

Afroeuropa@n Configurations: Readings and Projects,
Edited by Sabrina Brancato

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To my children,
my twinkling little stars
on their way from Bamako to Frankfurt

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LIMINALITY AS CRITICAL EMPOWERMENT:
 SECOND GENERATION IMMIGRANTS,
 'GUERRILHEIRO' MEMORIES AND NOMAD
 WOMEN POETS
 JOANA PASSOS

The reception of postcolonial literatures in Europe usually falls into two patterns. The critical debate either focuses on the scars of the colonial period to understand current day international dynamics or it addresses the particular intervention of a specific writer as representative of a particular (non-Western) national literature. In my view the focus has to change in order to consider a third dimension, namely the international impact of writers from the southern hemisphere, who are increasingly popular with mainstream public and canonized by critical circles. In other words, what are these writers saying that Europe is so eager to listen? Why is this alternative canon, on the margins of European national literatures becoming so visible and appealing?

Liminality

"Liminality" is one of those concepts that have become part of current critical jargon, a fact that may have contributed to grant it a fluid, differently nuanced meaning on account of diverse uses for the term. Accordingly, for the present discussion, I think it is useful to make explicit the meaning of "liminality" I will be working with, as a key concept to approach four case studies which I will use to argue for the consolidation of a particular literary trend in contemporary literature, a trend that, in my view, links intercontinental literary systems in a dialectic without precedent before our current globalized epoch.

I will use the concept of liminality to represent the positive, empowering position of African writers that are, somehow, circulating at the margins of European literary systems. Their marginal yet visible position instigates in these writers a subversive, critical perspective that frames their writing,

offering readers a surplus of awareness and a seductive journey into deeper insights.

My strategic use of the notion of "liminality" was inspired by the work of Victor Turner and Homi Bhabha. The anthropologist Victor Turner (2004)¹ used the term "liminality" to describe ritual transitions, either in initiation rites or during enthronement ceremonies, which invest individuals with new functions or powers. In other words, "liminality" would be the transitional limbo between two borderlines, when you are about to become something else, and you no longer are what you used to be. In this sense, a liminal state suggests you are in a provisional, unfixed position, undergoing an active process of transformation, which I interpret as active translation between two cultures or civilizations in a changing world order.

Another use of "liminality" is to be found in Homi Bhabha² who has applied the concept to contemporary Western society, in the context of a postcolonial, globalised age. According to Homi Bhabha, "liminality" is a condition of the self within modernity, identifiable since "the emergence of the later phase of the modern nation, from the mid-nineteenth century, [which] is also one of the most sustained periods of mass migration within the West, and colonial expansion in the East" (1994: 139). This massive immigration into Western Europe, for it is mostly Europe that Bhabha addresses in *The Location of Culture* (1994, 2000), inscribed, in a significant manner, for at least a hundred and fifty years, the existence of African and Asian cultural elements within the borders of the modern European nation, even if these recognizable cultural differences were/are relegated to the margins of collective senses of national identity. Currently, as Homi Bhabha so adequately understood, the astounding number of people in transit in a globalised, postcolonial world enlarges the scale of this phenomenon to another dimension, eroding and de-territorializing homogeneous, fixed notions of collective national identity. One no longer projects a unique, stable identity over the whole of a European nation, such as it was conceived according to a traditional XIX century nationalist sensitivity, invoking an organic functional whole coinciding with a territory, a history and a shared culture. In fact, when "feeling the pulse" of contemporary Western society, Bhabha is stating quite the contrary. In his opinion, the current condition of the modern

¹ Victor Turner, "Liminality and *Communitas*," in *The Performance Studies Reader*, Henry Bial (ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 2004, 79-87.

