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New Cartographies of the Body in *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*: The (Counter-)Narrative of the Nation and the Sign of the Voyage Back

Hilary Owen

1. The real power behind the war Portugal has now been waging for the last ten years in her colonies, Angola, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique, is not Portugal herself. Portugal is too small and poor a country to be able perform, by herself, an effort which is proportionately eight times bigger than the American war effort in Vietnam. Without NATO's direct and indirect assistance, the war in the last colonies in the African continent, would have already ended.

(Humbaraci and Muchnik 26)

2. "(...e porque se diz por *laracha* que "a mulher é a última colónia do homem", talvez valha a pena correr o risco...."

Colonia do homem, a mulher? Que ideal Que exagero!...
 (Barreno, Horta, and Costa, *NCP* 255-6)

3. You let down, from arched
 Windows,
 Over hand-cut stones of your
 Cathedrals, seas of golden hair.
 While I, pulled by dusty braids,
 Left furrows in the
 Sands of African beaches.

Princes and commoners
 Climbed over waves to reach
 Your vaulted boudoirs,
 As the sun, capriciously,
 Struck silver fire from waiting
 Chains, where I was bound.
 My screams never reached
 The rare tower where you
 Lay, birthing masters for
 My sons, and for my
 Daughters, a swarm of
 Unclean badgers, to consume
 Their history.

Tired now of pedestal existence
 For fear of flying
 And of vertigo, you descend
 And step lightly over
 My centuries of horror
 And take my hand.
 Smiling call me
 Sister.
 (Angelou, 92-3)

Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa (the three Marias) describe "a national and personal sense of isolation" as one of their many motivations for collectively writing *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* in 1971 (Barreno, Horta, and Costa, *NPL* 400). When *NCP* was first published by Estúdio Cor in 1972 and its prosecution for offending public morals initiated its famous international solidarity campaign, it performed a crucially iconoclastic function on the small but influential battlefield of intellectual resistance to the Caetano regime, not only in relation to the (de)construction of the feminine under Catholic patriarchy but also as a comment on the status of Portuguese national power in the context of the Colonial War in Africa (1959-74).¹

However, during the 1970s, following the collapse of the Caetano regime which *NCP* legendarily helped to precipitate, criticism of the text abroad tended to occlude its national (dis)contents in favor of reflecting

the dominant interests of white middle-class (radical) feminists in the US and UK women's movements and the broadly psychoanalytical/semiotic innovations of new feminisms in France. As Linda Kauffman acknowledges in *Discourses of Desire: Genre and Epistolary Fictions*, "the three Marias do not, however, merely celebrate 'the feminine mystique'; nor do they endorse the 'essentialist' theories of some of their French feminist contemporaries about woman's nature" (295). Kauffman reveals *NCP* deconstructing the historical discourses of feminine desire ambiguously inaugurated as false origin in the Portuguese national imaginary by the disputed figure of Mariana Alcoforado in the *NCP*'s French "source text" *Letres portugaises*. *LP* forms the basis of a famous academic authenticity debate of national significance. Were these letters, voiced from the perspective of a 17th century Portuguese nun to French soldier who seduced her, translated into French from a "found and lost" Portuguese original, as their publisher claimed, or were they written directly in French in the prevailing 17th century mode of a pastiche? In responding to but refusing to close this debate, *NCP* significantly locates its sexual politics on a long disputed textual-as-national frontier, with established iconic status in high Portuguese culture. With the proviso cited above, Kauffman's groundbreaking 1986 analysis draws, nonetheless, on French feminist, poststructuralist critical discourses (Barthes, Kristeva, Derrida), many of which postdate *NCP* in a reading of the text in the tradition of amorous epistolary fiction. Her critique also constitutes a significant update on the reductive liberal feminist readings which reviewed the English translation of *NCP* negatively in the US and UK press in 1975. Appearing in 1986, Kauffman's analysis also pre-dates some major developments in postcolonial theory. Consequently, although my reading will draw on Kauffman's useful and at times ingenious readings of *NCP* as deconstructing literary discourse of desire, my intention is also to interrogate the gaps and questions posed by the Marias' variously inferred equations between recuperation of the feminine body and their obliquely articulated anti-colonial resistance from within. In order to conjoin existing feminist critiques with newer directions in postcolonial theory I make reference to Homi K. Bhabha's 1990 essay "Dissemi/Nation: Time Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" for this reconsideration of *NCP* in terms of (counter-)narrating the nation. According to Homi Bhabha "counter-narratives of the nation that continually evolve and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and

