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PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING WORLD

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Doris Wieser and  
Ana Filipa Prata (eds)

# Cities of the Lusophone World

Literature, Culture and  
Urban Transformations



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LUÍS PIMENTA LOPES

## 6 'Um camarote para a CRIL': Suburban Spaces and Transculturality in Pedro Vieira's *Última paragem Massamá*

In his work *Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Andreas Huyssen (2003) claims that from the 1980s onwards, the focus on present futures has shifted to present pasts, in the sense that nationwide memories have surpassed the strictly political sphere and have been made omnipresent in more visual elements such as city planning and memorial building. The Portuguese capital, as the former epicentre of an overseas empire, is no exception to this, exhibiting countless *lieux de mémoire* concerning its narrative of a land of sailors and adventurers who paved the way for the contact with the New World. A clear example of this would be the international *Expo '98*, an event that triggered the transformation of an abandoned part of Lisbon into a modern urban area, but in which history-related symbols are present, from the Orient Station to the impressive Vasco da Gama Bridge. This is what, back in the 1990s, Huyssen called the monumental dimension of memory culture (1996: 283), which he used to describe the Holocaust memorial boom in Germany, thus addressing the country's disputed ways of dealing with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). Such a concept proves useful when critically approaching *Última Paragem Massamá* [*Last Stop Massamá*], a 2011 debut novel by the blogger and graphic artist Pedro Vieira. I will argue that he has accomplished an original literary account of Lisbon's suburban landscapes that questions both the centrality of Lisbon as an epicentre and its monumental memorialization. He does so by showing its ultimate potential as a city for tourists (a fact which recent years



have proved to be an accurate prediction<sup>1</sup>) and portraying the transcultural nature of its suburbs, hidden by the solemnly preserved city centre.

The approach which considers Lisbon as the decaying former core of an empire becomes more salient when the context of Portugal's economic crisis unveils its peripheral position within the European Union, setting the foundations for a crisis-driven narrative that Vieira depicts as intrinsically present on a historic national level. Ultimately the novel displays the national catalogue of symbols that make up the general sentiment of what it means to be Portuguese as anachronistic, showing its palimpsestic nature through a narrator-commentator who emphasizes how the characters (do not) fit in the space, rather than how they are or feel: 'maldita terra que sempre tenta esconder qualquer coisa e escrever outra por cima' (Vieira 2011: 12) [damned land that always tries to hide something by writing something else over it].<sup>2</sup> My approach will focus particularly on space and its representation, based on some assumptions which constitute the structure of my analysis:

- I) The concepts 'city' and 'suburb' are challenged throughout the novel, as the latter and its inhabitants are tendentially represented as anonymous, but most of the narrative action takes place there. In contrast, the city arises as a space which lacks narrative content, providing sheer escape, work or tourist sites, becoming *de facto* the periphery, while the suburbs become the actual centre of the narrative; in this sense, the city centre is detached from its traditional meaning as a point of reference which defines what is peripheral (Ingenschay 2000).
- II) After defining the suburb as a space of anonymity, I will show how characters are depicted mostly within places devoid of anthropological or historical value, as conceptualized by Marc Augé (2010), pointing out both the interior life of characters and the suburban space as naturally rootless.

1 For a critical account of tourism in Lisbon see Cristina Martínez-Tejedo's essay (Chapter II) in this volume.

2 All translations in this chapter are mine.

III) Picking up on the previous assumptions and on Wolfgang Welsch's (2010, 1999) considerations on an actual historical inexistence of cultures as ultimately separate spheres, I will finally argue that the novel portrays a transcultural view of the Lisbon suburbs, mostly due to the interventive role of the narrator, who, throughout the novel, ironically comments on the expectations that any ethnographic, linguistic or socio-economic features of the characters might produce in the reader, thereby implying a concept of culture that is ultimately defined by the collective experience of suburban life.