² See the overall discussion on the book *The Location of Culture* (1st edition 1994; 3rd edition 2000). The term keeps reappearing within the frame of Homi Bhabha's theories, but it is central to chapter 8, "Dissemination, time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation", 139-170.

nation is fragmented, plural, contradictory, permeated by difference, and made of networks of provisional identities. In his view, the boundaries of the modern nation no longer are mere political and geographical borders:

(Freud's narcissism of minor differences) provides a way of understanding how easily the boundary that secures the cohesive limits of the Western nation may imperceptibly turn into a contentious *internal* liminality providing a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent. (Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994: 149)

How do we conceive of the 'splitting' of the national subject? How do we articulate cultural differences within this vacillation of ideology in which the national discourse also participates, sliding ambivalently from one enunciatory position to another? What are the forms of life struggling to be represented in that unruly 'time' of national culture (...) that both constitutes the exorbitant image of power and deprives it of the certainty and stability of centre or closure? What might be called the cultural and political effects of the liminality of the nation, the margins of modernity, which come to be signified in the narrative temporalities of splitting, ambivalence and vacillation? (Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994: 147)

Although I fundamentally agree that liminality is a feature of nowadays' globalised world (and even if you call it postmodern or postcolonial, you are still going through a transitional stage on the wake of modernity as Bhabha implies), I differ from Homi Bhabha in so far as I do not think the whole of European culture is equally liminal. Mainstream, Western, modern Europe is aligned with a grim expansion of xenophobic feelings ("fortress Europe"), welcomes neo-colonial moves concerning the moving of European based factories to Asia and China, and supports European based rural explorations in Africa. In the capitalist world, certainty, targets and aims do not leave much room for liminal sensitivities, and this not so liminal West is willing to turn a blind eye on human misery and environment irresponsibility in the name of profit. And yet, some of us in Europe do understand that in a globalised world the local and the global are inextricably bound together, for better or for worst. The consequences of irresponsible exploitation of peoples and environment will always bounce back. It is because of this principle of interrelatedness linking local and global in what comes to human and environment protection that the most urgent critical voices to sober up Western capitalist frenzy are the counter-discourses ensuing from either cultures from the southern hemisphere or from European "liminalities" – that is to say, from within

the margins of the mainstream modern nation itself. Very often, these "liminal voices" correspond to postcolonial, immigrant or diasporic writers, who live intercontinental biographies, becoming nomad observers between local and global geographies. These sensitive and educated nomads are the masters of insightful critical perspectives, the beholders of the aware gaze, the estranged travellers. They mind the detail, comprehending in its everyday banality the concrete cost of huge historical processes. If "liminalities" suspended between past and present, historical and the current, the Western and the South, the local and the global are indeed the living conditions of the modern self, the West needs the contribution of these nomads to understand itself, not only because of the critical sharpness of less integrated/accommodated voices, but because the *exile* (I will return to this image) is part of mainstream European life style and sense of identity.

Within the sphere of Western literary systems, the marginality attributed to postcolonial, immigrant or minority voices is not proportional to the centrality and the urgency of the literature they are writing as these voices address some of the most pressing ethical and human issues at stake in a globalised world. To illustrate this point, I will discuss below a set of literary texts that I can only place in a literary canon that refers back to an intercontinental crossroads, revealing of African, Asian and Western (dis)encounters. The place of enunciation of the selected writers is in part European, as they have long lived here, incorporate Western perspectives in their worldview and are perfectly aware of dominant ideas and values in Europe. However, they also live by other cultural geographies, decoding both 'here' and 'there' or 'local' and 'global', in a synchronicity beyond the mediating role of cultural translation. They became cultural polyglots, suffering from existential schizophrenia and estrangement in relation to their everyday social environment, experiences that sharpened their insight and awareness. You do have to speak from a "liminal" sense of self, from the position of the resident-foreign-yet-within-and-aware in order to confront Eurocentric narcissism in such culturally translated terms the West cannot dismiss nor minimize.