conceptual—disturb those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (300). In view of the specific imbrication of the literary discourse of desire in the Portuguese imperialist project, I discuss the implications of *NCP*'s deconstructing imperialist project, I discuss the implications of *NCP*'s deconstructing Portugal's discursive tradition of feminine desire for the (counter-)narration of the nation. Writing from the gendered margins of patriarchal patriotism, the three Marias demonstrate how, as Bhabha puts it, "forces of social authority and subalternity may emerge in displaced, even decentred, strategies of signification" (*Dissemi/Nation* 296).

The three Marias deconstruct an eternal feminine mythos, enshrined as disputed national heritage in Mariana Alcoforado, the abandoned weeping woman of *LP*. This enables them to re-read and even "translate" the nun's disputed "original" narrative as national, in such a way as to release the hegemonic national subject of Portugal into a detotalizing social diaspora of draft-dodgers, political exiles, refugees, *retornados*, migrant workers, colonists, and, of course, soldiers. Bhabha informs us: "It is precisely in reading between these borderlines of the nation-space that we can see how the 'people' come to be constructed within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement. The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference where the claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address" (*Dissemi/Nation* 297). *NCP* exploits precisely the potential of this "crisis within the process of signification and discursive address" (297) where the multiplication of Mariana Alcoforado into a (counter) host of female friends, descendants, and relations, precipitates a transhistorical dialogic exchange among women, along and across their correspondences with the diasporically scattered men from whom they are separated by national/sexual borderlines in(e)ternalized as natural. It is in this context that the metaphorical conceptualization of woman as man's last colony and, by extension, Mariana as the body of Portugal "internally" colonized by de Chamilly, the French Cavalier becomes significant.

The first section of my discussion will focus on the importance of the metaphor/metonymy distinction as it relates to the colonialism and the body in *NCP*. Bhabha makes an explicit connection between the language of metaphor and the stabilizing of modern diasporic movement as the "nation." "The emergence of the later phase of the modern nation, from the mid-

nineteenth century, is also one of the most sustained periods of mass migration within the west and colonial expansion in the east. The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin and turns that loss into the language of metaphor" (*Dissemi/Nation* 291). A recurrent interconnecting metaphor throughout *NCP* is the body of woman as man's territorial conquest. However, the concept of "a mulher [como] a ultima colonia do homem" (255-6) produces a revealing debate in "Segunda carta VIII." The following statement exemplifies an adherence to 1970s identity politics on race and gender, resisting the threat of interpellation with other "marginalities":

Uma sociedade onde surgem textos como este intitulado "A mulher e o Trabalho":

"... e porque se diz por *laracha* que "a mulher é a última colonia do homem", talvez valha a pena correr o risco. *Se bem que aquela fórmula entre aspas seja excessiva e de mau gosto, exprime, no entanto, o facto de a condição profissional das mulheres estar ainda submetida a numerosas desigualdades*."

Repare-se, num certo tom tão nosso conhecido: "se diz por *laracha*" (por *laracha*, irmãs?) e mais adiante "se bem que aquela fórmula ("colônia do homem") entre aspas seja excessiva (excessiva, irmãs?) e de mau gosto" (claro, de mau gosto, irmãs...)

Colônia do homem, a mulher? Que ideia! Que exagero!... (255-6; spacing, punctuation, and italics are original)

By asserting women's right to stake out a certain feminist (biological) specificity for the concept of "woman as man's last colony" the claim is complicit with the racial and sexual universalism/essentialism which leads Homi Bhabha to privilege metonymic over metaphorical readings for reasons I will go on to explain.