*Última Paragem Massamá* tells the story of the dramatic shift in the life of Vanessa, a girl from the suburbs, who decides to commit suicide by throwing herself under the carriage of a train on the Sintra line, thus interrupting the journey of ordinary people commuting to Lisbon. Vanessa's death, while resembling Anna Karenina's decision, stands out as a synecdoche of the tragedy hitting Portugal in the twenty-first century: the economic debacle. Vanessa's fate as an unemployed young woman from the suburbs leads her to a job centre where she meets her lover, Lucas, who turns out to be a homosexual infected with HIV, and who eventually dies with Vanessa at his side. The passengers on the train, whose lives are displayed throughout the novel, function as satellite-stories to the main plot, resulting in a representation of Lisbon as a clear division of spaces: the City and the suburb, joined only by the trains that travel to and from the centre.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the novel fits in with what Klaus Scherpe has called delocalization, dislocation and decomposition of the city towards a place of signs in modern narrative (2002: 50). Contrary to the monumentality of references such as Vasco da Gama and the Discoveries, the suburb of *Última Paragem Massamá* as a place of impersonal signs such as The Shopping Centre, The

3 '[...] aqueles que estão destinados a viajar por via férrea entre os extremos do Convénio Para a Infelicidade Suburbana, também conhecido como Linha de Sintra ou Comboio que a Pariu háo-de armealhar uns minutos gordos de atraso' (28) [... those who are destined to travel on the railway between the extremes of the Agreement For Suburban Misery, also known as Sintra Line or That Fucking Train will gain some fat minutes of delay].



Job Centre and others, conveys a logic of non-historic spaces, from which these characters nonetheless cannot escape, except as workers that commute to Lisbon (the City), the train line to Sintra being the central motif.

The symbolism of the train and the novel's structure as a journey through the suburbs might account for Miguel Real's assumption in his volume *O Romance Contemporâneo Português 1950–2010* that *Última Paragem Massamá's* interest lies in its urban and suburban language (2012: 185). Real sums up Portugal's brand new literary generation, those writing after 2000, as bonded by one aspect alone – cosmopolitanism:

A novidade literária que atravessa as obras dos autores que se iniciaram no romance a partir do ano 2000 reside na existência de uma imensa pluralidade de géneros, temas, estilos, que, desprovidos de uma unidade interna, consistente por si, só podem ser agrupados segundo um conceito externo, de todos aglutinador – *cosmopolitismo* [...] Para esta novíssima geração literária, não só não há temas tabus como tudo vale literariamente – todas as ideias, todas as histórias, todos os factos – desde que resulte num texto esteticamente belo [...]. (Real 2012: 184)

[The literary novelty that crosses through the works of writers who started writing novels from the year 2000 onwards, lies in the existence of an immense plurality of genres, themes, styles, which, lacking internal consistent unity, can only be grouped according to one external concept that unifies them – *cosmopolitanism* ... For this brand new literary generation, not only are there no taboo topics but also everything goes in literary terms – all ideas, all stories, all facts – as long as it results in an aesthetically beautiful text ...].

While I consider the category 'urban and suburban language' somewhat blurry, Vieira's novel does provide the reader with a representation of characters based only on voices, such as those one overhears on a suburban train. Little physical description is thus to be encountered in *Última Paragem Massamá*, only voices materialized, whether through imitated accents – physical voices – or through quite polemical statements that ordinary people might utter – mental voices.<sup>4</sup> With respect to Real's statement on

4 [...] onde transpira desconfiança a agora abandonada Loja de África, há anos que Vanessa imagina ver sair de lá uma fornada de pretinhos embrulhados, para oferta, sobretudo no Natal [...] (12) [...] where suspicion reigns around the now abandoned

cosmopolitanism, I will argue that Vieira's is particularly interesting, as the thematic organization of the novel is linked to Welsch's assumption that transculturality is historically anything but new. Every chapter opens with a brief description of a certain aspect of daily life in the Roman Empire, establishing a direct bond between urban life in that age and the social landscape of Lisbon's periphery in the beginning of the twenty-first century. The novel starts off with a reference to General Publius Quinctilius Varus's suicide after his defeat at the hands of Arminius's Germanic tribes in the Battle of the Teuroburg Forest (9 AD), a counterpart to Vanessa's suicide in times of economic recession under the power of a German-led EU:

Floresta de Teuroburgo, 9 d.C.

Confrontado com a derrocada dos homens às suas ordens, Públio Quíntílio Váro escolheira o suicídio como forma de sublimar o fracasso. Caíra na armadilha de Arminio, em quem depositara a confiança, dir-se-ia muito tempo depois que não devem colocar-se todos os ovos no mesmo cesto. (9)

Às 07/h26 Vanessa vai deixar-se trucidar por uma composição vinda de Meleças, zona onde a promessa de vida a meia-dúzia de minutos da Cidade entronca com a linha do Oeste e com as paredes salpicadas de tags de Mira Sintra, nome que é toda uma rasteira, sobretudo porque não nos faz olhar para o ponto onde se está mas sim para o horizonte, goze-se a vista idílica de Byron entre outros demónios, esqueça-se o betão esfarapado, os andares encavalitados, os comboios que partem a horas certas. (10)

[Teuroburg Forest, 9 AD

Facing the defeat of the men under his command, Publius Quinctilius Varus would choose suicide to glorify the failure. He had fallen into Arminius's trap, whom he had trusted, long after this it would be said that one shouldn't put all one's eggs in one basket.]