Speaking after Victor Turner, who underlined the empowerment ensuing from liminal status, and with Homi Bhabha, who used "liminality" as a metaphor for the fragmented and provisional basis of identity in our postcolonial, globalised age, my working notion of liminality refers to a strategic estrangement caused by diverse biographical circumstances that turn you into a cultural polyglot, someone always at home and always a foreigner to the multiple worlds you live in. Liminal spaces are in-between spaces, borderlines. Think, for example, of the no

man's land you walk between two guarded borders as a metaphor for a liminal identity. Thus, liminality as a condition of the modern self implies an estranged, non-stable citizenship, which I interpret as an enhanced critical view, looking back at history – that which we have left behind – so as to understand what we have not yet become, but are moving towards. I will then argue that liminality seems an adequate concept to describe precisely the enunciation position of a set of expatriate or immigrant writers, intercontinental citizens, whose works can be seen as composing a particular literary trend, received in the west as postcolonial, diaspora or minority literatures. In fact, these three concepts refer to related but different literary systems³ but for the matters that concern us here they share the margin as common instance of enunciation vis-à-vis canonical, mainstream European national literatures.

The exile

It was with a sense of empathy, of complicitous alignment, that I read Homi Bhabha's comments on Edward Said, being Said the other inspirational voice that led me to understand the complex position of these writers, simultaneously insiders and outsiders to plural literary systems. Here is Bhabha on Said:

When Edward Said suggests that the question of the nation should be put on the contemporary critical Agenda as a hermeneutic of 'worldliness', he is fully aware that such a demand can only now be made from the liminal and ambivalent boundaries that articulate the signs of national culture as 'zones of control or of abandonment, or recollection and of forgetting, of force or of dependence, of exclusiveness or of sharing. (Homi Bhabha quoting E. Said 1994: 148-149)

A hermeneutic of worldliness accepts the complex set of fragments and networks that weave the fabric of XXI century western society, beyond the myth of the nation as a coherent whole destined to progress on the wake of modernity. Worldliness establishes a claim to exchange, information and

³ To be more precise, I think postcolonial writers are primarily writing their contribution to diverse national literatures from the southern hemisphere, while diaspora or immigrant literatures exist in relation to distance from 'home' and to the claims of citizenship within a determined host nation. In any case, I believe these writers are creating either the most wordly, cosmopolitan trend in local literary systems, or, at least, the very alternative canons in the cultural life of the modern West.

quotation across cultural difference, eradicating silences and tension. Besides, in the globalised era, the sheer numbers of people 'in transit', of de-territorialised citizens, turns the exiled scholar, the expatriate thinker or the immigrant writer into the perfect epitomes of the world we live in. Note that the exile is by definition a figure never absorbed or assimilated into sameness. The exile lives in liminality, in between worlds, holding to his/her own non-accommodation, living physically in one place while his heart and mind are somewhere else. And yet, in Said's famous theory, the exile is neither indifferent to the society he lives in, nor passive in relation to the destinies of the world. A couple of quotes on the intellectual exile, such as Said imagined this metaphoric figure, will clarify the sort of attitude behind the literary trend I am identifying in contemporary literatures written from the margins of Western Europe:

Because the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation. Every scene or situation in the new country necessarily draws on its counterpart in the old country. Intellectually this means that an idea or experience is always counterposed with another, therefore making them both appear in a sometimes new and unpredictable light: from that juxtaposition one gets a better, perhaps even more universal idea of how to think, say, about a human rights issue in one situation by comparison with another. (Edward Said, 2000: 378)

Although Edward Said is perfectly clear about the extra insight in the hands of the intellectual exile – whom I materialize in this paper as the immigrant, or postcolonial writer living in Europe – there is a certain weakness in the worldliness Said envisages that I find unsatisfactory. In an interview (*The Edward Said Reader*, 2000: 419-470) I can read a certain hesitation concerning the role of the university. Said declares he sees the university as a sheltered environment, similar to the intellectual forum of a leisure class or the life of reflection you may expect to find in a seminar (2000: 436). And yet his interview is full of political insights and clear stands concerning international issues. Maybe after a life enduring stern criticism from diverse reactionary sectors he was simply being cautious, but I would prefer to think of the university, and especially the humanities, not as a corporate, sheltered institution but as the working place (and a formative place) of responsible, caring and aware citizens. Technological training alone does not help the world getting anywhere worth, and contemporary mainstream mentality should mind the necessity of discourses that work as counterpoints for a profit drive. Everywhere in Europe social rights are shrinking, and the laws regulating work are going

back to XIX century industrial exploitation across the borders, out of sight, leaving Europe with a massive unemployment problem. It seems the guys managing the economy are not doing a good job by any responsible, sustainable standard. We need an alternative plan, sensitive to humanistic concerns. And as inspiration to design it, I suggest you start by listening to a few insightful writers, the exiled observers from liminal worlds.

