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*The Turn and the Voice of the
Diaspora Daughters: Memory(ies)
and literary creation¹*

ANA PAULA COUTINHO MENDES

Abstract

The old Portuguese migrant communities have been frequently labelled as “silent” ones due to the social and cultural discretion and endogamy that characterise their lifestyle abroad. This silence was compounded by the ignorance or scorn that Portugal’s culture devoted to them.

In my paper, I shall focus on the surging of some female voices, intimately linked to the Portuguese Diaspora, who have rescued both their ancestors’ culture and the world of migration from this silent periphery.

¹ This paper, presented in the International Congress “The Voice and the choice of Women in Portugal and in the Diaspora” (University of California - Berkeley, 2005), has been written within the project “Interidentidades” of the Instituto de Literatura Comparada Margarida Losa, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, R&D Unit, financially supported by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, within the “Programa Operacional Ciência, Tecnologia e Inovação (POCTI), Quadro de Apoio III (POCTI SFA-18-500). I should also like to thank the understanding and support of the Fundação Luso-Americana para o Desenvolvimento.

Through the published works of Katherine Vaz, Brigitte Paulino-Neto, Erika Vasconcelos, Alice Machado, amongst many others, I shall seek to show how these authors have recreated, aesthetically, the Portuguese legacy.

The research I have been conducting on literary writing, especially that produced by emigrants of Portuguese origin, and also other authors linked to emigration or exile, or, generally, linked to what came to be called the Portuguese Diaspora², has enabled me to identify an evolutionary process that gradually goes from the woman's (and the women's) invisibility to her (their) visibility, particularly as writers. However, I would like to stress that this is mainly about emphasising a tendency, so, to be accurate, one can see that some (though few) emigrant women, or immigrant descendents, randomly wrote about their experiences, or cooperated occasionally in editorial initiatives directly linked to Portuguese emigration³. It is also important to point out that the woman's/women's absence has been, to a certain extent sublimated by the feminine matrix of nostalgia and desire in the writings of male emigrants, thus building a kind of an archetypical presence of the (Portuguese) Woman in the Diaspora literature.

Within the context of a community such as the Portuguese one that whether it has emigrated to North or South America or to other European countries, has always been judged as being discreet and silent, in the host nations as much as in Portugal proper, it is hardly surprising that the greater silence was that of the women themselves or the things that concerned them.

Just a few years ago, Eduardo Lourenço, one of our best known and acclaimed emigrants, at least in the etymological sense of the word, noticing a deep discomfort and an absence, wrote "Se a emigração é uma ferida, e mesmo se, num certo sentido, faz parte do nosso destino desde o século XVI, a chaga que ela representa não encontrou uma voz à sua medida"⁴. Then there were the honourable exceptions – Ferreira de Castro, José Rodrigues Miguéis, Jorge de Sena or Casais Monteiro. However, there is

a huge disproportion between the uprooting, which is one of the structural experiences of the Portuguese reality, and the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of its literary production.

Even if we circumscribe ourselves to the 20th century migratory cycles, it is not difficult to find some sociological explanations for such unbalance, starting from the weak education of most of our emigrants who left their homeland for economical reasons and/or to escape the Colonial War conscription. Even those who emigrated for family reasons and who ended up starting or completing their studies in the host countries, seldom managed the difficulties of a triad made up of their school curriculum and their integrationist goals, of the family expectations and their social reproduction effects and finally, of the Portuguese linguistic and cultural policy (or lack thereof) abroad. This means that their school education level would end up showing itself insufficient, or would alternately, drive them decisively away from a cultural (or specifically literary) involvement susceptible of establishing links with the emigration universe.

On the other hand, intellectual emigrants, for professional and/or political reasons, have mostly shied away from anything related to emigration. Their silence on this subject was never a result of an impossibility or of lack of capabilities, but rather an unconscious or a deliberate distancing⁵.