[At 7:26 p.m. Vanessa will allow herself to be slaughtered by a carriage coming from Meleças, an area where the promise of life, just half a dozen minutes away from the City, intersects with the Western line and the walls smattered with graffiti reading

Africa Store, Vanessa has imagined for years how a batch of little wrapped-up blacks comes out of it; as gifts, mostly at Christmas ...].



*Mira Sintra*,<sup>5</sup> a tricky name, mostly because it doesn't make us look at the place where we are standing but at the horizon, may we enjoy the idyllic view of Byron and other demons, may we forget the flaking cement, the piled up buildings, the trains departing on time.]

The irony of this excerpt sets the tone of the whole novel, where places scattered along the train line make up a prototype of suburban life, the bridge to the Roman Empire being a clear example of this: while in Rome 'centenas de famílias chorariam a perda dos seus, la longe' (15) [hundreds of families would cry over the loss of their relatives far away], in Portugal hundreds queue up for the Job Centre, a mere 'dano colateral' [collateral damage] of European and international economic affairs.

## I. City vs Suburb

The dichotomy city/suburb is present in the novel's title, which points to the intertwining of space, journey and tragedy. Massamá isn't actually the last stop of the Sintra line, but of Vanessa's life. In the very first chapter, the thoughts before her death are revealed:

Aqui é Massamá-Barcarena, a decisão não necessita de hífen ou de outros apoios, está tomada. A protagonista prefere despedaçar-se a sentir a bola na garganta, o ardor nos olhos, não está na sua mão salvar quem lhe interessa, é a palavra certa, Lucas interessa-lhe, sobretudo como presença viva, e ela sente que deve sair primeiro, pela esquerda baixa, lado pelo qual circula a locomotiva, atrelada a centenas de pessoas embebidas em carapaças de metal. [...] À volta o abandono, agora apimentado pela presença de inúmeros cilindros de betão que prometem uma civilização subterrânea a partir de data incerta. [...] [S]ucedo que dentro de minutos tudo isso contará muito pouco para Vanessa, aliás, não se pode dizer que alguma vez tenha perdido cinco minutos, 300 segundos ou menos a pensar nisso, ali é local de embarque rumo à Cidade, não de macaquinhos no sótão. (12)

5 *Mira Sintra* is the name of a part of a village in the suburbs of Lisbon. In Portuguese, it means *Look at Sintra*.

[Here is Massamá-Barcarena, the decision doesn't need a hyphen or any other support, it's taken. The protagonist would rather tear herself apart than feel the knot in her throat, the heat in her eyes, it's not up to her to save who she's interested in, that's the right word, Lucas is her interest, mostly as a living presence, and she feels that she should exit first, downstage left, the same side where the train circulates, towed to hundreds of people embedded in metal carapaces. ... Around her the abandonment, now spiced up by the presence of countless concrete cylinders that promise an underground civilization from an unknown date onwards. ... It so happens that in a few minutes all this will be of little value to Vanessa, one can't actually say that she's ever spent five minutes, 300 seconds or less wondering about that, here is the place of departure towards the City, not where you brood over things.]

Vanessa's tragedy (she exits downstage left) takes place at a train station, a non-relational place, where she has behaved for all her life according to the 'solitary contractuality' (Augé 2010: 76) that makes up life in transit places such as here in Massamá-Barcarena. In her death, however, she interrupts the purpose of the non-place, stopping the journeys of many other lives, and prompting a narrative that provides a reason for the stories of those usually unheard to be told. Not only as a passenger is Vanessa a *customer* (Augé 2010: 81) in her reality, but also in key moments of her emotional life. This is clear in the description of the scene where she meets Lucas, in which any romantic expectations of a first encounter are disappointed:

Agradecida anos a fio pela sua presença, mesmo que a espaços, mesmo que em cacós, Vanessa não se conforma com a saída de fininho do homem junto de quem se despiu pela primeira vez

'habilitações literárias?'  
'9º ano. Incompleto' (13)

[Having been grateful, for years on end, for his presence, even if intermittent, even if in shards, Vanessa cannot come to terms with the discrete exit of the man with whom she undressed for the first time