Liquid frontiers

Recently, I read a poem by Ana Mafalda Leite that stroke me as a wonderful illustration of the revealing insights one encounters in those liminal literatures of multiple belonging. There was, in this poem, a fine example of that in-between sensitivity I have been talking about, with its unsettling effects, the discrete erosion of distinctive borders, the slippage from certainty to open possibilities, the ubiquity of double lives.

Ana Mafalda Leite was born in Portugal but she moved to Mozambique as a baby, where she grew up, and where she remained even as a college student. She moved to Portugal as an adult, and she currently is a professor of African literatures at the University of Lisbon. She frequently is visiting professor in other universities of Europe, or in Mozambique and Brazil. As a poet she has published six anthologies of poetry. In her last poetic anthology, *Livro das encantações* (2005), I found the poem "Liquid Frontier":

Fronteira Líquida

Cose-se a dobra do tempo sem costura frente e verso
Coincidem
E o que acontece é apenas uma margem de
esquecida vontade

Assim o meu rosto está na sombra desde sempre
Até que o preciso número de luas encontre
A geometria exacta para o iluminar

Acredito nesses números secretos
Nesse entrecruzar de linhas
Pela palma da mão
Paralelas duas vidas
me dão

(Ana Mafalda Leite, *Livro das Encantações*, 2005: 15)

Liquid Frontier

You sew up the folds of time, seamless, right and reverse
Coincide
And what happens is but a margin of
Forgotten will

Thus my face has remained in the shadow since ever
Until the exact number of moons finds
The precise geometry to illuminate it

I believe in those secret numbers
In these crossed lines
Along the palms of my hand
Two parallel lives
They grant me.⁴

Indeed, a new geometry has to be found to trace the lines of destiny for those who live parallel lives. And what will those lines describe but the moving routes of contemporary lives in a globalised world? Across intermittent geographies, you have to catch up with interruptions in time. You adjust your life to make "here" and "there" reversible counterparts. If "right and reverse coincide", there are distinctions that cease to matter. Consequently, where does this worldview leave room for xenophobia and racism? You lack the stable, contained referents of projected national identities. The individual is not one in the crowd. The individual is the confluence of plural lives and relative certainties. Can you see the political potential of such a fluid view of the world? Old (colonial) binaries are left behind, centres of power can move with the people, and the idea of what "a foreigner" is becomes a blurred spot to the surveillance gaze.

But why is the face of the nomad across liquid frontiers hiding in shadows? Certainly, the schizophrenic condition of parallel lives across continents leaves its scars. For the migrant, identity is a problematic assemblage you have to structure yourself without the safety net of installed, universal traditions. In between cultures everything becomes more relative. The absence of comfortable, precise and continuous cultural references may cause schizophrenic non-coincidence between different "selves", a confused, shadowy identity to be settled with maturity... indeed, after one has lived through many moons.

⁴ I want to thank Ana Chaves for her willingness to help me with the translations of the two poems quoted in this paper. I have always trusted her experienced eye as literary translator, and I have welcomed her suggestions for these translations.

