

## (Re)claiming the Heritage: The Narratives of Manuel Veiga

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**Abstract.** Manuel Veiga's concern in *Odju d'Agu* and *Diário das Ilhas* is a specific Cape Verde to replace the colonial legacy. *Odju d'Agu* is a textual prescription for becoming Cape Verdean. It is rooted in the language and approach of Cape Verde's oral storytelling tradition and framed with a tale-telling session to show that the tradition can serve to (dis)articulate the hierarchies of the past and point the way to a progressive future. *Diário das Ilhas* is a textual itinerary for the discovery of Cape Verde. It imaginatively and poetically (re)invents a past for the archipelago that showcases the importance of Cape Verde's African heritage and gives voice to Jorge Barbosa and a number of other Cape Verdean poets. In both of those texts, Manuel Veiga seeks to address the issue of a postcolonial identity for Cape Verde, (re)capture an historical initiative for the Cape Verdean community and (re)site Cape Verde as the locus of its own experience.

Manuel Veiga has always vigorously advocated the unique features of Cape Verdean culture. Anyone who studies the *Diskrison Strutural di Lingua Kaboverdianu* and the *Introdução à Gramática do Crioulo*; probes the essays in *A Sementeira* and in *África, Voz di Povo, Fragmentos, Pré-Textos*, and other periodicals; takes note of his work with the Instituto Nacional de Cultura and the Associação de Escritores Caboverdianos, or follows his progress in the National Assembly knows this. This essay will argue that *Odju d'Agu* and *Diário das Ilhas* contribute by structuring a historically and linguistically specific Cape Verde to supplant colonialism's construct.

An unfamiliar toponymy in both is an obvious sign. Goltarpu and Kukuli are Veiga's terms for Portugal and Africa. The *baías* of Milho, Algodão, Cana Sacarina, Palmeiras, Dragoeiro, Flores, Chacina, Santa Maria, and Porto Grande are Veiga's names for the islands of Santiago, Fogo, Santo Antão, Boa Vista, São Nicolau, Brava, Maio, Sal, and São Vicente. If it is correct that "to name a place is to announce discursive control over it by the very act of inscription" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998: 183), then what Veiga does is make those places Cape Verdean.

That having been noted, let us now turn to *Odju d'Agu*, which should be read as a textual prescription for being reborn Cape Verdean. Veiga's text is rooted in Cape Verde's oral storytelling tradition. Its language, the tales it tells, its narrative approach, and its endorsement of the presence of an audience all acknowledge a veneration for the Cape Verdean storytelling tradition. But Veiga does not merely pay lip service to the format; he shows how the tradition can be mobilized to dismantle the colonialist, classist hierarchies of power that mark Cape Verde for much of its lifetime and to map out the direction to a properly Cape Verdean future.

In a 1996 study, George Lang felt compelled to cite *Odju d'Agu* as "[t]he most ambitious work in the [Cape Verdean] Crioulo canon and one of [the] few sustained works in creoles world-wide" (58). That Lang felt obligated to point out Veiga's work as so singular, because it used Cape Verdean, requires us to probe the importance of Veiga's choice of language. In its hybridity the Cape Verdean language is representative of Cape Verdeanity's more than five-hundred-years-old process of development. Everyone in Cape Verde is proficient in Cape Verdean (see Lesourd and Réaud-Thomas 108). Veiga's composition of *Odju d'Agu* in Cape Verdean denies the monopoly of literary expression to the Portuguese language (see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989: 38). *Odju d'Agu* confirms the validity of Cape Verdean as a literary language as much as does the *Diskrison Strutural di Lingua Kaboverdianu* the worth of Cape Verdean as a legitimate vehicle for scholarly writing.