The centrality of the "woman as land" and thence "woman as colony" metaphor in *NCP* informs Linda Kauffman's reading which works primarily in terms of metaphorical arrangement. This in turn creates a tendency for

Kauffman to reproduce, not always consciously, the more essentialist, universalizing movements of the three Marias' text.³ For example, Kauffman refers to Octavio Paz's comments on the conquest of Mexico stating:

Woman is thus the conquest even of those who are themselves colonized, whether in Mexico or Portugal. Men in love seek not a face but a mirror; it is that narcissism, that mystification and manipulation that the Marias set out to dismantle. (292)

The equation of colonial status in Mexico and Portugal expands into an elision of historical and political specificities when she remarks, "they [the Marias] painstakingly elucidate women's perpetual colonization historically, from Louis XIV to Angola" (307). Again, according to Kauffman, "speaking from the place of chevaliers, husbands, and lovers through the ages, the three Marias stage the ordeal of abandonment as colonization, for the letters they invent come from men fighting in colonial wars in Europe, Angola, or Africa, addressing the women they leave behind" (291). While the conception of "abandonment" with "colonization" is accurate, it tends to elide the multiple "border" positionalities which Mariana and her descendants assume, oscillating between subject and object positions as colonizer/colonized. The Mariana Alcoforado of *LP* was seduced by the French Chevalier de Chamilly when he came to Portugal as a foreign mercenary soldier of Cardinal Richelieu ostensibly protecting Portuguese territory in the Wars of Portuguese Independence against the Spanish (1640-68) which ended the Spanish Usurption period of 1580-1640. The Mari/ana "complex" which the three Marias build is simultaneously subject of colonial desire, the woman who waits, the land barren and longing and also the object of "colonizing" desire, the feminine aspired to and conquered, fertilized and found. This latter connotation is firmly established in the "Madre Abadessa" chooses of the "Freira Sangrenta" where woman is "Pomar da primeira, montada" (88) or "Terra esteril, montada" (89) or "Terra de ti, montada de suas lutas" (90).

However, the counter-ideological maneuverings of *NCP* arguably effect a figurative sleight of hand when metaphorical connotations of expansionism and colonialism attach themselves to the construction of woman as land to be desired, possessed, and ploughed. The birth of a patriarchal, feudal inheritance system, mockingly outlined in the "Madre

Abadessa" choruses, comes to prefigure the ideological construction of the New World as virgin territory for conquest and the possession of native women as the cornerstone of miscegenation. At the same time, however, *NCP*'s "woman as land" is also "woman as the land left behind," the waiting woman quite differently imbricated in the discourse of colonial desire from the exoticized native. Even where the archetypally abandoned woman, Mariana, refuses to wait and weep, the very terms of her figuration, the amorous discourse she deconstructs inevitably remains bound in the eurocentric representative epistemology of that amorous discourse and thus necessarily also invokes the complicity of the Portuguese feminine in the colonial project. This is the fear of vertigo to which Maya Angelou's "Family Affair," cited epigraphically above, refers. In this sense the "woman as land" and the colonized subject indirectly metaphorized behind the "woman as land," remain very differently subjected to a discourse of desire that circulates but cannot close. In its dependence on a dialogic, epistolary structure *NCP* deconstructively displaces and illuminates desire but does not eliminate it. The best thing that the "colonists wife" can offer her colonized "sisters" is her invocation to him to return in "Balada do Mal Real": "Senhor rei de sal e cedro / voltaí vossa barca aos vossos / contai vossa renascença / pelo dentro dos meus ossos" (304). The request to return still implies a land as Other to return to, however, ossified its body. Under the representative burden which *NCP*'s metaphorical systems sometimes impose, the colonial subaltern seems constrained to remain on the margins, as the essentialized referent of a "woman as colony metaphor" which depends on the continued subjection of the colonized to maintain the full rhetorical force of its analogy, on behalf of an object "woman" who is still sovereign nonetheless.