The second-generation immigrant

In the universe of communities of immigrants living and growing up in Portugal there is not yet a real literary milieu, even though you already find a couple of interesting cases. Editors I have been talking to tell me they have read a couple of promising manuscripts, but the authors were not keen on taking a co-author, someone that would edit and rewrite the text until it was up to publishing standard – the solution that, according to Sabrina Brancato,⁵ some writers have found in Italy. Apart from this possible arrangement, all over Europe, a new literature produced by diverse minorities is emerging as a serious aesthetic and philosophical contribution to European literary landscapes. In this scenario, the novel by Joaquim Arena, *A verdade de Chindo Luz* (2006)⁶ seems encouraging evidence of the development of such a milieu within Portuguese borders. It is true that the novel still has some flaws (after all, it is his first book), for example the detective story plot that relies too much on forced coincidences to be credible, and that I can only see as a staged appeal to popular mainstream readership. Nevertheless, *A Verdade de Chindo Luz* does represent a breakthrough in the assertion of literary immigrant voices inside Portugal, and the writing reveals Joaquim Arena's eye for relevant issues as well as his sensitivity to the internal logic presiding over some of the margins in Portuguese society. Among the set of writers addressed in this paper, Joaquim Arena is the only voice that deals with the experience of immigration such as it was lived by millions of people searching for better living conditions. In this sense, he could be considered a writer affiliated to minority communities within Europe, while the other three would be more adequately understood through a cosmopolitan, postcolonial episteme. But my argument is, precisely, that there are many voices to fit the many margins and silences of Europe. While the poem you read above (by Ana Mafalda Leite) offers the ubiquity discourse we necessarily have to invent to express moving citizenship in a globalised world (a condition that amounts to eternal sense of de-territorialisation, of disconnection, and hence of liminality), while another formulation of exile is to be found in Joaquim Arena's narrative about the marginal status of the immigrant. Arena explores the indifference (if not the violence) Europe has reserved for the immigrants it hosts as the very cause for social tension and marginality that nationalist sectors then blame on immigrant communities

⁵ Sabrina Brancato, "From Routes to Roots: the emergence of Afro-Italian literature" in *Afroeurop@ns, cultures and Identities*, (ed.) Lopez, Marta Sofia, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

⁶ Joaquim Arena, *A Verdade de Chindo Luz*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2006.

themselves. It is a vicious circle, producing ever widening gaps within European society.

The plot of *A Verdade de Chindo Luz* starts with the mysterious disappearance, and presumed suicide, of Chindo Luz, a second generation Cape Verdean immigrant. He had just won a popular contest on Portuguese television and had become the media star of the moment. The disappearance of Chindo together with the money he won, the subsequent discovery of blackmail letters in his apartment, the kept pieces of news about a corpse found in an old monastery – all of these narrative elements weave a detective story plot, in search for the truth regarding Chindo's mysterious disappearance. After this non-promising replica of Hollywood film noir, the narrative delicately takes you back in time, after a memory flow that contextualizes several photographs in the family album. Baldo (Chindo's younger brother) finds it open on the floor, in front of a silent, mournful mother. It is this family biography and Baldo's journey to mature self-awareness that will be discussed below as the two most significant narrative lines.

D. Nitinha arrived in Lisbon in the 1950s, long before decolonization and the Carnation Revolution in April 1974. Her marriage unites two typical emigration routes for Cape Verdeans: she is another young woman in transit to Italy (a great majority of the feminine emigration from Cape Verde goes to Italy) when she meets John Luzona, a Cape Verdean sailor trying to reach The Netherlands' busy harbours to find a job. They decide to settle in Lisbon and as John is usually away (until he disappears in a shipwreck), D. Nitinha raises their four children in the suburbs of Lisbon, running a bed and breakfast hostel. What kind of city does Baldo recollect from his childhood?

Esta zona oriental da cidade fora, em meados do século, escolhida para acolher a maior parte das indústrias químicas da capital. Depois caiu sobre ela um manto de esquecimento. Entre o bairro e o rio Tejo só havia baldios lamacentos atravessados por canaviais lúgubres e pelo caminho de ferro. Com o tempo, aquilo tornou-se um depósito de lixo industrial, com um ferro-velho à mistura. Nos últimos anos tinha-se tornado uma espécie de terra de ninguém, mal-cheirosa e sem qualquer interesse. (...) O único autocarro que se atrevia a cruzar aquelas bandas perdidas era o 28. Por isso, tínhamos por ele uma feição de amigo (...). Por aqui só havia fábricas e operários. E migrantes do Alentejo e das Beiras. Não havia liceus.⁷

Around the 1950s, this eastern part of the city had been selected to host most of the chemical industries. Afterwards, it was forgotten. Between the

⁷ Arena, 2006: 27.

