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Re-imagining a National Identity in Contemporary Portuguese Narrative

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For centuries Portuguese culture has basked in the contemplation of its glorious past as pioneer in opening up the frontiers of the Western world. As Eduardo Lourenço, one of the most respected analysts of contemporary Portuguese thought, has argued, it was Camões's sixteenth-century epic poem *Os Lusíadas* that first erected the Portuguese maritime and imperial venture into the founding myth of the nation's identity.¹ According to Lourenço, even after the loss of its African colonies in the mid-1970s, Portugal did not suffer a crisis of national identity. Rather, the problem with the nation's self-image, as construed in and by its literature, is one of *hyperidentity*,² which Vítor Viçoso has paraphrased as "an obsessive and almost delirious search for differences" (Viçoso 32; my translation).³ Thus, in Lourenço's view, Portugal's sense of being different from other European countries supposedly nourishes and strengthens an almost indestructible national identity. In a similar vein, Onésimo Teotónio Almeida begins an extensive survey of the question of national identity in contemporary Portuguese writing with the following statement: "A redução de Portugal à sua dimensão europeia, após a descolonização, não provocou no país o trauma que seria de supor" ("A Questão" 492). [Portugal's reduction to its European dimension after decolonization did not give rise to the trauma that might have been expected in the country.]

Nevertheless, the Portuguese revolution of 1974, the most decisive turning point in the country's modern history, and the consequential independence of the Portuguese colonies in Africa, inevitably brought about profound transformations in a society that had until then cherished its image as head of a vast African empire.⁴ Following the loss of this imperial dimension, which had constructed the country's imagination for centuries, and its relatively recent acceptance into

the European forum, from which it had been isolated for the greater part of the twentieth century, Portuguese society began attempting to redefine its self-image. The sheer volume of writings engaging in a reappraisal of Portuguese identity in the years since 1974 directly undermines Lourenço's belief about the indestructibility of the country's strong sense of collective selfhood.⁵

It is in the work of historians and sociologists, rather than in the writings of cultural essayists and literary critics, that we find the first refutations of the notion of Portugal's unwavering sense of national identity. In his sound study of Portuguese identity from a political, historical and sociological point of view, the historian José Mattoso affirms:

A convicção, largamente difundida até ao fim dos anos sessenta, de que Portugal possuía uma unidade e uma coerência culturais que não existiriam noutros países pode facilmente demonstrar-se como falsa para a cultura em geral, sobretudo quando não se considera apenas a cultura letrada, mas também a cultura popular. (10)

[Widespread until the end of the sixties, the conviction that Portugal possessed a cultural unity and coherence which presumably did not exist in other countries can be demonstrated to be false as to culture in general, especially if one considers not only the literate culture, but also popular culture.]

It is my conviction that Eduardo Lourenço's point about the literary origins of the country's self-image is undeniably true, but that Portuguese contemporary literature proves him wrong in the belief that the national identity remained unshaken after the demise of the empire. Since it was Portuguese literature that first shaped, indeed created, the sense of an imperial identity which prevailed until 1974, it is not surprising that the process of re-evaluating the nation's identity should be the focus of much of its contemporary literature too. Thus, an examination of the "literate culture" as well will corroborate Mattoso's point that Portugal's "cultural coherence" was deeply disrupted by the historical events of the mid-1970s. Before proceeding, it is important to underline that, although addressing the question of Portuguese national identity, I do not in any way sustain

that identity and nationalism are necessarily interdependent. Rather, I take the concept of national identity in broad cultural terms, meaning the awareness of belonging to a collective cultural entity, in which literature is included as well.

From the extensive list of studies dealing with the question of national identity in post-revolutionary Portuguese fiction, the 2002 study by Isabel Allegro de Magalhães stands out for its extremely sensitive close readings of some very well selected texts. In this study, the critic herself recognizes that her preoccupation is “an almost ethnographic examination of the voices and acts” of fictional characters treated as if they were real people (*Capelas* 164; my translation). As did Ellen Sapega a few years before, Isabel Allegro de Magalhães challenges the received view that little or nothing has changed in the cultural and literary discourse of Portuguese national identity. In a theoretically solid 1997 article, Sapega detects a marked departure from the temporal/historical linearity that has reinforced a sense of undisturbed national identity in Portuguese literature. Instead, she underlines the “renewed desire to regard the nation in spatial terms” (177) by identifying attempts at reterritorialization in half a dozen of the country’s most important novels of the 1980s. Her argument is that in these recent novels the authors focus on acceptance of the new Portugal, now limited to its geographical borders, taking Portugal as it is here and now, clearly departing from any nostalgia for the imperial past.

My purpose in the present study is to identify a different order of signs of a disrupted sense of national identity in Portuguese fiction published after the 1974 democratic revolution. In the first two novels here studied (roughly of the same period as the works analyzed by Sapega), the loss of empire appears as much more problematic for the continuity of a sense of national identity than Lourenço’s notion of an unshakeable Portuguese hyperidentity would allow us to suppose. In the second group of novels I examine, the burden of the imperial past appears to have finally been discarded, but it still pervades (by antithesis) the search for a new sense of Portuguese identity. The third group of novels here briefly discussed projects a new image of the country’s identity in the reterritorialization framework proposed by Ellen Sapega, but it also integrates new elements derived from the colonial empire previously not included.