Bhabha makes a crucial distinction between metaphor and metonymy in the post-colonial reading of texts. The implications of this distinction are usefully summarized as follows by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. Bhabha's "point is that the perception of the figures of the text as metaphors imposes a universalist reading because metaphor makes no concessions to the cultural specificity of texts. For Bhabha it is preferable to read the tropes of the text as metonymy, which symptomatizes the text, reading through its features the social, cultural, and political forces which traverse it" (52).⁴ As they also note "Paul de Man summarizes the preference for metaphor over metonymy by aligning analogy with necessity and contiguity with chance:

The inference of identity and totality that is constitutive of metaphor is lacking in the purely relational metonymic contact" (52).

NCP also signifies on a (counter-)narrative logic of metonymy which shifts, expands, disrupts its more universalizing metaphorical operations. Although Kauffman works mainly on metaphor, she suggests an interplay of the metaphorical and metonymic in the "intertextual dynamics between the original letters and the *New Portuguese Letters* [which] depends on a logic of relations and analogy" (305). Focusing on Mariana as metonymic it becomes possible to consider those elements of *NCP* which make it a counter-narrative of its "own" nationhood, despite its difficulties in superseding or fracturing the continued epistemology of essentialized colonial Otherness in its metaphorical arrangements as discourse of desire. According to Bhabha these counter-narratives "that continually evoke and erase its [the nation's] totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disrupt those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (*DissemiNation* 300). In "Terceira carta II," the Marias question the universalizing bind implicit in Mariana as metaphor, intriguingly mocked here in the figure of the ropes which moor a ship. They ask:

A que certeza queremos chegar, a que pudor maior, a que desolado concreto (sic) de três, instrumento de três cordas, amarra de que nova barca—porque inflectimos para a inflação da metáfora? Que metáfora nos é Mariana se nos quase matamos para a deixar de fora? (54)

The tension between metonymy and metaphor characterizes the very different discursive strategies of *NCP*. Reading the metonymy/metaphor tension is highly revealing with regard to the three Marias' pastiche of poetry, especially balladry. By reading, for example, the tropes of the poem "Brinco de Freira" (72-3) as metonymy, it becomes possible in Bhabha's terms to read "through its features the social, cultural, and political forces which traverse it" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 52). The poem starts from the classic metaphors of Portuguese maritime and dynastic history and juxtaposes them with "parts" that stand for the whole of the Mariana Alcoforado story and the three Marias themselves. The poem thus forces the metaphors to play, as it were, metonymically, exploiting the slippage of the sign by parenthesizing letters: Maritime and regal images "mar," "mare,"

"malhas," "marejados," "vento," "sal," "vela," "ilhas," "mouras," "paz de jus," "léu do povo-rei," "desveladas rainhas," "o sal real," "vigis," "perorando," and "sesmarias" (the colonial system by which the Portuguese crown awarded land and title to successful colonists in Brazil) are juxtaposed with the metonymies of the Mariana Alcoforado story, "mariana," "maria," "tresmariam," "maridadas," "o mal de beja," "a lei das se(i)marias," "o caldo," "horto dado," and "(com)vento," and the three Marias themselves are encoded as: "isolla bella (solda?)," "teresa de mão leda," "fátima da ácida azinheira." Thus "Brinco de Freira," itself a play on "trinket," "earring," and "playing"—"brincar"—allows essentialized metaphors of national identity, the sea, the salt, the net, the prayer, the veil to be read also as an entirely random string of metonymic associations made quite differently evocative for their new associations with each other, thus fracturing the "essential resemblance" bond at the root of metaphorization.

The "Brinco de Freira" poem is also emblematic of *NCP*'s constant play on the instability of the sign of Mariana's name. Against the universalizing of Mariana as land metaphor, the consistent subdivision of her name, Mari/ana makes her function as a metonymy for "Portuguese woman." Variations on the names, Mariana, Maria/Ana, Maina, Monica, Joana, arrange the feminine subject of *NCP* into metonymic textual patterns which highlight a principle of juxtaposition. The women's letters and accounts are placed side by side, up, down, and across history, as metonymic parts of a feminine "whole." As with the "Brinco de Freira" poem, their positional contiguity in the text suggests random new connections and associations, disrupting the metaphorical connections of resemblance associated with blood ties, family, and genealogy which revelations of illegitimacy narrated in the letters also relentlessly undermine.