'Academic qualifications?'  
'9th grade. Incomplete'

Undressing means giving away one's bureaucratic information, with forms waiting to be filled in as a replacement of an emotional interaction that

would eventually lead to love. Throughout the novel human relationships are portrayed as extensions of the status of anonymity that the characters hold. Patrícia, for instance, a random passenger on the train, is referred to as having 'enlisted in' a management degree at university:

[...] na sua mala a tiracolo transporta parte da bibliografia aconselhada para a cadeira de Técnicas de negociação, motivação e liderança, uma das fatias do bolo de Gestão no qual esta moça se alistou, como quem tenta orientar o futuro a partir de uma matrícula. O que preocupa é que no acto de inscrição o numerário ou equivalente tem mais importância do que a identidade

'sim, a fotocópia do BI, a do contribuinte, muito bem, mas traz o cheque consigo? Não se esqueça de que a primeira mensalidade é a duplicar, tem de pagar a caução' (30-31)

[...] in her handbag with a shoulder strap she carries part of the recommended bibliography for the seminar on negotiation, motivation and leadership techniques, one of the slices of the Management cake this girl has enlisted in, as someone who tries to guide their future based on an enrolment form. What matters is that at the time of application, cash or equivalent is more important than identity

'ok, copy of your identity card, of your National Insurance number, but do you have your cheque with you? Do not forget that the first monthly fee is double, you have to pay the deposit'

Identity card, National Insurance number, cheques. This is the world of the 'average man' (Augé 2010: 81): employees, whether at university, the job centre or the tax department. Not surprisingly, the narrative voice comments on the Orwellian structure of a life where the romantic first encounter with her soon-to-be lover is Vanessa's visit to the job centre:

Quis o destino [...] que Vanessa e Lucas se cruzassem no atendimento ao cliente, ao desempregado, digo, se bem que hoje todos somos clientes disto ou daquilo, os trabalhadores transformaram-se em colaboradores, os doentes em utentes, por aí fora, também nestas relações se pendurou uma novilíngua difícil de retirar [...]. [N]essa condição Vanessa entrou nas instalações do Instituto em busca de suporte, de uma orientação, de uma forma de manter-se à tona com o queixo acima da linha de água, falou com o vigilante [...]

'para se inscrever é aqui na sala à direita, siga em frente, tire a senha A e espere que a chamem' (63)

[Fate determined that Vanessa and Lucas crossed paths in the customer, I mean, unemployed support, although nowadays we are all customers of this and that, workers turned into collaborators, patients into users, and so on, Newspeak has also attached itself to these relations, in a way that makes itself hard to remove ... It was in this state that Vanessa entered the premises of the Institute in search of support, orientation, of a way of staying afloat with her chin above water, she spoke to the security guard ... 'Registration is in the room to your right, straight ahead, get ticket A and wait to be called']

Vanessa struggles with the mandatory visit to the Kafkaesque system that will enable her to stay 'above water', as much as Joseph K. reaches for an explanation for his accusation. The economic recession that seemed to come from nowhere is as surprising as the legal notification knocking one morning on Joseph's door in *The Trial*.

These lives, stifling though they might be, are not different from suburban citizens of other geographies. If we return to Patrícia, soon-to-be-unemployed management graduate, we read how she escapes for a time while listening to the band Vampire Weekend on her train journey:

[...] nos ouvidos a malha A Punk, é a forma suave de Patrícia gritar *no future*, nem sabe ela quanto, uma malha que reza assim

*I saw Johanna down in the subway*

que é como quem diz Patrícia, ou Sónia ou Catarina ou outra das suas amigas que como ela se embalam no metro de segunda a sexta, de lá para cá, ao sábado à noite só para lá [...];

*She took an apartment in Washington Heights*

só porque não sabe onde fica a Terceira, a Rinchoa, a cidade que ainda não o é com as vistas postas naquela que insiste em sê-lo, cada vez mais vazia no seu seio, que os Censos não mentem [...] (33-34)

[...] in her ears the great tune A Punk, Patrícia's soft way of screaming *no future*, little does she know how, a tune that prays<sup>6</sup> like this

*I saw Johanna down in the subway*

6 The use of verbs of the religious sphere is a common device of the narrator's style throughout the novel.



which is the same as saying Patrícia, or Sónia or Catarina or any of her other friends who are carried by the rocking motion of the subway from Monday to Friday, coming and going. Saturday night only going [...];

*She took an apartment in Washington Heights*

only because she doesn't know where Tercena or Rinchoa are, the soon-to-be city with a view to the one that insists on being it, emptier and emptier in its womb, censuses don't lie ...]

