

## Notes on the Historical Context of *Claridade*

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**Abstract.** This essay takes its starting point from the premise that a single coherent project for the publication of *Claridade* never existed, either in terms of the review's contents or of its actual physical layout. After demonstrating that three very different incarnations of *Claridade* appeared at three distinct historical moments (1936-7; 1947-49; 1959-60), I set about examining each "series" in light of the specific date in which it appeared. Paying particular attention to the selection and treatment of texts written in Creole, I identify several clear-cut changes in the placement and framing of these texts that occurred between the first and the second series. This, in turn, indicates that the purpose and reception of *Claridade* changed significantly over the course of its publication, as the editors sought different solutions to the problem of how to provide a metaphoric entry of Cape Verdean culture into the "Portuguese" text.

The literary review *Claridade* has undoubtedly received more critical attention than any other single publication in the history of Cape Verdean literature. As it occupies a central, yet ambiguous, place in the literature of the archipelago, *Claridade* has been the object of much praise; yet, at the same time it has received its equal share of negative critical responses. The review's founders were among the first to investigate the specificity of Cape Verdean experience, basing their studies on carefully documented customs, traditions and cultural practices of the islands, and the initial publication of *Claridade* in 1936 clearly marks an important historical moment in the process of imagining Cape Verdean identity as unique and autonomous from that of

metropolitan Portugal. For *Claridade's* critics, nonetheless, much of its contents have been judged disappointing since its contributors never venture so far as to issue a proclamation of political independence, or to affirm the centrality of an African component in Cape Verdean cultural identity.

This latter position, which took the *claridosos* to task for their emphasis on the twin themes of drought and emigration, was first staked out by the generation of nationalist writers who appeared on the Cape Verdean literary scene in the 1950s and 60s. Influenced by the philosophies of Négritude or by pan-African theories of liberation, writers such as Manuel Duarte ("Caboverdianidade e africanidade" [1954]) and Onésimo Silveira (*Conscientização na literatura caboverdiana* [1963]) accused the review's founders of grounding their literary project on a simplistic and escapist critique of the problems facing the Cape Verdean population.<sup>1</sup> Attempting to insert a model of Cape Verdean experience into a more generalized debate regarding the independence of Portugal's African colonies, this later generation also faulted the *claridosos* for having committed the unpardonable error of having placed too much emphasis on the European origins of the Creole culture and language that they wished to promote.<sup>2</sup>

While these accusations may appear a bit extreme today, they accurately reflect the polemical nature of the debate regarding *Claridade's* significance that took place in the decades prior to Cape Verdean independence.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult, however, to interpret these negative criticisms as directed at the final issues of the review, published in 1959 and 1960. Appearing at a moment when the idea of independence had begun to circulate in Portugal's *províncias ultramarinas*, these issues contained material that was far less problematic for the younger generation. Indeed, several of *Claridade's* collaborators at this point were also associated with the fight against Portuguese colonialism.<sup>4</sup> In the same vein, it is also very unlikely that the movement's detractors were addressing the first three issues of *Claridade*, published in 1936 and 1937. At that early date, it would have been nearly impossible to attempt more than a simple revindication of Cape Verdean political and cultural autonomy. In contrast, the decade of the 1940s represents an important transitional period, both in the history of the review and in the history of Portugal's colonial empire. At that time, some ten years after the appearance of *Claridade's* inaugural issues, its founders' cultural project was to undergo several important transformations.

In order to accurately assess these transformations, it is essential to return the review to its original socio-historical context and to examine each issue of

*Claridade* in light of the specific moment in which it appeared. Only through an analysis that takes into account the attendant conditions surrounding *Claridade's* publication will it be possible to identify and understand the subtle changes to the project that took place over the twenty-four year period that the review was published. As I shall demonstrate in the analysis that follows, it is not a coincidence that the most controversial issues of *Claridade* (numbers four to seven) are those that were published between 1947 and 1949. Presenting a view of Cape Verdean culture that was less engaged in a thoroughly defined political project, these are undoubtedly the most problematic issues when viewed from a pro-independence perspective. These issues appeared at a time when the Portuguese empire in Africa was undergoing significant structural changes that resulted in new concrete demands and more subtle ideological shifts. In keeping with these shifts, the pages of *Claridade* register at this time a seemingly more ambivalent response to the hegemonic discourses that aimed to justify the continued existence of the Portuguese empire in Africa.