The casting of *Odju d'Agu* in Cape Verdean is also a speech act to increase the prestige of the language in the eyes of its detractors and proponents. Veiga and others who have sought to contribute to Cape Verdean literature through the medium of the national language have had to face a centuries-old disdain for it. Chelmicki called Cape Verdean "idioma o mais perverso, corrupto e imperfeito, sem construção, sem gramática, e que não se pode escrever" (2: 331). Costa said that it is "um legado do escravo boçal e inculto que não pôde

aprender melhor o português dos antigos senhores" (25). As Veiga himself has observed: "Durante muitos séculos o nosso inimigo procurou convencer-nos de que a nossa língua não era um facto cultural. Durante muito tempo, ser culto, era saber imitar o colonizador. Imitar a sua língua, a sua filosofia, a sua religião, a sua maneira de pensar e sentir" (1994: 198).

It is especially important to note the use of the Cape Verdean language in *Odju d'Agu* as a commitment to authenticity. This shows that the dramas of the Cape Verdean experience can be constructed in a Cape Verdean way. Moreover, the overwhelming use of the Sotavento variant from Santiago, the one most removed from formerly imperial Portuguese and the one associated with the earliest settled part of the Cape Verdean archipelago where the African presence is most marked, represents a zeal to find the most exclusively Cape Verdean mode of doing so. As Veiga has expressed it: "O facto é que para transmitir a mensagem de Odju d'Agu, a melhor língua em que eu a podia exprimir era em crioulo—nada mais—porque é uma vivência moldada em crioulo" (Laban 2: 589).

In the tales that it tells, Manuel Veiga's book is about the (re)constitution of Cape Verde in a post-colonial context. It does not organize an emplotment of the (re)constitution process itself but rather presents four stories that exemplify some of the issues that must be resolved before the shaping of an authentically Cape Verdean Cape Verde is possible. People from three of them undertake a quest for an appropriate place in the Cape Verde being born at the time of independence; the fourth person tells the story of the quest of each of the other three.

The first of these accounts is the tale of Zé di Béba, the son of an *assimilado*, absentee, landowning family with holdings on Santiago and Fogo. Zé di Béba's story is a lesson in how to unassimilate from the colonial master's standards and overcome cultural alienation. He must learn how to do without the comforts of wealth, how to leave the life of a *branku* behind, and how to be humble. To discover what it is to be Cape Verdean, he must learn that returning to Cape Verde is not a facile, romantic journey.

The second is the tale of Pedrinhu, the son of a tenant of Zé di Béba's family. Pedrinhu's story is a lesson in how to learn the best way to help build the nation. Although early on he hears the messages of anticolonialism and antiapartheid, it takes him some time to feel free enough to apply the benefits of his education to the betterment of his people. When he does, although having committed himself to enter the priesthood, Pedrinhu finds his voca-

tion is service to the people outside of the church. He comes to understand that his independent way of being and seeing is incompatible with the church, which seems more an extension of colonialist authoritarianism than a refuge and nurturer for all the people.

The third tale is of Rejina, the daughter of a prominent family from Fogo, who had been in love with Pedrinhu. Rejina represents the potential of the privileged to see the inequities of a system that benefits her class and to work to disassemble it. With Mamadú, an African and probably Guinean, she must unassimilate from a colonialist imposition of Afrophobia, without moving to Afrophilia. The story of Mamadú and Rejina is a lesson in defining a relationship with Africa. They wind up discovering that it is possible to appreciate Europe without having to submit themselves to it, that it is possible to be oriented by Africa without having to abandon what in Cape Verde is not purely African. They succeed in perceiving that even though Cape Verde is not Africa, Africa is in Cape Verde.

In those three tales, each person's process of learning is precipitated by a sense of alienation arising from the colonial experience. Each one's decision to return to Cape Verde is a move toward the dismantling of class barriers and signifies a rejection of the colonialist teaching that a colonized people could only be civilized if they are assimilated into the colonizers' culture. It also indicates a recognition of the value and presence of an African heritage in Cape Verde, as well as a commitment to active participation in building an authentically Cape Verdean nation. This discovery involves, as Veiga has said elsewhere, the notion that "o centro para todas essas personagens, a terra-mãe, é mesmo Cabo Verde" (Laban 2: 564).