Like the shifting sexual and territorial boundaries in *NCP*, language difference can also be said to operate metonymically in the final exchange of letters between Mariana and the Chevalier. I turn now to discussing how far the metonymy inherent in language variation performs Bhabha's national counter-narrative strategy of "continually evok[ing] and eras[ing] its [the nation's] totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—[and] disturb[ing] those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (*Dissemi/Nation* 300). The Chevalier's "A Carta do Cavaleiro de Chamilly a D. Mariana Alcoforado,

freira de Beja" 1671 (the year of publication for the original *Lettres portugaises*) (114) is answered by Mariana's niece partly in the name of Mariana in "Carta da Mariana, sobrinha de Mariana Alcoforado, deixada entre as folhas do seu diário, para publicação após a sua morte, à guisa de resposta a M. Antoine de Chamilly" (151). The letter from the Cavaleiro de Chamilly is the only element in the work to make extensive play of linguistic frontiers between Portuguese and French, penned as original text in *NCP*.⁵ If the shifting of boundaries in *NCP* is intertextual (*LP*) and intersexual, it is also crucially, interlinguistic. Metonymy acquires a special significance in relation to linguistic differences and variations as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain:

However, while the tropes of the postcolonial text may be fruitfully read as metonymy, language variance itself in such a text is far more profoundly metonymic of cultural difference. The variance itself becomes the metonym, the part which stands for the whole. (52)

In this final defeated and humiliated gesture of farewell, the Chevalier switches between French and Portuguese, sometimes in the same sentence as a reassertion of a colonial dominance over Portugal which the publication of the letters, a writing back from the western edges of a European internal empire, has finally subverted. The Chevalier's letter details his anger at the success the nun's published letters are now enjoying among the French aristocracy and court. Once again Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin are highly illuminating with regard to the dynamics of language difference between colonial and subaltern:

Such uses of language as untranslated words do have an important function in inscribing difference. They signify a certain cultural experience which they cannot hope to reproduce but whose difference is validated by the new situation. In this sense they are directly metonymic of that cultural difference imputed by the linguistic variation. In fact they are a specific form of metonymic figure: the synecdoche. The technique of such writing demonstrates how the dynamics of language change are consciously incorporated into the text. (53)

The linguistic balance of the letter reduces French to a marginal,

levantando poeira ao vosso encontro e onde vossas gentes, negras a contraluz do sol-pôr, largavam suores e tempo de vida, donde vossas gentes pela madrugada me levantavam os olhos à passagem, olhos negros como os vossos et pleins de la même alégresse ironique, sans pudeur, puisque je leur étais le sauveur, le doigt du roi de France venu à raffermir à son profit votre liberté envers l'Espagne. (117)

The Chevalier seeks himself projected onto the landscape of the Alentejo. Where the Alentejo is the body of Mariana, as the citation above suggests, this seeking of self in the Other/constructing the Other in the image of the self, follows the paradigm by which the subject of a cultural discourse is constructed, as Bhabha suggests,

the subject of cultural discourse is dialogical or transferential in the style of psychoanalysis. It is constituted through the *locus* of the Other which suggests that both the object of identification is ambivalent and, more significantly, that the agency of identification is never pure or holistic, but always constituted in a process of substitution, displacement or projection. (312-13)⁶

Thus the Chevalier establishes himself by projection onto Mariana, metaphorized as her native landscape, as he remembers himself

... a cavalgar ao sol a vosso encontro como se nada houvesse de mim que em vós não tivesse lugar e matéria, como se os plainos secos de vossa terra me foram a segura própria, meu silêncio, eu deserto até que em vós dado, hábil ainda por prazer de vós, mas dado... (115)