Between Brooklyn and Rio de Mouro 'um oceano de distância mas só em teoria' (33) [an ocean of distance but only in theory], as young girls like Patrícia share taste and leisure habits in this non-place which is fated to become one. This is a clear reflection upon the concept of 'city', as Washington Heights and Tercena/Rinchoa, dormitory towns on either side of the ocean, arise as the 'real city', as long as one conceives of it as where 'real lives' take place. According to this judgement, against all assumptions, Lisbon is not, after all, the largest city of the country – 'censuses don't lie'. The largest city is the area where the novel takes its readers, anonymous and hostile to its citizens but not covered up by the monumentality that characterizes the City. Contrary to the rawness and authenticity of the suburb, the City provides its users with a make-believe world, materialized for instance in the restaurant menus, which offer bizarre gastronomic combinations, such as 'Bodas de Fíguro com Secretos' and 'Tosca de Porco Preto' [Figaro's Vows with *Secretos*, *Tosca* of Black Pork]. Luana, a commuter that works in central Lisbon, witnesses this every day:

Na Baixa da Cidade, onde Luana trabalha, não seria estranho ver tais declinações, seja para tentar a novidade junto dos compatriotas, seja para fígurar os turistas desprevidos [...]; fartou-se do farnel mas atura-o porque o NIB não lhe permite comer de faca e garfo e toalha de papel e azeitonas no pratinho [...]. Luana vê-os, os alemães e outros, a torrarem euros como se não houvesse amanhã, com os bonés e panamá mesmo ridículos, os guias de Lissabon Über Alles enfiados no sovaco, as meias brancas a empapelarem com as sandálias [...] (45–46)

[In central Lisbon, where Luana works, it wouldn't be unusual to find such declensions, whether to give it a try among the compatriots, or to hook unwary tourists ...; she is sick and tired of carrying her lunch around but she puts up with it, since her IBAN does not allow her to eat with knife and fork and paper tablecloth and olives

on a saucer ... Luana sees them, the Germans and the others, wasting euros as if there was no tomorrow, with their totally ridiculous caps and panama hats, their Lissabon Über Alles guides stuck under the armpit, their white socks matching their sandals ...]

The City provides room for tourists transformed into invaders,<sup>7</sup> whose guides lead them to a range of ready-made experiences, be it in restaurants or in tourist sites. In that sense, I define the city represented here as a *betwixt-erutopia of compensation* (Foucault 1997: 335), which Luana, for example, observes from inside the shop where she works as 'espaço perfeito, metuculoso e bem arranjado' [perfect, neat, well-kept space]. This is a place of temporary attachment, be it through tourists, workers who travel back and forth in the morning and at dusk, or youngsters who, apart from studying, come to party during the night. The suburb is, then, the neutral space, the City 'the other space', the exceptional area. The masses, anonymous and impersonal in their daily lives, thus inhabit the suburb, the Sintra line, stuck between the railway and the wide range of non-places that are made visible in *Última Paragem Massamá*, also bringing into existence the names that matter in that nameless world seen from the City.

## II. Names that Matter

The previous section aimed to show how the novel is structured around the symbol of the train journey through the suburbs of Lisbon. Just as the carriage stops at each of the stations of the Sintra line, so does the novel at specific spots of that area. Some names that come up in these chapters are important stations of daily life in the suburbs as opposed to the general designation of 'City' used to refer to the Portuguese capital throughout the novel, the name Lisbon being completely absent.

7 Hence the ironic name of the guides that tourists carry around – *Lissabon über alles* –, a play on the verse *Deutschland über alles* [*Germany above everything*], which is no longer sung as part of the German national anthem.



Edson, for instance, a Brazilian character whom we get to know through the information that he arrived late at his precarious job, is portrayed as living in a tiny apartment with a view of the CRIL.<sup>8</sup> 'à confusão instalada na casa sobrealugada nos arredores da Cidade mas com vista para a CRIL, serpente de betão' (58) [the mess installed in the house rented for more people than it is supposed to be, but with a view of the CRIL, a concrete serpent]. Edson lives with three other people in the same house (two male friends and the female partner of one of them), a camarote [theatre box] to the suburb, displaying the promiscuous potential of the narrow relationships of the people living there. This peeping into the interior of a suburban home presents the reader with a denial of the monumentality of the City. The apartment turns its back on the City, and the people living there are spectators from a privileged theatre box of the spectacle of the suburb and its 'concrete serpent'. The CRIL, as the Sintra train line, is also a visual element of the journey between City and suburb that inevitably marks its representation, and an unavoidable name of suburban life.