A preliminary step to understanding the choices and restrictions that the *claridosos* were forced to confront in the 1940s entails the recognition that a single coherent project for the publication of *Claridade* never existed, either in terms of the review's content or of its actual physical layout. While not explicitly identified as belonging to different series, three very different incarnations of the review appeared at three different historical moments. There are, of course, several elements that remained constant throughout *Claridade's* existence: it was always published in Mindelo, on the Island of São Vicente; after the fourth issue the director remained the same;<sup>5</sup> and each issue also contained work by at least two of three figures considered as the movement's founders—Baltasar Lopes, Manuel Lopes and Jorge Barbosa. However, some notable changes to the physical layout of the review did take place between the first and the second series. When the review reappeared in 1947, after ten years of silence, the initial length of eight to ten pages was extended to an average of forty-five pages. In a similar fashion, the number of collaborators increased from less than half a dozen to almost double that number. Moreover, in the second series, *Claridade's* original subtitle of “Revista de arte e letras” was modified to include the notice in parentheses, “não periódica,” and the actual physical size of the pages was reduced in size by more than half.

While the third series of the review maintained a layout similar to the second, the final two issues that comprise this group (published in May 1959

and December 1960) continued the practice of adding new voices and new materials. Containing seventy-five and eighty-two pages, respectively, the number of contributors increased at this time to twelve, in issue number eight, and fifteen in the final issue. In both cases, Manuel Lopes's name is absent; by this time he had left the archipelago, moving first to the Azores in 1944, then to Lisbon. As a final note to this brief overview of *Claridade's* material features, it is intriguing that only the last issue used a graphic design on its cover: in the place of the customary poetic text that was used to open the previous issues, the cover of this final issue contains an unsigned drawing of five women on a dock clustered around a fisherman.<sup>6</sup>

As these simple facts suggest, *Claridade* opened up its pages to new voices in the second and third phases of its publication. Logically, these new contributors were younger and brought with them new social and aesthetic concerns. Bearing in mind that it was also inevitable that the review's founders were to modify their views in light of the specific context of the moment, it becomes evident that each phase or series of the review consisted of a rereading and reformulation of the earlier issues. Turning our attention to the contents of *Claridade*, it is curious to note, however, that the changes that occurred between the first and second series seem, at least initially, to be slight. Besides the greater number of pages and contributors that mark the second series, the division of material into specific genres is maintained.

It is possible, on one hand, to identify modernist-inspired poetry that covers topics ranging from the social to the existential as well as literary prose written in Portuguese but inspired by the popular culture of the islands (good examples of this are excerpts from *Chiquinho* by Baltasar Lopes and various short stories by Manuel Lopes). On the other hand, we find essays that attempt to interpret the Cape Verdean experience already alluded to in the fiction and poetry from a sociological point of view. In this vein, a recurring topic is the study of Creole carried out by Baltasar Lopes that deals, in particular, with its origins and status as a language, and not just as a mere dialect of Portuguese. As a complement to this linguistic study, it was natural that the pages of the review also contained transcriptions of compositions from Cape Verdean popular music, such as *finaçons*, *batuques* and *mornas*, in which the original Creole language was maintained. It is only in the sixth issue of *Claridade*, nonetheless, published in July 1948, that there begin to appear original poems written in Creole and attributed to Gabriel Mariano, Mário Macedo Barbosa, Jorge Pedro, and Sérgio Frusoni.

While several of the poems and stories written in Portuguese refer to concrete social situations, it is in the varying selection and treatment of texts written in Creole that the different socio-political contexts of the first and second series of *Claridade* really come to the fore. By looking specifically at the placement and framing of these texts, it will become clear that their purpose and reception changes significantly over the course of *Claridade's* publication. Following on Ashcroft *et al.*'s observation that language variance is metonymic of cultural difference (52) and that in the post-colonial text it is the writing itself, dwelling at the intersection of a vast array of cultural conditions, that sets the scene for a constitution of meaning (59), my analysis of the specific instances of inclusion of Creole texts in the pages of *Claridade* will show the varying, and perhaps divergent, ways in which the editors sought to provide a metaphoric entry of Cape Verdean culture into the "Portuguese" text.