neighbourhood and the Tagus river there were muddy wastelands, gloomy cane fields and the railway. As time went by, it became a junkyard and a deposit for industrial waste. Lately, it was no man's land, stinky and irrelevant. (...) the only bus that dared to cross that forgotten area was number 28. That is why you were attached to it as to a sort of friend (...). Around here, there were only factories and factory workers, as well as Portuguese migrants from Alentejo and Beiras. There were no high-schools. (My translation)

In Lisbon, to live in a suburb means you are too poor to afford living in a neighbourhood closer to the city centre. Thus, poor, rural Portuguese people moved to the suburb when they arrived in the city looking for a better life. Other immigrants started to arrive, mostly from Africa and all of them remained circumscribed to the suburb life where "there were no high-schools". Actually, it is remarkable how many lines of marginalisation are condensed in this single paragraph: the poor public transports, the lack of access to education, the waste and garbage piling up in the landscape, the absence of professional alternatives. This is an area of oblivion in what concerns administrative care and public investment. Given this background, for the kids growing up in this neighbourhood, television stardom or the hope for a successful break in music are some of the most coveted dreams. High-school studies and college can also open wider roads to these boys, and yet Baldo, a graduate in history, finds himself partially living off an affair with an older woman (something that seems a current alternative for some of the other men) or under the protection of his uncle Naiss, who encourages him to try a living with his guitar. Some of Chindo and Baldo's childhood companions become lawyers and politicians, just as there are others who live miserable destinies. The narrative neither rules out the advent of a good opportunity nor the force of circumstances to make you walk sad roads. However, the truth is that even Chindo, the television star, is caught within a negative, destructive logic. In part, this negativity is the consequence of Chindo's inability to speak out the truth about an accidental murder in his childhood, but Chindo's inability to tell the truth is not simply an individual issue as Chindo is trying to keep a silence vow he had made to his childhood friends. Besides, there is no alternative affective bond outside the universe of the suburb. There is no one he can talk to, no friend, no institution, nor trustworthy contact. Consequently, the truth that led Chindo to suicide is thus a revelation of a landscape of urban indifference. This hostile urban environment is a motif that runs through the whole of the text, even in minute side comments or isolated scenes. There is for example a scene where Mohammed is sitting in the waiting room of a hospital urgency service and notices a wounded

worker who has been brought in. A little later, a doctor walks to Mohammed and tells him that the wounded worker, who has just entered, has died. Beyond the shock over such a tragic working accident, Mohammed cannot bear the pathetic indifference in the context of being informed of this death simply because he is the only (equally black) person who happens to be in the waiting room. No one cares to verify if he is the right person to address, and nothing is done to correct the mistake. Bearing this kind of scene in mind it is worth noticing that the novel manages to avoid a bitter note or a melodramatic impression. Joaquim Arena seems to have found a detached (even if too deliberate) tone to balance the themes he addresses.

All along the novel begs the question: can a suburb youth break the feeling of alienation and loneliness in relation to the big city? When Baldo joins college, he makes a discovery:

A periferia da cidade tinha sido uma fronteira implacável. Na verdade, (Baldo) só a cruzou quando foi estudar para a faculdade. Os novos amigos interessavam-se por coisas diferentes, frequentavam livrarias, galerias de arte e bibliotecas. 'Julgávamos que vivíamos em Lisboa, mas na verdade não vivíamos em Lisboa'.⁸

The city's suburb had been an implacable frontier. Actually, (Baldo) only crossed it when he started attending college. The new friends were interested in different things; they went to bookshops, art galleries, libraries. 'You thought you lived in Lisbon, but in fact you did not.' (My translation)

The moment Baldo becomes aware that growing up in the suburb means living in exile in relation to Lisbon is the moment he realises he needs to use his liminality to sit back and watch. His own story is still open ended, and he has in his hands the responsibility to make his own itineraries and choices. All along, Baldo's slow pace of living and his introspective mood prove advantageous. It is this careful, doubtful attitude that keeps Baldo from accommodating to the suburb or selling out too quickly to any easy alternative. It is this same attitude that prevents Baldo from falling under Mohammed's spell, a character that embodies a reference to opportunistic sects with less than impeccable moral credentials.

