well be in order.

But once again, why are we here really, and speaking of Luso-American literatures and cultures today, no less? Is it to make us all feel better in a difficult cultural and political moment, to stroke each other's fragile egos and self-esteem, and tell each other that everything is okay, with me, you and other minor characters, as we all attempt to reaffirm, in our own ways and often against all odds, the value of the commonalities we are still said to share? Perhaps, especially if what is at stake here is an ethnic culture or set of cultures characterized not only by shows of community and affinity, but also one beset with grudges and animosities of equally long standing.

As I conclude, however, I cannot help but think of two perhaps diametrically opposed contemporary cultural figures. First, there is the internet comic commonly known as Jeffrey Popsick, whose series of prank YouTube videos featuring his "Portuguese Grandmother," set in a 'casa portuguesa' somewhere in metropolitan Toronto, seem to represent the most uproarious, unapologetically irreverent, and even nihilistic potential, both in our present and future interactions with previous generations, language and traditions, as well as our own all-too-often insufficiently ironized sense of cultural identity.

And at the other end of the spectrum, there is the university psychology professor Laurie Santos, a Portuguese-American from New Bedford, whose semester-long course on happiness is the most popular in the history of the Ivy League college where she teaches, receiving rave reviews from the overworked,

stressed-out aspirants of a future transnational elite, who at some point will also have had to ask their own questions about what success really means.

In the end, is there anyone or anything in this minor culture of limited reach and resources that can “say it right, say it all”? That is, what not only can help us calm our cynicism, sarcasm and hopelessness in the present moment, but also learn from and teach others, perhaps even in an emotionally sincere and earnest way, what it might mean to be truly happy? Or might it still have something more to do with not taking ourselves too seriously, being able to laugh at ourselves at least somewhat self-effacingly and honestly, perhaps even being able to take a joke that is clearly on us? Most likely we need a bit of both, both in our own lives and in our literature and culture, in order for them to be considered of a richness and complexity we can both be proud of and find affirming, character faults and all.

Whichever you choose, I do hope you enjoy your issues, including the one you find before you here today.

NOTES

1. I recently visited the current owner of WJFD 97.3 FM, Henry Arruda, down in their studios in the South End of New Bedford. He had wanted to speak to me because of something I had said to him and longtime radio host Dionísio Garcia after the Ana Moura concert in Boston a few weeks before. I had told him how important WJFD was in giving me a way to listen to spoken Portuguese in my teens and early 20s, as well as learning about Portuguese popular music. When I arrived, we discussed what I might be able to do to help WJFD protect its broadcasting range in southeastern Massachusetts from encroachment by applications on its edges by mainstream commercial stations, usually owned by large conglomerates with immense political pull at the Federal Communications Commission in Washington. Even as this kind of community outreach remains an important part of my work in Luso-American cultures, this is a much more personal issue for me. I dedicate this introduction to the local communities that have welcomed me and so many others over the years, but also to WJFD and to many more years of uninterrupted broadcasting free from interference, be it from other transmissions or from other entities unaware of its importance and value to Portuguese speakers in the region.

2. As for what Gaspar is doing at the moment, in connection to our current topic of Luso-American Literatures and Cultures Today, I guess that I, as his current literary editor at Tagus Press, can perhaps answer that question better than anyone apart from Frank himself. As I complete this issue of *PLCS* 32, he is out in southern California working on a final draft of a new book of poetry and accompanying prose fiction titled *The Poems of Renata Ferreira*, to be published in the Portuguese of the Americas Series of Tagus Press.

3. Many thanks as well to my local fellow travelers and collaborators at Tagus Press Mario Pereira and Maggie Felisberto for their unflagging dedication and hard work, my MA students Matt de Matos and Orlando Ramos for the courage and willingness to take their work in Luso-American cultural studies to an advanced level with me, and colleagues Bonnie Wasserman and Ben Legg for their expert insights from the always certain cultural interstices of Luso-American community and identity.

4. The edition that I refer to here is the Portuguese edition of 1974, published in Porto three years after Dr. da Silva published the original English edition in 1971. I had the chance to meet Dr. da Silva in May of 2004 at the Dighton Rock Museum that explains his theory, years before I had even begun work as a professor of Portuguese language and literature. Even then, however, it appears that Dr. da Silva already had plans for me and my research, long before I had any clear idea of what my professional involvement in this culture would turn out to be—that is, at least if the dedication he wrote in the copy of his book he gave to me is any indication: “Ao Dr. Christopher Larkosh. Como lembrança da sua visita ao Museu da Pedra de Dighton, ofereço com sinceros votos para que venha a escrever em inglês a odisséia dos Portugueses na Nova Inglaterra desde o tempo dos Corte-Reais. Com o grande abraço do autor, Manuel Luciano da Silva, 14 de Maio de 2004.” No wonder that so many of us still struggle with letting go of these perhaps overly ambitious historical assignments in Luso-American literary and cultural studies, even today.

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