Bhabha's specific coining of the term "ambivalence" relates to this psychoanalytical dialogical or transferential model for constructing the subject of cultural discourse whereby the Other is effectively, of necessity, furnished with a built-in resistance factor. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain:

The dominant discourse constructs Otherness in such a way that it always contains a trace of ambivalence or anxiety about its own authority. In order to maintain authority over the Other in a colonial situation, imperial discourse strives to delineate the Other as radically different from the self, yet

minority status as the Chevalier is forced not only to validate Mariana's difference but also to validate the counter-effects of her difference in so successfully Othering him. However, surrounded as it is by Portuguese, the French merely underlines the nun's success in counter-colonizing the Chevalier and his language through successful publication of her letters. Her sexual/textual difference is thus validated in the new situation whereby the Portuguese language in the Chevalier's letter is unsuccessfully accosted by the contiguity of French. The Chevalier makes an unconscious admission that he is aware of the role of language difference in producing this validating effect when he tries to reappropriate the nun's words by translating his citations of her utterances back into French. For example, he quotes, "je n'approuve que ceux qui cherchent en gémissant" (115). He also seeks to reaffirm the racial and sexual hegemony of French male-authored culture over Portuguese by quoting French contemporary playwright, Cornelle, on the causes and effects of love. "Le cause [de l'amour] en est *un je ne sais quoi* (Cornelle), et les effets en sont effroyables" (114). However he is ironically "double-voiced" by his own utterance when he refers to Dona Ximene, the wife of El Cid, the hero of Cornelle's famous tragedy *Le Cid*. The Chevalier had wanted Mariana Alcoforado to be his Dona Ximene so that he could be a real soldier again. This feminine icon of Iberian chivalric culture, resigned to a convent after the death of El Cid, is here presented as a figure of double (racial and sexual) appropriation in her literary construction by the pen of a French man. It is precisely this fate that Mariana has reversed, achieving renown for her published letters and thus forcing the embarrassed de Chamilly into a quasi-religious seclusion. The Chevalier attempts to reinstate the dominance of an imperialist, metropolitan France when he metaphorizes the body of Mariana in terms of her native land and people. Mariana herself is thus as dry as the land the Chevalier gallops over and as wretched and oppressed as the sweated native peasants whom he passes en route. Here the Chevalier switches deliberately from French *belles-lettres* to the earthy "native" essentialism of Portuguese and then back to French for the elevation of his own mounted military position in relation to the peasants and Mariana, both implicitly equally grateful for his deliverance. He writes:

Vous étiez vide Marianne. Tao seca e gasta de húmus apesar de ardente como os montados tórridos que cruzava

at the same time it must maintain sufficient identity with the Other to valorize control over it. The Other can, of course, only be constructed out of the archive of "the self," yet the self must also articulate the Other as inescapably different. Otherness can thus only be produced by a continual process of what Bhabha calls "repetition and displacement" and this instigates an ambivalence at the very site of imperial authority and control. Thus there is a kind of built-in resistance in the construction of any dominant discourse—and opposition is an almost inevitable effect of its construction of cultural difference. (103)

Consequently, the Chevalier is frustrated at finding not himself but only "le tombeau de ma présence" (117) in making love to Mariana. Mariana and her descendants reverse the Othering process which, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin suggest, operates in the construction of any dominant discourse. Thus the three Marias exploit the built-in resistance in their own construction as Other. Consequently, the Chevalier and his male "descendants," the soldiers, emigrants, and colonists are constructed as male "Others" with a redeemable trace of the feminine in their make-up.