In the end, only in Cape Verde will Baldo find himself, but while he struggles for self-discovery, the reader is offered a view of Lisbon through the eyes of one of its margins, revealing the city's inability (or

⁸ Arena, 2006: 114.

unwillingness) to accommodate not so few of its own children. It is worth mentioning that the novel's secondary narratives invoke other marginal communities, left to linger in their own liminal world. Such is the case of 'the Club' of Cape Verdean retired civil servants who worked for the Portuguese colonial administration. They will not adjust to a postcolonial world and they cannot fit the meanness of the rushed, impersonal, pragmatic city. They are too old to start again, and they no longer have access to the privileged life they lived in Africa. They live enclosed in a shell of colonial nostalgia, reviving cherished memories. In fact, the importance of these memories explains the compulsory necessity of speaking of their lives in Africa, as if the act of speaking confirmed each other's past and legitimated their longing. Actually, these are double exiles, removed to the suburban periphery and disconnected from the present time. Lisbon could never make up for what they lost.

'Guerrilheiro' memories

The Angolan writer Luandino Vieira is one of the key voices in the plural context of African literatures written in Portuguese. Among his many books, I am going to discuss the most recent one, *O Livro dos Guerrilheiros* (2009),⁹ a very particular novel in terms of form, language and content, which was written as homage to a moment in the history of Angola and to the individuals who made this history by joining the armed fight. Angola has endured a long war period¹⁰ and this tragic history has inspired many texts over the years. Some of these, lacking in aesthetic and philosophical quality, are usually referred to as 'propaganda literature', and they amount to relevant documents to the history of Angola, even if they are irrelevant as literary heritage. On the other hand, Luandino Vieira's trilogy¹¹ is a real literary contribution to this period of Angolan history, creating an "epic narrative" that makes artistic justice to such matter.

With these introductory lines I am separating postcolonial literatures from other written documents and, secondly, I am asserting the fact that postcolonial writers have a life outside European publication industries and that their concerns stand primarily in relation to their mother culture.

⁹ Luandino Vieira, *O Livro dos Guerrilheiros*, Lisboa: Caminho, Outras Margens (grupo Leya), 2009.

¹⁰ The independence war in Angola lasted from 1961 to 1974. Civil war among different factions started the next year and lasted until 1994 with further war periods, until 2002.

¹¹ The first volume in this trilogy was *O Livro dos Rios*, 2006, Lisboa: Caminho.

Having said that, where does Luandino Vieira fit in the marginalia of European literary systems? What is he doing here? I have brought the reader through the ubiquity of double lives and their cosmopolitan expression as the key discourses to grasp mobile, globalised identities. Then I have analysed a case that stood for the literary expression of the immigrant experience inside contemporary western society. Now, I am turning towards the invocation of a memory of the independence struggle. I believe such memory has to be present in Europe, as part of European self-awareness, and as a key pedagogic discourse to define European citizenship within the frame of a globalised world. This is not about guilt. The study of postcolonial literature in Europe is about awareness, self-knowledge, and the learning of what went wrong in history, and at what price. In other words, I am saying that the knowledge of literary heritages in the West has to include the study of pieces of colonial and postcolonial literatures, so much so as the study of the classics or the key authors in any national literary system.¹² I believe a journey through the memory of colonial wars is a confrontation with a repressed margin of historical awareness, and that is how a study of the 'guerrilheiro' fits in this paper.

O Livro dos Guerrilheiros starts with a grave, formal introduction, reminding one the tone of medieval chronicles. This tone subtly sets in the reader an attitude of respect, even awe, towards the exemplary narratives expected to follow. And yet, while bringing a medieval Western note to the fore of the first pages of this novel, the language and the subject matter are so uniquely Angolan that the final impact leaves the reader with the discovery of an African epic. I need to explain further. The 'chronicle' proposes to narrate the lives and (heroic) deaths of fallen warriors "for the joy of the young, and the wise sadness of the older".¹³ Coherently, the text is full of references to ancient histories of resistance, episodes erased from European official historical record. These ancient episodes inserted in the main narrative, combined with the aesthetic references of the medieval chronicle and the epic, undo centuries of silence and reveal the bias in the historical archive. At least in the case of the independence war, the record will not go so unaccounted for. Luandino Vieira saw to that.