Portuguese fiction of the final quarter of the twentieth century often portrays a society whose image of itself and its role in the

world has been torn apart by the loss of its African empire. Many of the novels of the 1980s and 1990s show a recurring concern with the fragmentation of self, even in extreme cases the dismembering of the body. These are common themes in the so-called postcolonial literatures, but they are not generally studied as such in the literatures of the former colonizing countries. I argue that these thematic preoccupations, often represented also in the discursive fragmentation of the text, reflect the profound tearing of the country's identity and self-image, deriving from the new, post-imperial situation in which the Portuguese find themselves.

After Fanon's pioneer depictions of the psychological fissures suffered by the colonized under colonialism, it became easier for others to conceptualize the sense of doubleness experienced by formerly colonized people. In his foreword to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Homi Bhabha draws our attention to the importance of memory in the rebuilding of postcolonial identities. He does it in terms that bring out both the psychological and the physical sense of sundering of self inflicted on the colonized: "It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (121). By his clever hyphenation of the word re-member, Bhabha forges a link between re-membering and dis-membering which, although etymologically spurious, is metaphorically thought-provoking, reminding us of the strong connection between cultural identity and consciousness of a "present, dismembered and dislocated" (115). Without wishing to underline more than some remarkable similarities between the violently disrupted sense of identity of once colonized people and that of the former colonizers, I believe that postcolonial theory can provide useful tools also for the reading of post-imperial literatures, despite the danger of over-emphasizing continuities.⁶ This is the case specifically when the post-imperial literature in question is so strongly anti-colonial that it comes close to postcolonial political feeling, or, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, when the *post* in postcolonial is taken to signify "explicit resistance and opposition, the anticolonial" (10).

The fixation with the dismembering of the body appears, not surprisingly, in the more extreme case of novels dealing specifically with the colonial wars in Africa. While the loss of Portugal's stronghold in India did not inspire any notable fictional work, Portuguese involvement in the independence wars of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau constitutes the focus of numerous novels. Many of these

are works of high literary quality, often displaying political sympathy for “the enemy,” the African other, which makes them particularly striking. Apart from the two narratives here analyzed, other examples of colonial war novels that fall into this category include António Lobo Antunes’s *Os Cus de Judas* (1979), Lídia Jorge’s *A Costa dos Murmúrios* (1988), Modesto Navarro’s *Ir à Guerra* (1974), José Martins Garcia’s *Lugar de Massacre* (1975), Abílio Teixeira Mendes’s *Henda Xala* (1984), or Cristóvão de Aguiar’s *O Braço Tatuado* (1990). None of these should technically be considered postcolonial, but the anti-colonial feeling they express is so strong that their narrators more often feel that they are the victims of colonialism than the upholders of the imperial values they are sent to defend in Africa.⁷

Many passages of these narratives reveal an obsession with severing of limbs or dismembering of the body, which must be read at an immediate level as the natural consequence of the war situation. It is as if disconnected parts of the human body had an existence of their own. Some very obvious examples of this trauma of physical amputation appear in João de Melo’s *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* (1984).⁸ The novel begins inside the mind of a soldier who, while on sentinel duty, becomes suspicious that someone or something is approaching the army camp. As he cries out “Quem vem lá?” [who’s there?], we read the comment: “a voz já não era sua” [the voice was no longer his] (11). This does not yet amount to a feeling of dismemberment, but his own voice already sounds disembodied.

The first chapter of the novel concentrates on voice, gaze, saliva, hands, feet, as if they were entities disconnected from the living bodies to whom they belong. This might well be interpreted as a natural consequence of fear and the surrounding evidence of death and mutilation in a war situation, but the end of the very first chapter gives it another dimension:

eu aqui, soldado ocidental, a mão armada, o olhar deserto, esquecido me dou, venho de um navio sem rédeas, assim um cavalo montado às avessas e de freio nos dentes (24).

[I, here, occidental soldier, a weapon in my hand, emptiness in my gaze, forgotten I give myself, I come from a ship without reins, a horse that has taken the bit, being ridden the wrong way around] (my translation).

The hand and the gaze are shown as somehow separate from the whole body, but the context and the poetic imagery unambiguously establish the essential clue for reading the novel: *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* claims as its narrative impulse a collective voice, one which is simultaneously epic and poetic, concerned with re-evaluating the self-image of a nation historically associated with maritime expansion. The voice of this soldier at war is neither merely personal nor generally Western, but specifically “occidental,” because it is loaded with echoes of the history and epic of the country which Camões described as “ocidental praia lusitana” [the occidental Lusitanian seashore].⁹ The mention of a ship in the landlocked Angolan front seems as totally incongruous as that of a horse, an anachronism in a war no longer fought with cavalry. But they only appear to be the result of badly mixed metaphors if one does not realize the overarching aim of the novel, which is to portray the impossibility of upholding a Portuguese colonial empire, once reached by sailing vessels and then conquered on horseback. This metaphorical ship has lost its equestrian reins because the empire it represents is crumbling, and the soldiers’ collective sense of national selfhood is falling apart, as much as the human bodies around them are dismembered. No disjointed hand, armed or unarmed, can defend it, no eye can make sense of it: a Portuguese imperial identity is no longer possible.