Another visual element pointed out by the narrator is the 'Grande Centro Comercial com nome de aventureiro e de grande descobridor' (60) [big shopping centre with the name of an adventurer and great discoverer]. This 'anachronic and colourful monster' (53) is an important intermodal passenger transport in the Lisbon suburb as well as a meeting point – one of the biggest shopping centres in the country, *Colombo*:

[...] as vidas que se passeiam por ali também são de trevas com adamastores à espreita, também se lhes partem cabos e às vezes são vidas a andar de capa, tal é a fúria das tempestades caseiras e a ineficácia dos lemes [...], e que dizer dos canhões de proa, inúteis, farrapos, não se pode disparar contra o destino (61)

[... the lives strolling around there are also of gloom with awaiting *adamastors*, their ropes also break and sometimes they are lives walking around with a cape, due to the furious homemade storms and the ineffectiveness of the rudder ..., and what is there to say about the cannons on the prow, useless, rags, you can't shoot against fate]

The imperial past I referred to at the start of the chapter is sprinkled all over *Última Paragem Massamá*, following this model: the narrator dislocates the national discourse on the drawbacks which the country faced in its history of conquests to suburban daily lives. In that sense, while the novel is critical of this discourse, on the other hand it also uses it as resource to underline the unfair invisibility of common citizens, to whom the feats of their ancestors are of little value, at least in their current economic state. Suburban people struggle as much as seamen used to against Adamastor, and contrary to them, they suffer 'homemade storms', they walk around in the suburbs that no one seems to care about, while the 'monster' of consumerism – *Colombo* – reminds them of people greater than them, the ones that – unlike them – will be remembered forever. In this way, Vieira exploits the national metanarratives while appropriating them in favour of those who traditionally don't matter. Hence, the importance of names such as *Churrasqueira* (barbecue restaurant) or the shopping centre *Babilónia* as opposed to *Colombo*. *Babilónia*, built in the 1980s and visible from the Sintra line, gathers all kinds of voices, ethnicities, languages, all 'happy together', contrary to *Colombo*'s lives of gloom:

[...] os mais cínicos evitam-no e já o apelidaram de cancro urbanístico, os pragmáticos reconhecem-lhe o nome premonitório escolhido nos idos de 80 que agora se confirma em pleno, cornucópias de pretos, de brasileiros, de brancos à cata de encontros, de convívio, de lazer, de ténis da moda na loja Bombastic, é ver as mulheres com roupas garridas a arranjarrem o cabelo no Jessy, os casais de monhés [...], felizes juntos, o Babilónia, lá dentro uma fartura de línguas [...]. (128)

[... the most cynical avoid it and have already called it urban planning cancer, the pragmatic ones recognize its premonitory name chosen in the ides of the 80s, now completely confirmed, cornucopias of blacks, of Brazilians, of whites looking for dates, for social interaction, for leisure, for trendy sneakers at Bombastic's, you see women with colourful clothes getting their hair done at Jessy's, the Paki couples ... happy together, the *Babilónia*, inside it a torrent of languages ...]

In this sense, *Última Paragem Massamá* displays the inversion of centre and periphery, in which the former is a direct inheritance of historic value, and the latter an element that defies the borders, where fixed identities are permanently questioned (Ingenschay 2000). This 'urban jungle', as Heike



Schmidt puts it (2000: 102), is also present in the novel through its triangular love story, which is in itself a challenge to static identities – in social, sexual and gender terms. Vanessa, Lucas and João are involved in what Schmidt calls *Grenzerfahrung* [border experience]. Portugal's metanarrative is in fade-out mode, Vanessa is fated to kill herself, Lucas to be killed by AIDS. Apart from the names that matter, these are bodies that matter, to pick up Judith Butler's claim (1993), as João, fated to infect Lucas with the HIV virus, provides a trigger to the triangle that is also distant from the 'more or less normal life' of the City, divided into surface and subsoil: 'É um gosto com alicerces bem fincados no subsolo da Cidade, das suas vidas mais ou menos normais, pelo menos da superfície para cima' (25) [It's a taste with foundations well planted in the City's subsoil, in its more or less normal lives, at least from the surface upwards]. João carries the burden of so many people whose lives remain in the subsoil:

[...] aquele homem que hoje vemos a desbaratar um casamento, a empurrar Vanessa para uma linha do comboio sem sequer precisar de usar as mãos, é o resultado das camadas de vida que lhe passaram pelas mãos e pelo lombo [...], vidas que dão resto de zero nem sequer vale a pena olhar para elas, há quem garanta que nunca sequer saíram do celofane. (26)

[... that man we now see destroying a marriage, pushing Vanessa onto a railway track without even using his hands, is the result of the life layers that passed through his hands and over his back..., lives not worth zero are not even worth being looked at, some claim they have never even left the cellophane.] (26)

The alterity of suburban life is thus represented not only in its proliferation of non-places, but also in its production of *non-relationships*, as opposed to the normality valid in the City and on the surface. The strange element (*das Fremde*), which is, according to Heike Schmidt, always present in this *Grenzerfahrung*, is in this case the non-normative love story, bringing into evidence the multiple binary layers of the dichotomy urban/suburban life in the novel: centre-periphery, monumentality-anonymity, surface-subsoil, normality-abnormality. All these binary oppositions seem to swirl around the palimpsestic nature of the city as an element that binds them together.

### III. Suburban Spaces and Transculturality

Vanessa throws herself under the carriage at *Massamá-Barcarena*, and the passengers react:

E Edson a suar frio, ainda não sabe das razões da paragem, sabe que tem uma missão a cumprir, o regresso fugaz a casa, que há-de ser em Maio, tem um propósito para além do mar de saudades, e que seria desta historieta se Edson não fizesse parte da CPLP, da pátria que é o linguajar português, com a palavra saudade ausente deste parágrafo este co-protagonista estaria transformado num bruto, num daqueles estranhos que falam línguas guturais, a quem o fado no sentido de destino nada diz. (19)

[And Edson, cold-sweating, doesn't know yet why it stopped, he knows he has a mission to accomplish, the quick return home that will happen in May, he has a goal beyond curing his homesickness (*matar saudades*), and what would be of this little story if Edson wasn't part of CPLP<sup>9</sup>, of the motherland that is the Portuguese parlance, were the word *saudade* absent from this paragraph, this co-protagonist would be turned into a brute, one of those strangers who speak guttural languages, to whom *fado* as destiny is completely unknown.]

This 'little story' is a prototype of suburban life, contrary to the 'greater story' conveyed by the City's monumentality. The national past is brought into daily life by claims of the uniqueness of words such as *saudade*, immediately assigning any Portuguese-speaking person a higher status, anything but a 'brute'. Here I must refer to the distinction made by Laura Cavalcante Padilha in her essay on *Lusism* and Lusophony (2005: 3), the former being present in much of post-25 April Portugal's literary 'dive' (2005: 12) in a search for identity. *Lusism*, originally a peninsular counterpart to *Hispanidad*, describes Portugal's historic struggle for affirmation within the European space. Padilha sees in the postimperial literary works of Saramago, Lobo Antunes or João de Melo a kind of 'euphoric *Lusism*' (2005: 12), searching for a rebirth of the European country detached of an Empire as the predominant topic. She concludes by claiming that the

9 *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa* [Community of Portuguese-Language Countries].



powerful image of a Stone Raft between Africa and America remains a key concept to understand the inevitable dependence of Portugal's present and future on its past accomplishments (2005: 14). In this sense, Pedro Vieira's novel displays an approach of *post-euphoric-lusism*, as national trauma seems to be an unavoidable identity feature even within the EU. Vanessa's suicide, contemporary with *Lissabon Über Alles* guides strolling around Lisbon, is a consequence of this: 'é os alemães, porque se suicidam os alemães?' (48) [what about the Germans, why do the Germans commit suicide?]. Who does the 'Portuguese parlance' save then? Why does Edson long for a return home?

[...] uma promessa de existência sólida mesmo que enfeitada de areias, mais terra, menos água salgada, quanto do teu sal, sim, já todos sabemos o desenlace da modinha, Edson dispensa a parte das lágrimas, as agruras teve-as à tripa-forra, mas olha para a frente com optimismo. (61)

[... a promise of a solid existence even if embellished with sands, more earth, less salty water; how much of your salt, yes, we all already know how the *modinha* ends, Edson dismisses the tears, bitterness he had a lot, but he looks ahead with optimism.]