The book of Guerrilheiros (*O Livro dos Geurrilheiros*) takes the unaware reader to the jungle of Angola and to the routines of *guerrilla*. Actually, Luandino Vieira's writing has such a strong (affective) appeal that you feel a ghostly presence among the group. You come to know them

¹² Most technical universities are blind to this necessity, at the cost of their own students' notion of citizenship.

¹³ "(...) para alegria dos menores e tristura dos mais velhos", Luandino Vieira, 2009: 1.

by their nick names, you can tell their position in the group as they move silently through the jungle, you learn to understand why you have to stop after that bird has cried, and you learn to be careful where you lay your foot. While reading, you hold your ear to their hearts. And then the novel narrates a few of their biographies, so that you know how they came to be there, fighting this war. And everything is more complex and pungent than you expected, and yet, a dignified silence falls short of narrating the unbearable. In the pages of this novel, if you are not an Angolan learning to love your country and history, then, you are still grabbed by your emotions and intelligence to see from the other side of European arrogance, and you learn to love the colours, the ground and the despair of Angola, together with the 'guerrilleiro' who was never too busy or too scared to stop and take in the natural beauty around him. Reading this novel was an experience of suspended (Portuguese) identity. Even the bilingual language of the text, full of words of Quimbundo (glossary available at the end of the novel) forces you to master a bit of this Angolan language. You start to recognize some of the words, building your own provisional idiolect as you read, and you are pushed, even linguistically, to 'feel' Angola. Then, you have to consider the set of 'guerrilleiro' biographies. A less gifted writer might have hidden the insecurity, the rage, the corruption, the fear and the ideological manipulation among these units. Nothing is smoothed over. There is enough dignity in their motives, in the road that led them to this war. And there is the irony, the laughter that carries you through the tension and avoids the grand scale narrative, the Hollywood take that would release empathy. Everything in this text is deeply humane, close, intimate. No spectator's distance.

This novel also hints at different ways of making the independence war, convoking the effort of generations, from grandfather (proud tribal warrior), to father (cerebral state engineer contributing to Angola's modernity) to son ('guerrilleiro' pushed to the jungle). Silenced history has many dimensions, and all of them have to be written. Then, after the record is straight, you have to let time wash away heavy memories, learning the wisdom of this attitude with the flowing water of the river Kwanza (a pervasive metaphor in Luandino Vieira's writing) the silent witness to many histories, deaths and destinies. And yet, none of these ever prevented the river from flowing to its destiny. As Luandino Vieira says, "we were the ones that were rowing too fast",¹⁴ while the river, just as history, live on another scale of continuity and deliverance. Probably, it is this faith in the future and in the ability to heal and love that explains the

¹⁴ "Nós é quem éramos os apressados canoeiros", Luandino Vieira, 2009: 98.

surprising amount of light and generosity in a book of 'guerrilheiros'. It never ceases to amaze me.

Why margins are the centre

Ana Paula Tavares, Angolan writer who lives between Portugal and Angola, wrote a small poem I offer as an adequate conclusion to the urgency of listening to these authors. I place them in exile because they live multiple lives and belong exclusively to none. From the liminal, ubiquitous spaces they inhabit, they have found, each in her/his own ways, the ability to articulate routes for self-knowledge and awareness, so urgent in a globalised, moving world. It seems it is up to the margins of the literary heritage claimed by the West to find the words to shatter indifference. It is a beginning.

Aquela mulher que rasga a noite
com o seu canto de espera
não canta
Abre a boca
E solta os pássaros
Que lhe povoam a garganta.
(Paula Tavares, *O Lago da Lua*, 1999: 17)

That woman who pierces the night
With her chant of longing
Sings no song
She opens her mouth
And lets free the flustered birds
in her throat.

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