Mariana's niece pens a reply to the Chevalier when he and Mariana the nun, are both dead. As it will never be read by its proper addressee the niece's missive falls into line with the self-reflexive pseudo-correspondence more typical of the *journal intime* than epistolary discourse. She effectively moves the struggle over sexual/national frontiers into a self-consciously literary, self-referential textual space. Mariana's niece thus reinforces, for herself, the Othering of de Chamilly by making Portuguese pre-dominant over French, repeating and reworking, solely in Portuguese, the French comments of his final letter to Mariana the aunt. She explicitly distances herself from the French language, suggesting its unsuitability for intimate discourse and scorning the "ironia distante de vossa linguagem de franceses" (151). The question of discursive dominance becomes more overtly rhetorical and ideological. The Chevalier had asked Mariana the aunt,

Est-ce-que votre liberté ou vos amours ne peuvent être, vous, gens du Portugal, que contre l'autre, le prochain? Est-ce-que vous, Marianne, si douce, distraite et accueillante, ne pouvez compâir avec la souffrance, l'horreur de l'amour humain, que dans l'absence de l'aimé? (117)

To this the niece replies, appropriating his French words into Portuguese:

... e que nos dizes "vossa liberdade ou vossas amores, gentes de Portugal, só podem ser contra outro, contra o próximo?" Pois assim são nossa liberdade e nossos amores, Senhor cavaleiro seguro de vossas armas de país rico e culto e civilizado, e assim serão enquanto nossa independência depender das ordens de vossos reis e da honra conivente dos cavaleiros. (153)⁷

Thus, in her retort to the Chevalier's criticism of Portugal's self-definition by opposition, Mariana the niece challenges the sexual ideologies of conquest and/as desire, through which "imagined communities" are given essentialist identities" (*Dissemi/Nation* 300). This dialectical construction of conquest and/as desire also serves as a pretext to make the French Chevalier secondarily connotative of Portuguese imperialism in Africa. As Mariana the niece suggests, and as I noted early in the present paper, this tends to construct the conquistatorial impulse solely in terms of biologically essentialized masculinity, occluding the racial contents of specific colonial situations by making the French imperialist configure also the Portuguese. Encoded in the three Marias' deconstruction of the sexual (dis)contents of Portugal as imagined community, lurks the metaphorical power of a re-essentialized African identity as the now-familiar passage ostensibly describing Mariana's body reveals:

Tão seca e gasta de húmus apesar de ardente como os montados fôrridos que cruzava levantando poeira ao vosso encontro e onde vossas gentes, negras à contraluz do sol-pôr, largavam suores e tempo de vida, donde vossas gentes pela madrugada me levantavam os olhos à passagem, olhos negros como os vossos et pleins de la même alégrése ironique, sans pudeur, puisque je leur étais le sauveur, le doigt du roi de France venu à raffermir à son profit votre liberté envers l'Espagne. (117)

A closer reading of these Alentejan peasants brings to light the subtextual encoding of the African colonial issue. The dusty, sun-scorched land of the Alentejo evokes the dust bowls of Africa. The plural "vossas gentes" suggests your peoples, Portugal's colonial communities, as well as Mariana's people, her immediate compatriots. The "peoples" are outlined

black against the setting sun, a commonplace image for the decline of the western empires. The "suores e tempo de vida" which the laborers exude derive a rhetorical force from an image of slavery as the black-colored eyes are raised to a colonial master traversing his estates on horseback. The accusing question, "vossa liberdade ou vossos amores, gentes de Portugal, só podem ser contra outro, contra o próximo?" implies Portuguese Africa as the real colonial other, not Portugal in relation to Spain. This is underlined by the deflation of the Chevalier's self-image as a military man:

o ter perdidos para sempre meu lugar entre os meus, meu gosto de aljetar-me à sela, à farda, ao bom comando, à leveza as rendas e casacas, à inteireza de servir com boa pólvora minha honra, meu Rei e meus haveres. (116)

This stripping of the metonymic attributes of military honor is again powerfully inlaid with cross-references to the decline of Portuguese military prestige in the Colonial War. Deconstructing patriotism is subtly displaced from Portugal onto France. Allowing, as one certainly must, that the threat of censorship under the *Estado Novo* notoriously dictated the need to write as if in "exile" from a national self, the effect here is also to prioritize, at the expense of racial difference, a "universal feminine" readily recognizable (and subsequently challenged) in the feminist identity politics of the 1970s US. Thus the successful counter-projection of Mariana's letter-writing victory arguably leaves her trapped in the teleologies of sexual identity, within the dialectic pincer movements on which the amorous epistolary structure of *NCP* depends. According to Bhabha, "[cultural difference] addresses the jarring of meanings and values generated in-between the variety and diversity associated with cultural plenitude" (305). *NCP*, in its context demonstrated a textual praxis of radical cultural difference, applicable across, if not fully consistent to all, the intersections of oppression and marginality seeking cultural expression at that time.