Later on in the book, consistent with the physical devastation to be expected in a war novel, such dismembering of the body is described in gory detail. However, the indication that this must be read as a metaphor for the dismantling of empire is there from the beginning of the novel. Eyes in particular seem to acquire a life of their own. The eyes, of course, confer the privileged status of the eyewitness, they are capable of legitimizing truth claims. In *Autópsia*, we sometimes see the eyes of men recently deceased offer unconquerable resistance (“Tentou em vão fechar-lhe os olhos. As dobradiças das pálpebras já não podiam obedecer aos seus dedos” (128) [In vain he tried to close his eyes. The hinges of the eyelids no longer obeyed his fingers]). Sometimes it is the eyes of the living—though they fear that they may already be dead—that do not seem to obey the commands of the brain (“os olhos desmesuradamente abertos, fora de todo o entendimento” (141) [the eyes excessively open, beyond any understanding]). The mind commands them to make sense of the senselessness of war, but these autonomous eyes cannot be made to understand.

While such an obsession is natural in a war setting, it does not always correspond to bloodshed and casualties. Chapter 13, for example, opens with a catalogue of disconnected body parts: arms, eyeballs, stomach, fingers, legs, hands, teeth, skin, mouth (159-60). It is the gaze of a living soldier trying to figure out what death feels like, if the dead feel anything at all. However, the clear impression for the reader is that this disembodied gaze stands metaphorically for the collapse of the belief in the validity of empire. It must be read as that of someone trying to make sense of an imperial identity, which is now discovered shattered.

Manuel Alegre's 1989 *Jornada de África* is another novel of the colonial war set partly in Angola (like João de Melo's), and partly in Portugal.¹⁰ Here the experience of war is recaptured through a myriad of literary echoes, with the result that the tone is completely different from that of most narratives of war. It presents practically no gruesome descriptions of dismembered bodies. Yet, one of the very few passages where such details are present is much more explicit than those quoted from *Autópsia* in relating physical mutilation with a shattered sense of imperial identity. As Sebastião, the protagonist, a non-commissioned officer in the Portuguese army sent to war in Angola, goes to visit a friend who has just lost his leg in a grenade explosion, he sees many other amputees in the military hospital. The sentence is oddly impersonal, constructed without the personal pronoun normally used with the verb *faltar*: "Faltam braços, mãos, pernas, pés" (168) [arms, hands, legs, feet are missing]. The narrator claims that Sebastião "tem a sensação de que o acusam de vir inteiro" [he has the feeling that they accuse him of arriving whole], as if dismemberment had somehow become more normal or more acceptable than wholeness. The next paragraph begins with a description of what must be standard circumstances in a military hospital, but it soon makes a very explicit connection between dismemberment and shattering of imperial identity:

Coxos, manetas, paraplégicos. O resto ficou nas picadas, Angola é nossa, venham ver, há bocados de carne por aí, são pedaços de Portugal florindo algures no mato, sangue e merda, duarte de almeida é o nosso nome. Para Angola e em força, braços, pernas, mãos. (169)

[Cripples, one-armed men, paraplegics. The rest were left on the dirt-roads, Angola is ours, come and see, there are pieces of flesh all around, they are pieces of Portugal blooming in the woods, blood and shit, duarte de almeida is our name. To Angola with might and main, arms, legs, hands] (my translation).

The passage makes abundant use of nationalist slogans, which are still quite familiar to readers of the generation that lived through the years of the colonial wars (1961-1974). “Angola is ours” was the motto of the very right-wing white colonists, who in fact would have preferred to put an end to the African independence movement by their own means, without the Portuguese army’s intervention, which they considered too humane for their liking. The motto was enthusiastically adopted by Salazar’s regime, which used it to bolster Portuguese imperial feeling, and it was even used as the refrain in a military march composed in 1961. The words “to Angola with might and main” were Salazar’s immediate reaction to the news that a pro-independence uprising had just taken place in Angola. The paragraph leaves no doubt that the three things are connected: the sight of physical mutilation (which Portuguese readers readily associate with the historical figure of Duarte de Almeida),¹¹ the feeling of guilt of those remaining whole, and the rhetoric of a Portuguese imperial identity to be defended at all costs. To the exhortation “with might and main” the narrator sarcastically adds the severed arms, legs, and hands which are missing in the hospital, and which readers of Portuguese colonial war novels encounter disjointed in many narratives of the conflict. These dismembered bodies, then, not only represent the collapse of the very empire which these soldiers are there to uphold, and which is finally falling apart. They also signify the impossibility of ever putting the empire back together again and the foolishness of clinging to the old imperial identity, which can no longer be sustained.