On the cover of the very first issue of *Claridade*, a "lantuna & 2 motivos de finaçom" are transcribed and identified as taken from *batuques* of the Island of Santiago.<sup>7</sup> Several critics have called attention to the importance of this cover as presenting a strong statement of the group's project. For Pierre Rivas, "é um manifesto em ato, provocador no seu laconismo e revelador de seu espírito duplamente manifesto e dissimulado" (40).<sup>8</sup> By presenting these songs without commentary or translation, *Claridade* begins its publication with a strong and sure affirmation of the importance of the Creole language and of cultural practices that are African in origin. After this moment, however, this gesture is never repeated—while the cover of the following issue also transcribes a text written in Creole, it is a *morna*, not a *finaçom*. The third issue of *Claridade* is then opened with the "Poema de quem ficou" by Manuel Lopes, and the covers of all the following issues, with only two exceptions, also present original poems written in Portuguese rather than Creole.<sup>9</sup>

If the material chosen for the cover of the inaugural issue constituted a challenge to prevalent ideas about Cape Verdean cultural identity by proclaiming a radical difference from Portuguese and European models, the choice of a *morna* for the cover of the second issue is already indicative of a move away from a cultural model inspired by African artistic practices. Although it is also written in Creole, this is not an anonymously authored text. On the contrary, the *morna* entitled "Venus" is identified as written by Xavier da Cruz, a prominent composer popularly known as B. Leza. At least one step away from the anonymous oral tradition that inspired the *batuques*



of Santiago, the *morna* also belongs to a more ethnically mixed popular tradition than the *finaçom*. In this way, B. Leza's lyrics for the issue's cover are representative of the cultural politics of miscegenation that would inspire a great deal of the literary and theoretical works produced by the *Claridade* generation. Finally, and in marked contrast to the inaugural issue, the text chosen for the cover of the third issue of the review—Manuel Lopes's "Poema de quem ficou"—represents a return to European Modernist-inspired literary values. Besides incorporating a dynamic constructed around the opposites *eu-tu* and *cá-lá*, this text privileges subjective intimate experience as a means to knowledge: "... O mundo não é maior / que a pupila dos teus olhos: / tem a grandeza / da tua inquietação e das tuas revoltas."

The other four poems appearing on the cover of *Claridade* do not differ significantly from this particular example. Although they sometimes present veiled images of an economically difficult situation that is experienced by the community as a whole, they do not directly address the culturally miscegenated aspects of Cape Verdean experience.<sup>10</sup> A composition written in Creole will never again serve as the review's opening text; when the Creole language does reappear in issues 6 and 7 (July 1948; December 1949), the transcribed *finaçons* and *batuques* are followed by literal translations and explanatory notes about the forms and vocabulary employed.<sup>11</sup> As this tendency to translate and interpret is then carried over to the poems written in Creole that are published by contemporary authors, it becomes abundantly clear that the relation between *Claridade's* editors and its readers has changed greatly in the review's second series. Initially, if *Claridade's* intended audience was not made up exclusively of Cape Verdean readers (and I believe it was not), its readers had, at least, to accept the responsibility of having some reading knowledge of the Creole language and being able to recognize popular art forms. In the case of the second series, however, the review's editorial board took it upon itself to present and interpret Cape Verdean culture to an audience that was unfamiliar with the language and with cultural practices like the *batuque* or the *finaçom*.

This move from an openly provocative stance to a more didactic position in regard to the material presented indicates the editors' response to certain changes in the political situation. Even if this response was unconscious, it attests to new restrictions that were to affect the editors' and contributors' freedom of expression. Perhaps the earliest and clearest instance of these new limitations can be found in the editors' refusal to submit the first issue for

inspection by the censors. Indeed, the fact that the infamous phrase “Visado pela censura” does not appear anywhere in the inaugural issue of *Claridade* emphasizes the daring and independent-minded attitude that was behind this intellectual project. It is evident, nonetheless, that the authorities soon caught wind of this project and became ever more vigilant—in all the following issues it is impossible to ignore the censors’ mark, as the words “Visado pela censura” always appear in bold capital letters.<sup>12</sup>

The concrete demands imposed by the Salazar regime’s censorship authority do not serve, however, to explain all the changes that occur after the first series in regard to the editors’ view of Cape Verdean culture. A wider view of the social and political context will also help to account for other transformations that took place during the 1930s and 40s. *Claridade* appeared at an important historical juncture characterized by the rapid consolidation of the Estado Novo’s repressive structures and the changes made to the structure of the regime greatly altered various aspects of daily life in both the *metrópole* and the colonies. The extremely difficult local conditions in Cape Verde have been well documented in both literary and historical texts. São Vicente in 1936 was still facing many of the problems portrayed in Baltasar Lopes’s novel *Chiquinho*. While the action of this novel took place more than a decade earlier, several chapters of this book were published in the first issues of *Claridade* and the crisis to which it referred continued to shape daily life in Mindelo. Traffic in the port declined precipitously as the result of fierce competition from Dakar and Las Palmas. Moreover, the traditional escape from poverty via emigration to the US was also closed off, as Jorge Barbosa reminds us in the poem “Irmão,” which also appears in the inaugural issue of *Claridade*.