Palu di Djodja, the presenter of Veiga's tales, is a traditional storyteller, who has in him the collective wisdom of society (Lang 58). His own story is also part of the fabric of Veiga's work. In point of fact, what frames the book is the story of what happens to him, to his family and to those in the audience who listen to him tell his tale. The absence of the parents of Djon di Mana, Palu's grandson, casts Palu and Djon in roles of the Cape Verdean drama, which is as much theirs as of the characters in the tales Palu tells. While those tales are about those who come home, Palu's and Djon's is the drama of those at home who wait for the emigrants' return. That final ingathering is what allows Veiga to conclude his story.

All of that acknowledges a veneration for the Cape Verdean storytelling tradition exemplified in the texts collected by Tomé Varela da Silva and by

Elsie Clews Parsons. That storytelling aspect of *Odju d'Agua*, which is the center of some dozen of the book's fifty chapters, has not always been recognized, and if recognized, not studied. Laban's interview of Veiga does not confront it, nor do Semedo (1987) and Romano (1988) in their essays. Whatever the recognition of the narrational mode of *Odju d'Agua*, it is usually limited to an acknowledgement of that aspect of Manuel Veiga's book. That is as far as Duarte (1987: 11; 1998: 175) and Lang (59) go.

Veiga's narrative frame, however, does more than acknowledge the fact of traditional Cape Verdean storytelling. For one thing, it presents that art as discourse vital to Cape Verde's progress in a modern world. The onset of the storytelling is instigated by a younger generation of students, who are the audience, particularly by Djon di Mana. Those young people had decided to recover the traditional story, about which they had been told by their school teacher and of which he said that it was at risk of disappearing in the face of more technologically complex forms of entertainment. When the tale-telling begins, the traditional opening formula for the traditional story is kept for the opening of the real and historical story of Zé di Béba: "Kusa ma kusa [...] éra un bes un rapasinho ki txomaba Zé di Béba" (12). What Manuel Veiga gives us, however, is not the traditional narrative in the sense of generalized content. Its telling begins on a specific day, its characters have specific histories, and they travel to specific places.

Of course the specificity is deliberate. Palu di Djódja's response, in which he insists that he will tell "un storiaiferenti" (11), clearly underlines that intent. Yet, this "stóriaiferenti" offers more than a mere narrative of people, places and events that could be part of the historical world of Palu's audience. While the primary purpose of the traditional story is to entertain and to enliven a difficult life, the active and engaged reaction of Palu's audience indicates that the purpose of his narrative is to stimulate and provoke. Naturally the members of this audience interact with each other. They comment on the stories Palu gives them. They tell him when they like his tale and when they have trouble with it. They tell him what they want to hear more about. They remind him where he left off when it is time to continue after an interval in the telling.

More importantly, however, the students who are Palu's audience take what Palu gives them in his tale and explore what it means for them and their lives. They reveal a critical and questioning impulse. Their enthusiasm is so strong that when they are in school their teacher suggests that they put on a play to dramatize what they have heard as well as to interpret and explore



their reactions. The play consists, however, not of an adaptation but of their continuation. With their play, the youths contribute to the richness and the potentiality of the old man's material and prove themselves potential contributors to the well-being of their country in its first moments of freedom. "Stória éra diferente, Ka so kel ki Palu di Djódja konta, mas tanbe kel ki mininus prende y sa ta prende ku independénsa di ses txon, ku liberdadi di ses povu y pugresu di ses téra" (54).

In the pedagogical process that allows for that kind of active involvement, freedom must be accompanied by discipline and patience. We note that the young people in Palu's audience react unfavorably to parts of Pedrinhu's story, perhaps because, as Moser speculates, something is "above the heads of [Palu's] young listeners" (713). Thus, it is important to note that, here, through Palu, Veiga suggests that in addition to being a joy, learning is also a challenge: "Sabi e kunpanhéru di kasabi. Pa nhos xinti sabi, nhos ten ki konxe kasabi, nhos ten ki sabe ma kasabi di oxi pode ser sabi de manhan, ma kasabi di un pode ser sabi di out" (91).