Postcolonial theory has made us aware that “the construction or demolition of houses or buildings in post-colonial locations is a recurring and evocative figure for the problematic of post-colonial identity” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 28). Building a house stands metaphorically for the (re)construction of nation and the (re)imagining of collective selfhood, which are indispensable steps in postcolonial resurgence. As to the significance of the body in this connection, it

was feminist theory that first drew our attention to the fact that the body must be seen as part of a socio-historical context, rather than merely in biological or even psychological terms (Braidotti 4). In post-colonial literatures, metaphors of the body, also, as a whole made up of cohesive constitutive parts, are suggestive of the rebuilding of community and the reparation of fractured identity.¹² As a corollary, while figures of the healthy body acquire special importance in postcolonial contexts, in that they symbolize the site of nationhood, images of dismemberment and loss of cohesion between body parts symbolize a profound disruption in the sense of national identity in a literature of imperial agony.

A large number of recent Portuguese novels undertake the kind of therapeutic rewriting of History (often presenting the long forgotten point of view of History's anonymous players) that we associate with European postmodernism in particular, as well as (from another perspective) with postcolonialism. From that rather extensive corpus, which could provide ample ground for discussion of a reformulation of Portuguese identity, I select two novels by the two best known contemporary Portuguese novelists: *A Jangada de Pedra*, by José Saramago, and *As Naus*, by António Lobo Antunes, 1986 and 1988 respectively. These two books stand out as representative of a transitional stage in the subtle changes we can detect in the perception and reshaping of Portuguese national identity as construed in the country's literature. *A Jangada de Pedra* tells the tale of the Iberian Peninsula breaking away from the rest of Europe and sailing into the Atlantic Ocean, until it stops, of its own volition, half way between the coast of Brazil and the African continent. Such a brief summary can, however, be misleading, given that it only emphasizes the social and geopolitical implications of a novel which is in fact, above all, a meditation on human solidarity and love, on every human being's need to choose to create a new life together with others. Apart from the obvious elements of magical realism, the novel also contemplates the choices that Portugal has made, is making, or must make, as to its strategic position in the world. It is important to point out that this is not just a question of Portugal's finding its most comfortable place in the oceans of the southern hemisphere, between its former African colonies and Brazil, the largest Portuguese-speaking country in the world. It is also about Portugal's choice finally to stop turning its back on Spain, its historical arch-enemy in Europe and a long-term

threat to the country's identity and independence.¹³ This does not mean that the novel advocates a joining of the two Iberian nations in one single political entity of any kind. But as it happens, and through personal rather than political choices, it is together that Portugal and Spain, transformed into a single stone raft, choose to position themselves in the geographical region of their former colonial empires, as if their destinies were inextricably bound together. Given Portugal's traditionally peripheral position within Europe, this is not a clear-cut case of a formerly colonizing northern nation making amends to once colonized southern nations, but it is certainly a significant step towards envisioning different imaginative possibilities in the search for a new, more open, national and cultural identity. Portugal and Spain are viewed no longer as the remote, northern, former heads of empire, but as equal partners, or at least as equidistant partners from their former colonies.

While *A Jangada de Pedra* thus attempts a reshaping of world geography, which would entail a very different national self-image for Portugal, in *As Naus* we see an equally imaginary attempt at rewriting world history. In António Lobo Antunes's 1988 novel, the most famous fifteenth—and sixteenth—century Portuguese navigators, a sort of complete 'who's who' of Portuguese maritime expansion (Pedro Álvares Cabral, the "discoverer" of Brazil, Diogo Cão, the African coast explorer, Vasco da Gama, leader of the first sea voyage from Portugal to India around the Cape of Good Hope), as well as their contemporary kings and viceroys, the poet Camões, the traveller and writer Fernão Mendes Pinto, the botanist Garcia de Orta and even St Francis Xavier, the apostle of India, all return to Portugal at the time of the 1974 revolution. The novel is extremely complex in its constant interweaving of past and present, deliberately mystifying the reader as to whether the characters can possibly be read as the historical figures that they once were or if they are supposed to be seen exclusively as "returnees."¹⁴ Above all it is an intricate parody of both the Portuguese discoveries and the failures and disappointments of the Portuguese democratic revolution.¹⁵ This is a perfect example of the trend to stop "making the past intervene as a model for the present," but rather making the present intervene "as a re-evaluator of the past," which Cerdeira da Silva identifies in contemporary Portuguese narrative (111).¹⁶

In *As Naus*, Lobo Antunes undertakes a massive critique of Portugal's "civilizing mission" in its former colonies. The heroes

of Portuguese imperialism—the great navigators, the celebrated kings and viceroys, the saintly missionaries—acquire new identities as returnees trying to make do back in their native Portugal. They are now portrayed variously as small traders or functionaries, as shopkeepers or diamond dealers, a cheap guesthouse manager, a water-meter reader, a pimp, and a card player. Most of them are poor migrants, some involved in shady dealings, others living by their wits, others simply turning their hand to whatever can help them make ends meet. The novel, then, turns the most revered, the most canonical symbols of Portuguese imperial history completely upside down. Those who once created Portugal's strong sense of an imperial destiny are now shown as having to try to build a new identity for themselves, attempting to fit into a changed society, which the end of colonialism has robbed of a sense of its former, proud imperial identity. Thus, in these two novels, both José Saramago and António Lobo Antunes, the two major figures of contemporary Portuguese literature, present new, imaginary possibilities for the development of a different sense of collective cultural affinities, and each undermines the founding myths of Portuguese identity.