Lisbon's ultimate character as transit place accounts for this crossing of Lusophone *leitmotif*, such as Fernando Pessoa's *Mar Português* [*Portuguese Sea*], turned into a *modinha*,<sup>10</sup> as well as Amália Rodrigues's *Povo que Lavas no Rio*,<sup>11</sup> which announces the national drama, transferred to Lucas's own personal tragedy:

10 In the poem 'Mar Português', Fernando Pessoa remembers the suffering of ordinary families whose men died during the Portuguese Discoveries. This sentence refers to the widely known first two verses of this poem: 'Ó mar salgado, quanto do teu sal/ são lágrimas de Portugal' [Oh salty sea, how much of your salt/ Are tears of Portugal]. *Modinha* is a general term for a sentimental song that, while originated in Portugal, has developed and become popular in areas under Portuguese influence, such as Brazil and the former African colonies.

11 The verse that inspired this excerpt reads: 'Povo que lavas no rio / Que talhas com teu machado / As tábuas do meu caixão' [You people who wash in the river / And carve with your axe / The wood boards of my coffin].

[...] meu querido, no momento em que sentiste uma picadela entre as pernas pela primeira vez à vista de um macho, de um garrano empinado, talhaste com o teu machado, blábláblá, é assim a nossa narrativa clássica, o horror, o drama, a tragédia, como num guião manhoso de reality freakshow. (39)

[... my dear, the moment you felt a sting between your legs for the first time in front of a macho, of a stiff garron, you carved with your axe, bla bla bla, this is our classic narrative, the horror, the drama, the tragedy, as in the dubious script of a reality freak show.]

To conclude, I will pick up on Welsch's theoretical construct of transculturality, accounting for its usefulness when approaching *Última Paragem Massamá's* portrait of the suburb. Welsch (2010: 43 ff.) distinguishes between a macro-level and a micro-level where transculturality is present in current globalized societies. The macro-level refers to the most visible side of globalization: national cultures are more and more difficult to identify as such, with hybridization and availability of goods and information everywhere. On the micro-level, Welsch refers to individuals within *national* societies, who nonetheless contain an *innere Pluralität* [inner plurality], being more and more embedded in multiple cultural models, which can no longer be described by a general concept such as 'cultural diversity'. The focus, then, should be on individuals in their relationships with other individuals, regarded in their plurality and their potential within this scheme to understand and acknowledge the external, that is, the macro-level of transculturality. Pedro Vieira's focus on hidden spaces, with their hidden figures, wrapped up in a criticism of the metanarrative that enables this invisibility, be it in monumental physical terms or in political decisions, suggests, in my view, that greater focus should be placed on the individual potential for change. This demands a revision of the palimpsestic nature of Lisbon, as the last desperate act of Vanessa at the end of the story seems to convey. She prays for Lucas at the *São Domingos* Church, far away from the suburb, right in the core of the City, where several forgotten bodies have been left unnoticed under this land in the process of 'always trying to write something else over it':

[...] foi só o tempo de dar uma mirada rápida ao largo onde se vende a bebida mais doce da Cidade, o mesmo onde se fazia dos judeus churrasco, cortesia dos dominicanos e da



fé verdadeira, [...] este largo tem um poder que se pode apalpar, se tanto sofrimento já aqui teve lugar porque não uma centelha de redenção, sobretudo se contarmos com a ajuda deste templo que em 1755 liquidou fiéis aos cachos, dezenas de inocentes reunidos para rezar no dia de todos os santos [...]. quase não ficou pedra sobre pedra, cristão sobre cristão, [...] definitivamente paira por aqui uma inquietação, talvez por isso Vanessa pense ter encontrado o local certo para apelar a uma reviravolta. (198)

[... she only had enough time to take a glimpse at the square where they sell the sweetest drink of the City, the same spot where Jews were used for a barbecue,<sup>12</sup> courtesy of the Dominicans and of true faith, ... this square has a palpable power, if so much suffering has taken place here why not a sparkle of redemption, especially if we count on the help of this temple that in 1755 destroyed bunches of churchgoers, dozens of innocents united to pray on All Saints' Day ... there was almost no stone left over other stones, no Christians over other Christians, ... there's definitely some restlessness hanging over here, maybe for that reason Vanessa thinks that she has found the right place to call for a twist in the plot.]

Just like the Massacre of the Jews in 1506 and the purge carried out by religious entities after the Lisbon Earthquake, the lives of Vanessa, Lucas, João, Patrícia, Edson, Luana and all the others will remain silenced and hidden by a selective version of past events, a denial of the transcultural call of the current world, and of the individuals that struggle every day for redemption in the face of adversities that no monumental history will ever respond to.

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<sup>12</sup> A quite powerful metaphor referring to the fact that they were burnt at the stake.

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