Much of what we observe in Veiga's configuration of the young students in the learning process related in *Odju d'Agü* is reminiscent of the thinking of Paulo Freire, who did share his view with Cape Verdean educators in the 1970s. The interactive and dialogic pedagogy between Palu and his audience in Veiga's book seems to be what is described in these words from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their re-consideration and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own" (81).

If *Odju d'Agü* should be read as a textual prescription for being reborn Cape Verdean, then *Diário das Ilhas* should be read as a textual itinerary for the (re)discovery of Cape Verde's roots. It is a kind of ship's log that, although plotting the trajectory of Cape Verdean history from its beginning, sets a course different from that which had been operative during the time of the colony. It accumulates relevant factors, presents the impact of those factors on Cape Verdean history and explores the ways those factors shaped contemporary Cape Verde. It also articulates those facts through a distinctively Cape Verdean voice.

Given the PAIGC's publication of its history before independence, and, more recently, Elisa Andrade's release of her account, considering the scholarly project to put together a history of Cape Verde since the coming of inde-

pendence leading to the appearance of the first two volumes of the *História Geral de Cabo Verde*, and keeping in mind his own interest in this kind of undertaking as president of the Instituto Nacional de Cultura in the early 1990s and as a scholar himself, it is only natural that Manuel Veiga should decide to articulate his own version of the Cape Verdean past. It seems evident, however, that his intent in *Diário das Ilhas* was to serve other needs. Recall that the coverage field of the PAIGC's account was broader than what Veiga had in mind. Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau had each been going its own way since late 1980; it is possible that the tale of Rejina and Mamadú in *Odju d'Agu* alludes to those separate directions. Remember also that the *História Geral de Cabo Verde* depended on archival and secondary material from primarily Portuguese sources. A cursory glance at the contents of the two volumes of the *História Geral de Cabo Verde: Corpo Documental* and at the bibliography to each volume of the *História Geral de Cabo Verde* itself confirms such a reliance. That debt might suggest to some that no matter how heavily involved the Cape Verdean scholars were in the project, the tilt of any scholarly account will inevitably be Eurocentric. As Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant point out through a citation from Eduard Glissant in their little book, from which Veiga takes one of *Diário das Ilhas*'s epigraphs, the methodology of historians gives the post-colonial writer access only to the colonial chronicle, which reveals that which supports the colonialist viewpoint. There is then, we may extrapolate from them, no anticolonial chronicle. Therefore, only the imagination or a poetic knowledge can lead to what the colonial chronicle does not reveal. "Seule la connaissance poétique, la connaissance romanesque, la connaissance artistique, pourra nous déceler, nous percevoir, nous ramener évanescents aux réanimations de la conscience" (38). It is in that kind of alternative context that *Diário das Ilhas* should be viewed: as a narrative that elaborates a portrait of its own Cape Verde, supplanting the authoritarian vision left to us by the colonialist discourse of a bygone era and recognizing the contribution of a formerly marginalized originating people to the formation of Cape Verde.

Veiga's most important objective in *Diário das Ilhas* is to reassess the importance of the African contribution to Cape Verde. The way he does this is to go back to the moment in time when the African and European forebearers of Cape Verde first encountered each other, taking a direction that colonial historians and chroniclers did not follow. He affirms the predominance of Africanness in the story of Cape Verde and its people over the

Europeanness, even during the colonial era. Pedro Monteiro Cardoso's "Ode a África" is the text that defines the esteem for Africa that underlies that position.

To begin with, Veiga establishes the African forebearers of today's Cape Verdeans as the protagonists of the story. We may note, for example, that when the first Portuguese arrive on the coast of Africa it is they whom the text considers strange, not the Africans. Clearly, the text judges Africans morally superior at that moment of transition from a stage of freedom in their *história milenária* to another of captivity. In contrast to colonialist history, the text acknowledges the value of the culture and society of Africa and argues that its people have never been at odds with it, but rather have worked symbiotically within it.