As a third stage in this study, it becomes appropriate at this point to scrutinize further aspects of the question of the return in contemporary Portuguese literature, as an avenue for the investigation of the re-shaping of the sense of national selfhood. Maria Alzira Seixo has deftly referred to Lobo Antunes's novel *As Naus* as depicting "o retorno inverosímil" [the implausible return, or the non-verisimilar return] (*Os Romances* 167), for in this novel the great characters of Portuguese history come home in very reduced circumstances and stripped of any historical grandeur. But perhaps this "non-verisimilar" return in literature is in fact beginning to approximate late twentieth-century reality, and opening the way for the fictional expression of other returns which are changing Portuguese identity at the dawning of the new millennium. The aim here is to investigate what seems to be the natural consequence of a centuries-old sense of imperial nationhood. The independence of the countries that were once Portugal's colonies set in motion two different kinds of return. One was that of the so-called returnees, going back home after a life in the colonies. The other is the arrival of African migrants, who have the right to migrate to the former colonial metropolis, a migration that must be seen as a metaphorical return in the case of a country which insisted

that it treated the people it colonized as if they were Portuguese too. Here we need to investigate whether the latest literature being written in Portugal pays attention to these two types of return, and whether it perceives a change in the sense of national identity, leading to the inclusion of those two groups so often very obviously excluded.

Few novels deal with the new demographic fabric of a society which has profoundly changed with the arrival in large numbers of not only Portuguese-born returnees, but also African-born migrants from the newly independent countries. In sociological terms, these arrivals have had the strongest impact on Portuguese everyday life. Nevertheless, in literary terms, they are still fairly invisible in the country's most recent fiction. Isabel Allegro de Magalhães has rightly pointed out that the voice of the returnees in particular is strikingly absent from contemporary Portuguese literature (*Capelas* 213). There are few exceptions, one of the earliest ones being Wanda Ramos's *Percursos* (1980), in which the perspective of the narrator's father on his own life as a colonial, now a returnee in Portugal after the decolonization process, is very briefly considered, but then not mentioned again:

desculpa de que uma vida inteira perdida pelas áfricas e imprevista a descolonização, vida toda de sacrifícios, diria, uma ridícula indemnização e já foi sorte, como não havia de estar ele traumatizado (13)

[the excuse that a whole life wasted in the africanas and the unforeseen decolonization, a whole life of sacrifices, he'd say, a ridiculous pittance by way of indemnity and better than nothing at that, how was he supposed not to be traumatized] (my translation).

Another such exception is a much later novel by António Lobo Antunes, *O Esplendor de Portugal* (1997). Its plot revolves around the life of a returnee family of a different kind: the children were born in Angola, though of Portuguese descent, during the colonial period, but their return to Portugal is occasioned not by the independence war but by the later Angolan civil war. One of the children turns out not to have the same Portuguese mother, indeed to be the son of an African woman with whom his father had an affair, but he is hardly recognizable as a mulatto. In any case, these characters all share a

sense of having been unfairly treated by the mother country, and especially of not belonging, that is, of not really fitting in with the rest of the community.

As to the presence of more discernible mulattos and especially black African characters coming from the former Portuguese colonies, this is slowly becoming more noticeable in the country's fiction.¹⁷ In the few books in which they appear they tend to be cast in cliché roles as criminals or drug-dealers, which inevitably creates a distance between *them* and *us*. There is no sense that such characters are accepted as an intrinsic part of the country's collective self, of the Portuguese sense of personal and national selfhood.

Three novels very recently published deserve further attention here, as they seem to herald fresh literary explorations to come: first, a novel by a much younger writer, Possidónio Cachapa's *O Mar por Cima* (2002); secondly, Maria Velho da Costa's *Irene ou o Contrato Social*, published in the year 2000; and finally Lídia Jorge's *O Vento Assobiando nas Gruas* (2002). In *O Mar por Cima*, there are two main intertwined plots, narrated alternately and by distinct narrative voices. The two sets of characters eventually are brought together precisely because one of the protagonists is a policeman who moves between both fictional settings. He arrests a black youth caught in the act of assaulting a white teenager, whose money the African boy is trying to convince his victim to part with. This black character, then, is still cast in the role of teenage delinquent, particularly connected with drug-related crimes, as is often the case in the few Portuguese novels in which black Africans make an appearance. What makes Xuinga different in *O Mar por Cima* is the fact that he reveals a social conscience of sorts. He repeatedly claims that he does not wish to harm the people whose money he takes. He simply wants them to stop being selfish and to start sharing their money with him: "Uma repartição mais equitativa entre ricos e pobres" (110) [a more equitable distribution of wealth between rich and poor]. But the novel contains another surprise too: taken to the police station to lodge a formal complaint against his black attacker, the white young man is still so terrified that he can hardly tell the officer in charge what happened. But it turns out that it was not the violence of the black boy's attack that scared him, but rather the brutality of the policeman's attack on the attacker, which verged on madness. Indeed the policeman leaves Xuinga for dead. What is interesting here is the almost worryingly ironical tone:

the officer in charge who interviews the complainant says: “Eu não sou racista, mas se fosse, dizia-lhe que isto com tipos de cor...” (170) [I am not a racist, but if I were, I’d tell you that when it comes to colored guys...]. In the end, the policeman is found not guilty, due to insufficient evidence:

Um jovem marginal com a face desfeita não era argumento suficiente para que a juíza desse os factos como provados. Xuinga, ele sim!, foi julgado e condenado por ofensas corporais. (189)

[A marginal young man with his face smashed up was not sufficient argument for a judge to consider the (policeman’s) actions to be proved. Xuinga, yes!, he was tried and convicted for grievous bodily harm.]

Indeed, this is a radical departure from the litany of the Portuguese as a non-racist people that had informed Portugal’s previous self-image as conveyed not only in the country’s official discourse, but in its literature as well.

In *Irene ou o Contrato Social*, the latest book by a novelist with a very distinguished writing career and a long list of literary awards to her credit, signs of a new Portuguese identity emerge: the characters come from very different backgrounds, both socially and racially. Here, the (admittedly ex-) drug addict is a white woman actor seriously attempting rehabilitation, which at long last produces positive results when she falls in love with an unusual mulatto character. This is a young man also with a dubious past, as he too was involved in a crime that forced him to disappear from Portugal for a while, allowing time for Portuguese authorities to forget about it. But this mulatto young man is the son of an African woman (presumably Cape Verdean) and the stepson of a German diplomat. He has striking blond hair and extraordinary good looks; and also enough money, and enough diplomatic protection to be able to disappear in times of trouble. In this novel, then, the cliché of the African young man who has no escape from a life of poverty and crime is broken. But in another sense the book avoids any real questioning of the presence of racism in this new society, because the mulatto character has money, and money has a long history of whitewashing blackness.

What makes the novel more striking is its deliberate inclusion of clear marks of postcolonialism in the text. The actor-character is rehearsing *The Tempest*, the Shakespearean play that has been most “cannibalized” by authors from postcolonial English-speaking countries. The mulatto’s name is Orlando, which immediately places him in a prestigious European literary lineage, as if to grant him the right to be in Europe. Many characters speak many languages: the two African characters (mother and son) speak Cape Verdean Creole, as well as Portuguese, German, English, and French (all of them languages of former European empires). English seems to be the preferred means of communication between the troublesome young adolescents involved in petty crime, but so is also another idiom of their own invention, which sets them apart and gives them an edge of complicity. And, of course, constituting the most obvious sign of postcolonial hybridity, Orlando’s skin is dark but his hair is blond. It is important to underline that there is no hint of exclusion here. The fact that the characters are multilingual amounts to a social advantage, rather than pushing them into the exclusion zone that black African characters often must inhabit by reason of their linguistic difference.

For his part, Orlando takes advantage of the mobility (and immunity) that his stepfather’s money and position allow him. During his time in European hiding he takes on various false names (all old Portuguese names, such as José, Antero, António, Alfredo, or Mário), and he does not at any moment deny or hide his Portuguese identity. He even assumes the traditional role of many Portuguese migrants in Europe: “trabalhador braçal” [hand laborer], passing, in Manuel Gusmão’s words, for “emigrante e mestiço, ‘portuga e preto’” [migrant and half-breed, Portuguese and black] (97; my translation). Thus, this novel makes a conscious attempt at construing a new Portuguese identity that is inclusive of those others who have come from the world that the Portuguese have always wanted to be seen as having opened to Europe. Whether this portrayal is very realistic is another matter, concentrating as it does on atypical, privileged, and affluent African characters. It is almost at the other extreme, deliberately undermining the cliché of the disadvantaged, criminal—black—character. Perhaps we have to wait until many more African or part-African characters begin to appear regularly in Portuguese literature, especially in a less self-conscious way. But it certainly revolves around an Other who is not automatically excluded from a sense of Portuguese identity.