While the fate of abandonment resulted in an exacerbated sense of isolation from the world that is subsequently denounced in the literature produced during the 1930s, it should also be noted that this isolation created unique opportunities for writers to express their plight from a freer and more autonomous position. As Alfredo Margarido has pointed out in an essay on *Chiquinho*, the paucity of references to Portugal in this novel affirms that “já a metrópole, já Portugal, são apenas um lugar distante e vazio, que envia autoridades incompetentes e incapazes” (459). This leads Margarido to conclude that Lopes’s book is in effect a “decolonized text” in which the Portuguese are excluded from any discussion regarding the destiny of the islands and their inhabitants (460). This tendency to neglect the colonies was

coming to an end though, exactly at the moment when *Claridade's* founders were preparing to launch the review. It was at this very moment that such paramilitary groups as the *Mocidade Portuguesa* and the *Legião Portuguesa* were created in the *metrópole*. We should also remember that in April of 1936, just months before the first issue of *Claridade* appeared, the Tarrafal prison camp opened on the Cape Verdean island of Santiago. In response to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the Estado Novo regime began to extend its direct control over the metropolitan and colonial populations by tightening its grip on censorship, by giving new and greater powers to the PIDE and by investing more resources and energy to the project of cultural control through propaganda (Oliveira Marques 649-650). One can only imagine that it was difficult, if not impossible, for *Claridade's* contributors to ignore these important structural changes to the regime. It is likely, in fact, that these changes contributed to the rapid disappearance of the review after the publication of only three issues.

When *Claridade* reappeared after an interval of ten years, there is little doubt that the review's interlocutors had changed greatly, as evidenced in the editors' decision to translate and gloss the Creole texts included in its pages. While the Salazar regime would maintain the practice of political and social neglect for years to come, the colonialist ideology it was predicated on had begun to undergo some important transformations. Cape Verde's position in the imperial system would not be significantly reconfigured as a consequence, but the concept of the Empire as a privileged space for a uniquely Portuguese model of colonial development did begin to acquire new currency in the metropolitan imagination. This was due, in part, to heightened interest in the work of Gilberto Freyre. While it is not within the scope of the present essay to enter into a detailed analysis of the complex relationship between *Claridade's* founders and the Brazilian sociologist, it is worth remembering that Freyre's influence was of great use to the government in Portugal during the post-War years. As most Western powers began to accept the inevitability of decolonization, the Brazilian's theories of Luso-tropicalism, with its emphasis on the "ação civilizadora lusitana," became an important tool for the Salazar regime's justification of its continued presence in Africa.

In the opening number of the second series of *Claridade*, several issues before the appearance of transcriptions or original poems in Creole, Baltasar Lopes published the first part of his treatise on the origins and structure of Creole. Entitled "Uma experiência românica nos trópicos," this essay laid out



an argument in favor of the language's predominantly European influences. While Lopes's theories in this essay are grounded on the work of a wide spectrum of respected linguists, he uses the ideas of Gilberto Freyre first and foremost to justify the need for such a study. In addition to the explicit allusion to Freyre's work contained in the essay's title, the author uses the opening paragraphs to map out a method of inquiry that departs from the Brazilian's thesis that the politics of *mestiçagem* united those living in the "Mundo que o português criou." While in this instance it may appear that Lopes, by citing Freyre's theories as inspiration for his research, was participating in the newly sanctioned state-sponsored project to glorify the impact of the Portuguese on Cape Verdean culture, it should be noted that his interest in Gilberto Freyre goes well beyond that of mere political opportunism. In fact, Freyre's ideas had also had a great impact on the selection of material for the three issues of *Claridade* that were published in the 1930s. At that time, the Estado Novo's project of imperial renewal did not coincide with Freyre's culturalist views regarding race (Vale de Almeida 166) and recourse to these views could be construed as representative of a challenge to the prevailing notions of European superiority.<sup>13</sup>

We may conclude, nonetheless, that Baltasar Lopes in the 1940s would certainly have been more aware of the new importance that certain politicians in the *metrópole* were ascribing to Freyre's theories. It is possible, in fact, that Lopes at this moment saw in Freyre an opportunity to establish a dialogue with the Portuguese authorities. Like any dialogue, of course, the objective would be to initiate and maintain an exchange of ideas, and not just defend a specific fixed position. Judging from the ideas developed in Lopes's essay and from the diversity of Creole texts contained in the issues of *Claridade* that were published in the 1940s, it is evident that he and his colleagues expected this dialogue to be about the need to continue to value and investigate such cultural forms as the *batuque* and the *finaçom*. This dialogue would also entail the active promotion of Creole as a viable language, capable of serving as the vehicle for original literary compositions.

From our historical perspective, it is evident that Baltasar Lopes's efforts in this direction had scant result. The failure of this dialogue may well explain the return to a challenging and contestatory stance that characterizes the two final issues of *Claridade* published in the late 1950s. In the context of the previous decade, however, the options pursued by Lopes and the review's other collaborators made more sense. Through the translations and glosses of the

Creole texts, together with his academic investigations into the linguistics of Creole, Baltasar Lopes continued his project of valorizing the language spoken by all Cape Verdeans, calling attention to its richness and its vital importance as a cultural practice. In this manner, he remained firm in relation to his project of the earlier decade, even while recognizing that the cultural context had changed significantly in the intervening years.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to Silveira, this escapism was revealed in an “atitude espiritual” that attempted a “tradução intelectual do problema da emigração do ilhéu.” By focusing on the problems behind the need to emigrate, the *claridosos* “acabaram por simplificar, arbitrariamente, este complexo problema e por oferecer uma imagem estereotipada do homem caboverdiano” (10).

<sup>2</sup> While he cited the importance of the group associated with *Claridade* for its “tarefa colectiva e histórica de enraizar as letras caboverdianas,” Manuel Duarte criticizes those who “supõem não deverem os novos outra coisa fazer senão seguir na esteira daqueles” (643). As he had earlier denounced “o recalamento social e individual do que [no caboverdiano de cor] existe de negro-africano” (642), Duarte’s project of promoting Creole as an instrument of agency and change was clearly predicated on valorizing Cape Verde’s cultural ties to Africa.

<sup>3</sup> For an extended discussion and contribution to the debate surrounding European and African influences on Cape Verdean cultural production that took place prior to independence, see Hamilton, pp. 233-257; Brookshaw, for his part, observes that Germano Almeida’s post-independence “parody of the themes dear to the ‘*Claridosos*’ is evidence enough that the fundamental ethic of the earlier generation had survived the years and political changes, even if adapted to new circumstances” (199).

<sup>4</sup> A contributor himself to *Claridade*’s issue number eight (May 1958), Onésimo de Silveira recognized in it a “clave de denúncia e protesto” (17).

<sup>5</sup> Manuel Lopes is identified as the director of the first two issues; with the publication of issue number three, João Lopes assumed that role.

<sup>6</sup> This change in the format of the cover may be a further indication of the new directions that were to characterize the final series of *Claridade*. Also, the move to include elements of visual culture may speak to the printer’s access to technical procedures for reproducing images that were previously unavailable.

<sup>7</sup> A *finção* usually appears as the final part of a *batuque*. This musical genre, from the island of Santiago, is associated with the *badio* culture of the island’s interior. It is the Cape Verdean musical tradition most closely tied to traditional African music and rhythms. Performed by women who keep the rhythm by clapping their hands or beating on rolled up loincloths held between their thighs, the *batuque* accompanies such ritual celebrations as birth or marriage, and is also associated with religious festivals and the reception of important guests. The *finção* is a long poetic improvisation sung by a woman of high authority whose wisdom is used to teach the members of the community.

<sup>8</sup> Pires Laranjeira, on the other hand, calls attention to the “arranjo gráfico leve, acessível, anti-académico, quase juvenil” of the review, noting that the typewritten font used on this cover “lhe dá um realce, uma clareza, inabituais em revistas dessa década” (12).

<sup>9</sup> Besides the drawing on the cover of issue number nine, the cover of number five (September 1947) presents the second part of Baltasar Lopes's essay, "Uma experiência românica nos trópicos." I make reference to this essay in my conclusion.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, "Poema do rapaz torpedeado," de Osvaldo Alcântara (Baltasar Lopes), that appears on the cover of issue six (Julho de 1948).

<sup>11</sup> See: No. 6, pp. 36-37 and No. 7 pp. 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note, in this sense, that this same declaration appears much more discretely in the final two issues of *Claridade*, an indication that, by the end of the 1950s, the Salazar regime wished to downplay (but not abandon) its interventions in the sphere of cultural production.

<sup>13</sup> In the same vein, it is worth remembering that Freyre only began to use the term "Luso-tropicalism" in 1951, when he was travelling around the Portuguese Empire at the invitation of the Minister of the Overseas Provinces (Vale de Almeida 164). Ironically, on this same trip he visited Cape Verde for the first time. His quite negative impressions of the archipelago are collected in the volume *Aventura e Rotina*. For a response to Freyre, see Baltasar Lopes, "Cabo Verde visto por Gilberto Freyre."

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