Concerning the social and political recognition of multicultural societies, in spite of the ambiguities and differences between the North American (USA and Canada) and European societies, as well as any factors related to the intensification of mobility in an increasingly globalised world, the last decades of the 20th century witnessed substantial changes that will doubtless continue throughout this century. It is in this context, that one can already perceive some changes in the literary and, more globally, artistic expressions linked to the Portuguese Diaspora. Although it is not possible to quote precise numbers (and probably it will never be), one can easily verify that there has been a comparatively significant increase of female authors. It must be stressed that, in most cases, they are not emigrants anymore, so it is legitimate that they (or others in their name) react against any integrationist labelling, either unconscious or with uncon-

² It should be noted that this expression is more justified by a social-cultural rescue than by terminology or historical accuracy.

³ For the Portuguese-American universe, one can read Diniz Borges, currently following up studies of other renown researchers in this area, such as Eduardo Mayone Dias, George Monteiro, Onésimo T. Almeida ou Vamberto de Freitas, in "Contando as nossas vivências criando a nossa mitologia: algumas vozes femininas na literatura luso-americana", *The Voice and Choice of Portuguese Immigrant Women, Proceedings 1st International Conference*, Editors Manuela Marujo et alii, University of Toronto, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, 2005, pp. 43-51.

⁴ Eduardo Lourenço, *A nau de Ícaro ou o fim da emigração*, Lisboa, Gradiva, 2^a ed., 1999, p.47.

⁵ On this subject, it would be interesting to recall Jorge de Sena's blunt words in one of his last texts – "Ser-se imigrante e como" in *Gávea-Brown*, vol. I, nº1, Jan-June, 1980, pp.7-17.

cealed segregationist goals⁶. If, on the one hand, the emerging Portuguese-descendants' literature, mostly not written in Portuguese anymore, cannot be taken as being "emigration or as Portuguese Diaspora literature", the truth of the matter is that there are both textual and extra-textual relations between them. One cannot, for instance, be completely indifferent to the fact that many of these Portuguese-descendants female authors' (and male authors') texts, relate in one way or the other, to the Portuguese communities living abroad, or to their families' original land and culture.

Consequently, not only because of a glossing effect of the general theme of the Conference for which this paper was originally written, but by verifying more than once a clearly symbolic tendency, one can say that the time has come for the turn and the voice of the Diaspora daughters. Accruing to the verification of this predominance, that has actually also occurred in other migration linked communities, other authors add another fact, of a hermeneutical nature, defending that the gender factor is also relevant in this aspect; meaning that, for the female writers, migration or the hybridism that results from multiple ascendancies is expressed in a distinct way from that of male writers⁷. This eventual specificity is a result of particular life experiences in the private sphere that traditionally involve women or generations of women more than men.

Nevertheless, whether specific or not, there is no doubt that the responsibility of rescuing the silence to which their ancestors were voted, but also the general of the ethnic or cultural community to which they belong in a familiar sense, starts weighing on these writers. Some of them will verbalize that sort of mission in a more or less direct manner. As happens with the narrator of *Les Silences de Porto Santo*, by Alice Machado, a French writer of Portuguese origin:

Maintenant je porte leur vie en moi.
Elles respirent à travers les pores de ma peau, regardent à travers
mes yeux, parlent avec ma gorge, le son de ma voix. Elles pleurent
aussi avec mes larmes, le sel de mon corps.
(...)

⁶ Most writers and artists with ethnic origins distinct from the *mainstream* of the country of residence (where they were usually born), refuse to see themselves associated to the i/emigration world, for considering it, or seeing it being considered, as a ghetto. It is on this basis that one can, inclusively, understand the intervention of the Portuguese descendent Canadian writer, Erika de Vasconcelos in *The Voice and Choice of Portuguese Immigrant Women*, pp. 168-170.

⁷ Vd. Lucie Lequin e Mair Verthuy - *Multi-Culture, Multi-Écriture – La voix migrante au féminin en France et au Canada*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1996.

Désormais je serais l'encre, le corps de ces mères sacrifiées, de ces
images d'immolation que le dimanche nous voyions prier devant
la croix impuissante, dressée devant Porto Santo.
(...) leur histoire devait rester vivante, dévoilée à la lumière du
grand jour, gravée dans les siècles à venir, pour ne pas qu'elle s'efface,
pour ne plus se répéter ⁸

Or as the poetic subject of this poem by Luísa Costa Holzl admits:

ando a divagar
palavras sem sentido caídas em desuso
murmúrios de avós
rodas de borboleta branca
histórias de papão ⁹

Those ties of transmission that evidence the formative importance of female orality in the family world, start becoming part of the public knowledge/acknowledgement of writing. Sometimes they even appear figured as a heritage, a tie or a ring, from mother to daughter, as can be read in the poem "Inheritance" by Barbara Duarte Esgalhado¹⁰, or in another of her poems, entitled "Promessa":

This is the world my mother wanted to show me:
how some Portuguese
used to pray
make promessas
be heard by God
repay their debts
and with replicas of their healed appendages
embrace, for eternity
the underbelly of the House of God¹¹

On the other hand, Clara, the protagonist of *Saudade*, the first and acclaimed novel of the Portuguese-American Katherine Vaz, is a native

⁸ Alice Machado, *Les Silences de Porto Santo*, Paris, Éditions Lanore, 2003, p.58.

⁹ Luísa Costa Holzl, "Alentejo 3: Beco da Ponita" in *Textos da Diáspora – Homenagem a José David Rosa*, Org. Manuel G. Simões et alii, Berlim, Avinus Verlag, 2002, p.107.

¹⁰ Barbara Duarte Esgalhado, "Inheritance", *Gávea-Brown*, Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, Brown University, vol. XXII-XXIII, 2001-2002, p.218-219.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 232.

Azorean emigrant who is no longer deaf, strange and symbolically, in an immediate sequence of her mother's death. That abrupt access to articulate sound appears described in a very impressive way, suggesting a second birth, as if it were necessary for that vital cord with the past to burst so that Clara – as much connected to the home island so as to the land of adoption, had access to a discursive relationship with the world that would be effectively her own:

Her cry burst so unnaturally past tissue that had been determined to stay inviolate that her ears were startled into turning a violent red (...) Her cries came out in long streams and drove birds from the trees. She was shrieking as she ran outside, scooped hydrangea petals into an empty pillowcase, and returned to fling them over her mother so that her moth would not have to fly away alone, but it had already escaped. It was the bellowing protest Clara had refused to give at birth like everyone else.¹²

The invocation of this instant of rupture, marked by physical and psychological violence, allows me to also point out that the relationships of the migrant characters or descendants of migrant characters with their family past or, in general, with the world of their origins, do not always proceed in a pacific manner. Quite the contrary, contradictory feelings frequently arise towards family links, tensions that are represented sometimes in a more explicit and direct manner, sometimes in a more veiled and symbolic manner, as happens, for example, with the narrator of *Jaime de Baltazar Barbosa*, one of the novels of the French writer of Portuguese descent, Brigitte Paulino-Neto. Effectively, the intertextual relationships here established with the story of the “Barba-Azul” represent a subtle dramatization of the excess of antagonist feelings lived by a woman whose job led her to Portugal, that is, to the physical and symbolic space of her family roots.

Moreover, it is notorious that in these female authors' writing something prevails: what could be called globally as a memory(ies) work, or post memory, to recur to the concept developed by Marianne Hirsch¹³. It is not by chance that Hélio's grandmother, another character of the al-

ready quoted novel *Saudade*, is evoked as the author of a poem about the fact that memories are the only and undisputable protection against disintegration¹⁴. Besides appearing as forms of mediation between the private world and the public world, the memories that nourish these authors' writing appear as “fictions of fictions”¹⁵, a sort of second degree narratives which are forms of resistance, as they prevent total forgetfulness, besides helping fill in some gaps or silences of the official History of the families or of the countries themselves (of origin and of residence) and their cultural universes.

But that work starting from memories supposes overcoming a binary logic of opposition between “fidelity” and “treason”, since it is not as much about getting to a “historical truth”, as of creating other versions of History (personal or collective), executing inclusively a poetic levelling of different levels of reality. That is why an author like Katherine Vaz could not be indifferent to the perspective of “magical realism” or wonderful realism:

The magical realists will remind us that what seems to vanish is merely taking wing to hiding places, because what is familiar constantly needs to be rediscovered. Nothing is ever lost beneath the veil of the world, though the world often fails to record or even to see it.¹⁶

Not satisfied with the silencing of Mariana Alcoforado, as author and literary character, Katherine Vaz herself, in her homonymous novel *Mariana*, devotes herself not only to disseminate the famous letters of the nun from Beja to the Anglo-American public, but also integrates them in a fictional biography of the alleged author, also creating thus a female version of historical events, namely of the Restoration period. With that novel, just as with other texts, fictional or poetic, of authors connected to the Portuguese Diaspora, we are brought to the lesson or the revision of

¹⁴ Katherine Vaz, *Saudade*, p.141.

¹⁵ Ana Paula Coutinho Mendes, “Ficções de Luso-Descendentes e Identidades Híbridas”, *Cadernos de Literatura Comparada*, 8/9, “Literatura e Identidades”, Instituto de Literatura Comparada Margarida Losa, Dezembro de 2003, p. 38.

¹⁶ Katherine Vaz, “Reading History's Silent Passages – Azorean Stories”, *Gávea-Brown*, Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, Vols. XV-XVI, Jan.1994-Dec. 1995, p.116. Vd. also of the same author, the testimony of the magical sides of stories, lived or heard, that end up flourishing in writing “Songs of Fate: Portuguese Writing in America”, *loc.cit.*, vol. XXI, 2000, pp.16-24.

¹² Katherine Vaz, *Saudade*, New York, A Wyatt Book for St. Martin's Press, 1994. p. 47.

¹³ Cf. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography Narrative and Post Memory*, Cambridge, Harvard University, 1997.

History, presented by those whom Linda Hutcheon appropriately called "the eccentric", literally those who are out of the centre, or at the margin of the canonical¹⁷.

After the silences or a writing of mainly testimonial value of the first generations of Portuguese emigrants, it can only be significant that many of these authors biographically connected to the Portuguese Diaspora dedicate themselves, at least in some of their texts, to sketching an affective cartography, building imaginary bridges with the land of their own origin or of their progenitors. Those incursions appear as a sort of "mandate visit", as happens with the protagonist of the tale "My Hunt for King Sebastião", known as Dean. This young man, recently graduated son of an Azorean and of a Californian descendent of Italians and Germans, is taken by his father to the Azores to solve some patrimonial problems. He sees the opportunity as "a holiday", but the awareness of distance from that land, of which he has only a few and vague images, appears verbalized right at the arrival at the airport:

Here I was, the tourist in search of colour without its historical price tag – that is, being owned, transfigured by that very history. Infiltrators want to collect pieces of it, like souvenirs off a beach, nothing more.¹⁸

Dean, as well as Reginald, of the tale "Undressing the Vanity Dolls"¹⁹, will have to confront the distance that goes from the images, that were transmitted to them or with which they filled in the silences of their progenitors, until that experience of a physical and metaphorical journey to their origins. Not rarely, those narratives end up building an idyllic or even mythicized Portugal, for example in the form of a legendary land like the Azores, of a sacred space like Vale de Côa²⁰ or an imaginary one like Atlantis²¹. These dislocations (which cannot strictly speaking be called returns except for the stories heard in childhood) are distinguished from the occasional curiosity of pure foreigners and seem

to correspond to a necessity of interior reconstruction, because and just as the poetic subject of one of Alice Machado's poems recognizes, that world of origins, in spite of its disappearance (or precisely because of that) have an irresistible attraction:

Ses rayons me pénètrent
Et je me sens ailleurs
Emporté par vos traces
Vos sillages
Enivré par vos parfums de lavande
De genêts et de safran
Qui s'enlacent en ébullition.

Et la vie prend forme juste là,
Dans ce village de vieux granit,
Au détour d'une fontaine,
Dans une rue sans perspective
Vers le Sud...²²

Also the journey to Portugal of Fiona, the protagonist of *My Darling Dead Ones*, ends up having some signs of initiatory journey, where the desire of evasion and of personal reencounter excels in a frame of an interior scenery, more than necessarily the interest in (re)discovering more concrete aspects of the land of the ancestors:

I have come for fountains shaped like quatrefoils, trickling in courtyards. For the smooth stones of pavements, walked on for centuries. For the taste of sugar in my mouth, mornings on the beach. (...) I have come for kings and queens encased in tombs, and thin dogs gnawing on chicken legs in open markets and rose petals on the steps of churches. I have come for the ever-present sea and the precipices that beckon, *Look, will you choose to die today? Look how easy it is to fall off!* For the huge statue of Christ whose head bends over the city, in this country of old saints and stone.²³

²² Alice Machado, "L'Origine ne meurt pas", *L'Agitation des Rêves*, Paris, Éditions Lanore, 2002, p.75.

²³ Erika Vasconcelos, *My Darling Dead Ones*, Vintage Canada, 1998, pp.194-195.

¹⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*, New York and London, Routledge, 1988, p.230.

¹⁸ Katherine Vaz, "My Hunt for King Sebastião", *Fado and Other Stories*, University of Pittsburgh Press, p.32.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 56-74.

²⁰ Alice Machado, *La Vallée des Héros*, Trad. de Isabel Aguiar Barcelos, Porto, Campo das Letras, 2002, p.7.

²¹ Cf. Manuela Degerine, "Eléctrica Mensagem" in *Textos da Diáspora*, p.130.

Before anything else, or behind the vague character of these sensations, paradoxically the lack of definition is imposed, just as the tension of those who live and write “in between”, as Homi Bhabha says²⁴. That state of border can be lived and written under the sign of enthusiasm and of a slight euphoria, as under a sign of the emptiness and of the inner laceration. The title of Paula Gonçalves’ book, *Âncora estilhada*, could not be at that level more indicative of the disaggregation of the self, divided between two lands and two languages:

Comecei então a desagregar-me paradoxalmente em duas:

a que ficava, a que ficaria
polvilhada de barro estancado no tempo e no espaço

e a outra, a que partia, a que partiria,
salpicada de mágoas e saudades²⁵

For the narrator who is also the heroine of *Jaime Baltazar Barbosa*, the simple fact of watching the representation, in Portuguese, of *Barba Azul* by Georg Talk, is like reliving a family drama, with which she identifies herself but from which she would wish to escape.

Le moindre mot blessait. C’était comme si la “voix” de cette langue, tout à coup endurcie, s’était armée d’arêtes et de tranchant (...) – Je n’étais plus au théâtre, j’étais à résidence ; tenue d’assister à une scène de famille, honteuse d’y être convoquée.²⁶

In the short tale “As cambalhotas de um hífen”, by Aida Baptista, a Portuguese-Angolan teacher living abroad, the narrator, after a childhood of shame and revolt, starts declaring pride for her double-belonging and trusting in the advantages that it might represent:

²⁴ Vd. Homi .K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994.

²⁵ Paula Gonçalves, “Híbrida para sempre”, *Âncora estilhada*, Paris, Éditions Lusophone, p.30.

²⁶ Brigitte Paulino-Neto, *Jaime Baltazar Barbosa*, Paris, Éditions Verticales/Le Seuil, 2003, pp.220-221. A more detailed study of this novel can be found in Ana Paula Coutinho Mendes, “A sombra familiar de Barba-Azul numa encenação luso-francesa (a propósito de *Jaime Baltazar Barbosa* de Brigitte Paulino-Neto), *Cadernos de Literatura Comparada*, 10/11, “Séc.XXI – Questões e Perspectivas”, Instituto Literatura Comparada Margarida Losa, Junho 2005, pp.73-96.

Sou um luso-canadiano – a geração hífenizada – muito orgulhoso do meu hífen na lapela do país onde vivo. Reconheço agora que um hífen não é uma fronteira, é um traço de união, uma ponte que abraça dois mundos, o parapeito de uma janela aberta para dois universos diferentes, que eu poderei escolher ou fundir, conforme a posição em que projectar o meu olhar na linha de horizonte do futuro.²⁷

Contrarily to their mothers, in the figurative sense of the immigrant voices that preceded them, these authors, daughters or descendents of the Diaspora, tend to divert, in a very significant manner, from a mere autobiographic writing. On the one hand, it is natural that the existing dislocations and tensions in their texts are not by means unaware of their identity hybridity, as human beings, or of their status as a frontier, as authors. However, and on the other hand, I consider it highly important to consider the hybridity in their works as an aesthetic process, rather than only an effect of a biographical incident.

Much like what has been happening to the descendents of other migratory movements, it is expected that the future will continue to reveal more and different voices, daughters of the Portuguese Diaspora. Many of the future configurations of human interiority and of the world(s) that surrounds us depend on them and on other hybrid artistic expressions, ever less ruled by border stanch. For now, the least that can be said is that these and other Portuguese descendent writers have started to rescue emigration or the Portuguese Diasporas from a state of limbo (in Portugal, or in the countries where they publish), even when no direct reference is made to them. If it is certain that authors and texts refuse the stigma or the emigrant “mark”, they nevertheless seem to fear the “inscription” of the migratory experience(s), thus to conclude, saving us from the opposition of expressions/attitudes that philosopher José Gil used in his recent diagnosis of the “Portuguese disease”:

a marca surge mesmo como o avesso da inscrição.
Enquanto esta cria e abre o real, aquela destrói e tende a liquidá-lo.²⁸

²⁷ Aida Baptista, *Passaporte Inconformado*, Minerva Coimbra, 2004, pp.137.

²⁸ José Gil, *Portugal, Hoje – O Medo de Existir*, Lisboa, Argumentos, 2004,p.100.

That those "inscriptions" increase and develop as forms of absorption and transformation of History depends on the "voices" but also on who, at various levels and in different geographical quadrants, will be available to listen to and incorporate them!

Parental involvement and academic achievement in the 4th grade: a study of two groups of Portuguese immigrant children in the USA'

TERESA MEDEIROS, JOAQUIM FERREIRA,
ODETE AMARELO, MARIA PACHECO,
MANUELA DUARTE, SUZETTE ALMEIDA
AND JORGE LIMA.

Abstract

From a previous school achievement study which examined 149 Portuguese in (from the Autonomous Region of the Azores) 4th grade students 17 public Fall River schools in Massachusetts, the authors selected, characterized and compared a sample consisting of two groups with divergent academic achievement (group 1 — high achievement; group 2 — low achievement) having as bearings the impact of parental involvement on schooling and of the parents' expectations towards an academic level. The instruments used in the research were the *Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire* (TEQ), the *Parent Questionnaire – Interview*

¹ We wish to thank the institutions that financed or helped this research, namely the Fundação Luso-Americana para o Desenvolvimento – FLAD, the Education Alliance (Brown University), the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies (Brown University) and the public schools of Fall River's schooling system. We also thank all the teachers, families and students who took part in this investigation, as well as the researchers who started this investigation with us, namely Mariano Alves, Robert Moser and Maria Lindia.