Lídia Jorge's *O Vento Assobiando nas Gruas* (2002) comes closest to construing a fictional microcosm in which a new Portuguese identity emerges, making room for Portuguese and African characters learning to coexist in the same society. The plot involves two families, one Portuguese, the other Cape Verdean, who end up being connected by marriage when Milene, the Portuguese girl, decides to marry one of the Cape Verdean men. Milene is a character always described as different due to her slight retardation ("oligofrénica," 454) and disregard for social conventions. Her family also constantly intimidates her, making her feel so inadequate that she retreats into silence, whereas with the Cape Verdean extended family she is quite talkative and at ease. The choice of this protagonist, so insecure of her own speaking ability that she seems to be living in a permanent state of shock, gives the novel a perfect architecture, allowing it to be constructed around a character reduced to silence and desperately trying to assert her own identity. It is not true that Milene cannot speak. The problem is that she is aware that nobody wants to listen to her, and nobody gives her the opportunity to speak. Her silence, therefore, is much more a social imposition than a consequence of her mental condition. And the choice of this heroine who suffers from feelings of exclusion so strong that she becomes temporarily incapable of speaking and self-censors herself into silence is the perfect artifice for the introduction of a new element in Portuguese literature at the beginning of the new millennium. *O Vento Assobiando nas Gruas* points to the need to include in *our* literature also those *other* characters that until now have mostly been left out of it. Milene, white and Portuguese, shares with the Cape Verdeans, the only characters in whose company she feels able to break her silence, the experience of feeling different and excluded.

In her groundbreaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak was the first to make us think, in a systematic and challenging manner, of the ramifications of the silence imposed not only on the colonized, but especially on the most marginalized amongst them, "the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat" (78). As these oppressed "subalterns" have neither the power nor the opportunity to speak for themselves, they are condemned either never to obtain the right to be free speaking subjects or to be forever spoken for by Western intellectuals who take up their cause. In either case, they are left without any possibility for anti-colonial resistance.

Such a predicament is not totally different from the one in which Milene finds herself in *O Vento Assobiando nas Gruas*. Although this character is not financially disadvantaged, she is forever marginalized and silenced in her difference. Just like in the vicious circle that afflicts the real “subalterns,” Milene’s well-meaning aunts and uncles always interrupt her hesitating utterances and speak for her. It is certainly not by chance that in this novel Milene, always excluded and always reduced to silence by her own family, becomes the linking element between her white Portuguese relatives and the very large Cape Verdean family and community. Both groups are shown already living side by side in Portugal but still ignoring (or even fearing) each other. Milene’s family treats her in the same objectifying and demeaning manner as colonial authorities used to treat the colonized, reducing them to a subaltern role and to a silencing of their own cultural will.

The Cape Verdean characters that we encounter in Maria Velho da Costa’s *Irene ou o Contrato Social* seem to be rather erudite literary constructions in comparison with the apparently more flesh-and-blood Cape Verdeans of the Mata family in Lúcia Jorge’s *O Vento Assobiando nas Gruas*. The former live in a world that is by no means subaltern or marginalized. In this sense, Lúcia Jorge’s novel goes much further in the attempt to understand and observe from within a community still largely excluded from *ours*, but who are managing to express their interstitial selves amongst the dominant culture with which they have come to coexist. The entire plot revolves around the affinities that Milene discovers between herself, a personally excluded character, and the Cape Verdean family, the symbol of a people (and many other peoples) historically excluded, both equally silenced. Milene, then, becomes an agent for change within her own society, when she begins enacting a tentative identity that is as co-inhabited by the Other.

It is probably still too early to detect profound changes in a sense of national identity as construed by contemporary Portuguese literature. Nevertheless, there are many signs of significant fissures in a national self-image, which this study has tried to point out. First of all, the novels of the colonial war reject an imperial identity that Camões’s epic had first extolled, that the dictatorship had upheld and glorified, and that the writers of the generation directly concerned with the war finally destroy by associating it with images of physical dismemberment. These novels belong to a thematic sub-genre which will perhaps begin to dwindle in the near future, whenever the colonial wars lose their imaginative

appeal to a new generation of writers and readers who may come to see them as a dark episode in Portuguese history, now best forgotten.¹⁸

Then, in what appears to be a transitional stage in the reformulation of Portuguese identity detectable in contemporary fiction, in *A Jangada de Pedra*, voyaging is no longer gloriously associated with the caravels of the age of discoveries, nor (more destructively) with the ship wrecked in inland Angola in João de Melo's *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas*. The voyaging in Saramago's novel is simply connected with a lowly stone raft inhabited by humble individuals and their dogs, searching for new options to suit a reality they perceive as changed. For its part, Lobo Antunes's *As Naus* presents the imaginary possibility of a return of the great navigators of the past as common people of the present, foreshadowing other, more realistic returns that will necessarily change the country's cultural identity. These two novels have in common their non-mimetic nature. While all narratives create their own artistic microcosms, each of these two conceives a world that is primarily imaginary (give or take the real possibility of a climatic catastrophe which might one day sever the Iberian Peninsula from the European continent).

The third group is not yet very extensive. However, it seems to be growing and beginning to reveal a new, tentative sense of Portuguese identity. Perhaps in a not very distant future this will prevail, and there will be a different experience of identity (whether national or simply geographical). Victor Ramraj writes of an "anti-imperialist agenda" in postcolonial studies which places too much emphasis on difference "between the former colonies and their colonizers, between us and them" (181). The most recent Portuguese fiction seems to be at last including both groups: *we*—Portuguese, white and reasonably affluent, and *they*—whether Portuguese returnees (partly resented, partly outright rejected), or African, or part-African, black or mixed-blood. Literature has a special ability to detect and construe cognitive and experiential change in the society in which and by which it is written. It may well be that the tentative, inclusive, identities that we see these latest novels enacting will become more and more the rule in a new society in which we all must learn to be co-inhabited by the Other. The emerging re-shaping of Portuguese identity, which we can perceive as expressed in the country's literature, may well in the near future more comfortably include the other people whose identities have for centuries been intertwined with ours but to whose voices we have for so long been ethnically deaf.

Notes

1. See Eduardo Lourenço, *O Labirinto da Saudade*, particularly the essay “Da literatura como interpretação de Portugal;” also some of his occasional writings, for example, “Pequena Mitologia Portuguesa.”

2. See Lourenço, *Nós e a Europa ou as Duas Razões*.

3. Viçoso surveys the work of several earlier Portuguese thinkers and writers who likewise contributed to the establishment of a strong Portuguese cultural identity.

4. Portugal lost Goa, its last stronghold in India, in 1961. Its former African colonies, Angola, Cape Verde, Guínea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, gained their independence in 1975. In the East, Timor achieved independence from Portugal in the same year, though it soon lost it again to Indonesia, and Macau was handed over to Chinese administration in December 1999.

5. It would be superfluous to review here the extent and contents of this large body of writings because the work has been done before, and there exist good surveys of Portuguese literature dealing with the question of national identity. In Portuguese, see for example António Quadros’s thorough *A Ideia de Portugal na Literatura Portuguesa dos Últimos 100 Anos* (1989) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “11/1992 (Onze Teses por Ocasão de Mais uma Descoberta de Portugal)” (1992). In English, Onésimo Teotónio Almeida gives a general introduction to the topic in “Portugal and the concern with national identity” (1994), and a more in-depth analysis in “On the Contemporary Portuguese Essay” (1997). For a perceptive, fine-tuned examination of literary expressions of a changing Portuguese identity, see Isabel Allegro de Magalhães, “The Last Big Voyage out” (2000). Eduardo Lourenço, the doyen of Portuguese essayists, has frequently, almost obsessively, returned to the topic of Portuguese identity. His work has always been very well received and acclaimed but not much discussed. Rather than analyzing the treatment of Portuguese identity by other writers, Lourenço puts forward a very idiosyncratic vision of Portugal’s self-image, creating his own myths as he expounds them.

6. I am very aware of the dangers of over-extending postcolonial theory to the analysis of technically colonial and post-imperial literatures, which Benita Parry among others has carefully pointed out. Nevertheless, the analytical tools that postcolonial thought has put at our disposal are often extremely fruitful in the study of post-imperial fiction as well.

7. Elsewhere (“The Colonial Malaise in Contemporary Portuguese Fiction”), I have identified in some of these novels features normally considered postcolonial.

8. Born in 1949 in the Azores islands, João de Melo is a distinguished writer, the author of half a dozen novels, collections of short stories, significant anthologies, and essays dealing with Azorean identity, the colonial war, and other topics. Lately he has become Portuguese cultural counselor in Madrid, without abandoning his writing career.

9. Camões, *Os Lusíadas*, I.1:2.

10. The author of more than a dozen volumes of poetry, many of which have been awarded various literary prizes, Manuel Alegre is one of Portugal's best known contemporary poets. He also pursues an active career as a parliamentarian, and has, since 1989, also turned his talents to the writing of prose. He has published six novels. The colonial war and the exile's condition are recurrent themes in both his poetry and his prose.

11. Duarte de Almeida, 'O Decegado' [the Maimed], was the standard-bearer in the 1476 Toro battle between Portuguese and Spaniards, who had his hands amputated by the enemy rather than drop the king's flag.

12. A striking example within the Portuguese-language context is the Angolan writer Pepetela's 1985 novel *Yaka*. The titles of the various chapters correspond to parts of the body (legs, arms, head, mouth, etc.).

13. According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, this is a fear which is still prevalent in Portugal: "por detrás da 'civilização ibérica' está sempre o receio das pretensões hegemónicas da Espanha" (111) [behind the 'Iberian civilization' there continues to lurk the fear of Spain's hegemonic pretensions] (my translation).

14. This is the word coined after 1974 to refer to people born in Portugal who returned to their country of origin after years of colonial life in Africa, following the independence of the new African countries.

15. Although it is not often the case that an army stages a democratic revolution, this is exactly what happened in Portugal in 1974. A considerable number of the army captains, who had been or still were involved in the colonial wars in Africa, staged the revolution that overthrew Salazar's right-wing dictatorship and initiated the process of the country's democratization.

16. The translation is mine. This 1999 study deals with Saramago's work, but the observation could apply to many other contemporary Portuguese writers.

17. I am particularly careful not to assume that all Africans are black. In "Postmodernism under the Raj?," Ken Goodwin draws attention to the "imperial assumptions" that infect "the study of Commonwealth literature," with white always meaning European and non-white always meaning non-European.

18. This has not yet happened. Novels of the colonial war were still being written and published in 2001.

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