Veiga's text also seeks to convert the Africans's impotence in a new existence into an inherent power. It affirms that enslaved Africans were the foundation on which colonial Cape Verde sat. Even though they seemed to be onlookers, not actors, in the drama of the nature and the exercise of hegemony in pre-independence Cape Verde, it argues that they were the strength at the base of the social triangle that had to carry the weight of the crown and its vassals. The "poder' da base era o mais significativo" (118).

In addition, Veiga's text reconfigures the cultural losses the enslaved Africans suffered and makes it clear that they were the segment of the populace in the early days with the greater capacity for adaptation to new circumstances. One area was in religion. Here, "procuraram, lá onde era possível, harmonizar a palavra da Bíblia com a da sua própria Tradição" (113). A new language is also an organic part of the new culture. It is a vehicle for the expression of the physical suffering and the existential anguish of the descendants of Africa. It forms aphorisms that analyze their reality. It is the tool that allows them to understand the tasks they need to undertake. It is the expression of the unfolding culture.

Veiga's text also rejects a *pathos* of the tragedy of loss in favor of an admiration for the spirit of resistance in the face of that loss. To underline the nature of the deprivation, the text gives a litany of the outrages suffered: uprooting, destruction, coercion, sacrifice, subservience, etc. It compensates them for their pain with a notation of the acts of resistance: a display of bravado when the Europeans showed up on the coast of Africa for the first enslavements, suicide on the way from Africa, sabotage whenever possible, escape into the interior of the new land, an Africanization of the environment and Portuguese culture and language, and ultimately the creation of a new society.



In contrast to *Odju d'Agui*, *Diário das Ilhas* is in Portuguese, and, so, very much as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin might have remarked, in "the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages" (1989: 38). Veiga commandeers the Portuguese language to deny the colonialist a major role in the construction of Cape Verde's history as he works to make the main trunk of its past a link to an ancestral Africa. Since Veiga makes use of the colonizer's language to reach his goal, it would not be surprising to see that he uses some of the colonizer's narrative traditions as well, especially those most associated with the texts of the early years of the expansion. In some cases, what he does seems to be to replace some components of the Portuguese tradition with elements of his own. For example, Veiga's title, *Diário das Ilhas*, seems to allude to a title such as *Diário da Viagem de Vasco da Gama*. Any mention of Vasco da Gama will, of course, conjure up Luís de Camões, who used the voyage of Vasco da Gama as a pretext to elaborate a history of Portugal. Manuel Veiga also uses the motif of the voyage to frame his text and, in truth, as the metaphor for Cape Verdean history. His pretext is Jorge Barbosa's posthumously published 1966 poem "Relato da Nau," which, because it relates and recuperates a first and emblematic voyage of a slave ship from the African continent, must truly be considered the portal through which we all have to pass to access that past hidden by versions of the colonialist narrative.

A second point of contact is Jorge's vision from the Pico de António. His contemplation of the geologic establishment of the islands, seeing them passed in review before him, with a catalog of features associated with each island has to remind us of the "Ilha dos Amores" segment in *Os Lusíadas* (X: 76 ff.), where Gama is privileged to see the consequences of his 1497 voyage for Portugal's future history. The difference between those two visions is, of course, that Gama's is a sort of textual reward for his *ousadia* while Jorge Barbosa's is part of the process of anointing him.

In a remarkable instance, Veiga seeks to contest rather than replace something of the colonialist account, recalling a similar contestation in Virgílio Pires's "Titina." In this case, what Veiga does is conjure up an ironic (re)awakening of consciousness for Diogo Gomes, one of the original discoverers of Cape Verde and the only one who remains present there, in the form of a statue overlooking Praia's harbor from a vantage point high on the Platô. In his presentation, Veiga juxtaposes Diogo Gomes's recollection of the rivalries between himself, António da Nóli, and Cadamosto to the presence in his,

Gomes's mind of the putative ideology of crusade and discovery, and what he forgot or might not ever have known about Cape Verde. The words Veiga assigns to the hovering consciousness he creates for his Diogo Gomes make it clear that Gomes articulates an attitude of callous and petty cynicism about the Portuguese overseas adventure. Reduced to its human and petty aspirations, this profile of the *navegador* transforms the officialized panegyric verbiage of the speech (quoted in part by Veiga) with which the statue was unveiled in 1958 into the discourse of burlesque.

To imbue his story with plausibility, Veiga articulates it through another Cape Verdean, a poet of course, Jorge Barbosa. As the one founder of modern Cape Verdean literature who was almost exclusively a poet, Jorge Barbosa was one of the poets who have most acutely explored the factors contributing to a Cape Verdean identity, and, as Veiga has noted, the poet in whom he reads himself (1994: 26). Veiga gives his readers an indirect paraphrase of what Barbosa would have perhaps uttered if he had elaborated on his poems about Cape Verde, intersecting his material with many of Barbosa's own poems; with poems by Eugénio Tavares, Pedro Cardoso, António Nunes and Amílcar Cabral; with citations from the *História Geral de Cabo Verde* and from manuscripts relevant to Cape Verde's past; and with references to Palu di Djódja, *Odju d'Agu's* tale-teller.

Understandably, a noticeable portion of Veiga's text is occupied with a process of weaving Jorge Barbosa into the fabric of the narrative, as was the case with Palu di Djódja in *Odju d'Agu*. One sign of this process is Jorge's previously mentioned ascent up the Pico de António, practically the center of Santiago, Cape Verde's largest, most populated, longest populated and first populated island. If the visit to the Pico de António integrates Jorge into the landscape of Cape Verde, his visit to Nhô Nacho, the traditionalist teller of tales and oracle of the people, after he comes down from the Pico de António, represents Jorge's integration into its popular culture. Their conversation in the scenario of rustic, rural, unmechanized Cape Verde in the interior of Santiago touches on the recurring themes of Cape Verdean existence: hunger and want in the times of drought, forced emigration to São Tomé, departure to America in search of the dollar, and the possibilities of Europe.

This legitimization of Jorge as narrator empowers him to be the filter of the story that Veiga presents to his readers. Jorge is, however, not to be the ur-narrator of the Cape Verdean story. Rather, he is a transitional narrator, a successor to Pálu di Djodja. Significantly, just before Jorge begins his work,

he reads the concluding words of Palu's narrative, where Palu tells his audience that he is tired and his story incomplete. Those remarks seem to mark Jorge's as a complementary narrative to Palu's. Yet Jorge's time as the narrator will also come to an end when his work is done and his energy spent. As the chronology of the story of Cape Verde he projects draws closer to his present, the poet, tired of "tanto escrever sobre a história sem História" (1997: 215), and doubting he can keep on with the saga and the future, gives his work over to a popular prophet who recites lines from António Nunes's "Poema de amanhã," "contando [the better future that] a oratura ainda não sabe ou não pode escrever" (217). This passing on of a narrative legacy suggests that neither learned nor popular culture alone can completely articulate the discourse of Cape Verde and that as Veiga himself reminds us in the epilogue to *Diário das Ilhas*, there is a third voice yet to be heard from.

Inasmuch as that third voice has yet to speak, this would be an appropriate juncture to recall what the first two voices have offered up. For one thing they have put forward an impressive demonstration of language's possibilities, whether it be to show the worth of the national one, or whether it be to adapt the one left by colonialism to national uses. For another, they have spoken from the point of view of the people from whom they come. Thirdly, they have told the people's stories. And, finally, they have left the way open for those stories to be continued.

It is not just that there will be new storytellers, perhaps Djon di Mana among them. It is that with the recovery of what had been cast aside or fallen by the wayside and with the return to the wellspring of those who had departed, the groundwork has been laid for Cape Verdeans to apply their inner resources and the resources of their heritage to the building of their own future Cape Verde. Certainly that appears to be the hope contained in the imaginative retelling of a different Cape Verdean past and in the pedagogic dynamism of the new traditional tale-telling. Perhaps Veiga's third storyteller is only waiting to see what that future will be like before beginning another *stória*.

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