Notes

- ¹ See Kaufman 279-311 and Owen 179-191.
- ² For a feminist reading of the debate over the *Letras portuguesas* manuscript, see Karmil 284-99.

³ As is to be expected in a period of encoding and crypto-writing that was censorship driven, there is little direct reference to the black and/or African subject in *NCP*. A soldier in Africa writes to his friend at home about his experiences of prostitution with black women in "Carta de um homem chamado José Maria para António, seu amigo de infância" (210-11). Also there is a reference to a distant unspecified struggle for black liberation as an entirely separate question outstripping feminism in its quest to be taken seriously. "Iembrenno-nos, sim, que um negro extranista é já respeitável, mas que uma feminista é vituperada, assustadora do ainda indiscursível, incómoda, ridícula, mesmo para os cavaleiros do bem pensantes de toda a libertação" (113).

- ⁴ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin refer here to Bhabha, *Representations* 226.
- ⁵ Other French references in *NCP* are to published writers such as Albertine Sarrazin.
- ⁶ Linda Kaufman also supports this view. "Theirs is a theoretical procedure, drawn from psychoanalytic models of transference and countertransference. In the language of psychoanalysis, one would say that the three Marias practice the Imaginary in full awareness that they are doing so. They purposely shift roles from analyst to analysand repeatedly, so that no single woman becomes the authority on the other two" (286).
- ⁷ In "DissemiNation," Bhabha interestingly cites Freud's use of the Portugal/Spain rivalry throughout European history as epitomizing the love/hate relationship inherent in feuding. "Freud uses the analogy of feuds that prevail between communities with adjoining territories—the Spanish and the Portuguese instance—to illustrate the ambivalent identification of love and hate that binds a community together" (300).

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Silêncios Rompidos (A Produção Textual de Mulheres Africanas)

Laura Cavalcante Padilha

A palavra portuguesa, legado e imposição do processo colonizatório europeu, torna-se, mormente na segunda metade do século XX, pertença ao mesmo tempo pessoal e coletiva dos escritores africanos. Assim, ela, a palavra, começa a desconstruir-se para a seguir reconstruir-se como fala do outro. Até então, a assimilação como que constituía uma espécie de barreira de linguagem e de expressão simbólica, interposta entre a maioria dos produtores literários e as soluções estéticas por eles encontradas. Com isso colocava-se em cheque a força dos valores ancestrais, sobretudo no que dizia respeito à sua potencialidade de superação das armadilhas imaginárias contidas nos modelos ocidentais.

Quanto à produção de mulheres, malgrado a sua incursão pela chamada "literatura colonial", o acesso ao texto verbal lhes era duas vezes barrado: por serem mulheres e africanas. Encher de palavras o silêncio histórico foi para elas uma árdua e difícil conquista. Mesmo depois das independências, quando as nações se constituíram como comunidades políticas imaginadas—territorialmente limitadas e organizadas de modo soberano (Anderson, 14)—, o acesso das mulheres à condição de produtoras textuais não foi facilitado. A formação canônica em tais nações submeteu-se aos mesmos aparatos ideológicos e aos mesmos mecanismos de dominação cuja meta, como se sabe, é elidir as diferenças, sobretudo no que concerne a questões como as de raça e gênero. A obra *Encontro com Escritores*, organizada por Michel Laban em quatro volumes, serve como exemplo do procedimento. São entrevistados pelo autor, no conjunto, meia centena de escritores, entre os quais aparecem apenas duas mulheres: