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Mal de Mar: A Reading of Jorge de Sena's "A Grã-Canária" in (trans-)Atlantic Transit

O meu país é o que o mar não quer

—Ruy Belo, "Morte ao meio-dia"

Abstract: This article analyzes Jorge de Sena's short story "A Grã-Canária" in the context of a wider discussion on the topographies of the South Atlantic taken as an ideological construct, to some extent always already textual(ized). The story emphasizes the tensions in the enclosing of either the boat or the island as spaces of absolute fascist rule (in 1938 and 1961), and its setting in the Atlantic allows for a wider criticism of oppressive regimes operating in the South Atlantic axis while also addressing the "Atlantic exception" (Roberto Vecchi) in the context of wider European headings. It dismantles both the incipient establishing of the Atlantic as a "Portuguese Sea" by the Estado Novo and the construction of the legal and political conceptions such as that of the "overseas provinces" in the Constitutional Revision of 1951. This reading aims to foreground the *spacing* (Jacques Derrida) intrinsic to the inscription of such topographies of otherness and the projection of the selfsame in order to stress the tensions, the contradictions, and the limits of discourses underwriting an "immunitary paradigm" (Roberto Esposito) bent on establishing and marking the borders between a supposed *self* and its projected *others*.

<<key>>

Keywords: Jorge de Sena; South Atlanticimmunitary paradigm

<<1>>

Veering of the Island

<<text>>

Jorge de Sena's short story "A Grã-Canária," first published in 1961 in the collection *Os Grão-Capitães*, has been met with scrupulous analysis of its intertextual rewriting of the episode of "Ilha dos Amores" by Luís de Camões (*Os lusíadas*, 1572) and of its criticism of the Iberian fascist regimes. This reading will attempt to frame the text in the context of a wider discussion on the topographies (Miller 1–8) of the South Atlantic,ⁱ by swerving from the island as "centro semântico da novela," as an ironic appropriation whether as site of redemption (Macedo 169) or of criticism of Iberian fascist regimes in 1938 (see Fagundes). I am attempting to read the "imagined reality" (Macedo 169) in relation to a factual one, albeit (always already) textualized. After all, as Macedo points out, "a referência mítica de "Grã-Canária" deriva [. . .] do pormenorizado realismo concreto de uma narrativa historicamente circunstanciada" (171).

The dual historical context of this writing, in 1961, set in 1938, allows us to approach both the incipient establishing of the Atlantic as a "Portuguese Sea" by the Estado Novoⁱⁱ and the construction of the legal and political conceptions such as that of the "overseas provinces" in the Constitutional Revision of 1951. This was inspired by Gilberto Freyre's theory, widely known currently under the vague term "lusotropicalism."ⁱⁱⁱ This act has followed in the wake of mounting

international pressure in the postwar concerning Portuguese colonial possessions (Madureira, “The Empire’s” 141), coinciding with and attempting to veil a colonial drive aiming at the construction of an economic space in the Portuguese overseas that could provide the Portuguese nation with a space of influence outside the European community and the two rival superpowers of the Cold War.

The play between text and context, therefore, is not *in* question; it *is* the question. I therefore wish to stress how the short story emphasizes the tensions in the enclosing of either the boat or the island as spaces of absolute fascist rule (in 1938 and 1961), by making use of the notion of the “immunitary paradigm” (Esposito, *Comunidad, inmunidad y biopolítica* 14–16). Additionally, its setting in the Atlantic (the two epigraphs are “Atlântico, 1938” and an indication that the Canary Islands are located “au nord-ouest du Sahara”) allows for a different (con)textual play, opening up a wider criticism of oppressive regimes operating in the South Atlantic axis. It would be careless not to take into consideration that the short story was written and published during Sena’s exile in Brazil. The writing is thus dislocated both spatially and temporally, and this “veering” (to use Nicholas Royle’s felicitous and duplicitous term)^{iv} is significant for a reading that takes into account the text in relation to the historical and political contexts of 1938 (the Spanish Civil War and consolidation of power of both dictatorships) and 1961 (the signs of internal and international dissention, as conflicts arise in the colonies and the metropolis and Portugal’s position is overtly contested internationally).

I will therefore depart from the Atlantic, where the story is set, addressing the “excepção atlântica” (Vecchi 71, 72), which projects not only a Portuguese (or Iberian) dimension but also the “image and mirage” of a specific (exceptionalized) “lusiad” influence in the South Atlantic (Lourenço “Imagem e miragem da lusofonia”; Lourenço “Cultura e lusofonia ou os três anéis”), inevitably related to wider European projections. Anna Klobucka’s revisitation of an “Island of Love” episode influence on Gilberto Freyre’s luso-tropicalist imagery is a valid point of departure for an extrapolation beyond national borders and for a wider context of the South Atlantic sea that the short story undermines (see Klobucka). If one wants to consider a South Atlantic paradigm as an alternative to current cultural and political headings (globalization, *lusofonia*, neocolonialism), there is no alternative than to address the tensions of the construction of the South Atlantic so as to not be condemned to repeat the gesture and frame the Atlantic as a blank space where the advances of ipseity are projected.^v

<<1>>

Projecting (on) the South Atlantic

<<epi-1>>

Atirarmo-nos ao Atlântico não é solução.

<<epis>>

—Eduardo Lourenço

<<text>>

Taking the Atlantic as the *topos* and the *tropos* of the story implies more than a mere shift in perspective; it indicates a different

approach that supplements the intertextual readings of Helder Macedo and Costa Fagundes with an emphasis on textuality itself, that is, “the constant and radical dialectical play of the difference(s) between text and context” (McGuirk 137). In this short story the Atlantic is topographed in the sense that J. Hillis Miller lends to the word; the space is written, it draws and is drawn (Miller 13). As such, it draws in and draws from projections of national texts and transcendental(ized) imperial spaces, such as the “Portuguese sea” and the “Island of Love,” thus entering into dialogue with imperial chronologies such as those that Macedo and Costa Fagundes trace.

The Atlantic, however, enacts both more and less than the space of and for Portuguese imperial topography. It is the *spacing* that acts both as a condition of possibility and impossibility of the South Atlantic rendered as a sea in possession by the Portuguese. By “spacing,” I wish to question the opposition “presence/absence,” which underwrites the conception of a South Atlantic as a space to be projected/filled with meaning(s), with a fixed “spacetime.” Closely linked to the Derridian concepts of “trace” and “*différance*” (“Semiology and Grammatology” 26), spacing defers presence (“Semiology and Grammatology” 29) and is at the same time the condition of possibility for the effects of presence, as the “production of the intervals without which the ‘full’ terms would not signify, would not function” (“Semiology and Grammatology” 27). The concepts of spacing and alterity cannot be dissociated—and this is particularly visible in topography. Spacing, however, is not to be mistaken with a third way, or yet another space, substituting masses of

land (continents or islands) and ships: “*Spacing* designates *nothing*, nothing that is, no presence at a distance; it is the index of an irreducible exterior, and at the same time of a *movement*, a displacement that indicates an irreducible alterity” (Derrida “Positions” 81).

The empire acts (always) already as imagination, and in the Portuguese case, as Margarida Calafate Ribeiro has argued, empire acted as an “imagination of the centre” (136). The Atlantic plays a crucial role in this imaginary configuration. I would argue that this imagined center rests on what Roberto Vecchi identifies and discusses as the Portuguese “Atlantic exception.” In turn, Portugal’s Atlantic exceptionalism rests on the rendering of the sea as a blank space, erased in the representation of Portugal’s colonial possessions as illustrated by Henrique Galvão’s infamous propaganda map of 1935, titled “Portugal não é um país pequeno,” which projects the colonial landmasses onto the European surface. By confronting the supposed specificity of Portuguese literature’s connection to the sea with the deployment of the sea as an ideological tool (Vecchi 71, 72), one notes how the erasure of the sea (as the blank space where Portugal’s *ipse* is projected) neutralizes the differences between metropolis and the “overseas.” This neutralization was the basis of Portuguese colonial exceptionalism, veiled as a national universalism under the Estado Novo (Madureira, “The Empire’s” 141).

The setting of Jorge de Sena’s short story in the Atlantic marks both a dislocation of the territorial logic and a point of entry into the

supposedly monolithic national and political constructs of the represented island and the ship. I will therefore address the island and the boat, the spaces of the diegesis, as national and imperial repressive states constructed as a modernist immunitarian paradigm (Esposito, *Comunidad, inmunidad y biopolítica*). These are projected against the backdrop of an epic and historical sea that supposedly is the object and the agent of the inscription of a teleological line and national and cultural insemination and affiliation. The violence and conflicts unveiled by the story reveal, however, that this projection of ipseity takes place not due to a historical possession of the sea but due to its neutralization in modernity's configuration of absolute space.^{vi} The use of ideological tropes and of diverse images and mirages of the Atlantic as the extension of national and imperial sovereignty attempts to close space for political action (differences, separation, distance are veiled and harmonized).

One must point out the dialectical role of the sea in Hegel's conception of Europe and European history, which marks a tradition of rendering the sea as the object of suppression in the recovery of the other into the *ipse*. The advancement of Europe has been a trademark of political and philosophical European tradition (and, as we will see, of European colonialism) in the reproduction and projection of an *ipse* onto its (rendered) others (Esposito, *Communitas* 106–11).

Therefore, before entering Iberian or national exceptionalisms grounded on historical privilege, one must address the historicity of such phenomena. The propelled "specificity" of a Portuguese colonial

enterprise is a product of discourse and, as such, part of a larger European narrative that has always narrated the colonial process a posteriori, inscribing it into a logical and teleological line. This line features Europe not only as a point of departure and a point of arrival, but also as a *cap* of insemination. The Portuguese “specific” space in between Europe and its others and their supposed unique ability of adapting to and penetrating into the tropics is not only part of a Portuguese Atlantic exceptionalism; it also obeys a “phallogocentric” discourse that structures the narratives of European “advancement” of the “self”:

<<ext>>

To advance oneself is, certainly, to *present oneself*, to introduce or show oneself, thus to identify and name oneself. To advance oneself is also to rush out ahead, looking in front of oneself (“Europe looks naturally toward the West”), to anticipate, to go on ahead, to launch oneself onto the sea or into adventure, to take the lead in taking the initiative, and sometimes even to go on the offensive. To advance (oneself) is also to take risks, to stick one’s neck out, sometimes to overestimate one’s strengths, to make hypotheses, to sniff things out precisely there where one no longer sees (the nose, the peninsula, Cape Cyrano). Europe takes itself to be a promontory, an advance—the avant-garde of geography and history. It advances and promotes itself as an advance, and it will have never ceased to make advances on the other: to induce, seduce, produce, and conduce, to spread out, to cultivate, to love or to violate, to love to violate, to colonize, and to colonize itself.

(Derrida, *The Other Heading* 48, 49)

<<fltext>>

Europe projects itself onto the other, filling its own metaphysical vacuity with the reproduction and the projection of the selfsame. The South Atlantic ports, featured in the short story as an imagined (re)collection of women servicing the sailors, are a potent illustration of this advancement of the sailors and the ship, which represents Portugal (Sena, “A Grã-Canária” 218). The different cities and ports are fused and confused with prostitutes and their specific sexual attributes, exposing and exploiting the paradoxical but always violent advances (loving and violating, loving to violate) on the others within and without the self. It acts as context, pretext, and subtext for the violence imposed overseas and *intraseas*, namely in the immunitarian paranoid confinements of the boat and the island. The “Ultramar,” the Estado Novo’s “palavra de ordem,” is as an imaginary space of self-projection and attempted reproduction at the cost of the annihilation of alterity:^{vii}

<<ext>>

Santos era uma francesa magra, cuja boca, com o passar do tempo, se apertava sugante no sexo de quase todos que viam, em tremuras de passivo gozo, os cabelos louros dela saltitando sobre as barrigas. São Vicente de Cabo Verde era uma crioula de olhos verdes que alçava as pernas, exibindo um sexo infantil, húmido e rosado, com esparso cabelos impúberes, e que um deles, forçado pelos outros, lambeira, entre as gargalhadas que sacudiam, em frente à cama de ferro que rangia e desabou, os sexos erectos. Luanda era uns seios

gigantescos e negros, duros, que as mãos não conseguiam apertar. O Rio de Janeiro era uma praia noturna, onde uma polaca, cujas nádegas rotundas fora preciso abrir, brilhavam saltando à luz da lua. (Sena, “A Grã-Canária” 213)

<<fltext>>

This certainly falls within the sphere of what Anne McClintock has called “porno-tropics” (see Loomba 154). It also illustrates what Josiah Blackmore calls the “metaphoric erotics of imperial voyaging as represented by the iconic figure of the expansionist ship.” Blackmore is referring to the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope, which inscribes Africa “into an expansionist, cartographic imperative” (xxiv), although I would argue that this erotic element is even more striking in the libidinal reward dispensed to the sailors on their return to Europe after discovering the maritime route to Asia in the episode of the “Island of Love,” as Macedo notes in relation to “A Grã-Canária” and Klobucka in relation to Gilberto Freyre’s theories. In “A Grã-Canária” the imaginary of the discoveries presented in *Os lusíadas* is distorted by the sailors’ “virilidade obsessiva” (Sena, “A Grã-Canária” 213). The sailors function as a *cap*; their desires are fused and confused with ships in their penetration of and journey into “novas terras e novas prostitutas” (213), “alongando a sua nudez maliciosamente desperta pelas ideias de terra próxima” (212).

The description of the initial sexual intercourse between the narrator and the young prostitute in his conquering and plundering of her body^{viii} acts as yet another contextualized invocation of the trope of

the Virgin Land, available, ready to be conquered and penetrated (Loomba 151). It renders visible and duplicates the violence underwriting both the ship's calling in the ports of the South Atlantic and the exploitation of the young girl by the *falangista*. The European confusion, as a *cap* (and Portugal is a *cap* of Europe, "quase-cume" since *Os Lusíadas*) between love, violation, and colonization of other and self, is exposed here as an instrument of violence.

In 1961, when the short story was published, the whole ideological edifice of the New State was put to the test with the mounting pressures from the international community for the decolonization of Portuguese empire in the international stage and with the police and military actions taken by the Indian Union (in the 1950s, then in 1961) and the conflicts arising in Angola. The constructs of the Constitutional Revision of 1951, inspired by an appropriation of Gilberto Freyre's notion of a specificity of Iberian integration in the tropics, played a pivotal role in subverting the national narrative of decline (Ribeiro 147). Gilberto Freyre, who had been officially recognized as a member of the Portuguese Academy of History precisely in 1938 (when the short story is set), will have his theories of a racial democracy projected from the Brazilian context to a "Portuguese World" ("mundo que o português criou") (Arenas 7, 8), and the supposed propensity of Portuguese to mix with non-Europeans will paradoxically will reinforce the topography of Portugal as the *cap* of Europe reaching out and erasing differences across the sea, inseminating civilization overseas.

The short story exploits the powerful contradictions and tensions behind the ideological subtext and the supposedly scientific legitimizing of the Estado Novo's colonial endeavors. The discourse behind and in the wake of the 1951 legislation, which revoked the Colonial Act (1930), are exposed as nothing more than an ideological romanticizing of the Portuguese occupation of the South Atlantic space. After all, Freyre's notion of a racially or ethnically "democratic" colonialism can be seen to rest entirely on the "sexual availability" of the native women (see Madureira, "The Empire's" 142-143), featuring women as "disembodied vaginas" available to "oversexed men" of the Iberian West (Madureira, "Tropical Sex Fantasies" 163).

As Calafate Ribeiro states, the changes in 1951 did very little but change "the surface of Portuguese imperialism" (Ribeiro 165). However, this legal formality and the ideology projected by it have lasting cultural and political effects that cannot be ignored. The Platonic metaphor of the nation as a ship^{ix} is put to striking use in the context of the Estado Novo's insistence on Portugal's civilizing mission and its international isolation, as Portugal allegedly (Rodrigues, *Kennedy e Salazar* 236) stood "proudly alone" in the post-Second World War while it aimed to create a Portuguese economic space (wholly dependent on the colonies) as an alternative to the European block and to the hegemonic Cold War superpowers.

Via the ship, the fatherland penetrates beyond the sea, extending and duplicating itself through its envoys; it inseminates and disseminates itself. This is insemination and dissemination with a view

to a return to self, to the order of a self.

Hence, the evoked discourse of the captain regarding immediately preceding “visita de cortesia” to Brazil starts by referring to it as a “país irmão” and as a colonial offspring and follower (“colónia portuguesa”; “governo que modelara a sua conduta pelo exemplo de Portugal”) that awaits the ship as an immunitary injection: “para fortificar-se no seu patriotismo” (Sena, “A Grã-Canária” 216). The ship’s unplanned call to Grã-Canária disrupts the ideological, colonial, and nostalgic path of the South Atlantic crossing between Brazil and Africa, itself the nineteenth- and twentieth-century substitute for Brazil’s loss in Portuguese imperial policy (Ribeiro 149, 50).

The events that take place in the island are both the continuation of and a counterpoint to the imagined transoceanic community of wombs available to insemination, on either side of the Atlantic. Luís Madureira has analyzed how in the fiction of the colonial wars, the penetration of the “fertile tropical wombs of the cathectic geography of Lusotropicalism” is disrupted as sodomy (Madureira, “The Empire’s” 146, 147). “A Grã-Canária” anticipates the rendering the penetration as a sterile exercise, destroying the myth of integration and penetration by exposing it as violation.^x The sexual intercourse between the narrator and the young prostitute denounces the propensity for “advances on the other.” Only after the narrator’s penis retracts after orgasm is he able to see a different reality that goes beyond the imaginary projections of the self. The result of his advancement is sterile; there is but death in the name of (the pleasuring of) the self. The description of

the girl's body is very clear in this regard: she appears "como um corpo esquartejado" with her "ventre desvicerado" (Sena, "A Grã-Canária" 243).

<<1>>

Disrupting Insemination

<<epi-1>>

Penso que escrevemos para o futuro, evidentemente, mas
escrevemos para o nosso tempo.

<<epis>>

—Jorge de Sena

<<text>>

Dislocating the usual reading of "A Grã-Canária"—moving from a focus on the space (political and/or intertextual) of the island toward a reading articulated with a transatlantic slant, with attention to both "overseas" (in the case of the African colonies) and "over the seas" (in the case of Portugal-Brazil)—forces us to address the context of the writing of "A Grã-Canária." The year 1961 has become known as the annus horribilis for the New State regime because of visibility of international protest, allied with growing internal contestation within the elites of the regime. The fragility of the regime was exposed through the call to arms "Para Angola e em Força" with the start of the fight for independence in Angola (1961), soon followed by Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (1963) and Mozambique (1964). This revealed the fragility of the construct of a multicontinental nation, one "from Minho to Timor," where "overseas provinces" are an integral part of the nation.

Not only did the “overseas provinces” fight against their de facto (empirical) status as colonies; the sea itself (and the Atlantic) became the site of international protest in 1961 with the hijacking of the *Santa Maria* cruise ship by Portuguese and Spanish dissident groups that aimed to draw attention to the suppression of civil liberties taking place in both regimes of the Iberian peninsula. The relative success of this political action—the Brazilian state granted the activists asylum, signaling a shift in Brazil’s policy regarding the African continent via Jânio Quadro's government's “Política Externa Independente” (Dávila, *Hotel Trópico* 49)—shattered the notion of the Atlantic as a “Portuguese sea” and of a vague Luso-Brazilian alliance (renewed symbolically in 1922 with the ceremonious official celebrations of the aerial crossing of the South Atlantic by Gago Coutinho and Sacadura Cabral).

It is therefore not surprising that the emergence of a discourse of resistance performs a revision of the image of a heroic and epic sea, pointing not only to the vacuity of such notions but also to the underlying and underwriting violence sustaining these constructs. Fiama Hasse Pais Brandão, associated with Poesia 61 movement, rewrote her *Barcas Novas* in the idealized formal imagery of *Cantigas de Amigo* by evoking the dead bodies that were carried across the oceans in the context of the Colonial Wars; Manuel da Silva Ramos and Alface pointed to the spectrality and monstrosity of the imperial discourse by disrupting and distorting the national text in their *Os lusíadas* (1977); and João de Melo’s *Autópsia de um mar de ruínas* (1984) displaced the genre of the celebrated historical chronicles of

imperial expansion by shifting the subject to the colonial campaigns in Africa.

These texts all follow a similar strategy. They unsettle not only historical texts and contexts but also, crucially, the claim to a fixed relationship between text and context. They expose by distorting the ideological constructions underwriting, and ultimately undermining, such discourses. What is also revealed is that there is no “Ultramar”: the *mar* is never *ultrado*; there is no simple passage, duplication or reproduction of the *ipse*. The sea is rendered as the site of translation in the etymological sense of the word; the sea produces difference, it separates and creates distance. It is therefore, in this context, the site for political resistance.

With the military coup of 1964, things will change in Brazil. In *Fado Tropical*, the transatlantic projection of identity, criticizing the Brazilian political regime by referring to the colonial one, is disrupted precisely by the infection of the unity and union of the self with its projected (transatlantic) other, denouncing it as an act of violence and submission.

In the play *Calabar: O elogio da traição* (1973) Chico Buarque and Ruy Guerra attempted (ultimately unsuccessfully) to circumvent dictatorial censorship, contesting the official version of history by revisiting the historical figure Domingos Fernandes Calabar, traditionally regarded as a national traitor. The ironic appropriation of colonial history is visible in the popular “Fado Tropical” (1972–1973), a song that was written for the play, where the national *topoi* on either

side of the Atlantic are fused and confused in the projection of a single nation, the “ideal” of an “imenso Portugal” in Brazil. The Tejo and the Amazonas delineate a topography in which the rendering of the Atlantic as an empty space erases inter- and intradifferences (Buarque 706). The sea stands as an obstacle to be surpassed—its foldings are ignored—in ipseity, or in the mere imitation, duplication, (af)filiation of the (sublated or not) same presences.

The state censors allowed the song to be released, although they censored the mentioning of “sífilis.” The verse “(além da sífilis, é claro)” infects the (luso-tropical) construction of the vigorous yet cordial Portuguese colonizer, exposing the paternalistic and patronizing ideological discourses and practices disguising violence:

<<v-ext>>

Sabe, no fundo eu sou um sentimental

Todos nós herdamos no sangue lusitano uma boa dose de lirismo
(além da sífilis, é claro)

Mesmo quando as minhas mãos estão ocupadas em torturar,
esganar,

trucidar

Meu coração fecha aos olhos e sinceramente chora . . . (Buarque 706)

<<fltext>>

And yet only that verse was censored. What this demonstrates is that some narratives are beyond critique. When Moacyr Scliar points out how Gilberto Freyre notices the pervasiveness of syphilis within “patriarchal Brazil” (Scliar 176), one is reminded, as in “A Grã-Canária,”

that violence and brutality have plural forms, often fused and confused. To go back to Derrida's quote: "to love or to violate, to love to violate, to colonize, and to colonize itself."

The mention of syphilis teases out the violence underlying the practices of miscegenation that led to social harmony, in Freyre's understanding, and that played an important role in terms of ideological discourse. The actions required for the sake of the "ideal" of an immense Portugal, for the duplication and the projection of the *ipse*, are inherently contradictory.

Thus the censors in Brazil in the 1970s are concerned about syphilis in the same way that the captain of the ship of the ship is obsessed with controlling with venereal diseases. The captain and his officials will promote the sexual advances of the sailors (as long as with the "cuidado prescrito," 244), with the concession that it can be registered in a book in the infirmary, for the order of the self. On its way back from an injection of patriotism in Brazil, the boat calls on an island oppressed by "sotainas negras" and *falangistas*, historically overcharged as the point of departure both for Columbus voyage and for Francisco Franco's rebel assault to continental Spain (briefly merged in the narrator's point of view), mirroring Portugal's colonization of others and of the self. The captain's mentioning of the heroic suffering of "nuestros hermanos" when attempting to restore chaos and peace and the *falangistas'* behavior seem to tease out by rendering visible the undertones of Salazar's governmentality, discursively subtler and more sophisticated (by 1938, but particularly by 1961), although no less

repressive: the violence and repression perpetrated under the phallic triumphalism of “Arriba España” and “Por una España Mayor” slogans do not go beyond those made in the name of a “Portugal pluricontinental,” or “Portugal não é um país pequeno.”

As in the ship and its network of spies, a immunitarian paradigm operates in the island, in which order and the safeguard of the proper (*ipse*) attack internal enemies, “leprosos,” be it “comunistas” or “paneleiros.”^{xi} The drive to immunization, the obsession with the protection of the *ipse*, not only exceeds ipseity, as it potentially destroys both the *ipse* and ipseity, leading to the paradox of autoimmunity (Derrida, *Rogues* 45). Bravo’s excessive and violent “machismo” (“sexo em riste” [Sena, “A Grã-Canária” 251]), which will lead to the sexual assault of another sailor whom they believe to be a spy, is not an accident that befalls the otherwise healthy ship and can be read as more than a frustrated “internalised act” of violence.^{xii} It is, rather, the logical conclusion and the adequate punishment in conformity with the operative discourse. When Bravo mentions he will inscribe this rape in the book reserved for the sexual activity of the sailors, one is reminded that Bravo’s act is not a disruption or an accident that befalls this system, but its logical conclusion. The insults of Bravo are in fact a replica of the discourses (he adds “leproso” to the repertoire): “Seu leproso, seu filho da puta, quem é que é comunista?”.

<<1>>

Other Headings?

<<epi-1>>

The sea smells of sailors, it smells of democracy.

<<epis>>

—Jacques Rancière

<<text>>

Pátria manifests itself by representing its self, hiding its metaphysical vacuity in the form of its envoys. It manifests itself by manipulating and maintaining the impossibility of a full circle, the fullness of ipseity, by veiling tensions and contradictions into rituals of unity, enclosing itself around the place of the father and against its other. The ship functions as an envoy of the *ipse*, inseminating (with) otherness. As a *cap* he continues war with other means via its projection and (mostly failed) penetrations. The topography of the South Atlantic consisting of women servicing sexual fantasies, the plunder of the young woman's body in Las Palmas, the syphilis infecting colonial and (post?-colonial) patriarchal imaginaries are the spoils of this war by other means: "to love to violate, to colonize, and to colonize itself."

The poetico-literary performativity (Derrida and Attridge 47) of Sena's text takes place in and places in check the space of the Atlantic as that of the duplication of a Lusitanian *ipse*. It resists the ideological transcendental figuration of the Atlantic as a point of passage to the duplication of the self through colonization. The critical task, therefore, is to emphasize the eroded differences and disrupt the sedimented meanings implied in transcendental erasures of the Atlantic, which infest and are manifested in colonial, (some) postcolonial, and

neocolonial practices and discourses. To confuse the historical “mundo que criou o português” with the imagined and imaginary, Freyre-inspired “mundo que o português criou” is to endure in textual (noncontextual) fictions.

Fiction may act as a dismantling of fictional and imaginary spaces. A crude reimagined reality has the performative power to reconfigure an empirical reality beyond operating ideological fictions. The “experimentação estilística” in this “realismo que se quis integral” is applied in the volume *Os Grão-Capitães* “a tornar mais reais que a realidade, e portanto tão monstruosas como o que os nossos olhos temem reconhecer na “realidade,” experiências vividas, testemunhadas, ou adivinhadas nas confissões involuntárias e contraditórias de alguns dos actores” (Sena “Prefácio” 14, 15).

The disruption of imperial chronology is performed in the *spacing* of writing. As Sena puts it, emphasizing the necessity of the play between text and context, “o que escrevemos tem de ser o momento que escrevemos”: “Penso que escrevemos para o futuro, evidentemente, mas escrevemos para o nosso tempo. E o que escrevemos tem de ser o momento que escrevemos” (Sena and Williams). The moment in which “A Grã-Canária” was written and the moment which “A Grã-Canária” writes is not one of transatlantic insemination, but one of Atlantic dissemination.

The South Atlantic that was and is presented is exposed as a political sign (in the sense famously expressed by Umberto Eco: everything that can be used to tell a lie), which configures an absolute

conception of space and of politics. It is ideological as defined by Paul de Man, as an instance of “confusion between linguistic and natural reality, of reference with phenomenism” (363). Pointing out the incongruity is certainly helpful but notably insufficient. The specificity of the Portuguese colonial case would lie not in the in-between position the country occupied (see Santos), but in its spectrality, in the Derridian sense. As Calafate Ribeiro noted, “That Portuguese world [the imagined civilization created by the Portuguese] had been a model for all but, in reality, it never existed” (163). In other words, there is no father(land) drawn across the seas, merely the projection of an absent father heightened by the recuperation of otherness into the self. The spectral effect, in Derridean terms, of the legal formality of the Constitutional Revision of 1951, the “traces” of this form “in the materiality of social life,” must certainly be noted if an effective criticism of ideology is to take place (Žižek 128). If ideology is constructed by language, the “linguistics of literariness” becomes necessary in order to trace a critique and resist it (de Man 363).

The veering into the Atlantic, the sea itself, acts as a dislocation from the *cap* and the ship as the institutors of discourse, as the proxy father figures of identity. It is also a resistance to the projection and integration of alterity into sameness as well as to colonial projections and reproductions. It is an attempt at a reading that does not begin with the “father,” be it Camões, the Portuguese, or colonial desires and projections. It may configure a critique and a criticism of discourses that are still present now. This dislocated reading of “A Grã-Canária”

contributes to rendering the South Atlantic visible as a political space. If the sea has traditionally been perceived (as Esposito reminds us) as the space of the improper to be sublimated, then its sublimation—the establishing of a self and its projected other, to be sublimated into the self—is what is interrupted in “A Grã-Canária.” After all, it would be extremely naive to believe that the “South Atlantic” is not to some extent always already textual(ized), a product of reading and writing. It has been the purpose of this reading to take into address the *spacing* when confronting topographies of otherness and the projection of the self, to stress the tensions, contradictions, and the limits of discourses keen on establishing and marking the borders between a self and its others.

The ending of “A Grã-Canária” is a reminder that the *sea* is not a blank or a transcendental space, an obstacle to be overcome in the voyage of the self. The three companions, after their pilgrimage into a distorted “Island of Love,” now look out to the sea, after departing from Las Palmas, discussing their location and attempting to discern a route. The Atlantic, in this configuration which “A Grã-Canária” and *Calabar: O elogio da traição* denounce by distorting, is the site of production of differences; it marks the distance which is the condition for the possibility of any construct. Distance and separation are not an obstacle to the realization of the *ipse*, but its necessary condition. Distance and separation are the deferring and the differing of ipseity. There is no insemination without disse(a)mination.

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Notes

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ⁱ I am indebted to the Centro de Estudos Sociais (Universidade de Coimbra and the Università di Bologna), in particular to Roberto Vecchi and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, who

have developed groundbreaking research work and initiatives addressing the notion of the South Atlantic.

ii As Margarida Calafate Ribeiro notes, “The corner stone of a national resurrection was a return to the original values of the Portuguese imperial adventure” (158). The 1940 exposition of the “Mundo Português,” for instance, celebrated the Portuguese maritime expansion by focusing on the colonial possessions. If not consciously aware of this legacy, the 1998 World Exposition held in Lisbon put forth an ambiguous discourse regarding the Portuguese maritime expansion. It hardly disguised a triumphant and celebratory tone, as it now focused on the “encontro de culturas” brought along by the maritime expansion, allowing for parallel criticisms to take place in the analysis of the 1940 and 1998 international events (Almeida 111–57, 187–220).

iii Luís Madureira presents a succinct and insightful reading, based on Yves Léonard’s historical work, which lays out this relationship along with the shortcomings of Gilberto Freyre’s thought and of the Estado Novo’s political exploitation of Freyre’s ideas in order to legitimate colonial policies (“The Empire’s” 138–45).

iv Nicholas Royle argues in his latest book that all literature features some instance of veering (viii, ix). I take this veering, voluntary or not, as a product of literature’s iterability and excess; in other words, “meaning is context bound—a function of relations within of between texts—but that context itself is boundless” (Culler 120). Veering can indicate voluntary and involuntary action, conscious and unconscious, passive or active, and therefore is an apt term for such a procedure.

v The structuring and the ideology of a self-sufficient and autotelic self (*ipse*) is what is questioned by this term, as defined by Jacques Derrida: “By *ipseity* I thus wish to suggest some ‘I can,’ or at the very least the power that *gives itself* its own law, its force of law, its self-representation, the sovereign and reappropriating gathering of the self in the simultaneity

of an assemblage or assembly, being together or ‘living together,’ as we say” (*Rogues* 11).

vi According to David Harvey, the political implications of conceptions of absolute spacetime (as with relative or relational) must not be ignored (see Harvey).

vii There is a particular topography being drawn here (which also includes Dakar) as a projection of self-obsession, as nothing more than the projection of the desires of the (collective) *ipse*: “Mais tarde, na memória deles, os portos confundir-se-iam numa descorada névoa”; “numa só imagem, às vezes compósita de recordações alheias, cujas semelhanças e coincidências as amalgavam” (Sena, “A Grã-Canária” 213).

viii The narrator displays himself fully as a conquistador: “Daí em diante, eu possuiria, poderia possuir quando quisesse, que maravilha” (Sena, “A Grã-Canária” 237).

ix The captain acts as the king toward the subjects (Sena, “A Grã-Canária” 219). He leads the ship, “sozinho como sempre,” as if it were a “biblical enterprise,” “guiada de Lisboa a telegramas cifrados.” The ship represents Portugal (218) in the same way that the island represents Spain: “um arquipélago tão tradicionalmente espanhol como os Açores são portugueses” (217).

x The epigraph of “Capangala não responde” (set in “Africa, 1961” during the Colonial Wars)—the passage from Hesiod’s *Theogony* in which the penis of Uranus is thrown and left to drift in the sea—is a reminder, as is “Grã-Canária,” of the political “castration” the country (and its colonies; the *intra* and the *ultramar*) suffered under the Estado Novo (Sena “PS 1974” 12).

xi Portugal and Spain are bulwarks of Christian and conservative values *now*, fighting against the “forças desencadeadas do comunismo internacional” (Sena, “A Grã-Canária” 217). Even the narrator falls within this discourse: when he is told of the conflict and turmoil in the girl’s family, either dead or locked away in the sanatorium for those with “leprosy” of the soul, the narrator has, instinctively, a rather irrational reaction of fear of being

contaminated by the disease.

^{xii} Anthony Soares's reading of this passage is perceptive: "When Sena's narratives conjoin violence with sexual activity, they become evidence of the frustration that the imposition of a colonizing identity provokes which, as it cannot be directed against the regime that promotes that identity, seeks relief through internalised acts" ("The violent maintenance of the Portuguese colonial identity" 85).

