UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
FACULDADE DE LETRAS

PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES OF INCARCERATION
AN INQUIRY INTO *PAPÉIS DA PRISÃO* BY JOSÉ LUANDINO VIEIRA

Elisa Scaraggi

Orientadores: Prof.a Doutora Susana Isabel Arsénio Nunes Costa Araújo
Prof. Doutor Roberto Vecchi

Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de Doutor no ramo de Estudos de Literatura e de Cultura, na especialidade de Estudos Comparatistas

PHDCOMP

Ano 2020

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Trabalho financiado por fundos nacionais através da Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia. Bolsa de doutoramento: (PD / BD / 113727 / 2015)

Ano 2020

Abstract

Considered one of the fathers of Angolan literature and one among the most important contemporary writers in Portuguese, in 1961 José Luandino Vieira was arrested because of his participation to the struggle for independence in Angola. He would spend the next twelve years in confinement, first in Luanda and later in the notorious Tarrafal prison camp (Cabo Verde). While in detention, Vieira wrote most of his literary works, alongside a series of notebooks in which he reported his thoughts, feelings and literary and political considerations. Forty years after the independence of Angola, Vieira's notebooks were published in a volume titled *Papéis da prisão: Apontamentos, diário, correspondência (1962-1971)*. In this dissertation, I focus on the intersections between history, literature and the writing of the self that can be observed in Vieira's prison writings. I defend that, while the prison diaries cast a new light on the writer's literary production, they can also bring new elements to the history of Angola, having an impact on how the history of the struggle will be remembered in the future. Starting from a reflection on the issue of punishment and on prison as an instrument of social control, I question how the writings related to their locale of production, how the carceral experience had shaped them and how it was reflected in them.

Key-words: *Papéis da prisão*; José Luandino Vieira; Angola; prison; prison writings; history; autobiography; national identity.

RESUMO

Considerado um dos pais da literatura angolana e um dos escritores viventes mais importantes em língua portuguesa, José Luandino Vieira foi arrestado em 1961 por causa da sua participação na luta de independência em Angola. O escritor passaria os doze anos seguintes preso, primeiro em Luanda e depois no famoso campo de concentração de Tarrafal (Cabo Verde). Durante a reclusão, Vieira escreveu a maior parte das suas obras literárias, além de uma série de cadernos nos quais reportava tanto os seus pensamentos íntimos, como as suas considerações literárias e políticas. Quarenta anos depois da independência de Angola, os cadernos do cárcere foram publicados num volume intitulado *Papéis da prisão: Apontamentos, diário, correspondência (1962-1971)*. Nesta tese, analiso esse volume prestando particular atenção às interseções entre história, escrita literária e escrita autobiográfica que se observam nos cadernos da prisão de José Luandino Vieira. Na minha análise, defendo que os cadernos podem lançar nova luz sobre a produção literária do escritor e que, ao mesmo tempo, podem trazer novos elementos para a história de Angola e ter um impacto sobre como a história da luta vai ser lembrada no futuro. Partindo de uma reflexão sobre a questão da pena e da prisão como instrumento de controle social, questiono como os cadernos da prisão de Vieira se relacionam com os lugares onde foram escritos, como eles ressentem da experiência do cárcere e como esta se reflete neles.

Palavras chave: *Papéis da prisão*; José Luandino Vieira; Angola; prisão; literatura carcerária; história; autobiografia; identidade nacional.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has been developed thanks to the support of Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT), that funded my PhD project with studentship PD/ BD/113727/2015.

Apart from expressing my gratitude for the vital financial support, I feel the need to acknowledge the intellectual and emotional support I have received throughout these years. A PhD can be a hard endeavour and I have been very lucky to have around me people with whom I could share good and not so good moments. First, I would like to thank my advisor Susana Araújo for believing in this project in the first place and for her thorough dedication throughout every step of the process, even when external circumstances made her work harder than it should have been. I am also grateful to have been able to work again with professor Roberto Vecchi, who enriched my work with his precious advices, and who had the merit of introducing me to *Papéis da prisão* when the book was still in its early stages.

Thanks also to all the people at CEC who supported me, to my colleagues and to all the academic friends—in particular Alba, Daniela, Marcia, Alessia and Salomé—who helped me reflect on my work by discussing our projects, our points of view and our positioning within academia. More generally, thanks to all the friends in Portugal, Italy, Brazil, Canada and elsewhere who brightened these years with their presence and affection. Special thanks to Colleen and Flora for their help with my English and for being there whenever I needed a 'problem-solver'. I am also very grateful to prof. Ellen W. Sapega for her linguistic revision of the final draft of this dissertation.

During the whole process, I knew I could always count on the unconditional love and support of my family, to whom I am forever grateful. They have given me solid roots and let me grow my own way.

I cannot describe how grateful I am to José Luandino Vieira. Since our first meeting, he has honoured me with his friendship and I treasure our conversations, our correspondence and all the time I have been able to spend with him.

Finally, thanks to Alessandro, who has stood by me every day and has given me strength when I needed it most. I thank him for his constant encouragement and, above all, for his patience. For him I could literally go to the other end of the world.

FOREWORD: A RAIZ DOS CASOS

In the second of the three short stories that comprise the collection *Luuanda* (1963), by Angolan writer José Luandino Vieira, the narration is interrupted by a digression in which one of the characters questions if it is possible to establish the very beginning of a case, a story. How is one to know which is the beginning of something if, following the thread, one discovers that every beginning is the end of another story, which in turn is yet another beginning, and so on and on until they are confused and indistinguishable. The narrator brings the metaphor of a cashew tree: the roots and the little seed that each fruit produces—the beginning and the end—are made of the same material. Nevertheless, he concludes that when one has to expose a case, to tell a story, it is important to choose a beginning, to at least try to establish 'the roots of the case'.

Not unlike a story whose roots are hard to disclose and describe, the work that I present here, as it contemplates a variety of issues as well as critical approaches, could be addressed from different angles. This introduction, which is necessarily written at the end of a long process, tries to go back to the beginning and expose how my project and my research developed, offering at the same time a possible explanation for some of the paths I have chosen.

*

I first learned about the project *Diários do Tarrafal*[1] when I was a master's student at Bologna university, as my advisor, professor Roberto Vecchi, was one of the researchers working on José Luandino Vieira's personal archive. Based at the Centre for Social Studies of Coimbra University,

[1] "Diários do Tarrafal: Project Presentation," Centre for Social Studies, Coimbra University, Available at https://ces.uc.pt/en/investigacao/projetos-de-investigacao/projetos-financiados/jose-luandino-vieira-diarios-do-tarrafal Accessed September 26, 2019.

the project's aim was to classify, digitalise and edit the material that the writer had accumulated during the years he spent in prison. The result was the book *Papéis da prisão: Apontamentos, diário, correspondência (1962-1971)*[2], which was finally presented in late 2015. Before the book was published, I made the decision to focus my doctoral research on Vieira's prison writings. Prior to this, I had read and enjoyed most of what the writer had published before *Papéis* and I was familiar with the creative use of language and narrative structures that made of him one of the most interesting voices of literature in Portuguese. At the time, I knew little about the author's biography, not much more than what can be usually read on the inside flaps of his books: born in Portugal in 1935, he became Angolan because of his participation in the struggle for national independence in Angola[3]. I was also aware of the fact that Vieira's political commitment to the independence had caused him to spend more than a decade in prison, a period during which he wrote the most part of his literary works. On these bases—somewhat frail, as I still had no access to the material that was being edited, but also loaded with expectations—I wrote my research proposal, aiming to focus my project on the intersections between history, literature and the writing of the self that could be observed in Vieira's prison writings. I assumed that, while the prison diaries would likely cast a new light on the writer's literary production, they could also bring new elements to the history of Angola, since they would show how José Luandino Vieira framed in writing part of that history as it developed before his eyes. Last but foremost, I questioned how the writings related to their locale of production, how the carceral experience had shaped them and how it was reflected in them.

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[2] Hereafter referred to as *Papéis*.
[3] As Alexandra Lucas Coelho (2009) notes, this has become a standard description of Vieira's biography and it is included in most of his books.

As I am firmly convinced that historicising and contextualising are crucial operations that can enhance our understanding of a text—especially in the case of a text that has such profound links with history and real life experiences—I devoted the first part of my research to the study of the context, which was conducted on multiple levels. In fact, if on one hand I was delving into analyses of the prison as an institution and, more generally, of the issue of punishment, I was also reading on the history of Angola, on Portuguese colonialism and of how it came to melt in the air. As far as carceral questions are concerned, the works of Michel Foucault, Angela Davis and Ervin Goffman, among many others[4], have been particularly significant. These texts have resonated deeply with me and in more ways that I expected, with effects that go beyond the limits of the work I present here and that drew me closer to the movement for prison abolition[5]. Critical prison studies compelled me to rethink the way I looked at prisons—institutions whose reality I had basically ignored or taken for granted until then—pushing me to reconsider the relation between punishment and power. During my research, I gradually came to question the political dimensions of incarceration and dispute how prison came to be such an important element of our global society, to the point of appearing naturally entrenched in it.

Eventually, critical reflections on incarceration informed my whole work, but they are discussed at length in **PART I – The Purpose of Prisons**. Starting from some appalling events that denounce the current state of prisons, in this first part of my work I attempt to briefly trace the

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[4] As it would be impossible to be exhaustive here, I will mention just some of the texts that have been particularly compelling and relevant for my work: Alexander, Michelle: *The New Jim Crow. Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010); Bernault, Florence et al.: *A History of Prison and Confinement in Africa* (2003); Buntman, Fran Lisa: *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (2003); Davis, Angela Yvonne: *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003); Dikötter, Frank et al.: *Cultures of confinement: a history of the prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (2007); Foucault, Michel: *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (1975); Goffman, Erving: *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (1961); Melossi, Dario and Pavarini, Massimo: *The Prison and the Factory: Origins of the Penitentiary System* (1977); Morris, Norval et al.:*The Oxford History of the Prison: the Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (1998).

[5] On penal abolitionism, see A. Y. Davis 2003; Ruggiero 2010; Manconi et al. 2015.

history of prison as an institution, unravelling well-established discourses on punishment and redemption, showing how imprisonment has worked as a means to control the population and repress social and political dissent. Moreover, I discuss the resort to imprisonment and other practices of punishment based on the deprivation of liberty under colonialism[6], trespassing the borders of most canonical studies that are generally limited to the contexts of Europe and the United States. The idea underlying this approach is that Western modernity and its practices should no longer be analysed on their own, but rather thought in combination with their colonial counterparts. After all, the former are often modelled on and inspired by the latter: as Giorgio Agamben claims in his *Homo Sacer* (1998, 166–67), if prison camps are to be considered the *nomos* of modernity, it bears noting that they were first designed for and put to work in colonial contexts.

In **PART II – Prison as a Literary Space**, I move to another level of analysis to consider the relation between literature and confinement, taking into account literary works that relate to prison or other experiences of detention. Beyond critical and theoretical approaches, to understand how prison enters the literary imaginary, I have read several works by prisoners or former prisoners, including novels, short stories, letters, memoirs, diaries, etc.[7]. Going through the extensive and extremely variegated corpus of prison literature, I realised how both writers and critics could rely on a series of *topoi,* motifs or clichés to describe experiences of incarceration in their works. One of my objectives has been precisely to debunk some of these motifs, focusing in

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[6] Considerations on the specificity of systems of punishment under colonial rule have been prompt by the conference *Colonial incarceration in the 20th century*, which took place in Lisbon in 2016.

[7] Among these works, I remember some few important titles: Ramos, Graciliano: *Memórias do cárcere* (1953); Solzhenitsyn, Alexander: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962); X, Malcom and Alex Haley: *The Autobiography of Malcom X* (1964); Gramsci, Antonio: *Lettere dal carcere* (1965); Shamalov, Varlam: *Kolyma Tales* (1980); Xitu, Uanhenga: *Os sobreviventes da máquina colonial depõem* (1980); Wa Thiong'o: Ngugi *Wrestiling with the Devil. A Prison Memoir* (1981); Mendes, Luiz Alberto: *Memórias de um sobrevivente* (2009).

particular on images that conceive incarceration as a means to ultimately achieve transcendental freedom. Although it is true that some former prisoners recall their time inside as a moment of personal growth and improvement, I argue that, by associating punishment with transformative experiences and enhanced creativity, literary motifs such as that of the 'happy prison' actually contribute to mystifying the reality of imprisonment and its political dimensions.

Focusing on lived experiences of incarceration, in **Part II** I also discuss how writers that engage in accounts of incarceration assume the role of witnesses, as their histories of violence at the hands of the state are not limited to personal grief, but rather appeal to a large community—sometimes, a national community—and influence the way history is remembered. Arguing that history is always implied in witness narratives, I suggest that these texts can be read beyond the limits of a paradigm of interpretation which looks at the practice of writing mainly as a therapeutic process to overcome trauma. To enrich my argument, I bring some excerpts from a classic of Brazilian literature: Graciliano Ramos' *Memórias do Cárcere* (1953). Ramos' memoirs is a striking example of a former prisoner's lucidity on his own carceral condition, a proof that prisoners can find personal and original means to overcome the impasses usually associated with the act of bearing witness, producing narratives that are coherent and come to closure.

PART III – José Luandino Vieira: Personal and Historical Context works as a linkage between the first two parts, more centred on tracing a wider outline of the carceral question and its literary reflection, and the section of my work dedicated to diverse aspects of *Papéis*. A brief analysis of the evolution of Portuguese colonialism in Angola between the nineteenth and twentieth century—which retrieves and elaborates on some of the issues discusses in **Part I**—helps to situate historically the increasing desire for independence and self-determination that was widespread among the Angolan people in the 1960s. In order to grasp the tensions that resulted in

the outburst of the liberation war, I give particular emphasis to the cultural and ideological context that pervaded both the colony and the metropole at the time. José Luandino Vieira's personal experience is integrated in this context, informing on the circumstances that led to his arrest and determined the way he would face incarceration. The attempt to put different aspects of the book into their specific context set the ground for my analysis of *Papéis*. However, the book exceeds the limits of any possible contextualisation while also questioning "the precarious role of literary critique", as the editors wrote in their critical presentation of the volume (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015a, 13).

I got my copy of the book in November 2015 and, ever since, I have been reading it over and over, trying to unveil the different layers of meaning that the book contains. The main corpus of *Papéis* consists of the seventeen notebooks that Vieira wrote during the most part of his time in prison, from October 1962 to July 1971. Although assembled in precarious conditions and with low quality paper, the original notebooks are unique pearls of craftsmanship: each cover is illustrated by the author, there are quotes on all the inside covers and each notebook has a title: *Ontem, Hoje, Amanhã*. In an effort to be as faithful as possible to the original notebooks, the pages of *Papéis* are also enriched with Vieira's drawings, reproductions of notes written by other prisoners, facsimiles of pages where readers can see Vieira's tiny and neat handwriting. The result is compelling. One wonders how Vieira was able to accumulate, hide and smuggle out of prison all this material, but also how he created such beautiful objects in an environment where beauty was constantly negated. As he later claimed, the notebooks responded to an "aesthetics of poverty" (*Interview*, 238), to the logics of trying to make the best out of the little he had at his disposal. The title *Ontem, Hoje, Amanhã*—which appears outlined differently on each notebook cover—is dense with meaning and allusions. It establishes a connection between the past, the present and the future,

a connection which can refer to the situation of an incarcerated man who, living in hard conditions, reflects on his life and longs for freedom. But it may also hint at the situation of Angola, a country fighting for independence, trying to build a better future and making efforts to recover its past—which had always been ignored or rejected by the colonisers (Fanon 2004, 149). There is no unequivocal, outright interpretation that excludes the others; rather, as it happens for the whole of *Papéis*, the significant meaning is created by the overlapping of different perspectives: the intimate, the historical, the individual, the collective.

From the very beginning, *Papéis* struck me because of the disparateness of the materials it gathers, the subjects it covers, the different registers it presents, the range of experiences and situations it describes. However, I was also impressed by the consistency of the project and by José Luandino Vieira's dedication to it, which in turn implied his project of becoming a writer and the political project of an independent Angola. As I try to go back to the onset of my project, I have to recall that my first reading of *Papéis* was particularly important as, page after page, it gave me a sense of the rhythm of José Luandino Vieira's life in prison or, at least, of how he represented it in his writings. I got to accompany Vieira's life day after day through his roaming from one prison to another, learning about what troubled him the most or what gave him some relief, to the point that the writer almost became an intimate acquaintance to me. Reading through the accumulation of fragments, growing more and more familiar with his way of writings and with his world, I came to decipher his references, smile at his humour, notice how the tone of his voice changes, how he can pass from dreariness and despair, to composure, to sparks of happiness and then start all over again. The research I had previously done in critical carceral studies gave me some precious keys to better understand what I was reading and never lose sight of the carceral

horizons that constrained Vieira's actions, helping me to realise how, ultimately, all of what he wrote was directly linked to the circumstances in which he was forced to live.

During successive readings of *Papéis*, without overlooking the project in its totality, I have singled out some elements around which I have later built my argument. Because of the very nature of the book, its heterogeneity and complexity, I needed to focus on a few elements in order to go into depth. I made a selection aimed to respond to some of the questions that arose during my research, and that go from self-representation to how to make sense of a painful history, from the process of creative writing to practices of counter-discipline and resistance within the carceral system. My analysis of *Papéis*, divided across **Part IV** to **Part VII**, tries to keep together the diverse and sometimes contrasting facets of Vieira's work.

PART IV – *Papéis da prisão*: the Book starts with a description of the material aspects and circumstances that led to the writing of the notebooks and, more than forty years later, to the publication of *Papéis.* I focus on this time gap to inquire about the reasons that moved Vieira to finally publish his prison writings, questioning how the book participates in discussions on the rewriting of Angolan history. These discussions are urgent in a country that has been at war for most of its history and where a partisan and inaccurate version of history has often been used as a weapon against political opponents.

PART V – In Confinement focuses on the specificities of the carceral environments in which Vieira lived and on the profound impact they had on what he wrote and on how he wrote it. For instance, I examine how Vieira's transfer to Tarrafal prison camp is reflected in *Papéis*, as the text displays a break—a "cutting line"—that splits the book in two parts, clearly marking a 'before' and 'after'. The discussion on the period spent at Tarrafal is enhanced by references to the works by António Jacinto—Angolan poet and political activist who was tried and sentenced with Vieira.

In this section of my work, I also focus on what could be considered the minimal unity of *Papéis*, the fragment, examining how the dialectics between the fragment and the whole allows readers to grasp the writer's rhythm of thought.

PART VI – A Workshop of Writing deals with the intersections between *Papéis* and Vieira's literary works, illustrating how the notebooks can be read as a counterpoint to Vieira's novels, novellas and short stories. Appealing once again to the notion of contextualisation and calling into question the role of critique, I argue how the prison notebooks provide stimulating material for rethinking the evolution of the writer, his commitment to literature and to a political ideal.

Finally, in **PART VII – Subjectivity and Referentiality** I claim that in the case of José Luandino Vieira the frontiers between literary and autobiographical writing are unstable. This section delves into the practice of life-writing and considers the entanglement of temporalities that it entails, as well as the ethics associated with self-representation and historical accuracy. I question how texts centred on the experience of a single individual can come to stand for and represent larger communities, including the entire nation. On this last point, by resorting to the comparison with Nelson Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, I discuss how autobiography intervenes in the public sphere and can have profound implications on a political level, especially in the case of autobiographies written by political activists.

*

Before putting an end to this beginning, I would like to clarify that my analysis does not aspire to be all comprehensive, as it would not be possible to tackle all and each one of the issues raised by *Papéis* and the different strata of meaning that compose it. Yet, as at every new reading of the book I come upon aspects that had passed unnoticed at first and that raise a whole new series of

questions, I wonder whether I have left something crucial out. Throughout the years, I have accumulated my own load of papers, drafts, commentaries and annotations on *Papéis*, most of which, for different reasons, will not be part of the analysis that I present here. The final selection that I made was influenced by my meeting with José Luandino Vieira and by our conversations[8], which covered diverse aspects of the author's experience in prison, his notebooks and other literary works. This was a crucial moment for my research and one that contributed to shape my analysis of *Papéis*: Vieira's own retrospective perspective on his experience and his writings oriented my reading and gave me a map to go through a work that, during one of our conversations, he described as a desert[9]. This image stuck with me and, with time, I came to appreciate it more and more as a sharp representation of *Papéis*. At first, the word desert summons images of inhospitality, harshness and dreary living conditions, characteristics that one can easily associate with prison life; yet, the term can also evoke other meanings and metaphors. In fact, without ever giving a romanticised or edulcorated vision of his experience, Vieira insists on reminding us that life in prison "although it may seem a completely void life, it is very intense" (*Interview*, 243). *Papéis* testifies to this intensity, it is a proof of how the extent of thought cannot be limited by the boundaries imposed by detention. Just like in a desert, where life strives to thrive under the dull surface, under the appearance of a barren land, *Papéis* brings to us the precious material Vieira produced in confinement, under conditions that are sadly representative of the history of violence that marked the 20th century.

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[8] The interview I realised with José Luandino Vieira is annexed to this work, on pages 226—62. Throughout the work, I quote excerpts of this interview using the bracketed reference (*Interview*, x).
[9] E-mail received by the author, January 25, 2019.

*

Some technical issues:

* Concerning translations: I provide a translation for all the passages quoted from a language other than English. I have used a published English translation whenever one was available, otherwise I have provided my own version. In the case of published translations, I have given credits to the translator in the bibliography.

* Since literary translations require more time and attention than I could devote to them during the course of this work—and presuming that the readers of this dissertation will understand Portuguese—I have not translated quotes by Graciliano Ramos, António Jacinto and José Luandino Vieira. In the case of Vieira, I have maintained the original Portuguese also in excerpts from interviews with the author, so that Vieira's own voice can come through the text.

* Although I use the author-date system for other references, I came to the conclusion that this system might not have been an effective way to quote from Vieira's works, as it could lead to a number of misunderstandings. Hence, to allow readers to easily recognise the book by Vieira from which I am quoting, each quotation is followed by a bracketed reference containing part of the book's title and the page number. For example, a quotation from page 26 of the book *Lourentinho, Dona Antónia de Sousa Neto e eu*, will be referenced as (*Lourentinho*, 26). All the details about the editions of Vieira's works that I have consulted are available in the bibliography.

* For what concerns *Papéis da prisão*, please note that when I quote using the bracketed reference (*Papéis*, x) I am referring to excerpts drawn from Vieira's notebooks or from the introduction that Vieira wrote for the volume. Instead, when quoting from the paratextual apparatus of *Papéis*, (i.e. editorial note, critical notes, chronology, interview), I use the author-date system to acknowledge the editors' work. Please refer to the bibliography for more information on each reference.

* I have used bracketed ellipses in italics *[…]* to signal the elisions I made in fragments taken from *Papéis*. I have maintained unaltered any other ellipsis or bracketed clarification which was already present in original text.

PART I

THE PURPOSE OF PRISONS

PERMANENT CRISIS

At the beginning of 2017, Brazil was struck by a wave of violent prison riots[1]. Allegedly because of feuds between rival criminal factions, at least one hundred and sixty inmates were brutally murdered in the month of January alone, with many beheaded or mutilated. The extreme degree of violence that characterised the riots shocked the public and, for days, in and outside Brazil, there was much discussion about what was described as an exceptional prison crisis[2]. Nonetheless, not everyone agreed on the terms of the crisis. For some, the system was to blame for not being harsh enough, lacking in control and discipline, while others thought it was being excessively harsh, exceeding in brutality and punishment instead of focusing on prisoners' rehabilitation. The debate drew forth some structural problems of the Brazilian penitentiary system—such as endemic overcrowding, forced co-existence of rival criminal gangs, lack of resources and of prison staff, etc.—and some sectors of society called for an urgent reform. However, although reforms are dramatically necessary in a context that international observers define medieval-like[3], they will

[1]Riots occurred in the prion establishments of Manaus, Roraima and Natal. See: Romero, 2017.
[2] Both Brazilian and international media were almost unanimous in using the word 'crisis' to describe the event. The then president of Brazil, Michel Temer, however, referred to the massacre as 'a terrible accident', failing to assume responsibility for the violent death of more than a hundred people who were under state custody. At this regard, see: Phillips, 2017.
[3] See: Portal Terra, 2017.

not be—nor have ever been—a definitive solution. And this is not only true for Brazil, but worldwide.

As scholar and activist Angela Davis affirms, "if the words 'prison reform' so easily slip from our lips, it is because 'prison' and 'reform' have been inextricably linked since the beginning of the use of imprisonment as the main means of punishing those who violate social norms" (2003, 40). Likewise, the words 'prison' and 'crisis' have also been inextricably related. The frequency with which they recur, however, reveal that crisis are not the result of mere misadministration, exceptional circumstances or 'accidents': instead, it seems that prison itself subsists in a state of permanent crisis[4]. In the light of these arguments, some activists[5] claim that it is no longer possible to speak of crisis, but rather of a project, and a project that it is based on—and inevitably entails—violence, in different shapes and degrees[6]. Although only a very few particularly gruesome events end up being front page news, violence and heinous violations of fundamental human rights are less rare than one would like to believe. Moreover, in certain parts of the world more than in others, being a prisoner today still means putting one's life at risk. For example, several more riots and atrocious killings[7] have occurred in different prisons in Brazil since the massacres in January 2017,

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[4] For example, prison riots do not constitute isolated or exceptional phenomena at all, yet they are always described as crisis and emergencies. For decades, the Brazilian penitentiary system has been periodically shaken by violent prison riots, of which that of Carandiru is the most well-known, and certainly the deadliest one. On October 2, 1992, at least 111 inmates held at the Carandiru facility were murdered by the military police that was trying to regain control of the prison facilities after a riot started. Up to now, no policeman has been punished (Ferreira et al. 2012).
[5] See: Pastoral Carcerária, 2017.
[6] Violence does not need to be corporal to have devastating effects on prisoners. Consider, for example, the widespread practice of holding prisoners in solitary confinement, a form of punishment that may cause irreversible psychological damage. While the U.N. General Assembly has ratified that any period of solitary confinement in excess of 15 days constitutes a form of torture, numerous countries hold prisoners in solitary confinement for much longer periods. As one can read in a report issued in 2011, in the U.S., some prisoners have been held in solitary confinement for 40 years (Mendez 2011, 17).
[7] Data show that an average of one inmate per day is killed in Brazilian prisons. See: Folha de São Paulo, 2017.

with peaks in January 2018[8], May 2019[9] and in July 2019[10]. As politicians treat these events as 'accidents' and hold no accountability whatsoever[11], the public gets used to such news, which cause less and less impact: violence is naturalised[12] and seen as an orderly condition of prison life, as part of the punishment. Yet, when imprisonment was established as the main form of punishment, it intended to render punishment more humane, abolishing corporal sanctions and other forms of violence.

The prison as an institution as we know it today emerged within a context of reform of penal institutions and the very concept of punishment, which took place around the end of the 18th century. Places of confinement and captivity had existed long before that date (Peters, 1998), but the modern or 'reformed prison' presented some substantial differences in relation to them. In fact, the modern institution—emblematically also called 'penitentiary[13]'—was designed to comply to a set of moral principles, which include the idea of rehabilitating 'criminals', of correcting prisoners through confinement, work and education. However, ever since the beginning, the institution, its devices and techniques have proved controversial. Critiques of the penitentiary system and calls to "a return to the fundamental principles of the prison" (Foucault 1995, 268) emerged very early, and they have kept emerging almost unchanged for the last two centuries. This demonstrates that reforms are part of the very functioning of the prison itself, rather than means to correct it (Ibid.,

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[8] See: Almeida 2018.
[9] See: Público, 2019a.
[10] See: Público, 2019b.
[11] Elected president of Brazil in November 2018, the far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro has repeatedly made some disheartening comments on the riots that resulted in the death of dozens of prisoners. In this regard, see: Folha de São Paulo, 2019.
[12] See: Maia, 2019.
[13] The word immediately evokes religious and spiritual images, suggesting there is a close connection between the prison cell and the monastic cell (Foucault 1995, 149). As Fergus McNeill observes, "the penitentiary was seen as a place of confinement where the sinner is given the opportunity to reflect soberly on their behaviour, and on how to reform themselves […], perhaps with divine help" (2014, 4198).

234): they do not radically change how imprisonment is conceived and practiced, nor do they actually solve the problem posed by prison. On the contrary, there are more people incarcerated today than at any other time in history and appalling figures show how the world population of inmates has been increasing at unprecedented fast rates in the last few decades[14]. The causes of this rapid growth in incarceration rates are not directly linked to an escalation of crime[15], since crime has been declining at least since the 1990s in most Western countries[16]. Moreover, as Elizabeth Hinton observes in her analysis of mass incarceration in the U.S., "leading social scientists have been unable to establish a strong correlation between incarceration and crime rates, debunking the idea that the threat of imprisonment serves as a powerful crime deterrent" (2016, 7). If anything, the problem seems to be quite the opposite, as "prison has succeeded extremely well in producing delinquency, a specific type, a politically or economically less dangerous—and, on occasion, usable—form of illegality" (Foucault 1995, 277). The claim that prison not only attempts to control crime but ultimately produces it is supported by data on recidivism[17], which

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[14] The latest report on prison population says that the full total of prisoners in the world may well be in excess of eleven million, probably more if we consider that many countries do not provide reliable data. Just to give an overall idea: "there are more than 2.1 million prisoners in the United States of America, 1.65 million in China (plus unknown numbers in pre-trial detention and other forms of detention), 690,000 in Brazil, 583,000 in the Russian Federation, 420,000 in India, 364,000 in Thailand, 249,000 in Indonesia, 233,000 in Turkey, 230,000 in Iran, 204,000 in Mexico and 188,000 in the Philippines"(Walmsley 2018, 2).

[15] Since it was introduced in penal codes as the primary form of punishment, imprisonment responded to the need to "produce stability through controlling what counts as crime" (Gilmore Wilson 2007, 13), and it did so by complying to some basic principles: retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation and incapacitation: "The shock of retribution – loss of liberty – supposedly keeps convicted persons from doing again, upon release, what sent them to prison. Retribution's specter, deterrence, allegedly dissuades people who can project themselves into a convicted person's jumpsuit from doing what might result in lost liberty. Rehabilitation proposes that the unfreedom of prisons provides an occasion for the acquisition of sobriety and skills, so that, on release, formerly incarcerated people can live lives away from the criminal dragnet. And, finally, incapacitation, the least ambitious of all these theories, simply calculates that those locked up cannot make trouble outside of prison" (Ibid., 14).

[16] At least since the 1990s, both the U.S. (King et al. 2005, 1) and the European Union experienced an overall downward trend in crime rate. At the same time, in some countries (such as Italy) the citizens' "perception of insecurity" increased, causing an increased demand for punitive policies (Manconi et al. 2015, 52).

[17] A study realised in Italy in 2007 showed that the rate of recidivism was 68.45 % among convicts who spent their entire sentence in prison, while it fell to 16% among convicts who had spent their sentence outside prison, working with social services (Manconi et al. 2015, 54). On recidivism and how it does not work as a deterrent for crime see also: Muntingh 2008; Roodman 2017.

demonstrate how prison misses its main objective, that is, to transform and rehabilitate the prisoner.

A DETAIL OF MODERNITY

Considering these premises, is it possible to say that the prison as an institution has failed? The answer depends on what one considers to be the purpose of prisons. As Michel Foucault observes in his groundbreaking *Discipline and Punish* (1975):

> perhaps one should reverse the problem and ask oneself what is served by the failure of the prison; what is the use of these different phenomena that are continually being criticized; the maintenance of delinquency, the encouragement of recidivism, the transformation of the occasional offender into a habitual delinquent, the organization of a closed milieu of delinquency. Perhaps one should look for what is hidden beneath the apparent cynicism of the penal institution. (1995, 270–72)

In the last few decades, and especially after Foucault published his *Discipline and Punish* in 1975, an increasing number of researchers and scholars have been looking at what is hidden beneath the penal institution. What emerges from this vast corpus of research and reflections is that, rather than a minor or marginal institution as it may sometimes appear, the prison is a fundamental component of the larger structure of modernity, a "detail" in the architecture of modern capitalism (Melossi and Pavarini 2018, xxvi). The introduction of prison sentences that are measured in terms of time, for example, is directly connected to the notion of human labour measurable in time, which is one of the pillars of the capitalist mode of production:

> To calculate, to measure a punishment in terms of labour-value by units of time is possible only when the punishment is filled with this significance, when one labours or one is trained to labour (to wage labour, capitalistic labour). […], the propaedeutic, ancillary nature of the institution is precisely such as to exact retribution through the very fact of having to serve time, calculable time, measured time, that 'empty form' which is never a mere ideology but which gnaws away at the body and mind of the individual to be reformed, and which shapes him according to utilisable parameters for the process of exploitation. (Ibid., 75)

Furthermore, modern incarceration is associated with the idea of 'paying one's debt to society[18]', an assumption that today is routinely repeated as common sense but, as French philosopher Jacques Derrida observes, it was initially related to the fact that "the origin of […] penal law, is commercial law; it is the law of commerce, debt, the market, the exchange between things, bodies and monetary signs, with their general equivalent and their surplus value, their interest" (Derrida in Butler 2014). In fact, apart from the humanitarian principle of abolishing corporal punishments, a practice regarded as barbarian, one of the main arguments for the introduction of imprisonment in penal justice was that every citizen could pay their debt to society equally.

In the age of the great revolutions and of the Declaration of the Rights of the Man and the Citizen, as "the individual came to be regarded as a bearer of formal rights and liberties" (A. Y. Davis 2003, 43), punishment evolved to dismantle some of those individual rights and liberties.

[18] On the relationship between incarceration and debt, see also: Wang 2018.

Detention was presented as the fairest of penalties, the most uniform and egalitarian, as it concerned something that all citizens share and can be deprived of: freedom. However,

> it would be hypocritical or naïve to believe that the law was made for all in the name of all […] it would be more prudent to recognize that it was made for the few and that it was brought to bear upon others; that in principle it applies to all citizens, but that it is addressed principally to the most numerous and least enlightened classes; that, unlike political and civil laws, their application does not concern everybody equally. (Foucault 1995, 276)

The quote by Foucault leads to the question of whose interests does the law serve, and which social groups are more likely to be criminalised and sentenced to imprisonment. Understanding that the law and the penal system are intrinsically selective is the first step towards a critical assessment of how and upon whom punishment is bestowed. As Brazilian criminologist Vera Malaguti Batista observes, what accounts for crime is defined according to the demand for order expressed by dominant social classes. The emergence of a science of crime—criminology—as well as of policies implemented by the state to control crime "arise as specific axes of rationalization, as knowledge/power at the service of the accumulation of capital" (2009, 23–24). For example, in the early ages of capitalism—which Marx calls the age of primitive accumulation[19]—some characteristics associated with poor, popular classes were quickly criminalised: as early as the 15th century, most European states introduced a legislation against vagrancy, beggary, idleness, etc.[20].

[19] See the last section (Part VIII) of the first volume of *Capital*, whose title is "The so-called Primitive Accumulation" (Marx 1963, 713–74).

[20] "The proletariat created by the breaking up of the bands of feudal retainers and by the forcible expropriation of the people from the soil, this 'free' proletariat could not possibly be absorbed by the nascent manufactures as fast as it was thrown upon the world. On the other hand, these men, suddenly dragged from their wonted mode of life, could

These measures aimed at criminalising popular attitudes and behaviours that denied the ethics of the rising bourgeoisie and challenged ideas about the sacredness of work (Valença 2014, 100), ensuring that workers adapted to the new system in order to avoid chastisement and punishment. Different historical contexts and successive phases of capitalism saw the creation of other criminal categories[21], showing that the system is adaptable and dynamic when it comes to dealing with population control and defining what accounts for crime.

Through the creation and criminalization of a usable delinquency, dominant hegemonic groups succeeded in maintaining a social status quo and their grip on power. Since its outset, then, the carceral system has worked as a great producer of social differentiation, nurturing the interests of some social groups to the detriment of a large share of the population—including working classes, political dissidents and, more generally, people not conforming to the social, economic and political norm. As Davis affirms, "the prison […] functions ideologically as an abstract site into which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers" (2003, 16). To further the purpose of removing the undesirables, a whole network of corrective ancillary institutions—the so-called carceral archipelago (Foucault 1995, 296)—arose

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not as suddenly adapt themselves to the discipline of their new condition. They were turned *en masse* into beggars, robbers, vagabonds, partly from inclination, in most cases from stress of circumstances. Hence at the end of the 15th and during the whole of the 16th century, throughout Western Europe a bloody legislation against vagabondage. The fathers of the present working-class were chastised for their enforced transformation into vagabonds and paupers. Legislation treated them as "voluntary" criminals, and assumed that it depended on their own good will to go on working under the old conditions that no longer existed" (Marx 1963, 734).

[21] Consider, for example, drug-related offences and how have they been tackled. The criminalisation of anyone involved in the production and distribution of drugs, but also of drug users, has been one of the main causes of the swell of prison population in the last few decades. However, not all drug-related crimes are treated equally. According to scholars such as Michelle Alexander (2010) and Elizabeth Hinton (2016), the so-called 'War on drugs' and its 'zero tolerance' approach targets African Americans disproportionally and criminalises entire communities, mostly poor and racialised. It has been argued that the politics of the 'war on drugs', which quickly crossed the national boundaries of the U.S. and was adopted by a large number of countries worldwide, has been an efficient means of social control of certain sectors of the population. At this regard, see the report issued by Human Rights Watch (HRW 2000).

along with the prison. This network included workhouses, reformatories, asylums for the mentally ill and other prison-like institutions whose basic function was "to prepare its guests to follow a 'life of laborious honesty', an objective to be fulfilled by regulating their behaviour and by obtaining their submission to authority" (Melossi and Pavarini 2018, 38). One could say that, for the masses of poor, unemployed and unskilled workers, disciplinary institutions in their early ages represented a sort of training to the work in factories and to capitalist production in general[22].

Racialised Punishment

Similarly to what happened in Europe at the outset of modernity, in former colonial contexts such as Brazil or the U.S., incarceration and convict labour were used as means to control and discipline the mass of unemployed former slaves soon after the abolition of slavery. The first step in this direction was to create a legal framework that permitted the criminalisation of the now freed black people: in Brazil, a code issued in 1890—just two years after the abolition of slavery—toughened the punishment for vagrancy and a whole variety of other crimes related to the moral obligation to work (Roorda 2017); in the U.S, most Southern States introduced a series of special codes, also called the Black Codes, which applied to blacks exclusively. Race and crime were so entrenched that "there were crimes defined by state law for which only black people could be 'duly convicted'" (A. Y. Davis 2003, 28). In this specific context, the criminalisation of non-work was "designed to ensure that white planters had cheap and exploitable labor. These laws directly regulated black

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[22] The first workhouses were created as early as the 16th century in Britain and the Netherlands. The backwardness of their means of production proves that these institutions focused more on punishing inmates through hard labour than on the quality of what prisoners produced. More than "true and proper place[*s*] of production, [*they were*] place[*s*] for teaching the discipline of production" (Melossi and Pavarini 2018, 38). Nonetheless, workhouses could be very profitable businesses: the large profits of Amsterdam's workhouse, for example, were ensured by low wages payed to inmates and by the creation of a monopoly on the product they developed (Ibid.).

workers and aided white planters in their efforts to maintain labor and racial control" (Lung 2019, 317). As most people ultimately preferred low wages to imprisonment, vagrancy laws worked as threats that compelled labourers to accept certain jobs under certain conditions (Ibid., 318). Once they were arrested and trapped in the system, black men and women were put to work. The rhetoric of the moral obligation to work, combined with narratives that depicted blacks as lazy or idle (Ibid., 317), justified the imposition of hard labour and supported the creation of a convict labour system[23]. The system was legally derived from the institution of slavery, as Angela Davis notices:

> With the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, slavery and involuntary servitude were putatively abolished. However, there was a significant exception. In the wording of the amendment, slavery and involuntary servitude were abolished 'except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted'. (2003, 28)

Although the techniques of punishment[24] and the fact of disproportionately targeting black people[25] show that there exists a continuity between slavery and the system of convict labour, there are nevertheless some substantial differences between the two institutions. Sometimes, the conditions of convict leasing could equal or even surpass the brutality of slavery, as convicts could be worked to death without compromising lessees' investments (Ibid., 32). In fact, rather than

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[23] This system bears striking affinities with how forced labour was implemented and regulated in the colonies. See Part I, pages 28—32.

[24] Consider, for example, the use of whipping. As Matthew Mancini argues, "of all forms of punishment, the lash was the most frequently used. Its ubiquity in the [*convict leasing*] camps would have disturbed few people then, although it shocks us now. Whipping was the preeminent form of punishment under slavery; and the lash, along with the chain, became the very emblem of servitude for both slaves and prisoners" (1996, 75).

[25] In the U. S., the racial profile of prison population changed drastically right after abolition. As Angela Davis claims, "[…] before the four hundred thousand black slaves in that state were set free, ninety-nine percent of prisoners in Alabama's penitentiaries were white. As a consequence of the shifts provoked by the institution of the Black Codes, within a short period of time, the overwhelming majority of Alabama's convicts were black" (2003, 29).

staying in the custody of the state, prisoners could be leased to private entrepreneurs, who exploited their labour force in plantations, farms, mines, public infrastructures and the incipient industries. Although convict labour may appear as a retrograde practice, it should not be regarded as a 'regression' to pre-modern modes of production[26], rather "it was intimately tied to the economic modernization […] and mediated by thoroughly bourgeois forms of contract law, investment, and risk" (Lichtenstein 1999, 88). In any case, the functioning of the convict lease system, with its blatant neglect for the convicts' well-being or rehabilitation, corroborates the assumption that punishment in general, and punishment based on the deprivation of liberty in particular, were used as a means of controlling entire social groups, rather than being a measure to prevent or eliminate crime.

It appears clear that race was and still is a dividing line when it comes to criminalisation and punishment, especially—though not exclusively—in contexts where, historically, white elites have built their hegemony upon the work of black or other non-white minorities, inclusive through slavery or other systems of exploitation. The current state of prisons in countries such as Brazil and the U.S.—where a large part of the prisoners' population is made of young men of African descent[27]—has deep roots in how the penal system was shaped throughout the centuries to handle undesirable social groups and deny them full access to citizenship.

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[26] For example, railroads and other infrastructures in the U.S. South were originally laid by convicts, whose labour force played a crucial role in paving the road for the modernisation of the whole region (Lichtenstein 1996).

[27] In Brazil, half of the convicts' population is made of young people between the age of 18 and 29, 64% of whom are black (See: Verdélio, 2019). In the U.S., as Hinton claims: "African Americans have in the long term been hit the hardest by the punitive transformation of domestic policy. Regardless of socioeconomic status, African Americans are more likely to serve prison or jail time more than any other racial group in the United States. Odds are 50-50 that young black urban males are in jail, in a cell in one of the 1821 state and federal prisons across the United States, or on probation or parole" (2016, 5).

As outlined in the previous paragraphs, the history of the prison and of modern punitive systems is, to a great extent, a matter of economy. Not only has imprisonment assisted the development of capitalism, but it has proved a highly advantageous business in itself. Beyond convict labour and beyond the recent expansion of private prisons, there is a whole economic system—which is referred to as the 'prison industrial complex'[28]—which is nurtured by incarceration. Finally, the history of colonialism further proves that the management of punishment can be extremely lucrative.

In fact, the modern forms of punishment based on the deprivation of freedom, including incarceration, fuelled European colonial enterprises in several ways. Over a time span of more than four centuries, large number of convicts were forcefully transported to the colonies, where they worked for free or at exceptionally low wages, while also being used to populate strategic areas and open up frontiers, thus reinforcing colonial power on the occupied territories (C. Anderson 2016)[29]. Then, when by the turn of the 19th century European imperialism subjugated more and more territories, the prison proved to be a very effective way of taming local resistance.

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[28] The abolitionist organisation *Critical Resistance* defines the prison industrial complex (PIC) as "the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems. Through its reach and impact, the PIC helps and maintains the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and other privileges. […] This power is also maintained by earning huge profits for private companies that deal with prisons and police forces; helping earn political gains for 'tough on crime' politicians; increasing the influence of prison guard and police unions; and eliminating social and political dissent by oppressed communities that make demands for self-determination and reorganization of power[…]". See: Critical Resistance, 2019.

[29] Taylor Sherman affirms that, even if violence has been a central theme in discussions on colonialism, "the colonial state's techniques of coercion have only come under serious scholarly scrutiny in the last two decades" (2009, 660). It is therefore no coincidence that, while discussing the uses of delinquency, Foucault mentions the example of colonization and deportation, but he underestimates their extent, claiming that these practices "had no real economic importance" in the French empire (1995, 279). Data collected by historian Clare Anderson show that tens of thousands of convicts were deported to the territory of French Guyane alone, where transportation ceased only in 1953 (2016, 49). Worldwide, "the scale of convict transportation rises into the tens of millions [*and its*] full extent will probably never be known" (Ibid., 52). It is difficult, then, to agree with Foucault on the unimportance of deportation. As Timothy

Turning to the specific context of the Portuguese empire[30], the punishment of *degredo* exemplifies how convicts were used strategically to expand the borders of colonial empires. Included for centuries in the Portuguese penal codes, roughly from the 13th into the first half of the 20th century approximately (Torres 2013, 133), *degredo* played a crucial role in the Portuguese colonial expansion, although it is seldom remembered in the celebratory discourses on the 'age of discoveries' and Portugal being a nation of explorers. As Maristela Toma states, "*degredo* makes part of an extremely dynamic politics of population transfer based on the concept of rational use of convicts as workforce at the service of the State"[31] (2006, 64). The punishment responded to a highly utilitarian logic: it converted crime into something beneficial for the state by "expelling the undesirables and using them for state purposes in the places of *degredo*". Moreover, the state benefitted from extremely cheap manpower in the colonies, while reinforcing social control at home (Ibid., 67). Convicts were sent to serve their sentence in remote places within continental Portugal[32], or to the ultramarine colonies, or they ended up staffing the army (Coates in R. A. Ferreira 2012; Coates 2013).

Mitchell argues, Foucault fails to take into full consideration the colonial question, relegating it "to the margins and footnotes of his account" (2000, 16). Foucault admits to have worked just on the French case, for a comparative examination would have been too burdensome (1995, 309), however he does not seems to consider that colonies were not marginal accessories, but organic parts of the state, and that practices of punishment and surveillance concerned both European metropolitan centres and their colonies, although in different manners.

[30] Because of my interest in Angola and its history, I will focus mainly on the Portuguese empire. However, I will also refer to other European empires in order to trace common patterns and general tendencies, as well as differences and specificities.

[31] Although it acquired peculiar characteristics within the Portuguese empire, the practice of deporting convicts was common to all European empires and even to China and Japan (Anderson and Stewart 2013, 211). To get a clearer idea of the global-wide scale of this practice, see the website http://convictvoyages.org/, which is part of the "Carceral Archipelago project" funded by the European Research Council (2013-2018) and based at the School of History at the University of Leicester, under the direction of Professor Clare Anderson. (Accessed on September 25, 2017).

[32] For a list of sites of exile within Portugal, see: Coates 2013, 13.

Places of *degredo* were numerous and scattered throughout the empire: usually, infractions perpetrated in a colony resulted in *degredo* to another colony[33] while, for crimes committed in mainland Portugal, most of the convicts were sent to secluded regions of Brazil. However, from the 19th century on, it was the colony of Angola which received the largest amount of *degredados*. This trend is not surprising, as it follows the same pattern of other Portuguese investments which were redirected to Africa, and especially to Angola, after Brazil declared its independence[34]. With the loss of Brazil, the Portuguese concentrated most of their colonial efforts in Africa: the idea was to create "a new imperial economy and polity that could replicate the golden years of the previous imperial configuration" (Jerónimo 2012, 174). As the slave trade—the major pillar of the African colonies' economy—had been destroyed, it was necessary to develop and diversify productive activities, for example prospecting for minerals or introducing new crops such as coffee, palm oil, cotton, etc. (Clarence-Smith 1979, 169). To achieve this aim, the Portuguese hoped to increase the number of settlers migrating from the metropole, and effectively occupy the territory they claimed in Africa[35]. However, only few voluntary immigrants[36] dared to move to these remote, underdeveloped and unhealthy colonies; they were, then, replaced by convicts. Following the

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[33] Almost every crime was punishable by *degredo*. As Coates observes, "minor crimes such as insulting a judge or passing notes to someone in jail would result in possible banishment from town or being sent to internal exile not terribly far from the court. In Portugal, this was to Castro Marim or another border town. In Brazil, this might have been to the Colônia do Sacramento, in India this would have been to Diu. The four most serious crimes were counterfeiting, treason, heresy, and sodomy. These were punished by being sent the greatest distance to most difficult locales. From Portugal or Brazil that was to the galleys, São Tomé, or Luanda; from Goa it was to Mozambique Island" (in R. A. Ferreira 2012, 6).

[34] It has to be said that, although data show an increase of *degredados* in Angola in the second half of the 19th century, the colony had been receiving large waves of convicts long before Brazil's independence (See: Vansina, 2003). One of the aims of this politics was whitening the population of Angola, as historian Selma Pantoja shows (2003, 196–97).

[35] In the 19th century, with more and more European countries interested in exploiting Africa natural resources for their own benefit, it was established that guaranteeing effective control was a necessary condition in order to claim dominion over ultramarine territories. This principle was ratified during the Berlin conference (1884-1885), which inaugurated a new phase in the history of colonialism, commonly epitomised by the expression "the scramble for Africa". See: Alexandre 1995; Léonard 1998; Craven 2015.

[36] Portuguese migration to Angola became significant only during the 20th century, and especially after World War II (Castelo 2013, 111).

British and French models, several attempts to establish agricultural penal colonies were made both in Angola and in Mozambique during the 19th and early 20th century (Coates 2013, 50)[37]. Nevertheless, the great majority of convicts stayed in the cities, working in the *Depósito Geral dos Degredados*[38], in private houses or even in the public administration: this had a great impact on the urban social fabric of colonial cities such as Luanda, whose white population, at the end of the 19th century was "largely composed of current and former convicts" (Ibid., 83).

Although it had been part of the penal system for centuries, *degredo* changed over time to adapt to the context and better serve the state's interests, so that the application of the punishment was not immune to the ideals of a modern, reformed penitentiary spreading all over Europe. By the late 18th century, then, *degredo* "became the second part of a two-stage sentence. First, reflection and penitence […] in Portugal was then to be followed by closely supervised hard labor in one of the colonies. These two stages would result in repentance, followed by redemption" (Coates 2017, 26). With the advent of modernity, the idea of punishment became necessarily linked to the idea of redemption, which could be achieved only through hard work.

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[37] The regulations of one the most elaborate projects of agricultural penal colonies in Angola established that, once they had served their sentence, and only if they renounced to their right to go back home, convicts were offered the ownership of the land they cultivated. However, convicts would lose any claim on the land if they married an African woman (Coates 2013, 50). This proves how immigration also made part of a racist policy aimed at 'whitening' the population of the colony.

[38] The *Depósito Geral dos Degredados* were carceral-like institutions aimed at exploring convict's labour force. According to Coates: "The *Depósito* in Luanda would be the central hub of *degredo* and cheap labor, labor that would facilitate the 'effective occupation' demanded by the terms of the Berlin Conference. The piecemeal and unfocused use of convicts, which had been occurring since 1824, would now come to an end; the *Depósito* and its military administration would provide the control and direction (so completely absent) over this rabble. These were some of the basic objectives the state had in mind when it created these African *Depósitos* and specifically placed them under military command" (2010, 56).

FORCED LABOUR

As the practice of *degredo* confirms, imprisonment was not necessarily the principal form of punishing, rather it was part of a larger "coercive network"[39] (Sherman 2009), that included other means of controlling and disciplining colonial bodies. Labour was one of them. Spreading the "gospel of labour" (D. M. Anderson 2000) among the uncivilised was part of the civilizing mission that Europeans believed themselves to be entitled in the colonies, part of the white man's burden, to use the Kipling's famous line[40]. In a report dated 1893, António Enes, who had been Minister for Overseas Portugal and governor of Mozambique, declared that

> labour was the best moralising mission, the most instructive school, the most disciplinable authority, the conquest less prone to revolts, the army that can occupy the intractable interior, the only police that will repress slavery, the religion that will combat Mohammedanism, the education that will turn brutes into men. (in Jerónimo 2012, 192)

The imposition of labour, conceived as the only way to civilise natives, became a moral issue[41], as well as an economic keystone of the Portuguese empire in Africa, where it concerned not only

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[39] "The term coercive network is not meant to imply that the system was cohesive or coherent. Rather, it simply conveys the interlocking nature of the different penal sanctions. Indeed, it is clear that the practices which constituted coercive networks were defined not so much by discipline and regimentation, but by contradiction and the unpredictability which arose out of systems replete with tensions. The idea of the coercive network also suggests that, far from being a comprehensive and all-encompassing system, there were gaps in the net" (Sherman 2009, 669).

[40] Reference to the poem "The white man's burden", published in 1899 by British writer Rudyard Kipling. The poem is dedicated to the American conquest of the Philippines in 1898 and it is considered a hymn to colonialism, intended as a demanding but necessary action of civilization that white men should take upon themselves. See: Kipling 2013, 111–13.

[41] The argument to promote forced labour was similar to the one that had been widespread at the time of the slave trade under the name of 'lesser evil doctrine', according to which "slavery [*was*] circumstantial for the greater good, which was claimed to be the withdrawal of Africans from putative barbaric conditions and the consequent salvation of souls […]" (Jerónimo 2012, 176).

convicts but the whole social class of *indígenas* (natives), that is, the overwhelming majority of the colonies' population. The reduced time gap[42] between the abolition of slavery and the massive resort to forced labour should not lead to think that the latter was just another name under which slavery could be perpetuated. As in the case of convict labour in the U.S. South, forced labour was a new social institution which responds to a new framework of colonial exploitation[43]. In the Portuguese African colonies, as the age of mercantilist colonisation disappeared and colonial capitalism emerged, forced labour "was conceived as a means to subalternise entire societies instead of creating a class of proletarians" (Cahen 2015, 148). The legal framework was perfected with the introduction of *Estatuto do Indigenato* which, from 1926 to 1961, regulated the legal status of natives in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. Following the premises of the labour code, the *Estatuto* created a two-tier system of citizenship (Pearce 2017, 26): society was divided into 'civilised' and 'natives', and only the first enjoyed the benefits of a full citizenship[44]. Historian Conceição Neto considers the statute basically "a device to control and coerce labour" (2012, 18), seen that among the obligations of natives there was the above mentioned 'moral obligation to work', which was translated in periods of forced labour at the service of the state or of private companies[45].

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[42] Portugal officially abolished slavery in 1836, while the large and legally regulated recruitment of forced workers started at the end of the 19th century, more precisely in 1899, when the new labour code (*Regulamento do trabalho*) was issued.
[43] Forced labour should be seen as a distinct social institution and mode of production, although "from an ethical point of view, one can say that it was a 'form of slavery' and, obviously, a condition of servitude" (Cahen 2015, 141). Remarking the discontinuity with slavery is by no means an attempt to soften the gravity of forced labour. On the contrary, it is possible to affirm that, for some sectors of the colonies' population, forced labour was even harsher than slavery. In fact, virtually all male *indígenas* were recruited for forced labour, while slavery did not concern but a slice of the population, depending on the alliances that slave traders made with local chiefs (Cahen 2012b, 150).
[44] The expression 'full citizenship' should be understood in the socio-political context of the time. From 1926 to 1974, Portugal lived under a dictatorship, so that political rights were virtually null even for what concerned European settlers. In any case, white settlers enjoyed privileges and rights that were denied to non-whites.
[45] According to Cahen, "indentured laborers (a euphemism to call forced workers) were generally employed every other year in Angola and six months a year in Mozambique. After that, they had to return to their villages and 'rest'.

Natives could aspire to a social upgrade becoming *assimilado*[46]¸ that is proving to have reached the status of 'civilised' by adopting customs of European origin and rejecting African ones. The rosiest and most optimistic predictions assured that, little by little, all natives would eventually become *assimilados* and have access to citizenship, thus proving that Portuguese did not discriminate on the base of racial prejudices. However, it is precisely the category of the *assimilado* that unmasks the racist premises behind the partition of Portuguese colonial society. Limited to a few members of local élites[47], assimilation was an instrument of social control rather than an opportunity of social uplift. In order to achieve the status of *assimilado*, a native had to fulfil a series of conditions, among which speaking fluent Portuguese, having a job and providing for the whole family[48], 'behaving properly' and having acquired the customs of Portuguese citizens, that is, being Catholic, monogamous, etc.[49] In contrast, all white people fell automatically in the category of 'civilised', no matter what their level or literacy or education was, or whether they had a regular job or adequate means of sustenance[50]. In other words,

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[…] the function of this 'rest' [*was*] contributing to domestic production and, subsequently, guaranteeing family reproduction, thus avoiding permanent proletarianization" (2015, 146). This system not only prevented the development of a strong working class, but it also excused employers from paying wages that could ensure the workers' subsistence. As they delegated the onus of providing for the workers' sustenance to the workers' families, employers could afford to pay miserable wages, which sometimes corresponded only to the amount needed to pay the 'hut tax' or 'poll tax', an impost that weighed only on all *indígenas.*

[46] This is how the *Dictionary of race, ethnicity and culture* defines the word assimilation: "from the Latin *adsimilare*, to render similar, the term 'assimilation' was first applied by French and Portuguese colonial systems in Africa to the relationships between populations and cultures. The basic assumption was that colonized peoples could become citizens of the colonizing state – acquiring official citizenship – provided they had a certain income, a good level of education, a good knowledge of the language and that they kept a standard of behaviour adequate to the status of citizenship under consideration. In this case assimilation was partial. Total assimilation, which saw the inhabitants of the colonies treated in the same way – with the same rights and duties – as the colonizers, was rarely applied" (Bolaffi et al. 2003, 19).

[47] In Angola, throughout the whole 20th century, the percentage of *assimilados* never exceeded the 1% of the entire population (Messiant 2006, 69).

[48] The legislation implicitly refers to 'job' as understood in Western terms. As Cahen explains, "what was most socially discriminatory was the definition of labour, that is, the disqualification from the civilisation sphere of all African economic activity, which, as a whole, was considered as not-labour" (2015, 151–152).

[49] See: *Estatuto dos Indígenas Portugueses das Províncias da Guiné de 1954, Angola e Moçambique, Artigo 56º*.

[50] In her *In Town and Out of Town: A Social History of Huambo* (2012), Conceição Neto describes the difficulties Angolan natives faced in the process of applying for the status of *assimilado*. The excerpt is quite long, but it is worth

‘whites’ could be criminals, convicts, illiterate, very poor, alcoholic, politically undesirable, but they were always citizens. ‘Blacks’ and ‘their descendants’ had to satisfy different economic, cultural and political criteria to […] become ‘citizens’ – and only very few succeeded. (Neto 2015, 121)

As this last quote suggests, the division of society between civilised and natives had consequences on how law and punishment were managed. The Portuguese colonial administration created two separate systems of administration of justice, one for citizens and one for *indígenas.* The latter were to be judged by special courts, more “appropriate for their state and faculties, their primitive mentality, their way of life” (Magalhães 2014, 19—20). The so-called ‘native courts’ were supposed to judge offenders according to traditional African principles and with the help of native advisors. However, the indefiniteness of such principles led to the arbitrariness of judgement, with the result that administrative authorities acted as “rulers, legislators and judges” (Neto 2012, 278).

Although the resort to prison was not uncommon, most offences were punished by forced labour (Magalhães 2014, 29–30), the moralising hand of the state. This practice suited the colonial

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quoting the whole passage: “Application files kept in Angolan archives attest to Kafkaesque legal procedures but also to occasional deceiving tactics in favour of applicants, by merchants, missionary personnel or civil servants. The citizenship 'permit' application had to be joined by certified documents confirming: birth place and parents' names (*certidão de nascimento*); no criminal record (*registo criminal*); ability to read and write in Portuguese (*certidão de habilitações*); good civic and moral behaviour (written statement by administrative authorities); vaccination certificate; and economic resources compatible with a 'civilized' life style. All papers went up to the District Administrator through successive officials' scrutiny, taking weeks or months between the date of the first paper and the final decision. A small mistake could bring it all back down to the applicant; by then, many documents were no longer valid and he⁄she had to start again. However, the worst part was house inspection to establish if the applicant's family was 'civilized' enough: everything was checked, from furniture to food and clothes. Children were forbidden from going barefoot and women wearing traditional cloths or unable to speak Portuguese were relegated to the backyard as non-family, vexing family elders. That was resented as particularly racist and humiliating since many white people would not have a cleaner or better- equipped house and their children would run barefoot without their 'civilization' being questioned. It was common knowledge that inspectors could be deceived by borrowed furniture and kitchenware, but other aspects could not be faked” (2012, 286).

doctrine of the time and the principles articulated in 1909 by the already mentioned Enes, who encouraged the state not to hesitate in front of its duty, that is, improve the rude Negroes of Africa through (forced)labour (Meneses 2010, 75). Yet, behind the proclaimed good intentions and the empty rhetoric, there were serious economic matters. In fact

> […] historians have found much evidence to indicate that colonial states (and the metropolitan government) readily colluded with capital in providing the legal framework within which labour could be recruited and maintained in adequate numbers and at low cost to the employer. (D. M. Anderson 2000, 459)

Recurring to forced labour or putting convicts to work was the cheapest means of recruiting manpower. Convicts were employed in different activities, such as farming, the construction of roads and urban public works. Furthermore, since the interests of the state and those of private settlers and companies usually overlapped, convicts were largely employed even out of the boundaries of state prisons[51]. It was a vicious cycle: in order to deal with the constant shortage of labour force, colonial authorities promulgated a series of anti-idling laws that led to the incarceration of more and more people, who ended up joining the ranks of cheap labour supply. The process is analogous to what happened in Europe when deprivation of freedom was established as the privileged form of punishment; yet, more than class, what counted most in the colonial context was race.

[51] The example of De Beers in South Africa makes a good case in point. The diamond company "was the first company—and the first corporate, non-state entity—to use massive convict labor. The number of prisoners employed by the company increased from 200 per day in 1885 to 600 in 1889 (of a total number of 11,000 native laborers). By that time, De Beers had gone so far as to build a private prison branch (the De Beers convict station), with staffing and regular supplies, in order to secure a steady supply of penal labor" (Bernault 2003a, 10).

Colonial incarceration resulted mostly from the 'criminalisation of native life' (Bernault 2007, 60) and from racist premises, which is not surprising since the whole colonial system was based on and could survive because of racial segregation[52]. Race was "the major marker of difference between rulers and ruled" (Ibid.) and it was also a significant marker of difference in prison, where white prisoners were usually separated from non-white and enjoyed better treatment. Within prisons, racial divisions shaped "the allocation of prison space and privileges, and the distribution of resources" (Aguirre 2007, 38–39); outside the prison, they influenced the process of law-making and the judges' decisions. Imposing a harsh prison sentence on a white man in a colony would not only be "cruel", but also prejudicial to European political interests in that colony, as the whole system was based on race hierarchy[53]. Differentiated treatments due to racial bias negate the argument that imprisonment emerged as the prominent form of punishment because it was essentially egalitarian. Besides, colonial history also belies the assumption, which is at the core of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, that the birth of the modern prison is paralleled by a decline of physical punishment and torture.

Whereas it was considered out-of-date and barbaric in the metropole, corporal punishment was seen as the only effective means of disciplining native offenders, and it was largely imposed

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[52] For an overview on the relationship between colonialism and racism, see: Césaire, Aimé, *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950); Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and, by the same author, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

[53] David Arnold, who studied imprisonment in colonial India, reports the case of the Indian Law Commissioners who, in 1837, quite explicitly affirmed that "'It would be cruel […] to subject an European for a long period to a severe prison discipline, in a country in which existence is almost constant misery to an European who has not many indulgences at his command. If not cruel [...] it would be impolitic', when it was necessary for 'our national character' to 'stand high in the estimation of the inhabitants of India', to subject them to the 'ignominious labour of a gaol'" (1994, 170).

in the colonies, both legally and illegally[54]. This kind of punishment reinforced the idea that the body of the colonised was a site of construction for colonial authority, legitimacy, and control (Arnold 1993, 8). Carceral institutions in colonised territories resembled reformed Western prisons only on the outside[55] but, rather than places of custody and rehabilitation, they worked as places of corporal punishment and captivity, which could not but evoke memories of slavery[56]. However, rather than a vestige or an archaic remnant from a pre-modern epoch, this kind of punishment was a fully modern practice, which sustained the expansion of a modern capitalist system in the colonies. Practices and institutions adapt to different contexts, and prison is no exception, as Dikötter explains: "the prison—like all institutions—was never simply imposed or copied, but was reinvented and transformed by a host of local factors, its success depending on its flexibility" (2007, 1). In spite of the differences that might have existed between colonial prisons and their contemporary equivalents in Europe and North America, the purpose of the institutions was basically the same: to reinforce social control and social hegemony, while reducing the extent of dissent by creating docile, disciplined bodies. As it is clear, it was essentially a political purpose. "The political dimensions of incarceration", as J. Alexander and Anderson, affirm, "must be understood, in their broadest sense, to include not only the experiences of educated social elites and members of rebellious political movements but also the means through which penal regimes

[54] Bernault stats that "most colonial legislations allowed physical punishment against black prisoners [*and*] when the law did not allow corporeal sentences, officers and warders were seldom refrained from using it against African convicts" (2007, p.78).
[55] The architecture of most colonial prisons was inspired by European and North American examples, as to appear "as the embodiment of orderliness and control". Anderson and Arnold affirm that "in size and extent, gaols were often among the most imposing edifices the city could present, cathedrals of carceral power that towered over other buildings […] and commanded strategically important parts of the colonial townscape" (2007, 307).
[56] Patterns and techniques of punishment developed under slavery shaped the colonial prison system. At the same time, memories of slavery influenced how colonial subject experienced punishment and incarceration. As Bernault argues, "the frequent suicide of prisoners who came from higher classes, leaders and nobles demonstrates how incarceration resonated with local ideas about slavery and the loss of freedom and personal dignity" (2007, 60).

developed and protected the political economy" (2008, 392). In a broadest sense, then, all prisoners are political prisoners, although only the so-called 'prisoners of conscience' are commonly referred to as such.

Besides, it is no simple matter to define what a 'political' offence is, especially "in colonial contexts where crimes against ascribed status, harsh labour regimes or economic hierarchy and appropriation might be understood as overtly anti-colonial acts" (Ibid.). Sometimes, taking part to a non-violent march, for example, was framed as a political offence. At this regard, Fran Buntman reports that many of the participants in the Soweto uprisings of 1976 who were sent to Robben Island—by then a prison for political prisoners only—"were not then very politically conscious"[57]. Along the same lines, José Luandino Vieira remembers how, in the early 1960s, in Angola, anyone who complained about living conditions, or dared not to obey to an order, could be arrested by the political police and labelled as a political prisoner (*Interview*, 232). Vieira's *Papéis* testifies to this practice. For example, looking at the fragment dated November 12, 1969, we understand that, while he was at Tarrafal prison camp, Vieira met a prisoner he had come across some years before in a prison of Luanda, where he was listed as a common-law prisoner:

> Quarta, 12[*-11-1969*] * O O. que trabalhou na Volvo em 1958 e que eu conheço tb. da P.S.P. onde estava no meio dos comuns, confirma o que eu intuíra: em muitos é difícil distinguir, nos seus actos, o político e o delinquente comum. Não só pela natureza especial do que fazem como ainda pela acção das polícias – PSP PJ PIDE

[57] As Buntman explains, "Petros Mashigo, for example, joined the 16 June march because he found it difficult to learn Afrikaans. Other people were caught up in the crowds or in anger at a specific event. Islanders often refer to a 'tsotsi' (juvenile delinquent, gangster, or gang member) element who had joined the rebellion (or had been unlucky to be at the wrong place at the wrong time), later to be imprisoned on Robben Island" (2003, 131–32).

> – que os passeiam de uma a outra cadeia e que se digladiam em lutas de prestígio. (*Papéis*, 914).

Ironically, it was not uncommon for these people to gain political consciousness in prison. However, frequently, incarcerated political activists themselves insist in drawing a distinction between "genuine criminals" and an "honourable political imprisonment" (Causer 2008, 423). Honour is an important factor here. In fact, whereas for common people the experience of being incarcerated is usually lived as a social stigma[58], it can be a source of pride and of political recognition for political activists[59]. Further, it is important to take into account that, in most instances,

> political prisoners […] are in a more powerful position with regard to the prison system than ordinary criminal prisoners. They may be able to organise collectively within the prison; individual and group morale tends to be higher; they may have a long history of prison struggle from which they can draw lessons and inspiration; they may have amongst their ranks inmates with considerable organisational, military or intellectual gifts; and they may have supportive political constituencies, willing lawyers and, of course, organisations upon whose assistance they can call. (McEvoy 2015, 8)

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[58] Referring to the contemporary situation in the U.S., Michelle Alexander argues that "once a person is labeled a felon, he or she is ushered into a parallel universe in which discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are perfectly legal, and privileges of citizenship such as voting and jury service are off-limits" (2010, 92).

[59] There are exceptions to this rule. In Mozambique, for example, after the end of the war of independence, political prisoners were considered somehow "second category nationalists" (Meneses 2015, 39). In fact, contrary to guerrilla fighters who had proved their loyalty to FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front) on the battlefield, political prisoners were thought to have 'betrayed' the movement, allegedly for collaborating or lowering themselves to compromise with colonial prison authorities. After independence, many of those who had been incarcerated by colonial rule were once again deprived of their freedom and sent to FRELIMO re-education camps to be "purified" (Ibid.).

As suggested in the quotation, imprisoned political activists are more likely to draw the attention of the media and the international community[60]. Their imprisonment, therefore, helps to spread the powerful metaphor of the state as a carceral institution and of the incarcerated nation (J. Alexander and Anderson 2008, 392), and not only is this true in colonial contexts but, more generally, in authoritarian and even in democratic ones[61]. Finally, since political prisoners have generally a higher level of literacy and/or a greater interest in studying and acquiring formal or informal education, they are most likely to leave written record of their experience in jail[62]. These records—which include diaries, memoirs, letters and fictionalised narratives—contribute to shape the image of the prison in the modern collective imagination and to make of the prison a literary space.

[60] During the struggles for independence in Africa, political imprisonment, as Jocelyn Alexander says, "was subject to intense scrutiny nationally and internationally and political prisoners were symbolically weighty as a kind of measure of the state's standards of rule and of its assessment of the nature of its opponents" (2011, 71).
[61] Zoe Colley reports the case of the Nation of Islam (NOI) and of its best-known member, Malcom X, who "in a number of speeches […] continued to create a metaphorical association between the treatment of African Americans and incarceration, a point best summed up in his claim that 'all America is a prison'. Looking beyond the NOI's immediate membership to encompass all African Americans, [*Malcom X*] appealed to them to realize, 'You're still in prison. That's what America means: prison. I think that what you should realize, is that in America there are twenty million black people, all of whom are in prison.' His description of America as one colossal penitentiary made incarceration a shared experience that spanned across the prison walls" (2014, 404).
[62] Ioan Davies states that, of all prisoners, political prisoners are the only ones able to present a continuous narrative of incarceration that "imposes its mark on how we all read prison, or how prison-as-writing comes to be part of our everyday world" (1990, 3–4).

PART II

PRISON AS A LITERARY SPACE

TOPOI OF PRISON LITERATURE

Throughout the centuries, the prison theme has haunted Western literary tradition to the point that, as Ioan Davies affirms, "it is arguable that it is impossible to understand Occidental thought without recognizing the central significance of prison and banishment in its theoretical and literary composition" (1990, 3). Starting with the Bible and going up to our days[1], the link between prison and writing is solid and time-honoured. Since antiquity, outstanding writers and thinkers have written about living behind bars and have contributed to enrich the repertory of prison images available to the large public with their writings. In addition to this, imprisonment has been—and still is—extensively used as a metaphor to refer to a series of aspects of human existence other than prison itself, that is, for example, political subjugation, romantic love, spiritual and religious issues, etc.[2].

[1] For an exhaustive collection of prison images in Western literature, Brombert (1987) and Davies (1990).

[2] Pascal, for example, used this metaphor to prove his theological argument about the immortality of the soul. He considered all men as criminals waiting for the day of their execution in their solitary prison cell, where the cell is nothing but one's own body. Centuries later, Foucault would reverse this argument, emptying it of its Christian meaning, and claiming that modern disciplinary devices tend to act also on the prisoners' soul, and not only on his or her body. Following Foucault's argument, therefore, the soul is "the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body" (Foucault 1995, 30).

For a long time, literature has been a major source of information on prisons. In fact, since the introduction of the penitentiary system shifted the display of punishment—the spectacle of the scaffold, as Foucault calls it—from the public square to the closed environment of the prison, people had little means to know what life was like behind those high walls. A general knowledge of prisons relied greatly on images and accounts found in newspapers or in literature[3]. Prisons, as Cecil Dawn observes,

> are far removed from the daily lives of most people. These institutions are closed; access to them is strictly controlled. Unless one works, visits, or is incarcerated in a prison, opportunities for experiencing it firsthand are extremely limited. When personal experiences are absent, people turn to the media to gain knowledge of social issues […]. The end result is an overreliance on media imagery as a source of information about prison. The problem is that the media are known for presenting an inaccurate depiction of crime and punishment. (2015, 2—3)

During the centuries, the corpus of prison literature grew and grew to became extensive and heterogeneous. The amplitude of the corpus reflects the amplitude of themes that prison literature deals with, thus revealing, as Roberto Vecchi claims (2010, 47), that there is a dialectics between the finitude of the space (the cell) and the infinitude of thought. This implies that, although themes are conjugated according to the characteristic attributes of the carceral universe, they are not exclusive to prison literature; on the contrary, they are the same themes all literature is concerned

[3] Since the advent of mass media culture, films, documentaries, TV series and news broadcasting have replaced literature in providing images of how law enforcement, punishment and prison work. Movies and TV shows based on crime-related imagery are so popular that, as Cecil Dawn states, viewers "could live off of a diet of crime-related media" (2015, 3). Angela Davis also points at this aspect, blaming that the way we acritically consume images related to prison and incarceration reinforces the institution of prison as a natural part of our social landscape (2003, 17).

with: the passing of time, the obsession with space, the mystery of human nature, death, love, power, etc. There are, however, some recurrent motifs that can be identified as proper *topoi* of prison literature. Among them, French critic Victor Brombert lists

> the sordid cell and the hospitable cell, the cruelty of jailors (but also the presence of the 'good jailor'), glimpses of the sky, the contrast between the ugliness of the 'inside' and the supposed splendour of the surrounding scenery, prisons within the prison […], the insanity of the captive, the inscriptions in the stone, the symbolism of the wall as an invitation to transcendence. (1978, 9)

A very common *topos* is that of the happy prison. The expression, which may sound like a contradiction in terms, has proved to be particularly strong and pervasive and it reveals how the prison images scattered throughout Western literary tradition denote a certain ambiguity. If on one side prison is associated with impenetrable walls, gloomy atmospheres, torture and grief, on the other it is portrayed as an ideal place for meditation and artistic creation. Quoting once more from Victor Brombert:

> the place of enclosure and suffering is also conceived as the protected and protective space, the locus of reverie and freedom. Our tradition is rich in tales that transmute sequestration into a symbol of security […]. With the safety dream goes the dream of freedom through transcendence. The spirit will itself be stronger than prison bars. (1978, 5–7)

To understand the ambiguity of the *topos*, one can look, for example, at how the legendary Parisian prison of Bastille was depicted in popular culture. In fact, by the end of the 18th century, the Bastille

had become the very emblem of the rulers' cruelty and it was repeatedly described as 'the evil monster' or 'the devouring bull' (Brombert 1978, 44). Horror stories set in the Bastille circulated all over Europe, even after its fall in 1789, which symbolically marked the end of the *Ancien Régime*. Yet, at the same time, the Bastille was also considered 'the sweetest' prison of France, a 'hotel for intellectuals', a prison whose inmates "were only too glad to be imprisoned there in order to meditate and write in peace and comfort" (Brombert 1978, 34). There appears to be an unyielding connection between enclosure, spirituality and artistic creation: as it provides 'security', isolation, sobriety and plenty of time for self-examination, the prison enters the collective imagery as an unusual kind of *locus amoenus*, one where, despite all odds, the prisoner can achieve real freedom through inner transcendence. In the case of writers, the prison cell, just like the monastic cell, would ensure the perfect environment to one's complete dedication to work.

The Happy Prison

Surely, the happy prison theme has some roots in real experiences of incarceration, as many prisoners experience the time spent in confinement as a moment of individual growth and enhancement. Apart from the possibility to study and broaden one's intellectual horizons, which is per se something extremely valuable, especially considering the poor background of many prisoners, the cell can eventually be the setting of a deep spiritual experience. For some detainees, it can also be a place where to find God. For example, African American nationalist leader Malcom X affirms in his autobiography that prison completely transformed his life, as it was there that he had a religious epiphany and joined the Nation of Islam[4]. Moreover, X used his prison sentence to

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[4] On the Nation of Islam, see: Berg, 2015.

study and read, determined to get an education[5]. French poet Paul Verlaine also underwent a period of religious fervour while he was imprisoned in Belgium. Verlaine, who had been incarcerated for shooting the young poet Arthur Rimbaud, rejected his previous life marked by alcohol addiction and other abuses, and "new faith in Catholicism became the central fact of [*his*] prison experience" (Burianyk 1997, 273). Verlaine might seem exemplary to represent of the happy prison theme as he referred to his cell calling it "my magic castle" and even wrote a poem to express his gratitude for his incarceration (Ibid., 247).

However, spiritual experiences in prison do not have to be related to religious conversions exclusively and the expression should be rather understood in its broader meaning. In an interview released in 2009, José Luandino Vieira affirmed: "Considero que os meus anos de cadeia foram muito bons para mim. Estou a dizer do ponto de vista estritamente individual" (Coelho 2009). In another interview, he referred to his experience in prison saying: "Não há nada na minha vida, nem que eu viva mais vinte ou trinta anos, que possa adquirir tamanha marca dentro de mim. Felizmente, marcas boas" (*Interview*, 243). Just like Vieira, many prisoners strive to make the best out of a bad situation, taking all the advantages they can to improve themselves as individuals while they are making time, for example, training their willpower, working on their capacity for auto-discipline, cultivating relationships with other inmates or learning new skills. However, in one's prison experience, positive feelings as well as chances of progress and enhancement are intertwined with moments of intensive depression, discouragement, exasperation and rage.

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[5] As Angela Davis notices, the transformation experienced by Malcom X was also due to his dedication to getting an education: "In the 1950s, Malcolm's prison education was a dramatic example of prisoners' ability to turn their incarceration into a transformative experience. With no available means of organizing his quest for knowledge, he proceeded to read a dictionary, copying each word in his own hand. By the time he could immerse himself in reading, he noted, 'months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life'" (2003, 56).

The image of the happy prison that commonly appears in literature[6] tends to underestimate the mental and emotional unsteadiness associated to the condition of being a prisoner, or it does not take it into account at all. It often represents prison experiences in a univocal and simplistic way, as its aim is to display "the transformation, through art, of the fallen body into the transcendent spirit" (Haslam 2017, 4). Showing how grateful the prisoner is for his own reclusion, the image grants value to the experience of incarceration in itself, thus corroborating the ideals of prison reformers, who saw prisons as places for rehabilitation, where criminals, exposed to a moral way of life, could repent and be saved. According to these ideals,

> it is not […] an external respect for the law or fear of punishment alone that will act upon the convict but the workings of the conscience itself. A profound submission, rather than a superficial training; a change of 'morality', rather than of attitude. (Foucault 1995, 238–239)

Seen under this light, the image of the happy prison spread by Western literature is one of the greatest symbolic accomplishments of the penitentiary system. As Jason Haslam notices, this image is inextricably linked to prison reform, since it established that "physical incarceration is only intended to awaken prisoners' transcendent reason or spirit such that they recognize that the true prison was one of their own making, and hence they reform their actions" (2017, 3).

However, one can also look at things from another point of view. If one considers prisons as total institutions that aim to annihilate individual personalities in order to create a mass of docile bodies that can be worked on smoothly by the system (Goffman, 1991), the process that leads to

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[6] For a discussion on the happy prison theme, see: Brombert 1973, 62—79.

an inmate's spiritual enhancement and to some form of happiness could be seen as an unexpected side-effect rather than an intrinsic characteristic of the prison experience. The question can be posed in another way: if prisoners show some form of happiness or gratitude during their time in prison, what are they exactly being grateful or happy for? Is it for being locked up? Or because they have found some means of being happy *in spite of* being locked up[7]? Indeed, simply finding some sort of happiness in a harsh environment could be seen as a sign of resistance to incarceration, especially if one considers resistance, as Buntman does, as a series of "oppositional acts to protect and preserve physical, moral, and political integrity" (2003, 128)[8]. Taking a close look at these questions, it is inevitable to perceive how the reality of incarceration and of prisoners' responses to it is extremely complex, while literary *topoi*—such as that of the happy prison—tend sometimes to oversimplify it, thus proving to be unrealistic and partial.

LIVED VS FICTIONALISED EXPERIENCES OF INCARCERATION

At this point, it is necessary to make a perhaps obvious but fundamental distinction: in the corpus of prison literature, some texts are fictional representations, while others emerge from actual experience of incarceration. Although some critics include fictional texts under the umbrella of

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[7] In this regard, one could take a closer look at Verlaine's poem of 'gratitude' and see how it is more complex and ambivalent than it can appear at first. Indeed, the poet is grateful because he could use the time he was forced to spend in a cell to reflect and meditate. Nonetheless, already in the first verse, the poet describes the idle hours he is grateful for as 'hard' (*dur loisir*) and the poem finishes with an exhortation to open the doors that are still closed. See: Verlaine 1962, 502.

[8] In her work on the practices of resistance developed by South African political prisoners at Robben Island, historian Fran Buntman distinguishes between categorical and strategic resistance. As she observes, "these two forms of resistance can be crudely identified with an emphasis, respectively, on principle and on realpolitik as guiding the raison d'être of challenges to the state" (2003, 6). In other words, categorical resistance is an open challenge to prison authorities, while strategic resistance is "a means and not necessarily an end" (Ibid., 128). The historian also defines strategic resistance as a form of "dignity and self-consciousness" (Ibid., 274). Therefore, one can consider all means by which prisoners try to take some advantages on the prison system as a form of strategic resistance, including engaging oneself in a process of individual improvement.

prison literature, texts written by authors who have themselves been incarcerated offer a particularly privileged insight into the relationship between history, autobiography and writing in the circumstances of imprisonment[9]. Within this selection, it is possible to make further distinctions, e.g., according to genre or to spatio-temporal coordinates. For example, if a text was written in prison[10], its status tends to waver between the literary text and the historical document, while texts written years after the experience of detention and in safe environments will show different characteristics. Yet, as the corpus is extensive and extremely multifaceted, there are no fixed categories. In truth, it is not simple to trace straight lines and spot well-defined genres, nor is it simple to establish to what extent reality and fiction do or do not mingle in each text. Moreover, some very popular *topoi* of prison literature often cross the borders and appear both in fictional narratives and in many autobiographical accounts of incarceration acquiring, however, very different meanings.

To prove so, I bring here an example taken from *Memórias do cárcere* (1953) [11], Graciliano Ramos' prison memoirs. Brazilian writer Graciliano Ramos was imprisoned for eleven months

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[9] Some literary texts are reality-based, still they are not written by prisoners or ex-prisoners. In some cases, the author may elaborate on the testimony given by a witness. Such is the case, for instance, of *The Hunger Angel* (2009), a novel by Herta Müller about the persecution and incarceration of ethnic Germans in Romania during the regime of Stalin. As Müller explains in the novel 'Afterword', she based her writing on the accounts of a poet, Oskar Pastior, former deportee of her village to a Soviet labour camp. Müller's initial project was to write the novel together with Pastior, but his sudden death forced her to finish the work alone. A similar case, but with completely different ethic nuances, is that of Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun and his novel *This Blinding Absence of Light* (2001), which describes a prisoner's 18-year-long incarceration at the infamous prison of Tazmamart, where prisoners lived in dark, underground cells. In an interview with the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Ben Jelloun declares that his novel was built on a single three-hour interview with a Tazmamart survivor, Aziz Binebine. Binebine, on the contrary, claims that Jelloun stole his story for his own profit. The controversy arises issues of authorship and questions on ethics and the limits of 'artistic freedom'. See: Jaggi, 2006; Smith and Tuquoi, 2001.

[10] I am referring exclusively to autobiographical texts that discuss the author's own experience in prison. Texts that are written in prison but do not deal with the prison experience could still be considered part of the corpus of prison literature, but I do not take them into account here. I shall go back to the connections between fictional and reality-based works when discussing José Luandino Vieira's case.

[11] Graciliano Ramos was imprisoned between 1936-1937 and wrote *Memórias do Cárcere* between 1946 and 1951 (See: Arquivo IEB – USP, Fundo Arquivo Graciliano Ramos. Série: manuscritos, GR–M. 06.144./Caixa 009). Some of the manuscripts available for consultation in Ramos' personal archive show that the writer had attempted to write

between 1936 and 1937, under Getúlio Vargas' first presidency[12]. Months before his arrest, a leftist uprising—deemed pejoratively as the *Intentona Comunista*—had broken out in Rio and other cities in the northeast of the country. President Vargas took advantage of the uprising, which constituted no real threat to the stability of Brazil, to further concentrate power in his hands and reinforce the authoritarian tendencies of his government, among which was the systematic incarceration of political adversaries[13]. At no point throughout his detention did Graciliano Ramos receive a trial, a sentence or even a formal accusation, so that the causes of his incarceration remain uncertain.

At the time of his arrest, Ramos was not directly involved in politics. Although he had always had leftist sympathies and was resolutely anti-authoritarian, he was not a member of any political party[14]. He was, however, relatively well-known within the Brazilian circle of men of letters, even though literature was not his first occupation as, at the time, he worked for the secretary of education in Maceió, in the north-eastern state of Alagoas. Maceió was literally and symbolically very far away from the mainstream cultural centres of Brazil, but Ramos had nevertheless gained a literary reputation after he published his first two novels—*Caetés* (1933) and *São Bernardo* (1934). He was working on a new novel when he realised that he was at risk of being arrested. The circumstances behind his arrest, the uncertainties and the irreal atmosphere of being abruptly taken away from his own life are evoked at the beginning of *Memórias* (Part I,

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about prison as early as 1937, few months after being released (See: Arquivo IEB – USP, Fundo Arquivo Graciliano Ramos. Série: manuscritos, GR–M. 06.001). However, he soon abandoned the task and finally retook it only in 1946.

[12] Considered one of the most important and charismatic Brazilian political figures of the 20th century, Getúlio Vargas ruled the country from 1930 to 1945 and, in a second phase, from 1950 to 1954. In 1937, he created an authoritarian and nationalist regime named *Estado Novo*, converting the country in a dictatorship. In spite of the violent means used during the *Estado Novo*, Vargas could rely on significant support from the working class, both because he was the first politician to implement a work legislation in Brazil (Palomanes 2007), and because he could manipulate public opinion through propaganda.

[13] On Vargas' methods of repression of dissent, see: Cancelli, 1994, 1999; Florindo, 2011, 2015; Pedroso, 2003.

[14] Ramos eventually joined the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) only in 1945, when invited by Luís Carlos Prestes, the charismatic leader of the party, who had been among Ramos' fellow prisoners at 'Pavilhão dos Primários', in Rio de Janeiro (Alves 2013, 16).

Chapter III). At the same time, when he recalls his feelings right before his incarceration, Graciliano Ramos also evokes the image of the 'happy prison':

> *Naquele momento a ideia da prisão dava-me quase prazer: via ali um princípio de liberdade*. Eximira-me do parecer, do ofício, da estampilha, dos horríveis cumprimentos ao deputado e ao senador; iria escapar a outras maçadas, gotas espessas, amargas, corrosivas [...]. *A cadeia era o único lugar que me proporcionaria o mínimo de tranquilidade necessária para corrigir o livro*. O meu protagonista se enleara nesta obsessão: escrever um romance além das grades úmidas e pretas. Convenci-me de que isto seria fácil: enquanto os homens de roupa zebrada compusessem botões de punho e caixinhas de tartaruga, eu ficaria largas horas em silêncio, a consultar dicionários, riscando linhas, metendo entrelinhas nos papéis datilografados por d. Jeni. Deixar-me-iam ficar até concluir a tarefa? Afinal a minha pretensão não era tão absurda como parece. Indivíduos tímidos, preguiçosos, inquietos, de vontade fraca habituam-se ao cárcere. [...] por que não haveria de acostumar-me também? (2011, 24–25, my emphasis)

After an initial moment of shock, the idea of being incarcerated becomes almost desirable for Ramos: in prison he would be exempt from all the nuisances linked to his job and he would have time to edit his latest novel, a novel that ends precisely with the main character daydreaming about going to prison to expiate the murder he committed while dedicating himself to writing a book[15].

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[15] The last chapters of the novel *Angústia*—that was completed and handed to the typist on the same day of Ramos' arrest—sound indeed prophetic. After the main character Luíz da Silva commits a crime, he starts to rave and, in his delirium, he says: "Faria um livro na prisão. Amarelo, papudo, faria um grande livro, que seria traduzido e circularia em muitos países. Escrevê-lo-ia a lápis, em papel de embrulho, nas margens de jornais velhos. O carcereiro me pediria algumas explicações. Eu responderia: – 'Isto é assim e assado.' Teria consideração, deixar-me-iam escrever o livro.

As Ramos had no real previous experience of being incarcerated[16], it is safe to assume that he based his hopes on what he had read about prisons. The circumstances will violently prove him wrong, and the image of the happy prison will soon fade to make room for a more realistic and distressing one.

At this regard, it is interesting to point out that, while he was in prison in Rio de Janeiro, Ramos came across the novel *Usina* (1936) by José Lins do Rego, an important writer at that time and a very dear friend of his. He was surprised by the subject of the novel, which differed from the others by the same author and included the story of the main character's incarceration in the fearsome prison of Fernando de Noronha. Ramos writes: "Zanguei-me com José Lins. Por que se havia lançado àquilo? [...] A cadeia não é um brinquedo literário" (2011, 575). After months of tough incarceration, Ramos dismissed both the idea of the happy prison and that of prison as a mere literary device, a literary plaything: for him, writing about this subject should be taken very seriously. This points to the very heart of Ramos' poetics, that is, the crucial role of experience in his literature. According to him, writers should only write about the pain they themselves have experienced. "Impossível conceber o sofrimento alheio se não sofremos" (2011, 575), he writes referring to his friend's novel. This does not mean that there is no room for imagination or

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Dormiria numa rede e viveria afastado dos outros presos. [...] Faria um livro na prisão, estudaria, arranjaria camaradagem com dois ou três presos mansos. Habituar-me-ia. A gente se habitua em toda a parte" (Ramos 1991, 232—4). *Angústia* was published in 1936, while Ramos was in prison, and during the same year it was awarded the prestigious Lima Barreto prize.

[16] Ramos had been arrested and imprisoned for a few days during the so-called 'Revolution of 1930' that first took Getúlio Vargas to power. Ironically, he was arrested by a military that would be later incarcerated with him, Agildo Barata. As he affirms in *Memórias*: "Em 1930 um piquete das forças revolucionárias de Agildo Barata agarrou-me no interior de Alagoas e fingiu querer fuzilar-me. No Pavilhão dos Primários Agildo ria escutando a narração dessa proeza besta. Eram dezesseis malucos. Esvaziaram-me os pneumáticos do carro, encheram-me de perguntas e ameaças. Atrapalhado em excesso, não respondi; tirei do bolso um papel e mastiguei-o. Preso, estirado na cama, o chapéu cobrindo-me o rosto, ouvi pancadas; sentei-me, vi perto um indivíduo a bater com a soleira do fuzil no chão, querendo assustar-me. 'Você dispara esse diabo e mata um companheiro. Com licença'. Estirei o braço e virei a asa do registro de segurança. Achava-me bastante apreensivo, mas era receio comum. Alguns dias de reclusão, vários aborrecimentos. Mal sério não me fariam aqueles militares vagabundos, incapazes de pegar direito numa arma" (2011, 474).

invention in literature: on the contrary, in the first chapter of *Memórias*, Ramos has no hesitation in adapting his personal experience and memories to a literary tone, which implies a certain level of invention or fictionalisation. After all, as he writes, "true things may not be credible" (Ramos 2011, 14). What he demands is that writers follow the ethical principle of not indulging in describing someone else's sorrow only to produce a heart-breaking effect on the reader or, otherwise, literature would be but a mere collection of "dead things" (Ibid., 575).

The Writer as Witness

As I have argued so far, literary works that sprout from actual experiences of incarceration are not new in the history of Western literature. However, the idea of bearing witness, as it entangles individual experience, history and political engagement[17], seems to be eminently associated with modernity[18]. It is no coincidence that French historian Annette Wieviorka defines the 20th century as the era of the witness. According to her, especially after the two major world conflicts, individual testimonies have proliferated and have brought a revolution in how we deal with history and historiography. Witnesses initiated "a democratization of historical actors, an attempt to give voice to the excluded, the unimportant, the voiceless" (Wieviorka 2006, 116). Like many historians who have worked on testimonies[19], Wieviorka focuses on accounts by Jews who survived Nazi

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[17] I do not mean to affirm that all witnesses are political activists or have political interests, however, I see political implications in the act of bearing witness, both because it calls the attention to the catastrophes caused by political power and because it appeals to a community's duty to remember. Although the formula 'to remember so it does not happen again' has been so abused that it has lost some of its strength, it still is one of the political imperatives of our time. See: Margalit 2004; Wieviorka 2006.

[18] The expression 'bearing witness' was widespread also in the past, but it had very different connotations, mainly linked to religion. Since the 14th century, the word *witness* was used as a translation for the Greek *martys,* from which the word *martyr* derives. For a detailed etymological analysis, see: Agamben 2002, 15–40.

[19] Testimonies by survivors of Nazi concentration camps fuelled the interest in witness narratives both in the public opinion and in academia. This led to the creation of a dominant paradigm to analyse witness narratives, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

extermination policies, but her commentaries could be extended also to other subjects whose voices have consistently been silenced, including incarcerated people.

A brief definition of witness narrative could be a "record of historic events based on the writer's personal experience" (Rak 2004, 317). Therefore, even though history is certainly a part of them, witness narratives are distant from the work of historians. Unlike historians, witnesses may choose to write to preserve the memory of what they have experienced[20], however, as Wievorka argues, as writers they

> are in quest not of a factual, positive reality but rather of a literary 'truth' of another sort. [*One*] must also keep in mind that writers write using literary conventions, even as they are ready to subvert these conventions. Writers write from within literature, with literature as the point of departure. (2006, 41)

Writing from within literature implies inscribing one's work into literary tradition and its conventions, going back to forms of life-writings—including autobiography—that combine history with the writing of the self. Literary critic Leigh Gilmore compares autobiography to a memorial which "would perform the work of permanence that the person never can. A self-memorial says: 'I remember, and now, so will you'" (2001, 13). In spite of the apparent simplicity of this sentence, the status of autobiography as a literary form has been the subject matter of critical analyses for decades, and a very controversial one.

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[20] Wieviorka affirms that "at times, testimony is transformed into literature. It is often supposed that history is better transmitted by works of nonfiction. Above all, at a time when death is omnipresent, the idea arises that the work of art is eternal, that it alone can guarantee memory, that is, immortality. The trust victims placed in the written word demonstrates, in the last analysis, their irreducible humanity" (2006, 22).

At least since the 19th century[21], critics have been struggling to provide a decisive definition of what autobiography is, hoping to shed light on a textual form that may look transparent but that actually conceals "complex issues of representation, ideology, history, identity and politics" (Smith 1993, 393). As Laura Marcus has argued, this intensive critical interest in autobiographies has led to the paradox that "whereas autobiographical writing as a genre has proved very difficult to define and regulate, […] there is a distinctive genre of autobiographical *criticism*" (1994, 1). Each critical approach comes with its own definition of autobiography proper, thus entailing a proliferation of subcategories of the genre: memoirs, diaries, confessions, *testimonio*[22], etc. Although I will not engage with autobiographical criticism to provide yet another definition, I believe that the issues raised by autobiographical studies are worth taking into account. How is the autobiographical subject constructed? Is this subject reliable? Is this subject representative even if

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[21] In his article "Le problème ontologique de l'autobiographie", Jaime Cèspedes summarises the main critical tendencies in autobiographical studies, observing that "different conceptions have been classified according to the etymological analysis of the word autobiography: there is, then, a phase during which theory was based on the *bios* (historicist), another that highlighted the *autos* (psychological) and another one that relies on the *grafé* (deconstructionist)" (2001, 272–273). For a more general overview on autobiography, see also: Lejeune, 1975; De Man, 1979; Smith 1993; Gilmore 1994, 2001; Marcus 1994; Smith and Watson 2001; Rak 2004.

[22] *Testimonio* is the Spanish word for testimony which, when used as the proper name for a literary (sub)genre, indicates a "[…] novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience" (Beverley 1989, 12–13). It is important to add some remarks to this definition. First, *testimonio* is confined to a specific geographic area, that is, Latin America; in fact, the label *testimonio* was coined in 1970 by Cuban institution *Casa de las Américas* as a category in their annual literary contest for Latin American literature. Second, *testimonio* has been greeted as a democratization of literary actors, as its protagonists belong to social categories that have systematically been repressed: women, Indigenous people, *campesinos*, etc. However, although it is a narrative in the first-person and it is presented as an autobiography, generally *testimonio* is the product of a collaboration between (at least) two people: someone who tells the story of his or her life, and someone who writes it down, a relation analogous to the one established between informant and anthropologist in field research. This raises complex issues of authorship and compliance with the 'truth', as one can notice reading about the polemics that followed the publication of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1984), by anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos and Guatemalan activist and Nobel prize Rigoberta Menchú (see, for example, Gelles 1998; Gilmore 2001, 3–4; Avant-Mier and Hasian 2008). In Brazilian critical tradition, the *literatura de testemunho*, an expression that is an almost literal Portuguese translation of *testimonio*, has received great attention in the last decades. Nevertheless, *testemunho* should not be considered identical to its Spanish American equivalent. Studies on *literatura de testemunho* are rather a combination of critical categories coming from studies on *testimonio* and Holocaust studies, with the concept of trauma as their lowest common denominator. Recently, Laks (2018) and Macêdo (2018) have approached *Papéis* through the lenses of *literatura de testemunho*.

the life he/she recalls is no common life at all? And also "where does autobiography end and fiction begin? How do the fictive and the autobiographical traverse each other, and what prompts—or bars—their crossing? Where does collective history abandon an individual to a space of historical amnesia?" (Gilmore 2001, 14). These questions, which imply no easy answers, appear even more complicated when the experience described is particularly violent and upsetting, as it is the experience of incarceration.

From José Luandino Vieira to Graciliano Ramos, from Antonio Gramsci to Nelson Mandela, all the writers I will mention and analyse in this work engage in different experiments of life-writing and establish a dialogue with history: not only do their works originate from real-life experiences, but they also claim to be true to historical facts. One could say that bearing witness to history is one of the purposes of these works, although not always a voluntary one. As witness narratives, their status is hybrid, it stays in between literature and history, and in between the singular and the collective. In fact, although the texts are the fruit of an individual memory, they appeal to a larger community of remembrance. As they narrate of particularly dark periods in their countries' history, they resonate with their readers and seem to instil in them what one could call 'the duty to remember'. Like the memorial in Gilmore's example, they seem to say to their readers "I remember, and now, so will you".

A Paradigm of Interpretation

Quoting from a text in which African American intellectual bell hooks explains why she decided to 'talk back' and write about her life, one could say that

> moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance, […] that is the expression of [*a*] movement from object to subject". (1990, 211)

Relegated to the margins of society, prisoners have been the object of multiple discourses[23], but they were not expected to produce a discourse themselves. Assuming the role of witness and leaving a written testimony can be a means by which prisoners turn from objects into subjects of their own stories. In a text on South-African prison writings, Paul Gready affirms that "prisoners write to restore a sense of self and world, to […] seek empowerment in an oppositional 'power of writing' by writing against the official text of imprisonment" (1993, 489).

Given the lack of alternative, reliable written sources on imprisonment, "the writer seems compelled to assume the role of witness" (1993, 490). This implies giving one's account of the truth, thus having to grapple with the unstable boundaries between the intimacy of one's life and the complexity of history, but also between the private, the collective and the public sphere. Doran Larson shows how prisoners who write aspire to call upon society, denouncing their suffering and connecting their cells "to the apparatuses of power that turn to prisons as a primary means of establishing order" (2010, 145). Behind this kind of writing, both Larson and Gready agree in identifying a political intention, regardless of the motivation of each writer's arrest[24].

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[23] According to Foucault, the individual is the product of discursive relations of power and knowledge. This is true for all individuals, but even more so for those who are constantly under surveillance, as it happens in prison. As he states in *Discipline and Punish*, prisons work as a sort of "[…] machinery of power that explores the body, breaks it down and rearranges it […]. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection" (1995, 138).

[24] In his article "Towards a Prison Poetics", Larson (2010) works with writings by both political and common-law prisoners.

However, an openly political analysis of prison writings and the role of the witness has often been shaded by a paradigm of interpretation centred on the notion of traumatic memory and constructed in the first place around Holocaust survivors' accounts, which have become exemplary prototypes of witness narratives. The genocide of European Jewry[25], in fact, is often identified as a sort of original trauma from which others followed, but also as a paradigm through which it is possible to decipher other traumas of contemporary Western culture[26]. As Hirsch and Spitzer affirm, "the Holocaust has in many ways shaped the discourse on collective, social and cultural memory, serving both as touchstone and paradigm" (2009, 151). Influential works in literary and cultural studies have contributed to the establishment of this paradigm[27], fostered also by the establishment of a new discipline, trauma studies.

According to this paradigm, the experience of the witness is always associated with trauma and with a certain degree of pathologisation. Hence, the testimony is considered "always an agent in a process that, in some ways, bears upon the clinical" (Felman and Laub 1992, 9). The healing process can call for psychoanalytic sessions, but writing is also considered a useful tool to achieve the cure, a powerful means to work through the traumatic experience. Moreover, the discourse on the witness is built upon a fundamental contradiction, that is, "the contradiction between the

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[25] There is still a great controversy around the proper term to use when referring to the genocide of European Jews by the Nazis. I use the term Holocaust as it is the most widespread and the most used by the critics I refer to. However, many refuse to use this term, preferring the Hebrew word *Shoah* as, etymologically, Holocaust would convey an anti-Semitic meaning and the notion of a sacrifice to God (Derrida 2005, 67). Other critics refer to the genocide using the metonymic name of Auschwitz, an option described as an "immense problem" by Jacques Derrida (in Agamben 2002, 33) who, however, left the problem hanging without proposing an alternative.
[26] Wieviorka affirms that "just as Auschwitz has come to stand for absolute evil, the memory of the Holocaust has become, for better or for worse, the definitive model for memory construction, the paradigm in efforts to analyse recent events or to create the basis for future historical narratives of events unfolding before our eyes that have not yet become history" (2006, xiv).
[27] Among them, I remember Felman and Laub (1992); Caruth et al. (1995); Kaplan (2005). In the Brazilian context, the works by Márcio Seligmann-Silva have been particularly influential. Among them, see: "Testemunho e a Política da Memória" (2005); "Narrar o Trauma" (2008); "Testemunho da Shoah e Literatura." (2009); "O Local do Testemunho" (2010); "Novos escritos dos cárceres" (2006). See also: De Marco (2004) and Kolleritz (2004).

necessity, on the one hand, but also the impossibility of fully bearing witness to this particular traumatic past" (Hirsch and Spitzer 2009, 152). The traumatic experience is presented as an event without witness (Felman and Laub 1992), or to use Agamben's words, an event without a 'complete witness' (2002, 34).

Critics have also focused on the impossibility for witnesses to "settle into understanding" (Felman and Laub 1992, 5) the memory of the violence experienced, a phenomenon which leads to a breakdown of language. As trauma is not decipherable, language is not enough to account for it: witnesses are reduced to aphasia or shows some signs of loss in their speech. Therefore, there is a keen interest in the palpable marks of trauma embodied in the language of the witness, marks that are revealed through silences, hiatus and dissociation. In this shattered language many have seen a possible concretization of Theodor Adorno's famous and much commented sentence[28] "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (1981, 33). For Adorno, literary language should avoid mere aestheticization and, through its own subversion, reveal the horror of events such as the Holocaust. The sentence reveals that, like many other Western thinkers, Adorno was shocked by the accounts about the extermination of European Jews. How was it possible that such a brutal genocide took place in the very heart of civilized Europe? Auschwitz became a watershed event of modernity and a unique symbol of its horrors. One of the most controversial points of the paradigm is actually the claim about the uniqueness of the experience of the Holocaust[29].

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[28] The sentence, which should not be read literally, points to another aporia. As Luckhurst notes, according to Adorno "all Western culture is at once contaminated by and complicit with Auschwitz, yet the denial of culture is equally barbaric. If silence is no option either, Adorno sets arts and cultural criticism the severe, and paradoxical, imperative of finding ways of representing the unrepresentable" (2008, 5).

[29] Michel Rothberg explains that "the Holocaust has come to be understood in the popular imagination, especially in Europe, Israel, and North America, as a unique, sui generis event. In its extremity, it is sometimes even defined as only marginally connected to the course of human history. Thus, Elie Wiesel has written that 'the Holocaust transcends history' […]. Even arguments for uniqueness grounded in history sometimes tend toward ahistorical hyperbole. In an essay that seeks to differentiate the Nazi genocide from 'the case of the Native Americans', 'the famine in the Ukraine' under Stalin, and 'the Armenian tragedy', Steven Katz argues that the 'historically and phenomenologically unique'

For its proportions and its modalities[30], the genocide of the European Jews by the Nazis is seen as the incarnation of absolute evil, and the victims of the Holocaust are sometimes represented as absolute victims. This assertion could justify why the Holocaust assumed such a privileged and unique status in memory and trauma studies. However, the claim of uniqueness poses a series of problems as it creates an aura of sacredness around a catastrophic event. Apart from being an ethically questionable operation, this contributes to conceal the political, social and historical circumstances that lead to the catastrophe, while also concealing the political interests that lay behind the demand to acknowledge the Holocaust as the worst tragedy of modernity[31]. Moreover, to present the victims as absolute victims, totally at the mercy of their oppressors, has two implications. First, it removes from the victims any kind of agency, nullifying any potential act of resistance on their part. Second, it ignores that complex reality that Primo Levi named the grey zone, which reveals "the morally dubious actions of many of the Jewish victims" (Lee 2016, 283) and the responsibilities of those leaders who, for different reasons, collaborated with the Nazis[32].

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character of the Holocaust ensures that the Nazi genocide will differ from 'every case said to be comparable to' it" (2009, 8).

[30] According to Wolfgang Sofsky, what distinguishes the Holocaust from other mass murders lies "[…] less in the procedures of murder practiced than in genocide having been carried out with the aid of an experienced bureaucratic administration, a civil service for extermination. The setting up of death factories, to which an entire people, from infants to the aged, was transported over thousands of kilometers to be obliterated without a trace and 'exploited as raw material' was not just a new mode of murder; it represented a climactic high point in the negative history of social power and modern organization" (1997, 12).

[31] The claim of uniqueness of the Holocaust has historical and political roots. Philosopher Hannah Arendt states that it was not until the 1960s that the awareness of the catastrophe reached a widespread public. Until the Eichmann trial, the Holocaust was not considered as an "unprecedented crime", but rather "as the oldest crime [*the Jews*] knew and remembered", that is, it was conceived as the last tragic episode of a long history of anti-Semitic persecutions and exterminations (2006, Epilogue, loc. 4580—85 of 6750, Kindle). However, this perception changed thanks to the trial and the media coverage that it got. Israeli authorities used the trial as a means to unite the population and enhance nationalism. This is not surprising as "traumatic identity is now also commonly argued to be at the root of many national collective memories" (Luckhurst 2008, 2). Arendt also states that the creation of an institutionalised traumatic memory, reinforced the belief that the establishment of a fierce Jewish state was a fair reaction to counterbalance not only the crime that European Jews suffered, but also the docility with which they went to their death. Symbolically, the military fierceness of Israelis corresponds to the extreme victimisation suffered by European Jews.

[32] In her *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), Arendt affirms: "to a Jew this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story. […] Jewish officials could be trusted to compile the lists of persons and of their property, to secure money from the

In other words, it is a simplification that mystifies the historical discussion on the Holocaust. Finally, the claim of uniqueness and incomparability is a contradiction in terms, since establishing uniqueness implies comparison. As Wolfgang Sofsky notes:

> the very act of comparison is regarded as necessary for one's moral and political integrity. Yet to call an event 'incomparable' presupposes that one has already compared it with other events and come to the conclusion that it is radically different. It is only proper to assert incomparability after it has been established by comparison […] Even if one can see structural similarities among German, Soviet, and Chinese camps—a comparison both meaningful and necessary—this does not change the moral facts one iota. The crime remains the same. Injustice can only be judged from within itself; it cannot be lessened or mitigated by comparison. (1997, 11)

It has to be acknowledged that, in the last few decades, trauma studies have moved forward and evolved in very different directions, so that, "though it was the Nazi genocide of the Jews that has provided the impetus for much of the current theorization about trauma and witnessing" (Kacandes 2001, 99), scholars address now a variety of different traumas as for example slavery, colonialism but also child abuse and sexual violence. Nevertheless, some of the premises of the paradigm of interpretation that I have described here—e.g. the fundamental aporia, the therapeutic function of writing and the considerations on the language of the witness—have remained unchanged. What

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deportees, to defray the expenses of their deportation and extermination, to keep track of vacated apartments, to supply police forces to help seize Jews and get them on trains, until, as a last gesture, they handed over the assets of the Jewish community in good order for final confiscation. […] In the Nazi-inspired, but not Nazi dictated, manifestoes they issued, we still can sense how they enjoyed their new power". (Part VII: The Wannsee Conference, or Pontius Pilate, loc. 2213—23 of 6750. Kindle)

is more, its parameters are applied to a number of different contexts and analyses, including that of prison writings[33]. Are these parameters, however, effective enough to describe witness narratives related to the experience of incarceration?

At first glance, trauma theory seems to answer positively to this question. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma itself may provide a link between cultures and experiences "not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves" (1995, 11). However, if trauma is to provide a link between cultures[34], as Caruth proposes, it must be reduced to its essential structure, to its lowest common denominator. This means that contextual details are unimportant and can be overlooked. As Richard Crownshaw argues "our receptiveness to trauma is based not on historical experience […] but on an ahistorical structural trauma (a lack) at the core of our identity" (2010, 8). Paradoxically, although witness narratives claim a strong connection with truth, reality and history, the paradigm to analyse them seems to lack historicity. History and memory appear as two separated and even conflicting concepts: in contrast to what is perceived to be "the cold storage of history" (Hirsch and Spitzer 2009, 155), memory, whose incarnation is the

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[33] For example, the paradigm has been used to analyse the letters sent from prison by Antonio Gramsci, one of the most famous political prisoners of the 20th century and one that devoted his entire life to a political cause. Literary critic Massimo Lollini proposes a trauma-informed reading of texts by political prisoners which privileges the personal over the political, because the latter would "prevent the reader from a real and deep interaction with the text" (Lollini 1996, 525). Lollini, who identifies in LaCapra's *Representing the Holocaust* the best approach to analyse Gramsci's subjectivity (Ibid., 523), also states that Gramsci's *Letters* embody "the trauma and the paradox of the testimony, which lie precisely in this gap between the need of a consistent subject and the flow of time and of traumatic events that contradict this consistency and coherence. In this gap the subject experiences a crisis of identity" (Ibid., 522).

[34] One should also wonder which cultures Caruth refers to, considering that trauma theory has been concerned mainly with Western culture. As Susana Araújo notes, "experts have shown that trauma studies have seldom been applied to other historical realities" (2015, 3). Along the same lines, Sonya Andermahr affirms that "trauma theory has not fulfilled its promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement. Rather than forging relationships of empathy and solidarity with non-Western others, a narrowly Western canon of trauma literature has in effect emerged, one which privileges the suffering of white Europeans" (Ibid., 500). There is, however, an ongoing effort to 'decolonize' trauma studies. In this regard, see: Andermahr et al. 2015; Balaev et al. 2014; Rizzuto 2015, among others.

witness, is thought to be more accessible, more humane and able to transmit not only factual knowledge, but also emotions and feelings. Hence, personal approaches are thought to be more adequate to deal with "traumatic experiences such as those of long-term prisoners" (Lollini 1996, 520).

In opposition to this approach, I argue that witness narratives should be read in the light of their context. Ignoring the historical, political and social context in which the writer's incarceration takes place can mean losing part of the message that the text conveys, especially if one considers that texts written in prison tend to contain allusions, subtle references and encoded messages that writers did not make explicit for fear of being punished. Besides, in the case of works written in prison, sometimes the very form of the text is determined by contextual conditions. Prisoners of Stalinist gulags, for example, often chose to compose poems rather than prose because it was easier to memorise them when no paper was available (Pieralli 2017, 285). Likewise, texts written in prison are often fragmentary because the prisoner/writer did not have means to write or had to write quickly because of constant surveillance.

My claim for a context-informed reading of prison writing is also based on the assertion that the relation between memory and history should not be seen as strictly dichotomic, but rather as fluid and dialectic, and that one cannot deny the powerful relation between witness narratives and history. If the former is not comparable to the work of historians (Wievorka 2006, 41), one has to recognise that witness narratives often constitute valuable complementary historical sources, especially in those cases in which no other documents are available[35] (Jurgenson 2016; Pieralli

[35] The use of literature as historical evidence is at the centre of a debate that has been engaging both literary scholars and historians for decades. While some historians are still suspicious of 'soft' evidence, others have come to recognise that "literary texts offer important and sometimes unique kinds of historical evidence" (Fleming 1973, 95). For example, Ljuba Jurgerson claims the importance of Gulag literature for the historiography of the Stalinist era, given that, at least in a first moment, it was impossible to access any other kind of document (2016, 270). Jurgerson also

2017). Historians are therefore "expanding [*their*] notion of truth […], coming to a deeper, more encompassing historical understanding of what we might now think of as an embodied form of 'truthfulness'" (Hirsch and Spitzer 2009, 161—162). This implies that it has largely been acknowledged that witnesses cannot—and are not expected to—provide an exhaustive narrative of the truth, for their version of an historical event can only be partial and subjective. As the paradigm of the witness states, the complete witness really does not exist. The question is, should we aspire to completeness? Is this really—and in any case—an unresolvable paradox?

BEYOND HEALING

Prisoners who decide to write about their experience of incarceration find their own ways of dealing with the paradoxes related to the act of bearing witness, and they are still able to transmit the truth of their experience. Consider, for example, Graciliano Ramos' prison memoirs, *Memórias do Cárcere*. In the first chapter, which works as an introduction to the book, the author shows he is fully aware of the limits of memory and the possibility to convey historical truth through his text. He knows memory is unreliable. He is aware that his version of the truth is partial and, what is more, flawed and mixed with fiction. However, he does also claim his right to compose a coherent story in which all the pieces fit together and come to closure.

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suggests that what may justify the prisoners' wish to leave a written testimony was the awareness of the inexistence of other kinds of sources, "the awareness of being the only ones able to leave a trace" (Ibid.). Graciliano Ramos' prison memoir has also been used as an historical source: in fact, the book *Os signos da opressão. História e Violência nas Prisões Brasileiras* (2003), by historian Regina Célia Pedroso, dedicates a whole chapter to *Memórias do Cárcere*. According to Pedroso, this "literary source represents a range of opportunities for the historian, as it describes and narrates feelings that other sources would hardly ever mention, apart from being very significant with respect to other kinds of documents" (2003, 17).

> Não resguardei os apontamentos obtidos em largos dias e meses de observação: num momento de aperto fui obrigado a atirá-los na água. Certamente me irão fazer falta, mas terá sido uma perda irreparável? Quase me inclino a supor que foi bom privar-me desse material. Se ele existisse, ver-me-ia propenso a consultá-lo a cada instante, mortificar-me-ia por dizer com rigor a hora exata de uma partida, quantas demoradas tristezas se aqueciam ao sol pálido, em manhã de bruma, a cor das folhas que tombavam das árvores, num pátio branco, a forma dos montes verdes, tintos de luz, frases autênticas, gestos, gritos, gemidos. Mas que significa isso? Essas coisas verdadeiras podem não ser verossímeis. E se esmoreceram, deixá-las no esquecimento: valiam pouco, pelo menos imagino que valiam pouco. Outras, porém, conservaram-se, cresceram, associaram-se, e é inevitável mencioná-las. Afirmarei que sejam absolutamente exatas? Leviandade... Nesta reconstituição de fatos velhos, neste esmiuçamento, exponho o que notei, o que julgo ter notado. Outros devem possuir lembranças diversas. Não as contesto, mas espero que não recusem as minhas: conjugam-se, completam-se e me dão hoje impressão de realidade. (2011, 14–15)

Without claiming to own or possess the whole truth, Ramos consciously claims his right to expose his personal version of the facts. His account is partial because of the very limits of human experience, and not necessarily because he could not settle into understanding the distressing experience he lived. The writer discloses his contradictions and doubts, he even considers renouncing the task, but finally the motivations to write prevail. As he wrote his memoirs decades after his actual incarceration, one has to consider that Ramos' reasons to write include intervening

in the political context of his time, rather than simply denouncing the abuses suffered in the past by the state[36].

When it takes place within the prison's walls, writing is yet another demonstration of the fact that, even in harsh and sometimes inhumane conditions, prisoners tend to carve out some space for themselves, a space not controlled nor supervised by the authorities, a space where they show that they did not renounce to their agency nor to their creative power. Creativity, especially in the case of prisoners who write, also passes through the development of a language and a literary form suitable to describing the experience of detention. Yet, as I have already mentioned, language in witness narratives is a contentious issue. As words are considered inadequate to represent a context so violent and oppressive that it appears unrepresentable, witness narratives are usually identified with a breakdown of language. According to the dominant paradigm, the experience is uncommunicable because language becomes the embodiment of the traumatic experience. Of course, the paradigm acknowledges that most witnesses feel the urge to talk about their experience, but it also stresses the fact that there is always a discrepancy between reality and the words used to describe it. In spite of all this, large numbers of witnesses have written about their experiences and many of them have produced narratives that, apart from accomplishing their task of bearing witness to history, also have an undoubtable artistic value. Therefore, instead of focusing on the hardships related to the process of witnessing, I propose to look at its results and achievements. Instead of reading the discrepancy as a failure to convey the truth of the experience, it is possible to interpret it as a device that actually discloses part of that truth, bearing in mind that subverting

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[36] This is the thesis defended by Fabio César Alves (2016), who reads *Memórias* in the light of Ramos' participation to the political debate of his time.

the common use of language or revealing the mechanisms that lay be act of writing can lead to a more aware reading. Brazilian critic Jaime Ginzburg states:

> Breaking with the trivial convention of language forces the reader's perception into a different path of knowledge and formulation of ideas. Without this differentiating movement, literature would continue to use a trivial language, unable to provoke the reader to consider the singular, strange and terrible dimension of the experience. (2010, 272)

Reflecting on how to represent the unrepresentable and finding the proper language to describe the horrors and the pettiness of daily life in prison are not only attempts to restore the primary articulation between language and body, but also means to regain agency in a context that seeks to deny it. Furthermore, looking at the materiality of some of the texts produced in prison, it appears that, instead of suffering from a breakdown of language or aphasia, some writers accumulated words and more words. This craving for accumulation is particularly evident in Vieira's *Papéis*, where the very form of the text alludes to accumulation. In fact, the text is composed of a multitude of fragments whose juxtaposition eventually gives the impression of the flowing of time. However, looking at the date of the first entry of the notebooks, October 10, 1962, one notices that Vieira began to write almost a year after his arrest. How should this year-long gap be interpreted?

In the brief introduction that José Luandino Vieira wrote for *Papéis*, he affirms that he started to write as soon as the necessary conditions for the secret circulation of the notebooks were created (*Papéis*, 9-10). From that point onwards, his resolution to write sometimes wavered—which is not surprising given the circumstances—but, eventually, it was always renewed. As Vieira claims, "writing was a good way of killing time, as well as working out the causes that had

got me into that situation. Simply for having claimed a national consciousness, a national identity that translated into the nationalist activities that demanded independence, there I was" (in M.C. Ribeiro 2010b, 30). Nonetheless, one can wonder whether the year that Vieira stayed in prison and did not write any of his notebooks[37] was also functional for him to recover from the shock of the imprisonment, to process the experience and elaborate an adequate reaction to it, a reaction that was both political and personal. Writing in prison combines these two dimensions, as "one writes in prison to fill the void of time […], but on the other hand, one writes in prison to resist, to avoid forgetting, to survive" (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015a, 25).

Ramos' *Memórias do Cárcere* also reveal that writing was a primary need for the imprisoned author. From the first moments of his incarceration, writing appeared to Ramos as a necessity imposed by the circumstances, a necessity that had to be satisfied:

> *Necessário escrever, narrar os acontecimentos em que me embaraçava*. Certo não os conseguiria desenvolver: faltava-me calma, tudo em redor me parecia insensato. Evidentemente a insensatez era minha: absurdo pretender relatar coisas indefinidas, o fumo e as sombras que me cercavam. Não refleti nisso. *Havia-me imposto uma tarefa e de qualquer modo era-me preciso realizá-la. Ou não seria imposição minha esse dever: as circunstâncias é que o determinavam*. Indispensável fatigar-me, disciplinar o pensamento rebelde, descrever o balanço das redes, fardos humanos abatidos pelos cantos, a arquejar no enjôo, a vomitar, as feições dos meus novos amigos a acentuar-se pouco [...]. Avizinhei-me dos meus troços, afastei a

[37] Although he started to write his notebook in October, during his first year in prison Vieira wrote fiction, including the short stories that were later published in the collections *Vidas Novas* and *Nosso Musseque*. For more information, see the chronology at the end of *Papéis* (Silva 2015, 1009—34).

> calça e o paletó, dobrados cuidadosamente, abri a valise, retirei o bloco de papel e um lápis, arrumei tudo de novo, sentei-me num caixão, pus-me a escrever à luz que vinha da escotilha. Provavelmente fiquei horas a trabalhar, desordenadamente. (Ramos 2011, 132 my emphasis)

As he was a very strict critic of himself and his own writing, Ramos was aware that his prison notes were probably not good enough to become part of a literary narrative. However, in another passage, he remembers how he was nonetheless compelled to write, chaotically and desperately:

> [...] achava-me só, um livro na mão, espremendo os miolos inutilmente para entendê-lo. Pezunhava numa página, lia cinco, seis vezes, largava a brochura, desanimado. A leitura se havia tornado impossível; contudo aventurava-me a escrever. Se aquelas folhas me aparecessem hoje, desconexas, medonhas, revelariam a minha perturbação, a fraqueza do espírito. As horas longas arrastavam-se, e era preciso enchê-las. (Ibid., 479–80)

Reading these excerpts, one tends to agree with Ann Kaplan, an influential scholar in trauma studies, when she says that the project of "working through" motivates the project of the memoir (2005, 44). The urge to write seems to be part of the process of gaining awareness about one's own condition and putting thoughts and feelings in order. Still, in the case of Ramos and Vieira, writing not only has a therapeutic function, but it is also part of a larger project. Although incarceration leaves indelible marks upon prisoners' memory and subjectivity, these cannot always be regarded as 'trauma' as "trauma is not a straightforward process […]. It is the inner working of an event, not the immediate, direct, or simple response to a painful event" (Araújo 2015, 2). In the interview

annexed to this work, José Luandino Vieira affirms that the years he spent in prison left "good marks on him", and that he does not look at his prison experience as trauma. In that occasion, he also added:

> Cada dia na prisão são mil dias na memória, na vivência. Num universo fechado basta uma ligação com alguém e esse alguém é um grupo social, é um gênero. De maneira que é uma vida muito intensa. Parecendo que é uma vida totalmente vazia, é uma vida muito intensa e marca muito. Não no sentido do trauma, no sentido de experiência de vida. Desde que se encara a prisão como nós a encarávamos: podíamos estar mortos, podíamos estar presos, podíamos estar liberados, podíamos estar no exílio: tudo fazia parte das contingências da luta de libertação nacional. Da independência. (*Interview*, 244)

Putting the traumatic experience into an openly political frame of interpretation affected the way Vieira lived his time in prison, and the way he remembers it today. This is far from exceptional. Political activists, in fact, tend to see incarceration not as the end, but rather as another phase of their struggle[38]. The whole experience, then, acquires political significance. Whether political militants take on writing while in prison, the practice may have for them multiple meaning and functions, including a soothing, therapeutic function. However, this should not be analysed just on its own; on the contrary, it should be considered that one's awareness of being part of a larger struggle influences all aspects of one's carceral experience, ultimately influencing also how s/he

[38] The examples are numerous and come from different contexts. One could remember the Ira militants locked up in British prisons (McEvoy 2015), the anti-apartheid activists incarcerated in South Africa (Buntman 2003) or the Zimbabwean nationalists who fought for the end of white rule (Alexander 2011).

approaches writing. Hence, I argue here that a critical analysis of texts produced by prisoners should not overlook how political consciousness shapes one's experience of incarceration.

Look, for example, at the writings of another famous political prisoner, the Italian Antonio Gramsci. Arrested by Mussolini's fascist regime, Gramsci was sentenced to 20 years and he eventually died in prison because of the complications related to the poor living conditions he endured. One of the judges of the special tribunal who tried him justified the harsh sentence saying that they had to "prevent that brain from working for twenty years" (Gerratana 1977, LXIII). Nonetheless, during the whole time he spent in prison, Gramsci did not stop working and, on the contrary, he dedicated himself to studying and writing. In 1927, in a letter to his sister-in-law Tania, he wrote:

> I am obsessed (this is a phenomenon typical of people in jail, I think) by this idea: that I should do something *für ewig* […]. In short, in keeping with a preestablished program, I would like to concentrate intensely and systematically on some subject that would absorb and provide a center to my inner life. (1994, 83)

The project of doing something *für ewig* (literally, forever) would materialize in the pages of the *Prison Notebooks*[39], a series of essays that Gramsci wrote during his time in prison and that, in spite of its fragmentary and unfinished nature, remains one of the most original contributions to

[39] For a detailed analysis of the genesis of the *Prison Notebooks*, see the preface by Valentino Gerratana (1977, XXX–XLII).

critical thinking in the 20th century. It is worth noting that, from his arrest onwards, reading and writing had appeared to Gramsci as vital needs; however, in the letter mentioned above he is saying that these activities should respond to a higher purpose and seek a result for their own sake, rather than being a mere instrumental means of survival (Gerratana 1977, XVI).

Trying to explain the expression *für ewig* to his sister-in-law, Gramsci translates it as 'disinterested', which in this case does not indicate a work disconnected from reality, or art done for art's sake. On the contrary, disinterested refers to Gramsci's personal condition as a prisoner: the project he has in mind is to trespass the restrictions imposed by the circumstances, the limits of the cell, the degradation of his body. As Rosengarten states: "in prison, deprived of any immediate opportunity to influence the course of human affairs, Gramsci's sense of time became, paradoxically, both more intimate and subjective, yet at the same time more oriented to distant horizons" (2014, 119).

Like Gramsci, many other prisoners cultivated their writing in prison, and used prison time to collect material that would eventually become part of the literature they would write outside: the experience of confinement became for them a source of characters, stories and themes. Besides its therapeutic function, writing represents the refusal to give up a constructive dimension, a means to transcend the present and focus on life beyond prison. It also represents a means to intervene in the political debate of one's time and "stir consciousness" (*Papéis*, 865), even when the writer has been condemned to silence by the state. In the next chapters, I will discuss José Luandino Vieira's *Papéis* and other prison writings under this light, trying not to lose sight of both the political and the aesthetic intentions of prisoners who write.

PART III

JOSÉ LUANDINO VIEIRA PERSONAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

THE ARREST

In August 1961, José Vieira Mateus da Graça—birth name of José Luandino Vieira—travelled from Angola to Portugal together with his wife and new-born son. They were supposed to spend some time in the metropole, visit family and friends, and then continue their journey to Britain where Vieira was due to work[1]. The trip abroad would give Vieira the opportunity to leave Luanda, where the climate was particularly hostile for anyone who showed any sympathy towards the anticolonial nationalist movements or, worse, was suspected of being involved in the struggle[2]. After a security check, and in spite of having been granted an authorisation to travel, Vieira was asked off the plane that was to take him to London and had to return to Lisbon and report to the police.

On November 20, in Lisbon, he was arrested by the PIDE[3], the Salazarist political police. He would spend the next years in confinement, detained in prisons scattered in what was back then

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[1] At the time, Vieira was working for EIMCO, an American company involved in the project of the Cambambe dam (Silva 2015, 1018). Once in London, he was planning to reach Ghana to join other MPLA members (Kaczorowski and Chaves 2015, 188)

[2] In 1959, Vieira had already been arrested in Luanda because of his alleged affiliation with the Angolan nationalist movement. On that occasion, however, he was declared innocent and soon released (Silva 2015, 1018).

[3] The acronym PIDE stands for *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado*. Officially, the PIDE was established in 1945 and it is famous for its repression of any social and political dissent, for which it did not hesitate to use murder, torture and other coercive, violent means. The PIDE inherited some characteristics and functions of the previous

the collapsing Portuguese empire: a few days in Lisbon's Aljube, almost three years in different carceral establishments in Luanda and, finally, eight years in the notorious Tarrafal prison camp, officially renamed Campo de Trabalho de Chão Bom. Vieira was imprisoned and brought to trial together with two more poets, António Jacinto and António Cardoso, both of whom were white and had links with the Marxist-oriented nationalist movement MPLA (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*). After years of confinement in different prisons in Luanda, in July 1963, the military supreme court sentenced[4] them to fourteen years in prison[5], plus the security measures[6], up to then the harshest sentence ever handed down to any political prisoner in Angola (Medina 2005, 82). Only a few years before, it would have been highly unlikely that three white men should be punished so severely given that, in colonial societies such as that of Angola at the time, the harshness of punishment was a burden generally reserved to the colonised, to non-white

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political police (PVDE, *Polícia de Vigilância e Defesa do Estado*, created in 1933), among which some administrative authority on emigration, vigilance of frontiers and foreigners. In addition, from the 1950s, PIDE inspectors had the power to extend convicts' sentences autonomously, without depending on the decision of a court. During the 1950s and, later, throughout the whole colonial war, the power of PIDE grew and the number of agents increased dramatically, especially in the colonies. After Salazar's death in 1968, the PIDE underwent a period of reorganization and changed its name to DGS (*Direção Geral de Segurança*), but its functions and power remained untouched. See: Pimentel 2011.

[4] As stated by a document issued in 1964 by the *Procuradoria da República* in Luanda and destined for the authorities of Chão Bom prison camp, Vieira and his two friends—António Jacinto and António Cardoso were accused of being part of a conspiracy to "separate Angola from the motherland" (IAN/TT. Arquivo da PIDE/DGS, Governo Provincial de Cabo Verde, Campo de Trabalho de Chão Bom, Presos, Trabalhos, Salários, 1961 (Dez. 13) – 1966 (Out. 4), Processo nº 7, 1º vol., NT2, fls 189-205).

[5] Viera and Jacinto were released for good conduct almost two years before the end of their sentence, in 1972. Nonetheless, they were not allowed to return to Angola and had to live in Lisbon, where they reported regularly to the police (Silva 2015, 1033). Vieira was not able to return to his country until 1975, after the Carnation revolution. António Cardoso was not granted the privilege of an early release. During his detention at Tarrafal, Cardoso had frequently rebelled against prison authorities and, because of this, he had repeatedly been punished with long periods in isolation. Moreover, his prison sentence had been extended by the application of new security measures, so that he should have spent another three years in prison after 1974. However, the fall of the regime overthrew this situation and Cardoso was eventually set free on May 1, 1974. For more information, see the interview made by historian Dálila Cabrita Mateus to António Cardoso (Mateus 2006).

[6] As a means to strengthen its repressive potential, the PIDE had the power to extend the so-called security measures "[…] after the individual had served whatever the sentence handed down by the plenary court. […] In 1956, a legal decree strengthened the security measures by stipulating undetermined periods from six months to three years imprisonment and extendable throughout three successive periods of three years and even in cases where individuals had been found not guilty" (Pimentel 2010, 160–61).

people. Nonetheless, with the war ravaging on several fronts, not only was exemplary punishment considered necessary, but the repression of any dissident cultural activity was also deemed of extreme importance for the maintenance of the empire. This justified the deportation in 1964 of the three notable intellectuals to the territories of Cabo Verde, which would guarantee their complete isolation.

Despite their isolation, none of them interrupted his literary activities; on the contrary, several works emerged during their time of detention. António Cardoso wrote a series of poems which, years later, were gathered in collections such as *21 poemas da cadeia* (1979) and *Nunca é velha a esperança* (1980). António Jacinto also dedicated himself to writing poems, some of which were collected in *Sobreviver em Tarrafal de Santiago* (1982), a work that literary critic Tania Macêdo considers "one of the brightest moments in the artistic trajectory" of the poet (2007, 117). However, that of José Luandino Vieira is without any doubt the most emblematic case. In fact, most of the literary production of this writer dates to his days in prison[7]. Moreover, while in prison, Vieira also wrote daily notes on a series of notebooks that he himself created and that, in 2015, have been collected and edited in the volume *Papéis da prisão: apontamentos, diário, correspondência (1962-1971).*

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[7] For a detailed chronology of Vieira's works up to 1975 see: Silva, 2015. After 1975, Vieira published only a few titles, among which the short story *Kapapa* in 1998; a series of Angolan fables with illustrations made by the author himself (between 2006 to and 2015); plus the novels *O livro dos rios* (2006) and *O livro dos guerrilheiros* (2009). In the last few years, Vieira also created a small publishing house called *Nossomos*, for which, among other things, he has designed several books covers. The embryonic idea of *Nossomos*—with the same logo the publishing house uses today—dates from the days Vieira spent at Pavilhão Prisional da Pide in Luanda, as attested by a fragment dated June 26, 1963 (*Papéis*, 338).

The year that Luandino Vieira was arrested, 1961, was a crucial moment for the history of Angola and it is widely remembered as the year in which the armed struggle started. Trigged by events such as the attack to Luanda prisons[8] on February 4 and the massacres in the coffee plantations in the north on March 15[9], the struggle for independence was to last until 1974, when a putsch in Portugal overthrew the Salazarist government inaugurating the age of decolonisation for the former Portuguese ultramarine possessions. Over the thirteen years of its duration, the struggle for independence evolved on different fronts, involving an ever-growing number of Angolans, both military and civilians, apart from different international powers. Internally, various nationalist movements—of which eventually only three would thrive[10]—emerged in distant regions of the

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[8] Although the militants who participated in the *4 de fevereiro* (February 4) have never been clearly identified, the MPLA claimed the assault on Luanda's prisons. David Birmingham affirms that the uprising "[…] has a complex history and contested roots. Several incipient political pressure groups of exiles claimed to have planned the outbreak of violence. Portugal was willing to believe that revolutionary opposition was being coordinated and orchestrated. It is more likely, however, that the protest and the ensuing massacre were spontaneously sparked off by young local hotheads. These youths decided that they would attack the city gaol in an attempt to release some of their friends who had been rounded up by the secret police as potential trouble-makers. Their mini-coup failed but sent a shudder of panic through the white city" (2015, 71).

[9] The UPA uprising, which started on March 15, 1961 in the north of Angola, resulted in the death of 500 white colons and of several thousand Africans, many of whom were compulsory migrants from the south. The massacres affected men, women and children indiscriminately, with many mutilated before or after death (Marcum 1969; Birmingham 2015; Brinkman 2015). The Portuguese government documented both in video and pictures the violence of the massacres and used the images to legitimise its military intervention in Angola. It was the beginning of what historian Afonso Dias Ramos calls "a politics of colonial terror" (2014, 405). Pictures of the massacres were exhibited even during a session at the UN, where Portugal was called to respond of its colonial policies. In this last case, the images were used to shock the representatives of international powers, many of whom had been inclined to support the cause of decolonisation. As the historian states, "[…] sensationalism and emotional blackmail supported the morbid strategy of exhibiting the dead, which proved politically effective […]. The gains inherent to this perverse manoeuvre won over the concerns with the victims' dignity and their families' mourning" (2014, 404).

[10] Namely, MPLA, FNLA (*Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola*) and UNITA (*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*). As Justin Pearce explains, "the MPLA and FNLA both emerged in the early 1960s. The MPLA leadership came from the *assimilado* and *mestiço* populations of the coastal cities, including a strong element among Angolan students in Portugal. The FNLA organised among Bakongo exiles in the then Zaire. These two movements vied for the support of independent African states for recognition as the legitimate representative of the Angolan people. Later, Jonas Savimbi broke away from the FLNA, taking with him his constituents, whose origins were in the Central Highlands, to form UNITA" (2012, 201–2).

country, linked to social groups with different cultures, religions, languages, ethnic origins and political beliefs. It is known that, apart from fighting against the Portuguese colonial troops, these movements also fought one another, and that their animosity is among the causes that led to a violent civil war after the proclamation of independence. However, the situation was different at the outburst of the war, when divisions were not so clear-cut. As Inge Brinkman claims,

> in the 1950s and early 1960s, many people were open to any nationalist party. The links between region and movement only became more stringent in the course of the war. In 1961 few people had heard of UPA, of ABAKO, or MPLA. Some had heard about Neto, others of Kansavubu (Kasavubu), the elder Pinnock or Lumumba. But, who belonged to which party, and which party stood for what, was by no means clear. […] In the first phase of the war, the leadership of the various groups did not yet eye each other with the hatred that later came to be. (2003, 202)

This information is confirmed by the accounts of some former Angolan prisoners, who had been arrested as early as 1959 and sent to Tarrafal before the actual beginning of the war[11]. Although Angolan nationalist movements had different backgrounds, origins and cultures, and although some among them pursued a rather local agenda[12], they all shared the common desire of putting an end to colonial domination. In most cases, as Cahen declares, "the wish to expel the colonisers,

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[11] For example, the former Tarrafal prisoner José Diogo Ventura observes: "[...] we were not in the MPLA, not in the FNLA, nor in any other group. We had our own nationalist sentiment. I may say that it was in prison that I heard about MPLA, UPA, FNLA. […] When UPA did the attacks of March 15 we were already in prison. [...] It was in prison that I became a sympathiser of the MPLA, because of what I had heard and read about it, I realised it was the closest to my sensitivity. So, when I got out [...] I joined the MPLA" (in Lopes 2012b, 61).

[12] The UPA was originally called UPNA (*União das Populações do Norte de Angola*) and emerged in the context of the troubled succession to the Kingdom of Kongo. When the movement decided to act on a national level, it lost the letter 'n' in the acronym, which referred to a more local level of political action. Apparently, the change was made after an advice by Frantz Fanon (Bittencourt 2002, 127–28).

to have new governments and ultimately to have new states, was made synonymous with new nation" (2012a, 18). The idea of establishing a new, self-determined nation animated the struggle for independence, which was much inspired by what was happening at the time on an international level. In those decades, a wave of decolonisation was sweeping the entire continent: 1960 went down in history as 'the year of Africa', as seventeen colonies gained independence from European colonial rule in that year alone and were soon welcomed in the United Nations' General Assembly. In the eyes of a growing number of people, colonialism appeared as a thing of the past.

In this regard, the Portuguese regime was clearly anachronistic. Indifferent to the dismantlement of other European empires, it never seriously considered the idea of decolonising or granting some form of autonomy to its ultramarine territories. It was not only a question of imperial policy, but one that affected the very heart of Portuguese society, as Portuguese national identity itself was constructed around the idea of the empire. In front of the international public opinion and of organizations such as the UN or NATO, Portugal justified its permanence in Africa insisting on how different and unique Portuguese colonialism was, and claiming historical rights over the territories it controlled. Indeed, the history of Portuguese colonisation in Africa, and in Angola in particular, was a long one, as the Portuguese arrived in the Kongo Kingdom—north of current Angola—in 1438 and founded the city of São Paulo de Assunção de Loanda as early as 1575 (Neto 2012, 35). However, the much-heralded five centuries of presence in Angola—otherwise defined as five centuries of exploitation (Boavida 1981)—were little more than a piece of propaganda since, until the 19th century, the territory now identified as 'Angola' was an area of Portuguese influence rather than of Portuguese domination and effective colonisation. For

centuries, the territory worked mainly as a huge market for slaves[13] and other colonial goods; the administrative and military structure was poorly developed (Almeida and Sousa 2006, 140) and Portuguese presence was limited mainly to the coastal cities of Luanda and Benguela plus a few inland outposts, whereas ample portions of the territory were still under native rule[14]. Things began to change in 1822 with the proclamation of independence of Brazil[15], which pushed Portugal to turn to Africa to settle new colonial markets, and especially with the Berlin Conference, that officialised a new global colonial asset. During the conference, European colonial powers proceeded to the partition of the African continent[16] and established the principle of effective occupation of the land as a requirement to claim sovereignty over a territory, turning down the expectations of the Portuguese who hoped to claim their historical rights over a large portion of Southern Africa[17].

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[13] Slavery had everlasting consequences on the history of both the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Brazil, which at the time of the traffic enjoyed a quite intimate relationship. According to Luiz Felipe de Alencastro (2008), the richness and fortunes of Brazil were built to the detriment and depopulation of Angola. For centuries the African colony worked as a slave reservoir for manpower destined to plantations and mines in the new world, especially Brazil. Data extracted from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database show that, of a total of 5,532,119 African slaves that were shipped to Brazil, 3,864,687 embarked from West Central Africa, a region that coincides approximately with the actual boundaries of Angola and the two republics of Congo. See: Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, n.d.

[14] Regarding the effective occupation of the land in Angola during the 19th century, historian Maria da Conceição Neto affirms that "the government report of 1861 informed that 'Angola' was composed by the 'coastal districts' of Luanda, Benguela, Moçâmedes and Ambriz (these last two had been recently occupied) and the 'internal district' of Golungo Alto. The confine reached Malanje to the east […] and Humbe to the south. However, drawing a frontier would have been difficult since many of the internal outposts were completely isolated one from the other" (2017, 110).

[15] In 1822, prince regent Dom Pedro I—heir of João VI, king of Portugal—declared the independence of the kingdom of Brazil. After the 'loss' of Brazil, the Portuguese began to look at their African colonies as "the salvation of their country" and tried to develop a "new Brazil in Africa" (Clarence-Smith 1985, 56).

[16] Known as the 'scramble for Africa', the partition of the continent was made possible by precise conditions. As Bitencourt observes, it was "[…] an intricate game of internal and external variables [*among which*] one can highlight, on the European side, the combination of technological advance and mutation in patterns of production and consumption, which fomented the dispute for raw materials and, at the same time, created the conditions to make the venture viable" (2002, 25).

[17] Portugal claimed its sovereignty over a vast land corridor that went from the Atlantic to the Indian ocean, from Angola to Mozambique, covering the current territories of Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi. The imperial ambitions of the Portuguese were represented in a map that circulated widely at the time and that is best known as *mapa cor-de-rosa* (pink map) (Jerónimo 2018). However, since they interfered with British interests in that area, such ambitions were soon frustrated by an ultimatum imposed in 1890, which limited Portugal's rule in Southern Africa to Angola and Mozambique. If, as Birmingham claims, "in British diplomatic history the ultimatum of 1890 does not even merit

To gain effective control of the Angolan territories, the Portuguese army launched a series of war campaigns—euphemistically called 'peace wars', *guerras de pacificação*—which were to last up to the first two decades of the 20th century[18]. However, military expansion was not the only agent of structural transformation in the Portuguese African colonies: expeditions were accompanied by missionaries, national and foreign investments aimed at developing a plantation or extraction economy, and ever-growing waves of immigrants from the metropole[19]. Gradually and in line with other European colonial powers, Portuguese colonies in Africa were reshaped to supply the metropole with assets and raw materials, while they also came to constitute privileged markets for absorbing metropolitan industrial products (Messiant 2006, 24). This better served metropolitan interests and financed the strengthening of national industries and national capitalism.

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a footnote" (2015, 55), the event gained remarkable importance in Portuguese history and it fostered the development of nationalist and imperialist ideas. As Yves Léonard affirms, "the ultimatum of 1890 constitutes a turning point, a date that divides the colonial idea of Portugal between a 'before' and 'after'. [*Colonies*] are assigned a sacred character in the name of the 'colonial vocation' of the Portuguese people. Therefore, the colonial question acquires a 'vital character' and the colonial patrimony, which rose to the status of support and 'hope for the future' of the Portuguese nation, turns inalienable" (1998, 521).

[18] As late as the 1940s, Angola had not been completely 'pacified' and the colonial army had to face African revolts such as that of the Kuvale people (1940-1941), who rebelled against forced labour and cattle expropriation (Bittencourt 2002, 27–28). As Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo explains "the pacification campaigns […] were enduring, partially because they were ineffective. They were as much proof of muscle as they were a revelation of frailty in authority and influence, and the muscle was frequently provided by African auxiliaries. These military campaigns were also connected to efforts to expand taxation in each colony geographically and to particular economic interests of the 'legitimate commerce' (e.g., textiles and wine), as well as to prove 'effective occupation', deemed important after the Berlin Conference" (2018, 13).

[19] The white population of Angola grew dramatically over the 20th century: "from 9.198 individuals in 1900 (0,2% of total population) to 20.700 in 1920 (0,48%), 44.083 in 1940 (1,2%) and 172.529 in 1960 (3,6%). Even after the beginning of the armed struggle, in 1961, the number grew significantly, reaching more than 300 thousand individuals in 1974" (Bittencourt 2002, 29).

Beyond the evident material benefits that the colonies provided to the metropole[20], the empire was a central issue in Portuguese politics and, in general, in the collective imagination of the Portuguese. Portuguese nationalism grew around the idea of a vast colonial empire with Lisbon at its centre, to the extent that the very idea of a Portuguese national identity became inseparable from the idea of the empire. It has repeatedly been suggested[21] that, before the international community, the colonies worked as a sort of compensation for Portugal's smallness, both territorial and political. However, as Léonard (1998) shows, the colonial imagination was based less on the contemporary reality of the African colonies than it was on the past, the mythicized past of the 'age of discoveries'[22]. Public commemorations of historical personalities who had some connection with past Portuguese colonial ventures—such as, for example, Camões or the infant Dom Henrique—became real demonstrations of patriotic fervour that "not only did prove the pioneer role of the Portuguese who, to quote the famous formula, gave 'new worlds to the world', but also showed the civilising virtues of a colonisation that was already being presented as different from any other" (Léonard 1998, 523). This kind of colonial mystique crossed the 19th and 20th

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[20] Up to the early 20th century, historiography was dominated by the false myth of the uneconomic character of Portuguese colonialism. Christine Messiant summarises it in the following passage: "Portuguese colonisation is defined by its 'supernatural function and its social mission'. […] its difference from all other forms of colonisation is a difference in essence […] the difference between spiritual and material, between what Portuguese make in Africa – colonisation – and what all other colonisers do – colonialism, that is, they pursue economic interests" (2006, 61).

[21] See, for example, Alexandre 1995, 1998; Léonard 1998.

[22] Paulo Polanah states that "the Discoveries as an ideological instrument for promoting and legitimizing the colonial empire, amounted by themselves to an incomplete, unfinished historical project. The colonial empire, which was inseparable from the nation, represented its fulfillment. Empire represented the natural historical outcome, the inevitable corollary of the Discoveries; it became the reason why the Discoveries were celebrated in the first place […]. The emphasis on historical continuity, which aligned the Discoveries with the colonial empire, affirmed the unidirectionality of Portuguese history, not only precluding the possibility of alternative historical itineraries, but rendering colonialism and the colonial empire as an obligatory historical destination for the Portuguese nation" (2011, 56).

century, surviving all the different political configurations that Portugal went through. In addition, the process of development and modernization of the colonial system was carried out for over a century, and its objectives were pursued basically on the same lines by different governments and different political regimes: the constitutional monarchy (1834-1910), the First Republic (1910-1926) and the Estado Novo (1926-1974).

Initially, the establishment of the republic had been greeted with great enthusiasm in Angola, especially by the so-called *filhos do país*, the native interracial class which could be described as an autochthonous small bourgeoisie, mostly related to the colonial administration and the commercial apparatus. When in 1836 a law granted free press in Angola, this African, European and Afro-European class was eager to exercise the new right[23], which they saw as a means to gain more visibility not only within colonial society, but also with respect to the metropole. Along with "civic associations with cultural, recreational and educational objectives" (Freudenthal 2013), free press soon "turned out to be the main vehicle for local literary proclivities" (Corrado 2010, 69) and for animated discussions in defence of freedom, equality among all men regardless of their skin colour, and political autonomy. In 1891, an article entitled 'The Independence of Angola' was published in the satirical journal *O Tomate* (Corrado 2010, 61), while publications such *A Civilização da África Portuguesa* (1866), *O Comércio* (1867), *O Mercantil* (1870) and *O Cruzeiro do Sul* (1873), "not only criticised metropolitan authorities, but also stood by black people, 'the *indígenas*', writing about their value" (Silveira 2011, 115). Also the famous articles published as *Voz de Angola clamando no deserto* denounced the exploitation of the colony—and of the *indígenas*, in particular—by the metropole, stating, as early as 1901,

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[23] In his *Roteiro da literatura angolana*, Carlos Ervedosa reports the publication of 46 newspapers, almanacs and other periodicals between 1836 and the end of the century (1974, 21).

that “Angola was ‘a black country’ and that its ‘emancipation was inevitable’” (Pélissier in Silveira 2011, 115).

The free press period in Angola is usually associated with the emergence of a proto-nationalist consciousness among the African and Afro-Portuguese small bourgeoisie. Just as Benedict Anderson had seen in the establishment of a capitalist print market in Europe the basis for the emergence of “a new form of imagined community, which […] set the stage for the modern nation” (2006, 46), the creation of a community of writers, publishers and readers in Angola fostered the development of a new identity and a new consciousness. However, the movement lacked wide popular support and its influence was limited to a small group of educated people, based almost exclusively in Luanda and a few other cities. Moreover, at the time, the very idea of Angola as a nation-state—a political and territorial unity—had still to be conceived, so that, rather than just indicating an incipient or embryonic form of the concept, the prefix ‘proto’ marks here a distance from nationalism as we understand it today[24]. Finally, the creation of a public space for debate was hindered by the colonial repression apparatus[25], and the free press period was definitely over by 1916, when precautionary censorship was applied to all publications (Corrado 2010, 75). Meanwhile, the approval of the Constitution in 1911 definitely chilled the spirits of those who prayed for equality among all men, for it introduced racial discrimination in the legal frame of the colonies[26].

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[24] According to Eric Hobsbawn, the definition of proto-nationalism applies to “the political bonds and vocabularies of select groups […] directly linked to states and institutions, and which are capable of eventual generalization, extension and popularization”, however these cannot be “legitimately identified with the modern nationalism that passes as their linear extension, because they had or have no necessary relation with the unit of territorial political organization which is a crucial criterion of what we understand as a ‘nation’ today (2000, 47)”.

[25] Ervedosa reports that “most of the publications of the time did not have a long life” (1974, 26). In fact, it was not uncommon for the autorithies to censor or estinguish these publications, nor to arrest publishers and journalists.

[26] The constitution introduced the principle of legal differentiation for the *indígenas*, which evolved in the creation of two separate systems of administration of justice. See Part I, pages 29—31.

The experience of Angolan proto-nationalists, however, did have some lasting effects. Angolan nationalist and anticolonial movements in the 1950s and 1960s—especially members of the MPLA—recovered their writings and started to look up to them as pioneers and precursors. The movement was consecrated as "the first sign of 'modern' resistance to colonial rule in Angola" (Corrado 2010, 61). During a period of great expansion and aggressiveness of the Portuguese colonial project, it offered an alternative to Portuguese nationalism and made evident the existence of other (imagined) communities and other kinds of identity, which were part of the empire but not of its official rhetoric.

ANGOLA UNDER THE ESTADO NOVO

The Estado Novo did not bring about radical transformations of the colonial system established between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, rather it exacerbated some of its aspects. To avoid international criticism on its colonial politics, in 1955 the Portuguese government replaced the *Acto Colonial* of 1930 with the *Estatuto Colonial*, eliminating from its vocabulary words such as 'empire' or 'colonies' to replace them with 'pluricontinental nation' and 'ultramarine provinces'. Formally, all distinctions between metropolitan and ultramarine Portuguese were abolished, however these were mere "cosmetic changes, that essentially did not change anything" (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015a, 16). Any aspiration to self-government and autonomy in the colonies was repressed[27] in the name of Portuguese nationalism, which was indissolubly intertwined with the idea of the empire. The PIDE was an active part of this plan: in

[27] This includes also the white community's efforts to gain more autonomy or even independence. The repression of white settlers' aspirations to self-government became particularly evident during the election for the national assembly in 1945 and during the presidential elections of 1958 (Pimenta 2016). On white Angolan nationalism, see: Pimenta 2004; 2012; 2016.

1954, the first agents were transferred to the colonies, while in 1957 the political police, with its primary aim of defending the unity of the State, was officially established in Angola (Mateus 2004, 25). Second, the Estado Novo strongly pursued the dream of a 'white Angola' inciting emigration from the metropole[28] and contributing to a sudden growth of the white population in the colonies which had serious consequences on racial relations. The African or Euro-African elites that had extensively participated in the administration of colonial affairs and in the organization of the local cultural life were among the victims of this process. In fact, as the number of white settlers increased, immigrants quickly replaced the old local bourgeoisie, "upsetting the previous politico-economical and sociocultural schemes. The recently arrived settlers forced both old towns and small demographic nuclei to undertake new economic and cultural activities" (Corrado 2008, 14). In Luanda, deprived of their prestige and ostracised from the city centre[29], members of the old elites were forced to move to the *musseques* (shantytowns)[30]. The urban space of Luanda was therefore rearticulated along two poles, echoing Franz Fanon's considerations on the configuration of the colonial city:

> the 'native' sector is not complementary to the European sector. The two confront each other, but […] they follow the dictates of mutual exclusion: there is no conciliation possible, one of them is superfluous. […] The colonist's sector is a

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[28] The dream of a 'white Angola' had been pursued for decades. As early as the 1920s, Norton de Matos had tried to attract Portuguese settlers to the colonies, but it was only after the end of World War II that the phenomenon acquired significant historical importance (Castelo 2013; Bosslet 2014).

[29] In her dissertation, Juliana Bosslet (2014, 30) affirms that the municipality of Luanda had an active role in the expropriation of houses to black and *mestiço* residents and in their reallocation in less valuable areas of the city. The original residents of the Ingombotas neighbourhood, for example, were transferred to the Bairro Operário, where living conditions were precarious.

[30] José Vieira's short story "Vavó Xíxi e o seu Neto Zeca Santos", which opens the collection *Luuanda* (1963), deals with the decadence of the old black elite in Luanda. As the author observed, the characters of the story: "[…] são personagens da ponta final do processo de destruição das camadas burguesas, e já são o que resultou da proletarização dessas camadas—o pobre Zeca, a avó dele tinha sido uma grande senhora, que pertencia a uma média burguesia doutro tempo, e agora andava a catar coisas do caixote do lixo (in Leite et al. 2014, 26)".

> sated, sluggish sector, its belly is permanently full of good things. The colonist's sector is a white folks' sector, a sector of foreigners. The colonized's sector, or at least the 'native' quarters, the shanty towns, […] is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people […]. The colonized's sector is a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light. The colonized's sector is a sector that crouches and cowers, a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostrate. It's a sector of niggers. (2004, 5–6)

The two sectors of the colonial city were divided by an asphalt frontier—to use an expression by José Luandino Vieira[31]—a borderline that divided modern neighbourhoods with all sorts of facilities from the dusty streets of the *musseques*.

If it is undeniable that there was an opposition between the colonisers' sector and the colonised's one, it must also be noted that the *musseques* of Luanda were not exclusively black neighbourhoods, but rather displayed complex networks of social relationships and hierarchy. Many Portuguese immigrants, mostly poor and uneducated[32], settled in the *musseques*, competing for housing and jobs with the *indígenas*[33]. For the ideologists of the Estado Novo this was another

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[31] An entry of *Papéis* proves that Vieira read Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* while he was in prison (*Papéis*, 109). However, already in *A cidade e a infância* (1960), Vieira had shown his concerns about the increasing urban divisions that he experienced in the city of Luanda. In "A fronteira de asfalto" (*A cidade*, 39–44), one of the short stories that comprise Vieira's first work, we read how the friendship between a white girl and a black boy ends in tragedy when the boy tries to cross the 'asphalt frontier' that was keeping them apart. The asphalt frontier becomes then a symbol of the new asset of social relationships in Luanda.
[32] Messiant affirms that about 60% of the newly arrived white settlers were non-qualified rural workers, "peasants or former peasants haunted by misery" (2006, 171). Nonetheless, in spite of their lack of education, 'small whites' could occupy positions of prestige and responsibility.
[33] Indeed, the 'small whites' did not really resent from competition in the job market since *indígenas* did not have access to certain jobs or, when they did, they could only aspire to lower salaries. As Cláudia Castelo affirms, "physical proximity took place in a context of inequality and rigid racial barriers, even if it was to provide the social basis for the Portuguese non-racialist ideology. Mechanisms leading to the stratification and segregation between whites and

chance to reiterate the exceptional character of Portuguese colonialism (Cahen 2015, 155). In official discourses, this form of cohabitation gained positive value, something that would have been unconceivable in other European settlement colonies in Africa, which were organised according to the principle of racial segregation. In Angola, the cohabitation of blacks and whites was not degrading for Europeans as it was in South Africa, Rhodesia or Kenya; on the contrary, it was the proof of the absence of racism among the Portuguese and a demonstration of their capacity to blend with non-white people in the tropics[34]. Indeed, the reality of the *musseques* did not quite correspond to the image of a peaceful and respectful coexistence among whites and blacks, and sometimes it was very distant from it; however, as Michel Cahen (2015, 155) remembers, the role of ideology is not 'to be true', but to create a coherent narrative in which all the elements are meaningful. The discourse on the peaceful cohabitation between blacks and whites and the innate inclination of the Portuguese to mix with people of other races suited perfectly the colonial ideology of the Estado Novo, also because it worked as an indirect reply to the inquiries of the international community, which was starting to question the legitimacy of Portuguese colonialism in Africa.

The proximity between different social groups characterised part of the colonial society of Angola and, if the nature of this proximity did not fit the harmonious narrative sold by the colonial

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blacks applied to the home, labour, tax obligations, and the mobility of the natives. Although there was no formal apartheid system, there was a tacit segregation in public spaces […]" (2013, 121).

[34] "*Lusotropicalismo* was a theory produced by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre to explain Brazilian national difference. He asserted that Portuguese culture was uniquely predisposed to produce multicultural, racially harmonious societies in the tropics. While his theories, circulated and debated in Portugal in the 1930s and 1940s, had a following among Portuguese cultural elites, they met with a hostile reception from Portuguese politicians in that era. That changed in the 1950s. The state even went so far as to mail out copies of some of Freyre's books to foreign diplomats. From then on, the use of culture to define Portuguese difference with respect to other colonizing powers, to distinguish Portuguese rule from the explicitly racially segregationist regimes in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, and to justify ongoing colonial control made culture suspect as a term of analysis for those who opposed the regime"(Moorman 2008, 10–11).

government, neither did it respond to clear-cut divisions and solid unmovable blocks—such as, blacks versus whites; coloniser versus colonised. The reality was far more ambivalent and complex, so that social interactions were often marked by violence and structural racism, while others were based on bonds of affection and respect. Sometimes, they resulted in unforeseen alliances. In fact, starting from second post-war, the *musseques* of Luanda, with their mixed population of *indígenas*, small whites, old members of the African bourgeoisie and internal immigrants escaping from the harsh living conditions of the countryside, participated actively in the cultural scene of the city and, eventually, they became a fertile ground for the development of anticolonial movements—in particular the MPLA (Bittencourt 2010a, 137). Contrary to the other anticolonial movements, the foundational nucleus of the MPLA was urban, interracial and mainly associated with a local small bourgeoisie[35]: the ethnic pluralism that characterised the musseques of Luanda and the cultural associations which proliferated between the 1940s and 1960s laid the foundations for the articulation of its political claims.

In the following decades, the idea of an indissoluble connection between culture and politics would be developed and defended by many theorists of the national liberation movements, such as for example Amílcar Cabral, leader of PAIGC[36], who regarded "the liberation movement as the organized political expression of the struggling people's culture" (1979, 143). According to Cabral, culture was the very base of national liberation movements, which drew their force and their maintenance from the people's determination to preserve their own culture to the detriment of the coloniser's. Although oppressed and repressed, the colonised's culture resists and, "like the

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[35] On the origins of the MPLA and the uncertainties regarding the official 'date of birth' of the movement see: Bittencourt, 1997.
[36] The acronym stands for *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde*.

seed which long awaits conditions favourable for germination, in order to conserve survival of the species and its evolution, the culture of African peoples flourishes again today across the continent in the struggles for national liberation” (Ibid., 148).

Culture as a Weapon

Since the mid-1940s, a new series of cultural publications appeared in Luanda[37] and literature gained more and more importance. Political poetry and a kind of prose engaged with the realistic representation of local reality proliferated[38]. This created a favourable climate to recover and appreciate the heritage of proto-nationalists. When, during an interview, intellectual and founder of MPLA Mário Pinto de Andrade was questioned in this regard, he answered that

> […] we knew all about the generation of the past century, the generation of 1880, and all about the literature one could call political, and literature in general, and culture. I can give an example: at my father’s, there were all the books, *A voz de Angola clamando no deserto*, for example, and the old articles of that generation that had been published in the *Almanaques de lembranças luso-brasileiro*. One can say that we were nourished by the ideas of that generation. And then there were those who were a true link with that generation [...] there were the founders of the

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[37] As Mónica Silva observes, “in 1945, the Sociedade Cultural de Angola launched the *Boletim Cultura* that lasted until 1951. In 1951, the Cultural Department of the Associação dos Naturais de Angola (Anangola) launched the magazine *Mensagem*. In 1953, the *Jornal de Angola* was founded and lasted until 1965. It was also in the late 1950s that the Sociedade Cultural de Angola increasingly became a space for the discussion of literary, philosophical, cultural, and political issues. In 1957, it relaunched *Cultura* as a newspaper, which lasted until 1960” (2016, 75).

[38] Poetry was the favourite medium of literary expression and it was practiced, among many others, by intellectuals such as Agostinho Neto, Viriato da Cruz and António Jacinto, all of whom would also have relevant political roles in the struggle for independence.

> *Liga nacional africana*: my father was one of the founders and so was Assis Junior, whom I knew very well. (Messiant and Andrade 1999, 189)

The continuity between the two movements is established also by familial connections, signifying that part of the new generation of nationalists—those who would eventually form the executive cadres of the movements or fight the liberation war—came from the same social milieu as the old generation of proto-nationalists, the small African and Afro-European bourgeoisie, now impoverished. The interest in recovering the legacy of this generation of *mais-velhos* (elders) is evident in one of Vieira's prison notebooks and at the entry of March 16, 1963 one can read:

> 16/3/63 [...] Disse-me o A[*ntónio*] J[*acinto*] que o velho Teófilo tem colecções dos antigos jornais de Luanda. Mas quem tem a colecção do «Angolense» é o velho Mateus Vieira Dias. Na biblioteca da Câmara, há colecções desses jornais (Cruzeiro do Sul, etc.) e no Museu de Angola, na s/ biblioteca e nos «Arquivos de Angola». Quem também deve ter coisas antigas é o pai do Xirila (Gentil Viana), o velho Gervásio Viana. Deus os conserve vivos por muito tempo! (*Papéis*, 186)

The heritage of the old generation was both political and cultural: it was time to rediscover Angola and finally give proper value to its native culture. The pioneer movement launched in 1948 by a group of intellectuals that included Viriato da Cruz, António Jacinto and other members of the autochthonous intelligentsia was, indeed, known by the name '*Vamos descobrir Angola'*. The movement intertwined aesthetic and political concerns: the battle disputed on the ground of culture was a battle to conquer the minds and the imagination of readers, so that it can be said that one of the intents of *Vamos descobrir Angola* was to substitute the colonial imaginary with a local one.

"Without any concession to the colonial thirst of exoticism", the intellectuals who integrated the movement wanted to "express the authentic African nature" (Ervedosa 1974, 69). It is somehow ironic to see how the intellectuals that promptly adhered to this movement were driven by the imagination of a nation that not only did not yet exist in a definite political form, but that was substantially unknown to them[39]. Moreover, the discovery of Angola would be carried out also from abroad. In fact, among the associations whose activities would give an impulse to the revalorisation of Angolan culture, there was the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império*[40] and its magazine *Mensagem*[41].

It should be considered that most of these associations were not explicitly anticolonialist. On the contrary, the *Associação dos Naturais de Angola* (ANANGOLA)[42], the *Liga Nacional Africana* and the *Casa* "emerged […] as part of a strategy elaborated by colonial authorities to draw natives nearer to the government of the colony" (Bittencourt 2010b, 13) and, therefore,

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[39] An excerpt from Ervedosa's manual of Angolan literature reads: "In 1948, those young boys, white, black and *mestiços*, who were sons of the country and were about to become men, founded in Luanda the cultural movement "*Vamos descobrir Angola*!". What did they have in mind? The study of the land that cradled them, the land that they loved so much *and of which they knew so little*" (1974, 69, my emphasis).

[40] Alexandra Reza defines the *Casa* as "[…] a center founded in 1944 by the Portuguese government with the intention of preparing overseas students for future imperial duties. The *Casa* became a crucial nexus for later independence campaigns in Lusophone Africa. There key figures from Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau met, thrust together not only by their shared interest in decolonization but also by the particularly uncompromising response of the fascist Estado Novo regime to the anti-colonialism growing throughout European empires in the 1950s. A remarkable number of Lusophone African liberation fighters and early post-independence presidents were students there, including Cabral, Mário Pinto de Andrade (founder and first president of the MPLA), Eduardo Mondlane (the founding president of Frelimo), and Agostinho Neto (Angola's first President)" (2016, 39).

[41] Between 1951 and 1952, the *Movimento dos Novos Intelectuais de Angola*, which was linked to ANANGOLA, published a journal which was also called *Mensagem*. After the publication of the second issue, however, the journal was shut down by the PIDE (F. M. da Silva 2013, 86).

[42] An entry of one of Vieira's prison notebooks shows how anticolonialists mistrusted the ANANGOLA: "8-2-63 (18 horas) Concurso literário da Angangola. Não sei se concorra, se não. Vou falar com a L. Se mando para lá certos trabalhos, aqueles tipos são capazes de os irem entregar à pide..." (*Papéis*, 141). Although his ideas were certainly more radical and progressive, Vieira did take part in several activities promoted by the ANANGOLA and, eventually, while imprisoned, he participated in the literary competition organised by the *Jornal de Angola* in 1963. He won the first and second prize with the short stories "Estória da galinha e do ovo" and "Vavó Xíxi e seu neto Zeca Santos".

operated within the limits of colonial legality[43]. Notwithstanding, together with film clubs, football clubs, cultural newspapers and musical gatherings, these associations became spaces of political discussion and some of the most outstanding figures of the future anticolonial struggle would take form to their activities. José Vieira Mateus da Graça—alias, José Luandino Vieira—was one of them.

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[43]Considering the social environment in which they moved, Marcelo Bittencourt suggests examining how anticolonial and nationalist movements moved along 'blurred lines' to reach their goals, since they had to constantly negotiate their positions and their actions according to the context in which they operated. They could, for example, participate in activities or associations which were supported by the colonial government, while secretly writing independentist pamphlets, or establishing contacts with armed guerrillas (2010b, 10).

PART IV

PAPÉIS DA PRISÃO: THE BOOK

TWELVE YEARS IN THE LIFE OF A MAN

The cover of *Papéis* depicts some details of the map of Tarrafal prison camp drawn by José Luandino Vieira himself in August 1964, a few days after his arrival in Cabo Verde. In the background of the map, after the name of the author and the title, a line gives more information on the content of the book and the years that it covers: *Apontamentos, diário, correspondência (1962-1971)*. These are the coordinates that take the reader inside the fabric of José Luandino Vieira's own carceral archipelago. Moreover, the book has more than a thousand pages making it literally quite heavy. When I take it in my hands, I cannot but remember the words Vieira pronounced during the book launch of *Papéis*: "this is not a book, these are twelve years in the life of a man"[1].

The passing of time gained actual weight, the relentless succession of hours, days, months, years lived in confinement gained material concreteness in the form of a book. In confinement time becomes corpulent[2], it gains material consistency and its rhythm changes, as Vieira

[1] The book launch was held at Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian in Lisbon, on November 24, 2015. See: Fundação Gulbenkian 2015, min. 41:27.

[2] As pointed out by Roberto Vecchi (2010, 47), Antonio Gramsci expressed a similar perception in one of his letters to Tania. This perception of time, as Gramsci consciously declares, was due in part to the impossibility to move freely in space. See: Gramsci's *Lettere dal carcere* (1965, 286).

acknowledges[3]. To survive the experience of incarceration, prisoners must come to terms with time and find a means to get a grip on it. Perhaps it is not a coincidence, then, that the first illustrations that the reader finds when going through the pages of *Papéis* are two reproductions of the calendars that Vieira made in prison (*Papéis*, 11). Knowing that Vieira has kept the habit of making similar calendars ever since, one gets the measure of how the time spent in prison can have a profound impact on the life of a person (*Interview*, 244).

It is important to describe the book *Papéis* starting from its tangible, material aspects, as these are directly linked to the circumstances of its writing and publication. From October 1962 to July 1971, Vieira took notes on scraps of paper that, eventually, he started to assemble to create artisanal notebooks; by the time he was set free, he had accumulated more than two thousand sheets of paper (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015a, 17). More than forty years after, these have been collected and edited by a team of researchers—composed of Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, Roberto Vecchi and Mónica V. Silva—under the supervision and with the collaboration of José Luandino Vieira himself. *Papéis* can be described as a philological edition of Vieira's prison notebooks, as it accurately reproduces the written text of the notebooks, paying attention to the fact that, in this case, the 'text' is somehow multiple and multifaceted (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015c, 9). The paratextual apparatus—which comprises, among other things, a detailed chronology and a long interview with the author—becomes an essential piece of the volume that, by making the reader more familiar with some aspects of the context, allows for a more informed approach to the text and its complexity. The edition also tries to respect the heterogeneity of the material gathered by

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[3] See the fragment dated June 7, 1963: "O tempo, na prisão ganha outro ritmo. Ontem ao abraçar a K., parecia-me que a não via há muitos dias. A visita no parlatório quebrou o ritmo dos dias antigos, tudo o que sucedeu acelerou-se" (*Papéis*, 324).

the author, and it contains reproductions of many of Vieira's drawings, maps and letters, and of the notes he received from his fellow prisoners, some with practical information, other with lyrics of popular songs or short-stories in Kimbundu[4].

Vieira declared that he eventually decided to publish the material he had kept secret for years—and that for years he had been tempted to destroy—mainly because he wanted to avoid a posthumous edition, and in order to assume full responsibility for what he wrote[5]. In this regard, during the book launch in November 2015, Vieira added:

> Fui convencido a publicar isto antes de morrer [...] apenas por duas razões. Uma porque ao reler-me encontro em tudo ainda uma pequeníssima fagulha, de qualquer coisa que precisa de ser soprada. Esse é um ponto. E depois porque, publicar depois de morto, é muito fácil, ninguém assume a responsabilidade. Fui eu que recolhi os papéis, fui eu que os montei e ajudei a montar. (Fundação Gulbenkian 2015, min. 42:00)

In addition to this, participating in the edition of the notebooks gave him the opportunity to intervene once again in the text. Not only did Vieira help in the selection of the material to be published, but he also clarified obscure points in the text, he decided to delete names to protect the identity of people involved and removed passages to conceal certain facts or thoughts. *Papéis*, therefore, combines the researchers' philological approach with an active reorganization of the material made by the author himself, which influences the very idea of the book (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015c, 9). The edition adds further layers of meaning and interpretation to the original

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[4] For a thorough account of the editorial process that led to *Papéis*, see: Ribeiro, Silva and Vecchi 2015, 33–38.
[5] See: Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1074.

notebooks, as it is the result of a double authorial process and the result of the entanglement of different temporalities. If the text of the notebooks can be seen as a material representation of the time spent in confinement, *Papéis* throws a perspective glance on those years, covering them with the awareness of how the history of Angola and that of José Luandino Vieira himself have developed after July 1971, when the experience of the notebooks ended.

A Tiny Spark

In the speech he gave during the book launch, Vieira said that one of the reasons that pushed him to publish his prison notebooks was the impression that there still was a tiny spark smouldering in those writings. A spark that needed to be kindled. With these words, the author seemed to acknowledge the value of his writings for the history of Angola and of Angolan literature, as they bring to the public elements that were still unknown—both historical and literary. *Papéis*, in fact, can be interpreted as a workshop of Vieira's creative writing, and readers who are acquainted with Vieira's literature will find numerous examples of characters and anecdotes that transit from the pages of *Papéis* to those of his novels and short stories. Moreover, by displaying Vieira's context and his references—the books he read, the people he interacted with, the environment in which he was forced to live—*Papéis* gives new life to the critical discussion around different aspects of José Luandino Vieira's literary work. For what concerns the historical elements that the book brings to the surface, they gain particular relevance in a country such as Angola which, after decades of war and ideological disputes, is trying to come to terms with its recent past and offering a more comprehensive history of the process of its constitution as a nation.

As David Sassoon affirms, "national communities, as communities of any other kind, cannot exist without a common perception of their past" (2001, 11). The construction of a national

past—an operation which involves the establishment of a collective, national memory—is therefore a fundamental premise behind the formation of a national identity, as this operation gathers the community around a common narrative of belonging. Offering his contribution to this process is consistent and coherent with the approach that underpins the trajectory of José Luandino Vieira: after all, one could say that his whole literary production is marked by the quest for the definition of an Angolan national identity, its roots and its possible developments.

When talking of national memory, however, one should be aware of the multiple meanings of the expression. In fact, it is possible to distinguish at least two different kinds of national memory which, however, are porous rather than impermeable blocks: one refers to a collection of citizens' personal memories and experiences, in all their variety and heterogeneity; the other, on the contrary, is depersonalised: relying on institutionalised and essentially homogeneous accounts of the past, it is basically established through a top-down process (Assmann 2006, 215). Unlike individual memory, which is based on a human cognitive capacity, this second kind of national memory is constructed[6] "with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places and monuments" and it "is based on selection and exclusion, neatly separating useful from not useful, and relevant from irrelevant memories" (Ibid., 216). A critical approach to this kind of national memory should necessarily start by asking some questions, such as who the mediator is, who establishes what is useful and relevant, and what are the purposes behind this operation.

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[6] As a matter of fact, individual memory too is based on selection and exclusion as it is inevitably linked to forgetting. However, whereas individual memory is 'embodied', national memory is 'mediated' by those that Assman calls "memorial signs" (2006, 216), and by the establishment of a national narrative. Carretero & van Alphen affirm that "both memory and collective memory are mediated mainly by narrative, in which the relation between past, present, and future plays an important role" (2017, 285).

In the case of Angola, as in the case of most other countries, it was the winners who got to decide what was to be remembered and how. What was at stake was the narrative about the birth of the nation, a moment charged with undeniable symbolic power, one that is central to the construction of a national identity and that becomes part of the national cultural heritage and of its citizens' almost personal imagination (Messiant 2008, 156). The MPLA secured the narrative about the struggle for independence and the birth of the nation: politics came to hold the "monopoly of explanations of the past", to use an expression by historian João Paulo Borges Coelho (2013, 21). Overlapping its history and interests to those of Angola and the Angolan people, the movement—and, later, the party—contributed to disseminating a version of the past that was both partisan and inaccurate, and which was spread and consolidated through official commemorations, national holidays, education policies and so on. It soon became what Carretero and van Alphen describe as a master narrative, that is a dominant kind of "narrative that celebrates the nation, its origins and its achievements, and generally functions to interpret the past in terms of a (national) group and its present goals" (2017, 286). Angola went down a path shared by other African countries that emerged as nation-states after violent processes of decolonisation, where "the memorialisation of independence struggles [*became*] an important political tool for governments to assert […] nationalist legitimacy" (Pearce 2012, 199). Nevertheless, although it was widespread both within and beyond the borders of Angola[7], the master narrative modelled on the perspective of the MPLA has never been consensual nor hegemonic[8]. If one considers the

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[7] In the context of the Cold War, a network of international left-wing sympathisers (journalists, academics, etc.) living outside of Angola keenly supported the MPLA, its Marxist-oriented program and its proclaimed revolution. As Messiant argues, "the MPLA official version was often endorsed by allies and international sympathisers, out of ignorance, or knowingly but 'for the cause', or because it was easier (2008, p. 163)".

[8] According to Justin Pearce, "Angola is not unique in having witnessed the rise of several different conceptions of national identity within its borders in the period before independence, nor is it unique in that these different

context in which the MPLA achieved and maintained power, it is easy to see why large sectors of the population could not identify with this narrative.

During the liberation war, the three main Angolan nationalist movements—MPLA, FLNA and UNITA—had fought each other, struggling for political and military power, and for symbolic recognition. In spite of a timid attempt at forming a coalition government in January 1975 (Bittencourt 2002, 516), the conflict erupted again very soon, aggravated by the interferences of ideologically diverse foreign countries, which had political and economic interests in Angola[9]. Eventually, the MPLA got hold of power and proclaimed independence on November 11, 1975; meanwhile, however, UNITA established its own government in the Central Highlands of the country[10]. Therefore, rather than a moment of general consensus and national unity, independence was a time of open conflict and military confrontation (Messiant 2008, 155). After the end of the war against the Portuguese in 1975, the country experienced a civil war that lasted for twenty-seven years, with brief and unstable periods of peace in between[11]. The Luanda-based government soon took a dictatorial turn and, until the first multiparty elections were held in 1992, the MPLA proclaimed itself the only legal party in Angola. The necessity to demonstrate strength and cohesion in a time of conflict led to the silencing of critical voices and banned any form of opposition, including versions of history that did not match the dominant narrative. From its position of power, the MPLA was able to perpetuate its own narrative about the liberation war,

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conceptions were associated with rival political movements. Angola is unusual, however, in that no one strand of nationalism became hegemonic in the decades following independence" (2012, 199).

[9] For a brief account of Angola in the scenery of the Cold War, see: Birmingham 2006, 110–21.

[10] As Catarina Gomes explains, "independence was marked by the establishment of two governments – the government of the República Popular de Angola, based in Luanda under the control of MPLA, and the government of the República Democrática de Angola in Huambo. The latter was the result of a frail coalition between UNITA and FNLA […] (2009, 111)".

[11] The FNLA exited the military scene soon after its defeat in the battle for Luanda, in 1975 (Leão 2007, 2). The conflict between the MPLA and UNITA extended in various forms until 2002, when a peace agreement was signed after the death of UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi (Pearce 2018).

offering a much-simplified version of the history of the birth of the Angolan nation, one in which good and evil, heroes and villains, true Angolans and traitors at the service of foreign countries were clearly separated. This narrative did not reflect the effective role that the FLNA and UNITA had during the liberation war, claiming that the opponent movements were not guided by true nationalist ideals. In so doing, it discredited or ignored the experience of those Angolans who identified with them. Indeed, it did not even consider the multiplicity of political positions inside the MPLA itself, which were soon wiped out anyway[12].

For people to overtly take distance from the state version of the past was risky and, in any case, very difficult. Historians doing research in Angola in the decades after independence report that their work was inevitably influenced by the government[13], not only because funding was short and provided almost exclusively by the government itself, but also because of "the fear related to the situation of the war, that inhibit[*ed*] possible critics to the different centres of power, which could be faced as signals of approximation to the enemy" (Bittencourt 2000, 6). Only in the 1990s, with the shift to a multi-party system in 1992 and the opening of the PIDE archives in 1994, did new conditions emerge for writing a more comprehensive and accurate history of the liberation war of Angola (Messiant 2008), notwithstanding the many difficulties that persisted[14]. Moreover,

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[12] According to Messiant (2008, 159), the official narrative diffused by the MPLA was constructed also around the contraposition with its internal dissidents (the so-called *fraccionistas*). Hundreds of dissidents (Pawson 2007, 176)—including former detainees of Portuguese camps and prisons—were incarcerated by the MPLA after independence, a fact that shows how policies of punishment did not change with the end of the colonial system. This was the case, for example, of the brothers Vicente and Justino Pinto de Andrade, who were incarcerated by the MPLA after having spent four years at Tarrafal during the liberation war (Lopes 2012b, 160). Many other dissidents were murdered, especially after the failed coup attempt of 1977, commonly remembered as the '27 de Maio' (May 27). As Daniel dos Santos explains, "the coup failed, and the repression that followed was violent, short, and directed not only at the coup supporters but against all dissenting forces, in an effort to put an end to the political factions within MPLA" (1990, 159). Although figures are uncertain as official records were destroyed, the coup attempt is estimated to have resulted in the death of thousands (Pawson 2007).

[13] See, for example, Bittencourt 2000; Messiant 2008.

[14] Notwithstanding the shift to a multi-party system and the signs of openness, the MPLA is still in charge today, more than four decades after its rise to power. Despite an apparent simulacrum of democracy, the government has always

ever since the end of the civil war in 2002, the slow but gradual stabilisation of the country contributed to create a more favourable climate for these issues to be discussed in the public space, and not only in limited academic circles or abroad. This process seems to have reached a new stage when João Lourenço stepped into the presidency of Angola in September 2017, replacing José Eduardo dos Santos after his thirty-eight years of uninterrupted government. In this new political context, the government's decision to remove Jonas Savimbi's body from his pauper's grave and bury him with the military honours awarded to a nationalist leader is a symbolic yet important gesture[15], and it shows how the way of dealing with the past has changed—or is willing to change—in the Angolan political realm. By rehabilitating the image of UNITA's leader, and symbolically acknowledging the legitimacy of the UNITA struggle, different memories and experiences come to be part of the national memory.

THIS IS OUR MEMORY: CULTURAL OPPOSITION TO THE MASTER NARRATIVE

In Angola, culture has often had a leading role in contesting the master narrative. Literature, which has traditionally been associated with the effort to gain cultural independence and build a national identity, has continued to have a major role even after independence. In a context where historians writing about the nation's recent past encountered various obstacles, fictional writers could enjoy

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been highly authoritarian. The report published in 2017 by Amnesty International, along with hope that the elections held in 2017 could bring some real change to Angola, share serious concerns on the actual state of human rights in the country. For example, it states that "the space for individuals to exercise their civil and political rights continued to shrink. Peaceful protesters were met with violent repression; government critics faced criminal defamation suits". See: Amnesty International, 2018.

[15] This gesture must be understood in the light of the recent changes in the government of Angola, where "João Lourenço, though a soldier and an MPLA loyalist to the last, has displayed a less confrontational style more becoming of a peacetime president. On the one hand, there's nothing to stop a reappraisal of Savimbi's legacy, and on the other, there are […] groups of people who will positively welcome the moves to rebury the UNITA leader" (Pearce 2018).

more freedom. Books such as Pepetela's *A Geração da utopia* (1992) or Agualusa's *A Estação das chuvas* (1996) have called for a critical reappraisal of the history of the liberation struggle and for a new perspective of some of its consequences (Bittencourt 2000). In the last years, Pepetela, a MPLA member himself, has published other books that can be read as a clear act of accusation of the Angolan élites that have ruled the country ever since independence[16].

Looking beyond literature, signs of new ways of dealing with the memory of the past come from other realms of culture. Consider, for example, the documentary *Independência. Essa é a nossa memória* (2015), by Mário Bastos. The film is the result of the collaboration of Bastos and his team of audiovisual producers with the documentation centre *Associação Tchiweka de Documentação*, within the mark of the project "Angola – Pathways to Independence". Between 2010 and 2015, the project "produced more than 1.000 hours of interviews with around 600 participants in the struggle for independence, as well as national and international personalities associated with it" (Geração80, 2015). The documentary is then part of a much larger project, whose aim is collecting first-hand testimonies and creating an extensive audiovisual archive of the history of the struggle. Filmed in different locations in Angola (and abroad, both in Portugal and in other African countries), the documentary aims at telling the history of the independence from within, that is, through testimonies of people who lived the war. The main strength of the documentary lies in the diversity of the people interviewed during the project, that is,

> Angolans from different social, regional and political backgrounds, whose testimonies are less known. That option explains the absence of other voices and the choice of the interviewees, each one representing in some way, a larger group,

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[16] In particular, see the novel *Predadores*, published in 2005.

> making their experience part of the collective narrative. The memory of a nation is made out of many memories, which is urgent to collect. (Geração80, 2015)

As it is clear from these words, this new version of the memory of the liberation struggle is also built on selection and exclusion; however, the choosing criteria are very different from those that, so far, have shaped the dominant master narrative. Giving space to voices that had not yet been heard, the documentary creates a narrative in which, rather than the achievement of one party or one movement, independence appears as the conquest of all the Angolans who fought and suffered for it.

José Luandino Vieira was among the people interviewed and, during a quick appearance in the documentary, he remembers how he had the clear impression that, sooner or later, nationalists would win the war and obtain independence when a new wave of Angolan prisoners—among whom there were many students and young people—arrived at Tarrafal in 1969. Vieira's intervention is just a couple of minutes long, presumably because the troupe involved in the making of the documentary decided to leave more room to lesser known witnesses. As Vieira affirmed, the gist of *Independência* is the Angolan people, their testimonies are what remains after "squeezing the documentary" (*Interview*, 234). I believe that the publication of *Papéis* in 2015 can be framed in the same, renewed cultural context, as it brings new elements that can support the process of rebuilding a national memory. In this sense, Vieira's work could be associated with the documentary *Independência*. In fact, in spite of the difference in medium, circumstances of production, etc., they share an important feature: both portray a plurality of voices.

Although *Papéis* is clearly shaped by José Luandino Vieira's personality and his unique individual experience, not to mention his unique way of writing, the book also bears witness to a collective experience[17]. Alongside Vieira's intimate thoughts and reflections, the reader of *Papéis* gets a glimpse of the community of prisoners that the author encountered in his relocation from one place of detention to the other. As Doran Larson has observed,

> a dissociative turn of voice that allows the 'I' of the prison text – even when not opened into an explicit "we" – to represent communities larger than the prison author and other than those insisted upon by the prison; and the concomitant associative gesture whereby the prison writer names the contemporary communities among whom s/he numbers him- or herself [...]. (2010, 145)

Passing from the first-person of the autobiography to the plural pronoun of the public testament (Larson 2017, 2), incarcerated writers give voice to the community to which they belong through their writings. *Papéis* follows this pattern. Not only does Vieira describe his fellow-inmates, talk about their life experiences, report the information they gave him or comment on the injustices they suffered, but he also quite literally lets them into the space of his notebooks. Leafing through the pages of *Papéis*, one finds letters and notes written by other prisoners and attached to the original notebooks as if they were constitutive parts of the text. There are also poems and short

[17] Larson claims that bearing witness to a collective experience is one of the distinctive features of prison writings as a genre. According to him, "the writer's work speaks, beyond his or her personal experience, to a condition suffered by a larger population, of which the writer's experience is representative" (2017, xxii).

stories written by different authors, in different handwritings and in different languages[18]. There are the songs that Vieira heard from common-law prisoners in Luanda, and that formed part of what he called the *Cancioneiro Popular Angolano*, a project that, by the end of Viera's prison time, amounted to dozens of songs, mainly in Kimbundu. The recurrent interventions of different people in *Papéis* show how Vieira conceived his personal notebooks also as a means to retain the voices and experiences of his prison companions. Vieira reinforced this idea when, talking of *Papéis*, he claimed that the book should not have an author because the notes gathered in it belong to many people (Fundação Gulbenkian 2015, min: 47:14). The writer aspired to be a sounding board for his community and make its voice resonate outside of prison walls.

However, the community that Vieira integrates and to whom the notebooks bear witness is not only that of prisoners, but, more at large, the whole national community: whether inside or outside prison, it is to the Angolan people that suffer from colonialism that Vieira seeks to bear witness. This idea shaped the entire literary and political project that Vieira developed during the years of his incarceration, something that is confirmed also by the numerous interactions between the notebooks and his fictional works. Such interactions could be described as part of a twofold process: first he collected the stories, poems, songs, and other material that his fellow prisoners shared with him and wrote them down or attached them to his notebooks. In this light, the function of the notebooks is both documentary and political: by creating an archive that could breach prison walls and be shared with a larger public, Vieira supported the idea of an independent Angolan

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[18] Among this material, there are also poems and short stories by authors who would come to be highly appreciated in the following decades. It is the case of Portuguese poet and writer Manuel Alegre, who was incarcerated at Pavilhão Prisional da Pide in Luanda in 1963, and whose notes and poems are attached to Vieira's notebooks (*Papéis*, 263). Another example is that of Agostinho Mendes de Carvalho, who became a writer at Tarrafal, where he spent almost a decade. After the independence of Angola, he would begin to publish using the pen name of Uanhenga Xitu. See one of his poems in Kimbundu in *Papéis*, 619–20.

culture, which was a requisite for political independence[19]. In a second phase, Vieira returned to this material and incorporated it in his fiction writing. Under this second perspective, the notebooks appear as a support to literary writing, as Vieira's own creative laboratory. As Vieira himself claims, "aquelas anotações, os cadernos, são parte do ofício do escritor. Só que o escritor é essa pessoa compósita que tem isto e aquilo. Há as partes pessoais, há as partes políticas" (*Interview*, 227). To quickly illustrate how this two-step process works, consider the fragment dated January 18, 1964. This fragment is an account of what Mangololo, a common-law prisoner at Cadeia Comarcã de Luanda, had seen in the musseques during the repression that followed February 4, 1961[20]. After reporting in detail what Mangololo had told him, quoting his friend's words literally and in inverted commas, Vieira adds a small paragraph into brackets:

> (Tudo isto é bom material. Custa escrever isto, mas é preciso não atraiçoar a verdade para que o sofrimento de um povo não fique diminuído ou adulterado quando se recolhe como «material». Só me podem perdoar dum modo: valorizar a n/ literatura c/ a verdade do nosso sofrimento de povo.) (*Papéis*, 427)

In this passage, Vieira makes explicit his commitment to the community, and his intent to bear witness to the suffering of his people. Notice the double use of the adjective in the first-person plural (*nossa/nosso*) in the last line, referring, quite significantly, to literature and the people. He

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[19] In this regard, notice how he tried to send the *Cancioneiro Popular Angolano* to friends who could help circulating those songs around, because "when static, they are fruitless". See the fragment dated February 2, 1964, in which Vieira writes: "Vou escrever ao Papo para lhe mandar as canções recolhidas: talvez ele possa aproveitá-las para alguma coisa. Quietas não dão filhos" (*Papéis*, 433). Papo was the nickname of the Angolan poet Fernando Costa Andrade, who was also a member of the MPLA.

[20] Talking of the repression that struck the musseques after the attacks to Luanda prison on February 4, historian John Marcum observes that "Portuguese vengeance was awesome. The police helped civilian vigilantes organize nightly slaughters in the muceques [*sic*]. The whites hauled Africans from their flimsy one-room huts, shot them, and left their bodies in the streets. A Methodist missionary in Luanda at the time testified that he personally knew of the deaths of almost three hundred. The full dimensions of the massacre will never be known" (1969, p. 129).

will pursue his intent with all the means at his disposal as an incarcerated writer: the creation of the archive and its elaboration into literature. Notice, in fact, how an echo of what Mangololo had seen in the musseques is to be found in the short story "Mestre Gil, o Sobral e o barril", which was first published[21] by *Mensagem*, the journal edited by the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império*, in July 1964, only a few months after Vieira had heard his fellow prisoner's account.

The experience of incarceration will not only have an impact on the themes Vieira's literature deals with, but also on his style, as his literary language will be affected by the prolonged contact with his fellow prisoners' ways of talking, their mixture of Portuguese and African languages. Vieira clearly acknowledges the creativeness of his fellow prisoners, the strength of popular Angolan culture and that of popular Angolan Portuguese—sometimes called '*pretoguês*'[22]—allowing it into the sphere of literature, thus negating the difference between low and high culture. See, for example, the case reported on July 30, 1964, just a day before boarding the *Quanza* and leaving Luanda for Tarrafal. On that date, Vieira writes a commentary regarding the letter he received from a fellow prisoner:

> Logo de manhã recebi a carta (8-A) do Khassa Mariangu. Não digo nada, fiquei comovido. Mas essa expressão «zanga nova» para a futura justiça é um achado literário! A amizade destes 3 moços em menos de 5 meses de convívio, dão-me a certeza daquilo que sabia. É a confirmação, na prática, da ideia de solidariedade mundial dos povos de todas as raças, desde que não haja laços de sujeição entre

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[21] After the publication in *Mensagem*, Vieira edited the short story which was published in its definitive version in the collection *Velhas Estórias* (1974) with the title "Muadiê Gil, o Sobral e o barril".

[22] Pejorative term which derives from the juxtaposition of the words preto (black) and português (Portuguese). In an essay on José Luandino Vieira's literary language, Tania Macêdo states that, in colonial Angola, "pretoguês was the hybrid form of expression of bilingual colonial subjects. Usually, it was despised by the colonisers and was, therefore, yet another source of racism against the colonised. In this light, the author's decision to use this linguistic material lends prestige to the hybrid way of speaking of the common man and bestows a literary status on it" (1992, 173).

> eles e se baseiem na cooperação livremente aceite. Foi uma grande lição para mim este quase um ano aqui na cadeia, com os presos de delito comum. (*Papéis*, 536)

Vieira systematically drew from cultural and linguistic differences to enrich his literary work: notice his excitement in discovering an idiomatic expression in the letter (*zanga nova* for 'future justice') that he describes as a 'literary coup'.

The fragment quoted above also shows how, within the community of prisoners, bonds of affection and solidarity emerged across barriers of class and race, as people gathered around a common idea and shared the desire of being free, not only as individuals, but as a nation. People from different backgrounds, in terms of origin, religion, language, education, political ideologies and ethnicity, found themselves reunited in prison, which became an "exceptional observatory of the Angolan nation" (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015a, 17). In this sense, time in prison resulted in an enriching and enlightening experience for many prisoners, who gained a deeper insight into the community that aspired to become a nation. In prison, Vieira came in contact with an extraordinary variety of Angolans. Describing his fellow prisoners at Tarrafal, he says:

> eram do norte, do sul, eram analfabetos, Febel[23], meu mestre não falava português, Kikongo, Bakongo, Umbundu, Kimbundu, jovens, velhos. O Teodóro Cassinque da Unita tinha 20 anos. E o chefe da Unita já tinha sessenta e tal. E era professor primário. Era o Chingunji[24]. *Aquilo era a nação, a nação angolana estava lá*. (*Interview*, 252, my emphasis)

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[23] Febel Luginça.
[24] Eduardo Jonatão Chingunji.

As Vieira himself claimed, during his years of imprisonment, he had the opportunity to add a layer of African culture to his own cultural formation, which was already deeply influenced by Angolan popular culture (*Interview,* 252). He had "the opportunity to observe his companions, to listen to their stories, to became familiar with their beliefs, customs, and languages and from there to develop a literature that was intrinsically a project of national liberation (Silva 2016, 76–77)".

INTERNAL CONFLICTS

However, it would be incorrect to portray prisons during the struggle for independence in Angola exclusively as spaces of harmonious social interactions: not only did tensions and conflicts sometimes disrupt serenity, but the very circumstances of prison life and the violence they entailed often prohibited the development of fulfilling human relationships among prisoners. Moreover, immersed as they were in colonial society, prisons tended to reproduce the violent patterns of social interaction that were typical of colonialism. In Luanda, for example, white prisoners were granted better treatment in terms of accommodation, food supply, access to visits or a lawyer, etc. Sometimes, these prisoners did not even question the privilege they had, showing how even those who were fighting colonialism were imbued with colonial mentality. The episode Vieira reports with sarcasm in a fragment dated January 10, 1964 sheds light on this issue:

> O Ribas e o Bongololo fugiram. Foi o R. que desafiou o B. O Ribas veio entregar-se + o outro. Ficaram fechados em celas junto às nossas. Apenas para registar: – o Ribas já teve visita – o B. não; – o Ribas já teve recreio – o B. não; – o Ribas pode receber o que quer – o B. não; – o Ribas tem quem lhe faça as limpezas – o B. faz a dele e a do Ribas. O interessante é que as relações entre Ribas/ Bongololo são de «camaradagem» s/ preconceito racial visível e o Ribas acha natural que seja o outro

> a limpar-lhe a cela. I.e. nem sequer repara nisso! E o B. faz aquilo com a mesma naturalidade. Não há dúvida que é uma sociedade multirracial... baseada em relações abs. naturais! (*Papéis*, 411)

If some prisoners could establish relationships based on equality and mutual respect on an individual level, racism was an everyday practice at an institutional level, and one so internalised that it was difficult to identify it[25]. In his notebooks—especially in those written at Tarrafal—Vieira uses the term racism[26] also to indicate the discrimination suffered as a white nationalist in an otherwise black or *mestiço* environment. Not only was Vieira disappointed not to find the sharp revolutionary awareness he had hoped to encounter among political prisoners, but he was also resentful of some of his fellow prisoners, who made him the object of suspicions and unjustified accusations.

> 11-IX [-*1965*] Um ano de caserna "de Angola" ... tão pouco tempo, tanta ilusão perdida (ainda bem) tanto conhecimento s/ certas camadas de pessoas. Mas tb. perdi de mim, mesmo a alegria inconsciente – que me faz falta e me envelhece. (*Papéis*, 712)

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[25] Racial prejudices influenced the behaviour of black guards too, who paradoxically defended a system that mistreated them. Cipaio 121, the native guard from the Pavilhão Prisional da Pide, who was treated like a servant by the white guards and even by some white prisoners, is the perfect example of this. The fact that Cipaio 121 'took revenge' on black prisoners, using violence over them to reassert his authority, makes him a symbol of all the contradictions that colonialism as a repressive system reproduces. See: *Papéis*, 53–54.

[26] The use of this term is controversial, as it could be argued that anti-white discrimination cannot be defined as racism, if one considers racism as a doctrine claiming the superiority of one race over the others, and one which has fostered long-lasting systems of government. There is no such thing as 'reverse racism' since, historically, white people as a group have not experienced discrimination based on the colour of their skin.

Although divisions and conflicts among incarcerated nationalists were mostly related to personal inclinations, cultural contrasts and differences in temperament than related to feelings of ethnic belonging, race was certainly an issue. As one of the four white Angolan nationalists ever imprisoned at Tarrafal, Vieira had to face prejudices associated with his European origin, among them the accusation of working undercover to create an apartheid state in Angola[27]. At this regard, see the fragment dated May 19, 1969:

> De tarde tomo conhecimento das porcarias que um cérebro complexado e megalómano inventou – o D. Quixote que eu queria comprar como ministro para um governo tipo África do Sul (o que segundo ele fiz, ao Liceu!), que distribuía dinheiro para isso e até as encomendas eram para tal! Só me dá vontade de rir [...] (*Papéis*, 891)

Vieira was aware that prejudices against whites were justified by a long history of violence, and he himself had written on his notebooks that "todo o negro que mate um branco [em Angola] mata em legítima defesa" (*Papéis*, 330). However, *Papéis* shows how some of Vieira's fellow inmates doubted that any white man, any *filho do colono*, any settler's son, could be a true Angolan. For those who considered white people as their greatest enemies, a white Angolan nationalist was a

[27] Up to now I have used the term 'nationalist' to refer to anticolonial activists who defended the idea of an independent country governed by the black majority, however it is true that white Angolans—when they did not support the politics of the Portuguese colonial state—adhered to different models of nationalism. As Fernando Pimenta Tavares claims, certain white nationalists "aimed at a selective independence under the exclusive rule of the white minority, and at the maintenance of the colonial structures and the internal exploitation of the black population, mirroring the white supremacist regimes of South Africa and South Rhodesia" (2004, 19). As *Papéis* as well as his entire political and literary trajectory show, José Luandino Vieira could not have been more distant from these white supremacist positions.

contradiction in terms[28]. Clearly, race-based prejudices were not limited to prison, rather they played a role in the battle for hegemony among the nationalist movements operating in Angola. While the MPLA defended a "firm anti-tribal and anti-racist nationalism" (Messiant 2008, 211), the leaderships of FLNA and UNITA fostered the idea of blackness as a sign of the only authentic and legitimate connection with the Angolan people, and consequent true opposition to colonialism[29]. However, notions of race were fluid and they changed according to prisoners' personal attitudes and opinions, and according to the constraints related to the environment, which could favour or hinder solidarity among prisoners. See, for example, this fragment dated March 31, 1963, and written in the Pavilhão Prisional da PIDE, in Luanda.

> Enquanto cortava o cabelo com o Augusto, falei-lhe em ele ser o barbeiro da cadeia, mas ele disse que «os outros» não aceitam (referia-se aos pides) pois nem mesmo o inspector lhe deixa cortar as unhas encravadas com a tesoura. Tem medo e pede-lhe a tesoura... Isto a propósito de ele me estar a cortar o cabelo com uma lâmina e eu lhe falar em «me cortar o pescoço». Que todos os «brancos» têm medo. Eu disse-lhe: – E nós? – Ah! Vocês é diferente. Não vê fazem sentar as v/ famílias no chão? Aqui está um pormenor que mto. contou na cela 2 para a nossa posição. É que a qualquer outra visita de presos de raça «branca» eles oferecem logo cadeiras. Concluindo: não somos brancos! (o que tem a sua verdade!) (*Papéis*, 229–30)

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[28] See the fragment dated March 3, 1965: "«O n/ maior inimigo é o europeu» – como esta, muitas frases. Ao dizer europeu ele englobava os asiáticos de raça caucásica e os americanos – portanto «os brancos». Logo mesmo ao quererem pensar em termos regionais, o racismo é mto. poderoso" (*Papéis*, 641).

[29] As Messiant explains, both the UPA/FNLA and UNITA exalted blackness as a strategy to enhance their connection to the people and "in contrast to the creoles and particularly the mestiços" (2008, 213), who were accused of pursuing whites' interests. The MPLA would follow the same strategy, but more subtly: if on one side the discourse of anti-racial nationalism was reinforced, on the other "segments of 'new assimilados' opposed creole 'hegemony' and 'privilege', using racial and ethnic arguments to promote their position as the more genuine representative of 'the people', while simultaneously competing among themselves on ethnic and micro-regional lines" (Ibid., 223).

As a privileged observatory of the nation, not only does the prison show the Angolan people struggling to put an end to oppression, but it also exposes the contradictions and the conflicts that underpin the very idea of a national identity. The hostility that sometimes emerged among political prisoners had deep roots in different conceptions of what Angola was to be like, different ways of imagining the nation. What was at stake was also the definition of a national community, and of what it took to be Angolan:

> 21/12/67 Velho Candondo: «Vocês tb. tiveram a v/ independência. – mas quem são esses vocês? - Os portugueses! – E quem é que é port.? Ou é preciso pintar-me de preto p.ª ser angolano? (*Papéis*, 837)

The skirmishes into which *Papéis* offer a glimpse illustrate the tensions that crossed Angolan society, which eventually prevented the formation of a single, united front against Portuguese colonialism and that, after independence, resulted in open conflict. Although it is always declined in the singular form, the nation is inevitably plural, and *Papéis* reveals that Vieira was aware that multiple and sometimes contrasting modes of imagining the Angolan nation were at stake. "Aquilo era a nação, a nação angolana estava lá." (*Interview*, 252), stated the writer while speaking of his experience at Tarrafal and after listing the diversity of people and ideas that one could meet there.

The idea of an intrinsically plural nation, a nation that includes and contemplates multiple and even dissonant voices, is in sharp contrast with the homogeneous political body described in the MPLA's most famous post-independence motto "*um só povo, uma só nação*" (one people, one nation). However, the dialectics between plurality and unity is constitutive to the idea of the nation, and it helps to make of nationalism a very ambivalent concept. To make sense of the contradictions

inherent to nationalism, some critics[30] have claimed that the phenomenon is Janus-faced, and its productivity depends on the tensions caused by the unresolvable dichotomies that it englobes.

As for Vieira, in his vision of nationalism politics and culture are seamlessly interwoven, which leads Ribeiro and Vecchi to claim that *Papéis* can be read as "the demonstration of the existence of a nation with an archive and centuries of history that, up to then, could not emerge independently as a nation-state" (2015a, 29). Conceived in antithesis to colonialism, Vieira's utopian national project laid on the principles of freedom, equality and social justice, and had first and foremost a cultural dimension. This does not preclude the relevance of his political beliefs, nor the influence of Marxism and other political ideologies had on his system of thought, which are extensively documented by *Papéis*. Rather, quoting Homi Bhabha's words, one could say that Vieira regarded "the nation's 'coming into being' as a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social *life* rather than the discipline of social *polity*" (2000, 2). The publication of *Papéis*, a significant part of which is dedicated to documenting the richness of Angolan cultural expressions, unearths Vieira's gaze on the national question and its particular cultural dimension.

In this sense, although he was close to the MPLA, Vieira's perspective did not always coincide with that of the movement. One could say that a complete identification with any political movement was impossible[31], since in *Papéis* one finds considerations like this one: "1968 – Janeiro

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[30] See, for example, Nairn 1975; Bhabha 2000.
[31] In this regard, see also the excerpt of a letter that Vieira wrote to his wife from Tarrafal, after he had a conversation with the director of PIDE's delegation in Praia (Cape Verde): "[...] espantam-me sempre que me venham falar mostrando dar uma interpretação – e não só isso: um valor – a actos ou ideias minhas que não têm, de longe, nem esse alcance que lhe dão, nem o valor que parece quer atribuir. Sobretudo uma coisa me espanta sempre: como, ao longo de seis anos, ainda não se aperceberam que nunca fui nem serei um "político". Sou demasiado tolerante e incapaz de ódio para ser homem de partido; e demasiado sincero para ser político. [...]" (PIDE/DGS, Del. A, Sec. 964, NT 970, 154). The letter confirms how, in spite of his intense participation in the political life of his country, Vieira could not be described as a 'party man' because of certain traits of his personality that were not compatible with a total adherence to a political movement. However, the document must be read in its context and approached critically. When handling prisoners' personal correspondence, in fact, it is important to keep in mind how this was subjected to meticulous checking by the police, and how the prisoner's awareness of this fact could interfere with the content of letters.

2 – (1) Cada vez me convenço mais da veracidade duma frase que às vezes digo: finda uma revolução, guerra de libertação, os povos deviam fuzilar os líderes – é difícil não estarem corrompidos e comprometidos" (*Papéis*, 839). As Ribeiro and Vecchi suggest, Vieira's nationalism had—oxymoronically—a universalist character (2015a, 27), for it was based on the idea of the nation as a community sharing a common ground and a common past, rather than being an ideology that differentiated people according to principles such as linguistic homogeneity or ethnicity. In this regard, it is interesting to mention the title of one of the last short stories that Vieira wrote while at Tarrafal: "Cangundos, verdianos, santomistas, nossa gente" [32]. Notice how, under the designation 'our people', Vieira includes men and women of different nationalities who, nevertheless, are considered part of the Angolan people. Strongly refusing chauvinism and denying any form of discrimination, Vieira identifies his love for his country with a form of love for humanity, as he writes in a fragment dated August 8, 1965: "O meu amor à minha terra, Angola, é apenas a forma do meu amor pela humanidade. Nunca serei um mau nacionalista" (*Papéis*, 705).

FANNING THE SPARK OF HOPE

It should be noted that the conflicts that Vieira reports in his notebooks did not involve but a small group of prisoners. Besides, disagreements and quarrels might have been exacerbated by the carceral environment, the lack of privacy, the almost absolute idleness to which prisoners were

[32] The title could be translated approximately as "Poor whites, Cape-Verdeans, São Tomeans, our people". Written in 1971, the short story was later included in the collection *Macandumba*, which was published for the first time in 1978 by the *União dos Escritores Angolanos*. The short story is a perfect example of the interactions between the notebooks and Vieira's literature, as it incorporates elements and details that emerged during Vieira's conversations with Mangololo and that are anchored in reality (e.g. the name Mangololo given to one of the main characters; the falsification of the lottery tickets; the poor white who has his rival killed by the militia squads and moves to the *musseque* to live with a black woman; etc.). Moreover, the short story opens with a *cantiga* (song), possibly inspired by the prison songs collected for the project of the *Cancioneiro popular angolano*.

subjected. Some of the comments that Vieira wrote on his notebooks show that he was aware of how the environment spoiled his relationship with fellow-inmates: "12-6[-1967] Porque sempre a conversa de comadrio? Como a prisão e a solidão deixa os homens maus" (*Papéis*, 804).

In the interview that closes the volume of *Papéis*, Vieira admits that there existed conflicts among prisoners, but he also defends all the efforts that prisoners made to respect differences (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1049). He also argues that, as a rule, prisoners were well trained in self-discipline and self-control, and they would apologise to fellow inmates in order to resolve disputes and live more peacefully (*Interview*, 247). Vieira does not hold back that working through personal differences and overcoming conflict was difficult; nevertheless, according to him, prisoners tried hard to create a respectful environment and eventually succeeded. This is an opinion shared by other former prisoners in a number of interviews and testimonies[33]. Reconsidering their experience retrospectively, almost no former incarcerated nationalist mentioned memories of conflict or divisions separating prisoners. On the contrary, most of those who shared their prison time with other activists, even with those belonging to different political movements, valued this experience as one that taught them the necessity of overcoming differences to work together in favour of a greater cause. The feeling of having lived through an extreme experience together—of having endured incarceration, exile, grief and deprivation and, yet, of having survived—brings them together in spite of the many things that once may have kept them apart. The sense of belonging to a community is renewed. There is also the awareness that their sacrifice was necessary in the context of the liberation struggle and that it contributed to the process that culminated in the

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[33] See, for example, the interviews with former Angolan inmates at Tarrafal collected by João Vicente Lopes for his book *Tarrafal-Chão Bom. Memórias e verdades* (2012a; 2012b), or the testimonies gathered in the documentary *Tarrafal: Memórias do Campo da Morte Lenta* (2011), by Diana Andringa.

country's independence, which is considered always a supreme value. Small conflicts, then, are possibly forgotten in favour of a narrative that privileges the achievement of a greater good.

In the specific case of José Luandino Vieira, taking into consideration the small incongruences between the discourse of the past and that of the present means also acknowledging a substantial difference between the project behind the writing of the notebooks and that which led to the publication of *Papéis* in 2015. As I have already mentioned, the notebooks that Vieira kept during his prison time responded to the different demands and needs of the incarcerated writer—including that of venting his disappointment or gathering literary material—but they were not meant to be printed or divulged, and they did not have a defined addressee apart from Vieira himself. In contrast, the publication of *Papéis* clearly presupposes the existence of a public: in this case, not only do Vieira's prison writings give voice to the incarcerated community—speaking 'for', or on behalf of someone—but they also speak 'to' someone, that is, they identify a public to which it directs its message (Larson 2017, 69). Ideally, apart from literary and history scholars, this public comprises all the members of the Angolan national community since, as Larson observes, the prison text "asks us to consider our place as citizens" (Ibid., 29).

When considering the impact of the publication of *Papéis*, Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Concept of History* (1940) come to mind. According to the philosopher, the meaning of the past is transformed when read in the light of the present, or better, when read through a dialectical image that combines both the past and the present. Escaping a conception of history based on the idea of progress and on homogeneous, empty time[34], Benjamin claimed that a true understanding

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[34] Empty homogeneous time is described by Benjamin as the time of capitalist modernity. As Partha Chatterjee explains, "empty homogeneous time is the time of capital. Within its domain, capital allows for no resistance to its free movement. When it encounters an impediment, it thinks it has encountered another time-something out of pre-capital, something that belongs to the pre-modern. Such resistances to capital (or to modernity) are, therefore,

of the past can be achieved by getting hold of images that flash up at a moment of danger and quickly disappear (2007, 255). Rather than describing the past 'the way it really was', these images, condensed in "constellations in which different temporalities collide" (Rothberg 2009, 44), offer unique insights into the tensions that crossed the past and grant access to a more complete and revolutionary understanding of it. Reading through these images, one can also find a means to redeem the past and change the present: in fact, according to Benjamin's messianic conception of history, "the relation between today and yesterday is not a unilateral one: in an eminently dialectical process, the present illumines the past and the illumined past becomes a force in the present" (Löwy 2005, 39). Recovering the experience of the past, that is the experience of Angolan nationalists and their strenuous resistance to colonial incarceration, *Papéis* "fans a spark of hope" into the present, to use an image taken from Benjamin's fifth thesis (2007, 255), an image which remembers closely Vieira's own discourse about the motivation that urged him to publish his prison notebooks. *Papéis* calls for the reappreciation of an historical moment and it does it at a time when the tiny spark hidden in the book can be kindled without hindrance and, hopefully, lead to real changes.

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understood as coming out of humanity's past, something people should have left behind but somehow have not" (2005, 399).

PART V

IN CONFINEMENT

COUNTER-DISCIPLINE

Once that I have clarified the circumstances around the publication of *Papéis* and appointed some of the impact it may have in the rewriting of Angolan history, it is necessary to take a closer look at the circumstances linked to the creation of the original notebooks. This involves considering the environment in which they were written. In the 1960s, sociologist Erving Goffman described these prisons and other prison-like institutions—such as asylums, orphanages, migrant detention camps etc.—as 'total institutions', that is places "where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (1991, 11). In just a few words, the definition identifies three basic axes around which the life of an inmate necessarily revolves: time, space and consistent surveillance under the watchful eyes of some kind of authorities. The limitations imposed by the combination of these elements affect inmates strongly, causing violent repercussions at various levels, even admitting that in some cases the actual use of force and physical violence may be limited.

Individuals entering a total institution pass through a series of highly distressing and mortifying procedures that tend to disconcert and disorient them, depriving them of fundamental points of reference, and threatening the conception they have of themselves. Among such

practices, Goffman mentions "photographing, weighing, fingerprinting, assigning numbers, searching, listing personal possessions for storage, undressing, bathing, disinfecting, haircutting, issuing institutional clothing, instructing as to rules, and assigning to quarters" (Ibid. 25). Apart from admission procedures, inmates are exposed to various degrees of what Goffman calls 'contamination' throughout their daily life (Ibid., 31). In prison, contamination operates both on a physical level—poor living conditions, reduced spaces, soiled food, low hygiene, shared toilets, etc.[1]—and on a more intimate one, as the inmates' privacy is repeatedly invaded, their correspondence violated and censored, their relationships scrutinised. The aim of the total institution is to intervene on both the inmate's body and mind, to shape him or her "into an object that can be fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment, to be worked on smoothly by routine operations (Ibid. 25–26)". In order to create docile and disciplined bodies that can be worked on smoothly, total institutions act according to the punishment-reward principle: the more prisoners collaborate with the authorities, the more privileges they will obtain. Non-cooperation—or, worse, rebellion—is violently repressed.

Nevertheless, many inmates choose not to comply to institutional rules, or they just pretend to comply to them, while making conscious efforts to overcome the destabilisation to which they are subjected. Total institutions are constantly challenged by inmates, both by individuals and groups and collectives, who struggle to open breaches in the system. I am not referring just to

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[1] In Vieira's second prison notebook, one finds the description of the living conditions common-law prisoners had to endure in the Pavilhão Prisional da PIDE in Luanda: "13-1-63 […] vou copiar as condições de vida na cela 2, seg. Gan. A cela 2 tem actualmente 11 camas individuais, o espaço no máximo é para 12 camas indiv., portanto, 12 indivíduos. Há actualmente 30 a viver (!) lá e o máximo que lá houve foram 40! Há 2 casas de banho com WC e chuveiro e uma grande bacia de lavar com 2 metros de comprido aprox. Passo a copiar: 'Aqui as pessoas dormem no chão e cada cama leva 2 ou 3 pessoas, menos a minha. A distribuição da comida é feita no chão, mesmo ali no corredor [...]. Comer é em cima das malas de madeira que está(ão) nas celas que já passaste. As malas que cá estão não chegam para toda a gente, visto que só tem 9 malas. Percevejos é demais aqui, tanto como mosquitos. Os colchões estão já velhos e produzem um pó que só pode dar-nos T.P. [tuberculose]'" (*Papéis*, 94—95).

striking acts of open dissent, but rather to small, hidden acts that nonetheless intend to contrast the hegemonic power exercised by prison authorities. These can be interpreted as acts of strategic resistance, because resistance here is a means to achieve something, and not necessarily an end in itself (Buntman 2003, 128). Goffman describes these practices as 'secondary adjustments', that is, practices that "provide the inmate with important evidence that he is still his own man, with some control of his environment; sometimes a secondary adjustment becomes almost a kind of lodgement for the self, a *churinga* in which the soul is felt to reside" (1991, 56). Although they might not have any noteworthy impact on the system as a whole—and, sometimes, they might even result in loss of privileges for the inmate—such 'adjustments' are of major importance for those who practice them, for they help to restore a sense of self[2]. They are not less valuable nor less difficult to put into practice than acts of open rebellion, and they demand perseverance and patience[3].

I place Vieira's prison notebooks in the spectrum of these secret but powerful acts. His dedication to writing in prison testifies to his determination to resist the subjugation of his body and mind, and to cultivate an intimate and personal space—the space of writing—far from any surveillance or control. Vieira seems to have been deeply conscious of this strategy and he expresses it quite clearly in his notebooks. On March 19, 1963, he writes:

[2] While some researchers are sceptical about the utility of prisoners' small acts of resistance, others remember that, regardless of their outcome, these acts prove that prisoners are not passive recipients of disciplinary power. For an accurate literature review on this argument, see: Rubin 2017a, 2017b.

[3] Describing the practices that she encountered in her study on Robben Island prisoners, Buntman says that "what strategic resistance did demand, or at least this was the interpretation of its practitioners, was that prisoners attempt to create a trucelike situation with the authorities in order to create the space for organizational development within and beyond the prison" (2003, 129). In this regard, notice how Vieira tried to patiently gain the confidence of some of the prison authorities. This allowed him to move more freely, and even to write things that he could not have written in the letters to his wife.

> Agora nesta alienação da prisão, vivo intensamente cada segundo da própria alienação, tentando nunca a perder de vista, nunca me deixar enredar nela, «fazer o que quero, daquilo que eles querem fazer de mim»… Mas esta «experiência» vai dar frutos. Sinto uma capacidade cada vez aumentada de captação da vida, mesmo nas mínimas manifestações, uma predisposição cada vez maior à atenção compreensiva do que se passa à minha volta (eu dantes era muito «distraído», superficial) há um aprofundamento gradual da minha capacidade de perceber a vida e as suas manifestações. (*Papéis*, 101)

Writing and collecting material for his future literary projects allowed Vieira to overcome alienation and face his time in prison as something that would bear fruits. Moreover, by incorporating the habit of writing within his daily routine in prison, he created his own counter-discipline to oppose the disciplinary power he was subjected to. It is likely that disciplinary power had some sort of impact on him anyway, and Vieira himself claimed that prison had somehow tamed him (*Interview*, 242). In this regard, it is interesting to notice how Leigh Gilmore (2001) identifies a connection between the practice of life-writing in traumatic contexts and the embodiment of disciplinary procedures:

> As Foucault suggested in his example of the Panopticon, the development of a self capable of scrutinizing its actions is an ambivalent legacy of the Enlightenment for it describes not only the rational self formed through self-regulation but also the prisoner who, through subjection to surveillance, learns to monitor himself. […] The self who reflects on his or her life is not wholly unlike the self bound to confess

> or the self in prison, if one imagines self-representation as a kind of self-monitoring. (2001, 20)

In this light, and according to the critic, the practice of life writing could then be seen as "a discipline, a self-study in surveillance" (Ibid.).

I will return later to discussing *Papéis* as Vieira's experiment in life-writing; for now, I would like to point out that, during his years in prison, the notebooks had for the author a different value and a different function with respect to his literary works, also because they were never supposed to be published. Indeed, it is impossible to reduce the notebooks to one single function or purpose, as the motivations behind their writing are as diverse as their content. It is not surprising to see how even Vieira, when he interrogated himself about the reasons that made him write, was not able to come to a clear conclusion: "3/7[1970] Mas se não escrevo mais para quê estes apontamentos? [...] Será que esquecerei? (*Papéis*, 959)". Questioned about the value that the material collected in the notebook had for him, Vieira replied that

> para ser sincero, era material literário. Porque no fundo de todo, mesmo lá quando chegava ao fundo de mim, a conversar com o António Jacinto à volta do campo, eu chegava sempre à conclusão que a única coisa que eu posso dizer que sou é escritor. (*Interview*, 227)

Vieira was determined to write literary works that would show the liveliness and uniqueness of Angolan culture, thus contributing to shape a national culture and, eventually, serving the greater purpose of the independence of Angola. In the interview included in *Papéis*, Vieira affirms:

> uma coisa que posso dizer era que havia uma determinação de ser fiel ao projeto de escritor com que tinha entrado na cadeia. Não era ser um grande escritor; mas era, através da literatura e da minha formação como escritor, contribuir para a independência de Angola no sentido muito amplo da independência. Não era a independência só política, era a contribuição cultural para uma identidade nacional, para uma consciência nacional, para aqueles valores que segundo certas teorias enformam a nação. (in Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1050)

Also because of this, the preoccupation with the overcoming of colonialism and the construction of a more equal society in Angola emerge as recurrent themes of the notebooks.

Pavilhão Prisional de Luanda: Caderno 1

The first entry of *Papéis* dates to October 10, 1962 and begins as follows:

> A *[Sociedade Agrícola do. Cassequel]* ocupou na região do [*rio*] Catumbela todas as áreas disponíveis (na vila ou fora da vila) e todas as propriedades dos nativos legalmente constituídas ao abrigo do direito consuetudinário. Assim milhares de nativos ficaram sem as suas propriedades, algumas das quais constituíam herança de antepassados. Isto obrigou todos os nativos da Catumbela a trabalhar para a Cassequel, quer quisessem quer não ou a procurarem trabalho em sítios distantes. (*Papéis*, 41)

The account goes on giving more information on how the agricultural society leads its business in the region of the Catumbela river, and it takes the reader straight into the frame of exploitation of

natives' land and manpower that characterised late Portuguese colonialism in Angola. The provenance of the report is unclear; however, it is possibly the copy of a document that circulated secretly in the networks created by nationalist prisoners. These networks had a great impact on prisoners' lives and on the survival of the liberation movement in prison. Based on solidarity, their first aim was to help prisoners, for example delivering basic provisions as cigarettes, clothes, food, etc., to those in need. Moreover, they worked as secret channels for exchanging messages and information—both with people inside and outside of prison—and to provide for prisoners' education. In fact, among other things, these networks were also responsible for organising study sessions on different subjects, or literacy classes for those who could not write nor read. It is not a coincidence that, talking retrospectively about their experience in prison, many prisoners use the word 'university' to describe it[4].

It is significant that Vieira initiates his notebooks copying a report that denounces how the joint action of the state and private enterprises affected the life of natives in Angola. This beginning sets the tone of the writing and defines some of Vieira's priorities: *Papéis* is, in all its aspects, an act of accusation of colonialism and of colonial mentality. The notebooks written in different

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[4] For example, Dikgang Moseneke, member of the Pan-African Congress and former prisoner at Robben Island, declared that, thanks to their dedication to education, political prisoners were able to wipe out illiteracy within their group in just three or four years in prison. However, they did not stop there and, "as we moved on, we issued little wonderful certificates for every step that [*a prisoner*] would have passed, the heading always being 'The University of Robben Island'" (Buntman 2003, 63). Similarly, Manuel Pedro Pacavira, former Angolan prisoner at Tarrafal prison camp, declared that Tarrafal was for him "a university, a school". Besides the anguish he experienced there, he had the chance to improve himself, improve his culture and formation (Lopes 2012b, 114). Irina Dumitrescu observes how in Romania "some writers of prison memoirs do describe the experience as a university: Stanciu Stroia titles his prison memoir *My Second University*, while Petre Pandrea, imprisoned at Aiud, calls the penitentiary 'the last university I graduated from, as a vagabond and eternal student'"(2016, 20). The association prison-university—which, seen its diffusion, can be regarded as another *topos* of prison literature—often has a political connotation, as it was in prison that many incarcerated men and women developed or radicalised their political consciousness, especially through contact with more politicised militants.

prisons of Luanda[5] between October 10, 1962 and July 31, 1964 (*Caderno 1* to *Caderno 10*)[6], are also an account of the first years of the war in Angola and of how the colonial machine tried to crush the movements fighting for independence. Vieira can be defined a privileged observer of such phenomena: the prisons of Luanda allowed for an extensive view over state violence as prisoners from all over the country converged there. Some even spread information on the war techniques used by the Portuguese colonial troops[7]. Only a few pages after the beginning of *Caderno 1*, a fragment shows how a group of people coming from the north of Angola was brought to Luanda and incarcerated, while others—notably, young males—were simply murdered:

> 2-11-62 [...] Entrou uma grande leva de presos, vindos de Beça Monteiro. Alguns a K. [8] viu-os eram aqueles velhotes todos. São só velhos, mulheres e crianças! (Os novos não os apanham e se apanham, matam). Em cada grupo para identificação geralmente só um sabe (!) português e é intérprete. Os outros não sabem (!). Ler e escrever, ninguém! O Waldemar pergunta pela profissão e dão a resposta «trabalhar com a catana». Talvez escreva «trabalhador agrícola», talvez escreva «terrorista». Mas o que escreve, que eu vi, é: «motivo da prisão: atividades subversivas contra a

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[5] While in Luanda, Vieira, Jacinto and Cardoso were held at different prison establishments, namely: Pavilhão Prisional da PIDE; Cadeia do Comando da Polícia de Segurança Pública (PSP); Cadeia Comarcã de Luanda. For more information, see: Ribeiro, Silva and Vecchi 2015, 33.

[6] They are actually nine notebooks, since the author committed an error in the numeration and *Caderno* 8 is missing. See: Ribeiro, Silva and Vecchi 2015, 34.

[7] See, for example, the note that Vieira receives from one of his fellow prisoners on January 1963: "O Pedro, com aquele seu ar magoado, tem-me contado coisas extraordinárias da tropa. Diz que, quando sair daqui, não tem para onde ir, porque as sanzalas do Zongo foram todas queimadas, depois de roubarem o dinheiro e as máquinas – não sei bem a que chama ele máquinas – e de terem matado todas as pessoas que apanharam. Aqueles que caíram na asneira de se esconder dentro das palhotas – ele chama casas – (homens, mulheres e crianças) foram mortos. Já me descreveu algumas mortes de mulheres, com balas atiradas ao sexo. É isto, com certeza, a recuperação psico-social!!!" (*Papéis*, 89–90). See also the document intitled "Notas para um relátorio sobre o distrito do Moxico" (*Papéis*, 201–8), which denounces the army's attacks against the local population, including sexual violence on children and young women.

[8] Vieira's wife is identified through *Papéis* with the capital letters L. and/or K.

> segurança exterior do Estado»! * Mulheres, velhos, crianças nuas e raquíticas e velhos como os que viste! (*Papéis*, 51)

Since the beginning of the war in 1961, the north of the country had been the main scene of military operations and guerrilla attacks. Unprepared to fight against an elusive enemy who attacked in ambushes and whose moves were difficult to foresee, the Portuguese colonial troops tried to make a clean sweep of the area. The aim was to deprive guerrilla of the support of villages, on which they relied for food and other provisions[9]; the inhabitants of those villages were either exterminated or incarcerated, often without any proof of their involvement in criminal or political activities, and without the chance to get proper defense. This policy of repression resulted in the constant threaten of criminalisation for a large part of the population of Angola: civilians—women, old people and naked, rickety children—who could be punished arbitrarily. *Papéis* registers their presence in the prisons of Luanda, calling our attention to the fact that common people were arrested as political prisoners and suffered for the cause of independence, although what the narrative about the liberation usually remembers just the experiences of nationalist movements' leaders or those of guerrilla fighters.

L./K.

The fragment about the incarceration of the group coming from Bessa Monteiro is interesting also because it indicates the presence of a direct reader with whom Vieira converses and reflects on

[9] There is clear evidence that to accomplish this mission many native settlements were bombed, sometimes using napalm. In this regard, see: Birmingham 2015; Marcum 1978, II:172; Davidson 1973.

what he sees and experiences in prison. The verb in the second singular person (*como os que viste!*) and other details in the text mark the first appearance of one of the most important figures of *Papéis*, that is, the author's wife Linda. Identified through *Papéis* with the capital letters L. and⁄or K.[10], she helped to smuggle the notebooks out of prison and hid them, becoming also their first reader. L./K. is the mute interlocutor of a dialogue that Vieira establishes with her in the notebooks, especially in those written in Luanda. Unlike the correspondence between them, which was read by the authorities and often censored, the underground notebooks allowed for free expression and permitted to keep alive the particular kind of relationship Vieira had with his wife, 'a relationship for the future', as they used to call it (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1046). Following Vieira's relocation from one Luanda prison to the other, before and after his trial, the discourse between the two lovers evolves, both in the notebooks and during regular prison visits. Sometimes, it is a discourse marked by a feeling of absence and anguish, but in many other occasions the references to L./K. give strength, courage and hope to the writer. It is K., for example, who encourages Vieira to challenge the guards to preserve his dignity performing a little act of resistance, that is, avoiding standing up when an official entered the cell as a sign of respect: "18-1-63 A K. hoje fez-me prometer uma coisa boa, que não levanto mais o mataco quando os cães passarem…" (*Papéis*, 100).

The presence of such a privileged addressee in the notebooks is suggested also by a few drawings that Vieira made just to make his wife smile[11], or by fragments in which he asks her to

[10] The choice to identify his wife's name with the letters L./K. has been made by Vieira at the moment of the publication of *Papéis*. In the original notebooks, the two letters corresponded respectively to the name Linda and to a nickname that Vieira preferred not to reveal to the public.
[11] For more examples, see the fragments written on June 17 and 22, 1963, in *Papéis* 333—36.

help some other prisoner by delivering messages, etc.[12]. For Vieira, L./K. is many things at the same time: she is his partner in love, his comrade in the political struggle, the mother of his child, his first reader and critic. The progress of his literary works is always shared with L./K. and to her are dedicated most of Vieira's prison works. "All of Luandino's works are yours, L." (*Papéis*, 150), writes Vieira on February 18, 1963. In *Papéis*, there are several fragments that show how eager Vieira is for the next visit with L./K., when he will be able to offer her a new short story[13]. Sometimes, literary works are offered as a kind of present, as it happens on the day of their anniversary:

> 1-9-63 Fez hoje 3 anos o nosso casamento. Festejámos muito bem com uma boa visita e muita calma alegria temperada pela tristeza inevitável porque é esse um elemento de felicidade e sem ela não se avança. Oferecemo-nos um belo livro «A Odisseia» – 20 anos errou longe da pátria Ulisses e 20 anos Penélope o esperou... Fiz uma surpresa à K. que lhe deu a alegria que eu já sabia: a novela «o ladrão e o papagaio». Um dia feliz. (*Papéis*, 354)

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[12] In this regard, see the entry dated May 22, 1963: together with the note in which a prisoner writes down the information he was forced to reveal during a PIDE interrogation, Vieira attaches a note addressed to L./K. in which he asks her to copy the message and get in touch with the people involved. See: *Papéis*, 306.
[13] See, for example, *Papéis* 102; 116; 137.

The work mentioned in this fragment, "*Estória do ladrão e do papagaio*", is one of the three short stories (*estórias*[14]) included in the collection *Luuanda*, certainly Vieira's best-known work[15]. L./K. participated in all the phases of the creation of *Luuanda*: she approved the original idea that emerged in the Pavilhão Prisional da Pide, typed some copies and sent them to literary prizes[16], and finally shared her husband's gratification when the book started to be praised by critics.

[14] In Portuguese, there is a subtle but substantial difference between the words *história* and *estória*: they both convey the general meaning of story (meant as fictional narrative), but while the first one is also used to talk of official history, the second one alludes to "a narrative of popular and traditional origin" (Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa, São Paulo: Editora Objetiva, 2006). Luandino chooses the word *estória* to define his narratives, which are created under the sign of orality, a hallmark of traditional Angolan narratives. However, notice that in the fragment of September 1, 1963 the work is still described as a 'novella'. It was the encounter with João Guimarães Rosa's literature that made him change his mind and opt for the word *estória*. As Vieira declared: "I had written these stories when a friend of mine […] brought me work by what he termed a 'great Brazilian writer'. He gave me the book, Sagarana, by Guimarães Rosa, where I saw written the word I had chosen to call my novellas. They were not actually novellas […] and they had a form totally connected to orality. The word was 'estória' […] I finally had a way of designating my type of narrative" (in M. C. Ribeiro 2010b, 32).

[15] The circumstances around the publication of *Luuanda*—including the scandal that followed the award given by the *Sociedade Portuguesa de Escritores*—have been described in detail by several critics, among which Castelo 1995; M. C. Ribeiro 2010a, 2010b; Chaves 2014; Topa 2014b.

[16] Excerpts of correspondence exchanged between Vieira and his wife when the former was imprisoned at Tarrafal show that L./K. never stopped helping her husband with the publication of his literary work. In a letter dated October 19, 1965, for instance, Vieira asks his wife to correct part of the song in Kimbundu included in the short story "Mestre Gil, o Sobral e o Barril", which had been published in the journal *Mensagem*, linked to the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império*. See: PIDE⁄DGS, CTCB, PC 34, NT 4, 336.

Drawing by José Luandino Vieira. No title (*Papéis*, 256)

With Vieira's transfer to Tarrafal, the dialogue established in the notebooks with L./K. is interrupted. Years of distance and scarce communication, and only three visits in eight years, do not efface Linda from the pages of *Papéis*, but turn her into a remote, inaccessible, almost ghost-like presence. Vieira and his wife continued to communicate through the letters and telegrams they exchanged, some of which are included in *Papéis*. However, soon after his arrival at the camp, Vieira realised he was becoming more brusque and distant in his letters to L./K.: "30-IX[-1964] […] Reparo que estou ficando mais seco nas cartas para a K. // É da vida, do ambiente, da separação..." (*Papéis*, 572). With the passing of time, the distance between them was inevitably bound to increase. Correspondence was allowed only every fifteen days and had to go through censorship[17]. Besides, at least since 1966, Vieira was sometimes completely deprived of the dialogue with L./K.: many of her letters went lost or arrived without the money they originally included, or were delivered with tremendous delays. Exhausted by the situation, Vieira finally asked his wife to communicate only by telegrams[18]. The letter in which he communicated his decision to Linda was, implicitly, also addressed to the censors and it exhibited a clear political tone, even if it treated an intimate issue such as the correspondence between a couple forced to live apart[19]:

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[17] On the limitations imposed to prisoners' correspondence at Tarrafal, see: Barros 2009, 160–61.
[18] Vieira's files at the national Portuguese archive "Torre do Tombo" include several excerpts of letters and telegrams exchanged between Vieira and his wife, in which they discuss the consuming habit of seeing their correspondence constantly violated and intercepted. More than once, the couple seriously discussed of the possibility of cutting all communications. See: PIDE⁄DGS, Del A., Sec. 964 NT. 970.
[19] This is a problem shared by a vast number of prisoners, whose privacy is constantly violated. Notice how Antonio Gramsci described the letters he wrote to his family from prison as "public letters" (Gramsci 1965, 536), since he knew that censors carefully sifted through them. According to Cospito, Gramsci's notebooks resent from this same awareness and, because of it, their writing is marked by allusions and insinuations when it makes reference to "people, works and facts related to the Italian and international workers' movement" (2015, 36). Personal names, for example, are often identifiable only by their initials, revealing how Gramsci intended to pass on his messages without being understood by the police.

> Não creio que te surpreenda muito o meu telegrama pedindo-te que me não escrevas mais. Mas é possível que te custe bastante «obedecer» a esse meu pedido sabendo como bem sabes, o que a tua correspondência vale para mim. Mas como parece que ela tem outro valor para outrem, eu não gosto de coisas partilhadas deste modo. [...] Custará muito, doerá muito, mas dói muito mais dar satisfação aos nossos inimigos. E mesmo sem notícias e com visitas problemáticas a vida andará. Não é pela vontade dos homens que ela tem andado até onde andou já. Quero eu dizer: de certos homens. [...] Não é possível viver em tempos destes sem estes casos. A honestidade é paga pelo preço que antes se exigia aos grandes criminosos. Sinal evidente que «um anjo virá com uma trombeta» como disse S. João no seu apocalipse. Se não virmos esse dia, o Xexe o verá. E a nós restar-nos-á a ínfima mas legítima alegria humana de mesmo depois de convertidos em vermes que a terra albergará, irmos roendo as terras sob os pés dos tiranos de todo o mundo, que aluirão. (*Papéis*, 774–78)

Imposing strict limitations to inmates' correspondence was yet another means for the camp authorities to reaffirm their power and surveillance over the inmates, who could be induced to behave under the threat of a suspension of the right to correspond with family and friends. Moreover, all letters were considered a source of potential valuable information and could be used by the authorities to find hints of the involvement of the inmate—or of people close to him—in 'criminal' activities. In this context, Vieira's decision to renounce to his intimate correspondence can be considered as another form of opposition to the attempts to bend him, as he refused to comply with prison protocol, although this implied further separation from his dearest ones.

Indeed, Vieira's relationship with his wife was not the only thing that changes with his transfer to Tarrafal. On the contrary, his experience of incarceration in Luanda and in Tarrafal differ on so many aspects that rather than a mere passage from one place of detention to the other, the dislocation to Cabo Verde reflects a deep change in Vieira's life.

TARRAFAL

Situated in the island of Santiago, in the small and sparsely populated archipelago of Cabo Verde, the camp of Tarrafal had been vehemently desired by Portuguese authorities since the instauration of the dictatorship. The project to establish a special prison on an island in the Atlantic Ocean was announced as early as 1933 (Barros 2009, 33), showing how pressing a matter this was for the newly established Estado Novo. Only three years after, the first political prisoners were shipped to the remote locality of Tarrafal, in the northern part of the island of Santiago, where they were forced to build the camp infrastructure themselves, while being housed in tarpaulin tents (Ibid., 89). The project responded to the necessity of separating— temporarily or permanently—political opponents of the regime from the social and political contexts to which they belonged (Ibid., 79). The punishment added geographical isolation and exile to detention, thus exacerbating the inmate's rupture with his environment of origin. Banished from their milieu, removed from their country, prisoners saw their social and political relationships dissolve, and experienced a sort of political and civic death (Ibid., 28).

From 1936 to 1954, the prison camp in Tarrafal worked under the official name of Colónia Penal do Tarrafal and received more than three hundred, mostly Portuguese[20], political prisoners, including anarchists, communists, socialists, anti-fascists, trade-unionists and other opponents of the regime (Lopes 2012a, 13). This first phase of the camp was particularly harsh, both because of the almost absolute lack of medical assistance and basic infrastructure, such as water and sewage supply, but also because prisoners often suffered physical punishments. The *frigideira* (frying pan), a special isolation cell, became the symbol of the violence prisoners had to endure: the cell consisted in a cube of five meters length and four meters width, made of reinforced concrete and covered by a metal foil, where, "in the hottest moments of the day, the temperature reached fifty degrees Celsius, enough to 'fry' whoever happened to be there" (Lopes 2012a, 14). Due to the very poor living conditions, at least thirty-two prisoners died in Tarrafal[21], and the penal colony began to be known by the name of 'the slow-death camp'[22]. Concurrently, however, the name Tarrafal became a symbol of the opposition to the regime and it was associated to political resistance to the point that, in the 1940s, a Lisbon-based collective of anti-fascists published a clandestine bulletin whose title was precisely *Tarrafal*[23]. The spectre of Tarrafal haunted Portuguese politics so that, during the 1950s, the regime—which, by then, was firmly anchored to power and had the opposition under control —decided to close the penal colony. In 1954, the last prisoners left Cabo Verde (Barros 2009, 95). The process of closure was accelerated by the

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[20] Among them, there were also a few inmates of different nationalities. As Lopes recalls, between 1936 and 1945, two Germans, two Spanish, an Italian, two Poles and a Lithuanian were incarcerated at Tarrafal (2012a, 13–14).
[21] The number is uncertain. Lopes counts thirty-three Portuguese graves in the cemetery next to the camp and includes in the number of deaths also that of an Angolan guard who died of tetanus (2012a, 13).
[22] The appellation was recovered by documentarist Adriana Andringa for the title of her documentary on the camp, *Tarrafal: Memórias do Campo da Morte Lenta* (2011).
[23] For copies of the bulletin, see: Fundação Mário Soares, n.d.

sustained pressions of the international public opinion, shocked by the fact that Portugal could recur to repressive measures that remembered too closely some of the horrors of World War II (Barros 2009, 92).

With the beginning of the war in Angola in 1961, however, the regime resolved reopening the camp to imprison African nationalists. In February 1962, the first Angolan prisoners arrived at the camp. Many of them were part of the so-called group of the '*Processo dos 50*'[24] and had been incarcerated at the very beginning of the liberation war. Months after their arrival, the Angolans were joined by a large group of Guinean prisoners[25]. In the following years, several waves of new prisoners from Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde were sent to the camp; meanwhile, other prisoners were released or transferred[26] to other establishments[27]. In this second phase of its existence, Tarrafal became a sort of elite prison camp: since the camp capacity was limited, it received mainly prisoners considered to have prominent roles in the nationalist movements (Lopes 2012a, 20) or prisoners that had been sentenced by a military court[28]. The regime intended to

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[24] Even if it went down in history by the name of '*Processo dos 50*', there were fifty-nine people actually involved in the trial (Mateus 2004, 116). The PIDE started a wave of arrests in 1959, incarcerating nationalists linked to different groups and organisations, who were then tried by the Military Tribunal of Luanda. Thirty-one of them would end at Tarrafal (Lopes 2012a, 33).

[25] Prisoners coming from different colonies—or provinces, as they were called at the time—experienced different living conditions. This depended on the fact that each province provided for the expenses of its own prisoners: the province of Angola, for example, granted 20 escudos per day for each prisoner, while the province of Guinea only granted 5 escudos per day. This influenced the quality and quantity of food, medicines and other goods that prisoners had at their disposal. Because of poor nutrition, at least two Guinean prisoners died in Tarrafal (Lopes 2012b, 167). As a whole, Guineans endured worse living conditions than Angolans; nevertheless, Guinean prisoners agree in saying that they were better off at Tarrafal than in Guinea (Ibid., 192).

[26] A total of 104 Angolans, 102 Guineans and 20 Cabo Verdean prisoners were incarcerated at Tarrafal between 1962 and 1974 (Lopes 2012a, 74). For entry and exit records, see: Mateus 2004; Barros 2009; Lopes 2012b.

[27] Even before the beginning of the colonial war, the regime had planned to build new prison establishments directly in the colonies. The closure of Tarrafal in 1956, for example, was counterbalanced by the opening of a penal colony in Bié, Angola (Barros 2009, 95). In Angola, at least two more concentration camps were opened after the war—São Nicolau and Missombo.

[28] There are some exceptions. In fact, some of the prisoners incarcerated at Tarrafal were never sentenced or even tried, as it happened to Manuel Pedro Pacavira, Vicente and Justino Pinto de Andrade, Juca Valentim, Jaime Cohen and Gilberto Saraiva de Carvalho among others. For more information, see: Lopes 2012b.

separate them from the less politicised prisoners who crowded jails and prisons in both Guinea-Bissau and Angola, thus neutralising their potential for spreading political ideals. Responding to a new strategy of discursive legitimisation of its power (Barros 2009, 98–99) and trying to avoid internal and external criticism, the regime changed the camp designation: from penal colony, it was converted into a labour camp, thus including a reference to work as a rehabilitative principle, which was so dear to the regime[29]. More important, the regime removed from the official name the ominous reference to Tarrafal[30].

Concentrationary Landscape

Officially baptised 'Campo de Trabalho de Chão Bom', from the name of a small village situated near the camp, the new denomination sounded somehow sadly ironic, since Chão Bom in Portuguese translates as 'good ground'. Not only did that 'good ground' host a fearsome prison, but it was also very representative of the Cabo Verdean landscape: arid, dusty and deserted. Considering that most prisoners were used to living in very different natural environments, the camp's surroundings had a deep, gloomy impact on them, especially during the phase of adaptation to the new conditions. This is how former Angolan prisoner João Fialho da Costa, incarcerated at

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[29] Besides the new official designation as a labour camp, African nationalists detained at Chão Bom spent most of their time in idleness, shut in their barracks, which was highly demotivating. Some former Angolan prisoners declared that they were subjected to forced labour, which consisted in moving rocks from one point to another within the camp's perimeter. Clearly the task had no useful purpose, apart from disciplining prisoners who, nonetheless, did not seem to be particularly bothered by it (Lopes 2012b, 24). According to Cabrita Mateus, "as a rule, prisoners did not work. They occupied their time with classes and reading what they could find" (2004, 128).

[30] Barros affirms that the Estado Novo tried to erase the image and memory of Tarrafal as a concentration camp (2009, 179–80). To support his statement, Barros brings two examples: the first is the case of two Swiss citizens whose request to visit the 'Concentration Camp of Tarrafal' was refused with the explanation that such a camp did not exist. The second is an article published by Alfredo Margarido on the French newspaper *Le Monde*, in which Margarido explains that "the Portuguese administration can affirm that the camp does not exist because both its designation and function have changed". In this regard, see also: Lopes 2012a, 27–28.

Tarrafal from 1962 to 1965, describes his first impressions on the arrival at Cabo Verde and the camp:

> Red soil, completely desert, not a single green leaf, the trees were all stripped off […]. 'Well, this is where we die', we said to ourselves. […] When we got to Tarrafal that was impressing. It was the time of the year in which trees lose their leaves, and the branches of the acacias looked as souls from the other world. They ordered us to take off our clothes and we entered the empty barrack completely naked. (Lopes 2012b, 17)

The landscape had a great impact on prisoners' morale, as the vastness and emptiness of the space that surrounded the camp reminded them of their complete isolation and incommunicability[31]. It could be said that the environment was part of their punishment. The location of the camp was appositely selected among a pool of options, as the area around Tarrafal met all the requirements for the establishment of a political prison (Barros 2009, 81). Among those requirements were the sparseness of local population, the impossibility of escaping and the isolation of the area—which was located in an already remote island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. These conditions were a "materialisation of the Estado Novo's repressive aims" since they imposed on prisoners "both a real and a symbolic corrective force" (Ibid., 81).

[31] In an interview granted to Alexandra Lucas Coelho, José Luandino Vieira spoke about his first impressions upon his arrival at Tarrafal: "Eu fiquei chocado. Era tudo muito seco, árido. Aquela montanha à volta, aquela planície, só com umas árvores muito esqueléticas, raquíticas, todas inclinadas para o mesmo lado, porque o vento as obriga. [...] Vínhamos de uma terra em que a vegetação é exuberante. Chegar ali e ver aquilo tudo seco... E via-se logo o isolamento. O campo estava isolado da povoação de Chão Bom e do Tarrafal. […]. Era deserto, isolado" (2009).

The surroundings of the camp appear frequently in the poems written at Tarrafal by António Jacinto, which were later included in the book *Sobreviver em Tarrafal de Santiago* (1982)[32]. Jacinto, who was tried together with José Luandino Vieira and António Cardoso, was a well-known Angolan poet and political activist[33]. A key figure in the cultural scene of Angola during the years that preceded the outburst of the war, he joined the movement *'Vamos descobrir Angola'* (Oliveira 1981, 315) and later the *Movimento dos Novos Intelectuais de Angola*, a group of poets "oriented towards the people, who used in their creations the symbolism that their own exuberant land offers" (Ervedosa 1974, 73). Instead of the exuberance of his own land, though, in his exile in Cabo Verde Jacinto recurred to the barren elements that composed Tarrafal carceral landscape. They came to acquire such relevance in the poet's imagination, that the first part of his book, called not by coincidence *Tarrafal em redor*[34], evoked the environment and the surrounding of the camp.

PAISAGEM CONCENTRACIONÁRIA

Esta é a forma imprecisa
fusão do céu e do mar
linha que não se divisa
nos limites da paisagem insular

O Pico do Fogo é um astro
satélite dos olhos meus
suspenso no ar com lastro
de nuvens:
enovelados algodoais

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[32] Henceforth called *Sobreviver*.

[33] António Jacinto was among the founders of the PCA (Angolan Communist Party) in 1955 and of PLUUA (Party for the United Struggle of the Africans in Angola) in 1956, which would later merge to create the MPLA (Bittencourt 1997). He was arrested for the first time in 1959 and released soon after; in November 1961 he was arrested again, tried by the Territorial Military Court of Angola and sentenced to fourteen years of prison, of which he served twelve.

[34] The other two sections of the book are called, quite significantly, "Tarrafal interior" and "Tarrafal lírico".

Gracioso, Malagueta e montes
casas de pedra que os trepam
são fronteiras a limitar
os limites deste sonhar

Poeta – este viver é incerto
sinta-se o homem liberto
só de meditar

No pensar que é vida que se estua
– a ilha continua.

C.T. Chão Bom, 19.4.66
(Jacinto 1982, 33)

The landscape beyond the barbed wire is intimately related to the experience that prisoners get of the camp. In the poem "*Paisagem concentracionária*", Jacinto describes the landscape of the island of Santiago as it looms over the poet: the mountains that surround the camp (Gracioso, Malagueta), the outline of the volcano in the nearby island of Fogo, the line of the sea, the houses of stone: they all seem connected to the poet's body and to his experience. At the same time, however, these elements are alien to his presence, as they stay there, immutable and indifferent to his life, which is consuming itself. The landscape of Tarrafal marks the limits of the poet's dreams, leaving him the only option of withdrawing into meditation to feel some freedom.

As *Sobreviver* proves, António Jacinto did not renounce to writing poetry while he was incarcerated; on the contrary, the title of his collection of prison poems suggests that poetry was crucial for his survival. However, comparing these poems with his previous compositions, there are some differences that stand out, and that can be associated to the circumstances and effects of the poet's incarceration. For example, if one considers some of the best-known poems that Jacinto

wrote before his arrest, such as “Castigo pro comboio malandro” or “O grande desafio”[35], it is possible to see how they all share common concerns and similar formal patterns. These poems could be described as ‘poems of denunciation’ or ‘social poems’, as they exposed the unfairness of social relations in Angola, the racial discrimination and oppression to which ample sectors of the population were subjected, which in the poem “Carta de um contratado” Jacinto epitomises in the two powerful images of forced labour and illiteracy. The poems Jacinto wrote before his arrest are mostly narrative poems (Mata 2012, 28), that is, they tell a story that unfolds under the eyes of the reader[36]. The narrative structure of these poems suggests a hybridisation of literary forms, as if traditional Angolan storytelling and folk tales met avant-garde poetry; moreover, the stories they tell are related mainly to the musseques, which were themselves spaces of hybridisation, both social and linguistic. Finally, even though sometimes the narrative poem is written in the first-person singular form,—such as in “Monangambe”, where the poet talks of “the sweat of my face” or of “my blood made into sap”—the subject of the enunciation does not coincide with the poet: in these poems Jacinto let voices other than his own emerge, the voices of those who were usually silenced by the politics of the colonial regime.

In confinement, however, the urge to write poetry combines both the will to condemn the repressive mechanisms of the State and the necessity to express the poet’s inner desperation. As Chiara Pieralli observes, in prison “poetry assumes a […] documentary status, even though it does not abandon the lyric urge of which it is the […] expression” (2017, 285). Jacinto’s prison poems are frames of moments of acute awareness that illuminate the dullness of life at Tarrafal, moments

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[35] All the poems mentioned here were collected in a book titled *Poemas*, which was issued in 1961 by the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império*, and whose cover was designed by José Luandino Vieira.

[36] At this regard, some titles are particularly evocative of the poet’s narrative intentions. Consider for example the title “Era uma vez…”, Portuguese idiom for ‘once upon a time’, or the poem “Pântano”, which makes the narrative intention explicit, as the title is followed by the description ‘story of a musseque’.

in which the poet casts a renewed gaze on his condition of incarceration. The poems collected in *Sobreviver* reveal the poets' intimate voice in a unique way: sometimes, this voice is declined in the first-person plural to include the experiences of the community of prisoners[37], but, ultimately, it always refers to an embodied experience. Moreover, the narrative form of Jacinto's previous works makes room for a more concise yet sharp structure, with one-word verses that, rather than telling a whole story, provide only flashes of experience. They are inextricably linked to the poet's own experience of incarceration, of which Jacinto provides all the details and coordinates in the poem "Jornada".

JORNADA

Cá vamos
Na nave espacial TERRA
A cento e oito mil quilómetros/hora
Em torno do Sol
Cá vamos
Em Santiago, Cabo Verde
Embarcados
Mais precisamente
No Tarrafal
No Campo de Trabalho de Chão Bom
Ou
Mais concreto
No pavilhão D
Caserna 2
Dos reclusos políticos de Angola
Cá vamos
A cento e oito mil quilómetros/hora
(Aventura cósmica
Insignificante na grandeza
De fazer humanidade!)
Cá vamos
Siderais Luas
Astronautas valentes
Sóis, Galáxias

[37] See, for example, the poem "Neste navio embarcado" (Jacinto 1982, 29).

Outras estradas de Santiago,
Cá vamos
Boa viagem! Boa viagem!

C.T.Chão Bom, 31.5.66

(Jacinto 1982, 35—6)

From the remoteness of outer space, Jacinto zooms in the island of Santiago, the prison camp of Tarrafal, the pavilion D, the barracks where Angolan political prisoners are locked up. Looking at the earth as if it was a spaceship on which humanity is embarked, the (symbolic) journey of those political prisoners may look like an insignificant cosmic adventure, but nonetheless they go forward, as courageous astronauts.

The reference to the space in this poem is interesting. As different fragments of Vieira's notebooks show[38], the observation of the sky was a common practice among prisoners at Tarrafal, for whom contemplating the firmament also meant getting a glimpse of freedom: "3-X [-*1965*] Domingo como todos os outros. Passou um veloz satélite às 18h10m que me fez ver maior o contraste entre as situações de liberdade e prisão" (*Papéis*, 717). Both Jacinto's poem and some fragments of Vieira's notebooks reveal that prisoners at Tarrafal, just like many of their contemporaries, were interested in the possibilities of outer space and fascinated by the technology that could finally allow for human exploration of the universe, which was seen as a sign of hope.

> Domingo, 20[-*7-1969*] * «Apolo-11» partiu a 16 para a Lua. Comandante Edwin Aldrin e mais Neil Armstrong e Michael Collins. Estão em órbita na Lua e às 10 (21h) hora de Cabo Verde (eu estarei a dormir?) Armstrong pisará o solo lunar seguido, 17m depois por Aldrin. Não posso evidentemente, calcular a importância

[38] See, for example, *Papéis* 581; 615; 717; 722.

> deste feito, desta data – só talvez dentro de 100 anos se terá a verdadeira perspectiva deste sonho e aventura: o homem nos outros planetas. (Se ainda houver, daqui a 100 anos, o homem e o seu planeta!...) Neste dia, ao escrever isto, o meu pensamento está no Xexe – são os da sua geração que voarão para os planetas! ... (« Homem: esta palavra soa orgulhosamente», disse Gorki. E, às vezes, é verdade. Felizmente é verdade). (Ibid., 905)

Another fragment about this topic reads like this: "3-9-65 Boa, do A. Jacinto, a propósito da chegada à Lua de astronautas: – O 1.º telegrama deles só diz: «Nada de surpreendente. É como Cabo Verde»" (Ibid., 711). The joke made by Jacinto and recorded by Vieira in his notebooks alludes once again to the specific concentrationary landscape that prisoners had to live in at Tarrafal, which was almost as barren as the moon. At the same time, it also shows how irony could be listed as yet another survival tactic to which prisoners recur to resist incarceration.

A CUTTING LINE

José Luandino Vieira, António Jacinto and António Cardoso arrived at Tarrafal in August 1964, after a journey of almost two weeks on board of the ship *Quanza*. Initially, the threesome was located in a separated cell[39] and was denied contact with other inmates, of whom they could catch

[39] They joined the other Angolan inmates only a month later: "11-IX-64 *[...]* Mudança para junto dos outros angolanos. Na maioria conhecidos da C.R.M. Instalações razoáveis. [...] fiquei no fundo da caserna junto ao Manuel Santos e Liceu V[ieira] Dias" (*Papéis*, 556).

but a brief glimpse. This is what Vieira wrote on his notebook on August 19, 1964, six days after his arrival at the camp:

> Por um buraco da porta, vi os angolanos. Impressão geral: boa. A maioria está mais gorda mas embora sem os ver tristes, vê-se bem que não há alegria interior em nenhum. Nem nos mais novos. Aliás os que têm melhor aspecto são os + velhos. [...] Parecem todos devidamente adaptados, mas sem alegria nenhuma. Domingo (16) à noite muito tempo cantaram as nossas cantigas mas nem uma alegre. Era dramática a maneira (e o tempo) como cantavam «Oí oí mama, Luanda fica longe». (*Papéis*, 549)

As *Papéis* shows, the arrival at the camp was marked by a feeling of disorientation and bafflement, and Vieira lived his first days there as if he was living a weird dream (Ibid., 548). However, with his usual clarity of mind, the author of *Papéis* proceeded to a thorough description of the camp, its structure, the plants and animals he saw there, the living conditions, the discipline imposed on prisoners, etc. Narrating and describing the environment are means through which he tried to make sense of the new reality that surrounded him and, patiently, come to terms with it. In spite of his efforts, however, Vieira soon realised how his deportation to Cabo Verde represented a point of rupture with his previous self:

> 19-08[*1964*] Mais adaptado vou caindo em mim. Aumentam as saudades de tudo, mas sobretudo a falta de notícias da K., rói-me por dentro. Sinto porém que, mesmo com elas, não serei mais o Zé da C.C.L. Quebrou-se na verdade, qualquer coisa de muito valioso em mim [...] (*Papéis*, 549)

The same feeling of loss, of having reached a point of no return, appears in António Jacinto's poem "Nuvem Passegeira", in which the author attests his own death, or at least the death of a part of himself: "Olho-me: / Serenamente / morri. // Alguém morreu de mim dentro. // Quem me morreu no meu eu?" (1982, 99). Whereas in Luanda, in spite of the poor living conditions and the brutality of the prison guards, Vieira and other inmates could claim to live "a total life" (*Interview*, 233), Tarrafal was a time of isolation and withdrawal. Far from their families, their country, the daily contact with their people, at Tarrafal prisoners were confined to a prison in themselves[40].

As Ribeiro and Vecchi suggest, *Papéis* is divided in two parts by a "cutting line" (2015a, 17) that coincides with the deportation to Tarrafal. It is interesting to notice how Vieira's writing, as a "sensitive film" (Ibid.), keeps traces of these changes and makes them visible in the form of the text. At Tarrafal, in fact, the text of the notebooks becomes drier and more concise; moreover, from January 1967 (*Caderno 15*), this change results also in a different format of writing, since entries suffer a process of further fragmentation: one single entry collects, in fact, different references to facts, people and thoughts, often expressed very schematically, with just a few words[41]. An example of a fragment that shows this process of internal fragmentation can help clarifying the matter:

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[40] As Vieira declared in an interview: "[...] enquanto nas prisões de Luanda o que funcionava era o sentimento nacional, a comunidade, porque o inimigo estava no exterior e, portanto, nós estávamos ali naquela comunidade nacional, no Tarrafal não havia o inimigo exterior. [...] Há o mar e o inimigo é a natureza contra a nossa condição de seres humanos. Ali estávamos isolados da nação, o que deu origem a que nos virássemos para dentro de nós. O Tarrafal é a prisão em mim. Virámo-nos para dentro" (in Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1049).

[41] The changes are the result of a combination of intentional and unintentional factors: on one side, the deportation to Cape Verde determined that Vieira concentrated his reflections and thoughts in the letters he wrote to his wife (*Interview*, 225). It has to be considered that writing correspondence was a regular practice for Vieira, who had developed a system which allowed him to write a few lines each day to be able to send extensive letters to his wife—and, occasionally, to other recipients—each fifteen days, in accordance to the camp's regulation. The practice of writing correspondence, therefore, partially responded to his urge to write and communicate.

> 5-11[-*1968*] – (1) Pensei noutro livro com: «O Regresso do Arcanjo»; «Nós os do Maculusso» e o «João Vêncio» – mas para quê, para quem? ‖ (2) Marav., Nelita – Falo-lhes, i.e. escrevo-lhes (até para a L.) como se de mim-morto falasse – é tudo «espólio» o que lhes digo e mando. Quando terás coragem para lhes confessares isso que calas desde 65/66 (e isto tudo é vanitas, vanitatum et omnia vanitas) ‖ (3) Mas esta necessidade de contar a alguém (nem que seja a mim mesmo) as minhas dores e alegrias é ainda juventude? ‖ (4) faltam dezanove meses para a idade-limite, a dos sonhos de infância – sucederá? («to sleep, to die, to rest»). (*Papéis*, 865)

If one compares this fragment with any fragment taken from the notebooks written in Luanda, the difference is striking. Whereas in the first nine notebooks it was more common to find long descriptions of situations or people, here it seems that thoughts are reduced to their essential character, to their minimum requirements, to pure clusters of meaning. Somehow, this process reminds the reader of António Jacinto and the changes his poetry went through with *Sobreviver*. One question then arises: is the fragmentation of the text and, more generally, of literary forms a consequence of enduring incarceration?

The Fragment and the Whole

Up to this point, I have consistently used the word 'fragment' to describe entries on José Luandino Vieira's prison notebooks. The choice of the word was in part motivated by the fact that the term is so versatile it covers the multiple forms that each entry can assume: whether the excerpt of a letter, a shred of newspaper or a few lines on the most diverse subject matter, the term fragment suits them all. Other motivations arise by looking at the etymology of the word. Fragment, in fact,

comes from the Latin verb *frangere*, meaning to break or shatter: not only does the term evoke "the violence of disintegration, dispersion and loss" (Susini-Anastopoulos 1997, 1), but it also suggest that fragments "can only exist in a state of plurality" (Elias 2004, 1). Each fragment is related to the others, for they were once parts of a larger unity: the dialectics between the part and the totality, the fragment and the whole, is then inscribed in the very roots of the word. *Frangere*, however, is also the origin of the word fragile: apart from disclosing the dialectic relation that links each single fragment to the whole, then, the etymology also reveals both the frailty and the power to endure of fragments. Fragments are parts of something that has been broken, something fragile, yet sufficiently unyielding to survive the moment of the break.

In their critical introduction to *Papéis*, Ribeiro and Vecchi (2015a) point out these characteristics of the fragment, while referring also to a long tradition of western literature—and of literary critique—built on fragmentary forms. Since the Romanticism and throughout the whole 20th century, in fact, the recourse to the fragment in literature was connected to modernity and a desire for the liberation of literary forms. Françoise Susini-Anastopoulos (1997, 2) reminds that this literary practice must be understood in the frame of a crisis that characterises modernity. Refusing the principle of cohesion, modern—and above all, modernist—writers turned to fragmentary forms not "for the purpose of intimidating or confusing a reader. Rather, the use of fragments [*was*] a measured and deliberate stylistic choice" (Bullard 2012, 12). Faced with the loss of the illusion of a complete, total and unitarian subject, authors recurred to fragmentation to represent a fissured modern consciousness and a world in disarray.

These considerations can be easily extended to the context of prison literature, since places of confinement work as devices that undermine prisoners' consciousness and sense of integrity by "destroying the unitarian perception of cognitive objects and […] of both the individual and the

collective microcosmos" (Agliardi 2012, 17). However, the recourse to fragments should not be interpreted exclusively as an aesthetic option, as it can also be the result of external coercive factors. Considering that texts written in prison are often written secretly, on precarious materials and under strict surveillance, fragmentation seems, if not inevitable, a very likely option. Brief and concise texts, which can be scribbled down quickly and stored safely, appear indeed to be most suitable. The brevity of the fragment, however, does not coincide with the depth of thoughts that motivates it, depth that remains in part unfathomable. Whereas devoted readers can grasp hidden layers of meaning by reading between the lines, part of the experience always stays inaccessible as the fragment is but "the emerging tip of what is left out of scene" (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015a, 14). In this regard, see the case mentioned by José Luandino Vieira, when he explains how a simple reference to food in his notebooks can allude to a complex and diverse series of practices that took place in the camp and involved several people, both prisoners and prison authorities. Referring to fragments in which he talks of eating a typical Angolan dish (*funje*) at Tarrafal, Vieira commented

> como é que os angolanos comiam funje? Também a história disso é preciso explicar. Tinha que haver um propósito: alguém fazia antes um requerimento ao diretor a pedir que como é o meu aniversário, para festejar, que nos permita que nós cozinhamos, nós batemos o milho... Mandámos vir o milho, batíamos o milho, fazíamos a farinha, depois fazíamos o funje. Lá nos davam a autorização para comprar um frango, depois assávamos o frango e aquilo dava para comer e cantar e conviver. Uma grande festa! Com um frango e um bocado de funje! Eu ponho essa nota, hoje comemos funje: essas palavras querem apenas dizer esse sentimento de conforto espiritual que era estar ali e comer funje, uma comida da nossa terra. (*Interview*, 238)

The notebooks do not disclose the totality of this experience, but they keep a trace of it. A trace that can be found in fragments that sometimes are reduced to one single line: "25-X [-*1965*] O espectáculo do comer da panela de funje" (*Papéis*, 720). Remnants of the experience of the camp, fragments are necessarily incomplete, imprecise, they are sharp objects "whose irregular angles seem to adjust perfectly to the imperfection of the world. Ultimately, the fragment is what remains of the camp" (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015a, 14). Within the carceral context, fragments of prisoners' writings emerge as minimal meaningful units of humanity in a space otherwise dominated only by the authorities' 'apparatus of writing'[42].

Whether intentional or determined by external factors (or whether a combination of both), fragmentation is a tendency that crosses all of Vieira's notebooks, and that is taken sometimes to its limits in some of the Tarrafal notebooks. However, another tendency crosses all the notebooks and stands in a dialectical relation with fragmentation: I am referring to Vieira's impulse to accumulation, which results in *Papéis* being a vast corpus made of tiny elements, a large-scale construction assembled out of the smallest and most precisely cut components, to quote Walter

[42] According to Michel Foucault, the shift towards a modern form of punishment based on the deprivation of liberty was associated to the emergence of an 'apparatus of writing' whose aim was to classify, and tame individuals subjected to disciplinary power. As he observes, this same power that "places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them. […] A 'power of writing' was constituted as an essential part in the mechanisms of discipline" (1995, 189). Prisoners' writings contrast this institutional kind of writing – intended as a support of bureaucracy and an effective force in the hands of authority.

Benjamin (2002, 461)[43]. Just like fragmentation, accumulation is both intentional[44] and related to the specific circumstances in which the notebooks were created. As Ribeiro and Vecchi observe, in *Papéis* the accumulation of fragments "produces a heavy impression of effective history, escaping the tangles of History while referring to the unstable and problematic act of witnessing" (2015a, 14). The form of the text gives the impression of a real, lived life, which the reader can follow day after day, as all fragments are properly dated. Paying attention to the dates, moreover, the reader can also question the silences and blank spaces that separate one fragment from the other, and that sometimes are reminders of the violence and the constraints of prison life[45].

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[43] Benjamin's own work was consistently made of fragments. This is true especially for *The Arcades Project* (written between 1927 and 1940) in which fragmentation is both an aesthetic option—as the author's method implied working with fragments, aphorisms and especially quotations—and a condition determined by external conditions. In 1940, in fact, Benjamin was still working at the *Arcades* when he was forced to leave France because of the German occupation. He eventually committed suicide at the French-Spanish border to avoid repatriation to Nazi hands, leaving *Arcardes* unfinished. The *Theses on the Concept of History* are another unfinished project and, in their author's intentions, they were not even intended for publication. As Michal Löwy claims, in 1940, not long before he died, "Benjamin gave or sent [*a draft of the work*] to a number of very close friends, such as Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno, but he stressed, in the letter to Gretel Adorno, that there was no question of publishing it, as 'that would throw wide open the doors to enthusiastic incomprehension'" (2005, 17).

[44] As Vieira declared, this is a tendency that had marked him since his adolescence, when he developed the mania of keeping things, papers, documents (*Interview*, 229).

[45] For example, notice how in 1968 Vieira did not write anything on his notebooks for almost two months, soon after reporting the news of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (*Papéis*, 862). Although it is not possible to ascertain the causes of Vieira's silence nor to ascribe it to this particular event, the news of the invasion certainly had a deep and sober impact on him, and left him mourning the death of a political ideal. The impact of the news was worsened by the circumstances of prison life and the author's own lack of freedom, as one can read in this excerpt of a letter Vieira sent to his wife soon after the event: "Recebo o pequeno jornal local e leio a invasão da Checoslováquia pela URSS e outros países do Pacto de Varsóvia. Não percebo nada de política, não sei o que são 'imperativos políticos' mas aprendi um pouco já o que são outros imperativos. Linda: é sobre a dificuldade de ser homem, a dificuldade de o homem perante as suas ideias e os seus actos, esse desfazamento entre os fins e os meios, a nossa triste época, que eu ando a reflectir de há muito e hoje com muito mais dor e dificuldade. *Não posso ao menos, como em 56, vadiar pelas mesas dos cafés, estúpido a olhar os títulos dos jornais com o caso da Hungria*" (my emphasis). The letter is available at national Portuguese archives of Torre do Tombo. (PT/TT/PIDE/DGS/SC/NT7330/CI (2)/4236/100)

As Susini-Anastopoulos claims, fragmentary forms entail incompleteness as well as disruption in a text. The resulting loss of cohesion and closure inexorably deprives literary works of their "integrity, sanity, uprightness and sacred character" (1997, 51). According to the French critic, the lack of completeness in a literary work marked by fragmentation, even if the fragment is "perfect" (Ibid., 52), is the

> confession of a failure, a sign of psychological inconsistency and formal helplessness […]. Regardless of the context or perspective in which fragmentation emerges, it is spontaneously associated to the idea of failure, weakness, of a real pathology of being. (Ibid., 59–60)

However, and in spite of the fact that it is usually regarded as a negative aspect of a text, as a limitation or a lack of something, incompleteness can unexpectedly reveal more than it conceals. It may, then, be interesting to look at it under another point of view.

In a previous chapter, I mentioned[46] Antonio Gramsci and his much fragmentary *Prison Notebooks*. As Alberto Burgio observes, the circumstances in which Gramsci worked, his incarceration and the consequent impossibility to edit his drafts, suggest the "non elective character" of fragmentation in his text (2014, 118). The critic claims that, had he had the opportunity to do so, Gramsci would have given an organic form to his notebooks (Ibid., 119). However, since the fragmentary, unfinished version is the only one we can ever have access to, it

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[46] See Part II, pages 67—68.

is important to come to terms with it[47]. In an article whose title refers to Gramsci's notebooks as a 'work in progress', Joseph Buttigieg defends the fragmentary and open-ended nature of the *Prison Notebooks*. According to him, Gramsci's work has not become a pillar of modern critical thinking albeit its fragmentation and incompleteness, but also because of it. It is true that the form of the text does not offer certainties[48], but it does allow an attentive reader to grasp the unique "rhythm of thought" of the author (Buttigieg 2006, 39), his peculiar method of work. Incompleteness, unfinishedness and openness are seen as points of strength of Gramsci's work, and the critic blames those who have tried to tame or normalise the philosopher's rhythm of thought to make it fit into a close system[49]. Describing the notebooks as Gramsci's workshop, Buttigieg observes that

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[47] Burgio is keen to make a distinction between Gramsci and other intellectuals, e.g. Nietzsche, whose texts are composed mostly of fragments or aphorisms, claiming that Gramsci's choice was not his own, but rather it was determined by the circumstances. Starting from these premises, Burgio suggests that scholars should "try to restore the coherence of Gramsci's discourse" by "reconstructing the unitarian asset of which [*Gramsci's texts*] have been deprived"(2014, 120), an operation that should be guided by scholars' "sense of measure and sensitivity" (Ibid.). Although I appreciate Burgio's own analysis, his suggestions on this aspect of the Gramsci question seem to rely excessively on subjective criteria, such as one's individual sense of measure and sensitivity. It is likely that Gramsci would have put order in his texts had he had the occasion to do so, but since this did not happen, scholars have to deal with the fragmentary version of the *Notebooks*, which is the only version available, without forgetting that the materiality of the text and its form are determined by the violent circumstances of their author's imprisonment and not by an aesthetic preference for fragmentary forms. In my opinion, this awareness allows for an embodied analysis of the *Notebooks*.

[48] According to Edward Said "Gramsci chose the forms of writing that he did 'as ways of never finishing his discourse, never completing his utterance for fear that it would compromise his work by giving it the status of a text both to himself and to his readers, by turning his work into a body of resolved systematic ideas that would exercise their dominion over him and over his reader'"(in Buttigieg 2006, 46).

[49] As it is known, at least until the 1970s, Gramsci's work has been manipulated in order to suit the purposes of those who have claimed his intellectual and political legacy, namely the Italian Communist Party. As David Forgacs observes, "the party leadership and the intellectuals close to it had, it was alleged, appropriated his posthumous texts and edited them in tendentious ways. It was well known that Togliatti had expurgated the first edition of the prison letters (1947), removing letters in which Gramsci alluded to differences of opinion within the party leadership or referred warmly to Amedeo Bordiga, the leader of the party's defeated left wing. A more ample selection of the letters was published in the second edition, prepared under Togliatti's supervision and published a year after the latter's death, but several 'difficult' letters were still omitted, and the accusations of Cold War manipulation stuck. There were also criticisms from the left […] of the way the PCI drew selectively on Gramsci's prison notebooks to legitimate its post-war strategy of broad class alliances and the way it promoted his prison texts over his earlier writings on the factory councils as revolutionary instruments and nuclei of a future communist society, writings that became particularly attractive to the new left in the late 1960s and early 70s" (2016, 347–48).

> leafing through them one can see Gramsci at work, observe how he reads and studies, notice the attention he devotes to the specificity of the phenomena he examines, follow the intricate processes of analysis, critique, and reflection that lead to his insights, appreciate the discipline with which he resists the seductions of overarching, all-embracing theoretical abstractions. (Ibid., 39)

I would add that by studying the *Prison Notebooks* to understand how Gramsci organised his work—for even a "patently decentered, open, tentative, provisional, exploratory" (Ibid., 38) work requires organisation—one can also appreciate the self-imposed discipline that made him resist the prison forces that attempted to overwhelm him and nullify his intellectual efforts.

Gramsci's notebooks, unlike Vieira's, consisted mainly of critical essays and, although they would not exist had Gramsci not been sentenced to a harsh prison time, they do not contain any particular reference to the author's condition as a prisoner, nor to any other aspect of his intimate, personal life[50]. However, the elements described above put the *Prison Notebooks* in close contact with *Papéis*. First, both works are a collection of fragments which are held together only by the personality that assembled those fragments in the first plac: as Susini-Anastopoulos claims, the subject acts "as a federative pulsion and [...] it is the only thing that is able to keep together 'packets' of sentences and isolated sequences of thoughts" (1997, 232). Also because of this, part of the interest of both Gramsci's notebooks and Vieira's *Papéis* lays in the fact that they constitute a privileged observatory on the authors' process of work, on their "rhythm of thought". In the case of Vieira, by looking closely at his rhythm of thought one can gain exclusive insights on his method

[50] Gramsci's personal thoughts, feelings and impressions can be found in the letters he wrote to his family and friends, which were collected in a volume and are today considered pieces of literary writing (Manganaro 2009, 500).

of writing and grasp the recurring ideas, themes and obsessions that populate not only the pages of the notebooks but also those of his entire literary production.

The reference to Vieira's literary works brings us to another level, forcing us to reconsider under another light the dialectics between the fragment and the whole. To this point, I have referred to this dialectic relation considering each single fragment as, it goes without saying, 'the fragment' and the book, *Papéis*, as 'the whole'. However, if one considers that Vieira wrote the majority of his literary works during his twelve years' detention, the terms involved in the relation must change. What I had considered the 'whole', the book *Papéis*, becomes but a fragment of a new, larger whole, that is the totality of what Vieira wrote during his incarceration. This 'whole' includes all Vieira's creative writings—even those which never passed the stage of drafts or projects—, his correspondence, and all the other texts that were not included in *Papéis*. The seventeen notebooks collected in the volume are but a small part of the totality of what Vieira accumulated in the years he spent in prison or under police surveillance. Apart from the notebooks on which he used to write his literary works, there is also a large collection of diverse material which has not been classified yet, and that includes correspondence, newspapers clippings, etc. In fact, as I have already explained, *Papéis* is not just a facsimile of Vieira's prison notebooks, but rather a project that implied a process of selection and exclusion. In this light, it is interesting to notice that the extreme fragmentation which can be observed in the notebooks written at Tarrafal, corresponds to an intense period of literary production. Fragmentation in the notebooks is counterbalanced by the fluency of Vieira's literary writing since, in this respect, the time he spent in Tarrafal was particularly fruitful.

PART VI

A WORKSHOP OF WRITING

THE STORY OF A NAME

When he was arrested in November 1961, Vieira was already determined to be a writer and, although since the early 1950s he had been working at different jobs to make a living, he had nonetheless succeeded in publishing some of his literary works. In 1960, the Lisbon based *Casa dos Estudantes do Império* (CEI) published his first collection of short stories, *A cidade e a infância*[1], while in 1961 his *Duas histórias de pequenos burgueses* came out with a small publisher based in Sá da Bandeira (now Lubango). Moreover, just a few days before his arrest, Vieira had written the novella *A vida verdadeira de Domingos Xavier*, which circulated widely—though surreptitiously—until it was finally published in Paris[2] in 1971 (Silva 2015, 1022). Apart from these scarce yet important publications, during the 1950s and early 1960s and up to the moment of his incarceration, Vieira participated intensively in Luanda's cultural life[3].

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[1] A short-story collection with the same title was published in 1957 in Luanda, but it was immediately seized by the police and the author could save but three copies. The 1961 CEI edition of *A cidade e a infância* would count with original stories except from one which had been included in the first edition. See: Topa 2014a, 145-46.

[2] The novella was published in the notorious journal *Présence Africaine* in 1971, with a translation by Mário Pinto de Andrade. See: Topa 2014a, 151.

[3] Vieira was involved with several clubs, circles and cultural associations operating in Luanda—including the *Associação dos Naturais de Angola* (ANANGOLA) and the *Sociedade Cultural de Angola* (SCA)—whose aims "were cultural, but […] also clearly political" (Pimenta 2017, 235). Both before and after his arrest, Vieira published articles and short stories on different Angolan newspapers and journals, including the *Jornal de Angola* and the *Cultura* (respectively linked to the ANANGOLA and the SCA); the ABC and the *Boletim Cultural do Huambo*. He also collaborated with journals based in Brazil (M. C. Ribeiro 2010a, 27) and Portugal, especially with *Mensagem*, which

That was an era of great cultural activity in Angola, and especially in Luanda: people involved in the activities of journals, associations, circles and sport clubs organised numerous cultural events and discussions in diverse and unorthodox locations (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1042). At the time, the author was probably more active as an illustrator than as a writer (Ibid.). Up to 1961, in fact, he was much sought after for his drawings and he even created some iconic book covers for some of the most important Angolan authors of his time, such as Viriato da Cruz, Agostinho Neto, António Jacinto and Luandino Vieira himself[4]. From an early age, Vieira manifested a strong inclination for drawing, and it was as a young illustrator[5] that he started to sign his works with the name 'Luandino'. It was with this name that Vieira eventually signed all of his creative works[6], whether visual or literary.

Unlike authors that used a nom de plume to disguise their identity, and who did not hesitate to employ subterfuge to achieve their ends[7], the real person behind the pseudonym Luandino Vieira was not difficult to identify. Therefore, rather than concealing the identity of the man José Vieira Mateus da Graça, the pseudonym became his public persona, creating the identity of the writer,

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was published by the CEI. In addition to his literary activity, he was one of the founders of a film club in Luanda (Guerra 2014) and a member of the football club *Atlético Luanda*, which would become known as 'the terrorists' club' (Bittencourt 2010, 4). For more information on Vieira's participation in the cultural scene of Luanda during the 1950s and early 1960s, see the interview included at the end of *Papéis* (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1043–46).

[4] I am referring to the editions published by the CEI between 1960 and 1961. Vieira also designed the cover of his most famous book, *Luuanda*. On Vieira's activity as an illustrator, see: Moser 1980.

[5] Vieira allegedly started to sign his works as Luandino around the age of nine on the handwritten magazine *A voz da quinta,* which he created with his some of his friends, including António Cardoso (*Interview*, 245).

[6] Occasionally, Vieira's works circulated under other pseudonyms, such as José Muimbu (Andrade 1999, 155); Vinteoito (Silva 2015, 1023) and Mundele ua Kwanza, this last one chosen by Mário Pinto de Andrade (in Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1043).

[7] In her *Nom de Plume. A (secret) History of Pseudonyms*, Carmela Ciuraru (2011) gives several examples of writers who choose to use a pseudonym to disguise their real identity, for reasons as diverse as avoiding a gender biased reading of one's work—as it was the case with many women writers—or targeting a share of the market with works presented as 'autobiographical' but that are in fact a hoax. In this last case, the 'prank' (Ibid., xiii) can be taken to the point of hiring someone to impersonate the pseudonym for the sake of the press and the public (Ibid., xx).

the illustrator, the artist[8]. As Margarida Calafate Ribeiro claims, this "was one of the multiple faces of a man embroiled in the political project of Angolan liberation. Folded into [*Vieira's*] personality was a literary alter ego characterized by lucidity and artistic playfulness" (2010b, 27). It could be argued that publishing with a pseudonym was a safer option for Vieira, as it allowed him to avoid political repercussions and censorship, but this does not seem to be the case. In fact, although the great public might have ignored Vieira's real identity, this was well known in the cultural circles of Luanda and elsewhere by anyone interested in Angolan literature. Vieira did not seem particularly concerned about hiding his identity, so that, when in 1964 his short-story collection *Luuanda* was awarded the Mota Veiga literary prize, his wife personally collected the award from the hands of a government's delegate (Topa 2014b, 56). Indeed, connecting the writer Luandino Vieira to the political prisoner who was serving time for crimes against the fatherland was too easy to believe that the use of the pseudonym was determined by his need to hide. Besides, it would not be long before such connection was made. In fact, roughly a year after the Mota Veiga award, when *Luuanda* received the first prize by the prestigious *Sociedade Portuguesa de Escritores*, the police and other governmental apparatuses exposed Luandino Vieira's identity to the public, starting a campaign of uncommon proportions to discredit the writer and his work[9]. The campaign not only associated the name Luandino Vieira with terrible acts of terrorism and treason, but it also questioned the literary qualities of *Luuanda*[10]. Ironically, this same campaign boosted the

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[8] Although eventually José Luandino Vieira stood out as a writer, he never stopped drawing, as one can notice by leafing through *Papéis*. In recent years, the author has published a series of books, mainly conceived for a young public, which combine his texts and illustrations. For an analysis of this production, see: A.M. Ramos 2015.

[9] In a letter to Vieira's wife dated July 15, 1965, Carlos Ervedosa writes that, for fifteen days, the national television showed films with scenes of 'terrorists' in Angola, among whom appeared the 'criminal named Luandino' (PIDE/DGS, Del A, Sec 964, NT 970, 299).

[10] A round table discussion on *Luuanda* was broadcast on Portuguese national television on May 27, 1965, just before the kick-off of a very popular football match. During the discussion, the book was scorned and ridiculed, and Vieira was criticised for using a 'spoiled Portuguese language'. A transcription of the debate is available in Laban 1991, 913–25.

underground circulation of his books and contributed to the fame of Luandino Vieira, whose name gained international relevance[11]. Vieira had no say in the matter, and he could get an idea of the stir he caused only through scraps of news that breached the isolation of his confinement at Tarrafal[12]. Ultimately, however, both the incarceration and the controversy around *Luuanda* invigorated rather than undermined the political significance of Vieira's public persona. Being Luandino Vieira became more than ever a political responsibility.

> 11-7[-*1965*] Soube c/ alegria das 650 assinaturas dos intelectuais portugueses [*;*] da sessão no Porto presidida por Ferreira de Castro [*;*] das listas dos intelectuais franceses (Aragon, Sartre, Ives Montand, Simone Signoret, Simone de Beauvoir) [*;*] de toda essa solidariedade. *Devo manter-me sempre luandino, digno dessas confianças*. (*Papéis*, 684, my emphasis)

In this regard, notice how Vieira used to sign most of Tarrafal prison camp's official documents as José Luandino Vieira Mateus da Graça, introducing his pseudonym in the sphere of the institutional power of writing, thus reaffirming his public persona and the political stances

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[11] The news of the award and of the consequent destruction of the SPE had vast repercussion. It appeared in several international papers—including *The New York Times*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*—and broadcast by well-known radio stations such as the BBC. In parallel, the news had even greater repercussions in leftist channels and clandestine broadcasts such as Radio Moscow, Radio Prague, Rádio Portugal Livre, etc. (See: PIDE/DGS SC NT7330 CI (2) 4236). Moreover, in the letter to Vieira's wife which I mentioned in the previous note, Carlos Ervedosa adds some precious information about the effects of the campaign against *Luuanda* which, according to him, made of Vieira the most discussed writer in Portugal. It was "unnecessary advertising, as the edition was sold in all bookshops and the book would be the best-seller of all time if only republished" (PIDE/DGS, Del A, Sec 964, NT 970, 299).

[12] In an interview, Vieira recalls how he got the news of the award: "[...] durante uma semana não me deram conhecimento [*do prémio*]. Recebi um telegrama a dizer que tinha ganho um prémio e fiquei sem perceber porque não dizia mais nada. [...] No início o director não quis me dar conhecimento para que eu não ficasse com o moral em cima. Mas, depois, o que vinha na imprensa era de tal modo violento... Já não sei se foi o *Diário de Notícias* ou o *Diário de Lisboa* que transcrevia uma série de depoimentos de colonos que tinham estado no Norte de Angola e que diziam que me tinham visto a serrar pessoas... [...] Então, nessa altura, o director lá pensou: "Alto! Eu vou lhe dar isto tudo e ele vai ficar arrasado". E deram-me aquilo" (Lopes 2012b, 137).

connected to it. However, since 1967, Vieira was prohibited to use the name Luandino by Eduardo Vieira Fontes[13], the new director of the prison camp, who sensed the political significance of the name and tried to efface it altogether[14].

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[13] Also known as Dadinho, Eduardo Vieira Fontes served as director of Chão Bom work camp from August 1967 to May 1974, when the camp was definitely closed.

[14] Not only could Vieira no longer use the name Luandino to sign the camp's official documents, but he was also denied access to any personal piece of correspondence addressed to Luandino. Such letters, in fact, were sent back to senders with the label "addressee unknown" (*Papéis*, 837). However, the same director who insisted to wipe out all references to Luandino, proudly introduced the "writer Luandino Vieira" to Cape-Verdean writer Manuel Lopes, when this visited Tarrafal prison camp in 1970, an episode recalled in the notebooks (Ibid., 955). The episode contributes to outline the ambiguity of the director, whose behaviour with the prisoners could range from courtesy and consideration to extreme sternness. Therefore, while some former prisoners describe him as the worst director of Tarrafal (Lopes 2012b, 51), others declare that he was a sensitive man, who however had a fixation to 'catechise' and 'redeem' the reprobates he had in his custody (Ibid., 127). The overarching principle sustaining the director's conduct was his faith in his mission as an agent of 'rehabilitation', a faith probably deriving from his zealous Catholicism. This contributes to making of Dadinho Vieira Fontes a symbol of a well-established trend within Portuguese colonialism, one that was heavily marked by a patronising rhetoric.

Campo de Trabalho de "Chão Bom" 316

NOTA DE PRETENSÃO

Do recluso: José Luandino Vieira Mateus da Graça

ASSUNTO: Autorização p/ receber o livro abaixo, destinado ao 2/curso, de Sociologia:

(a)

√ + "The Story of Language" — Mario Pei
+ "Notas p/ a História do Socialismo em Portugal" — C. Nogueira
√ + "Tratado de Sociologia" — Fascículo III —
Livros de ficção
√ — "Nós matámos o cão tinhoso" (contos) — D.B. Honwana —
√ — "Praça da Canção" — (poemas) M. Alegre
√ — "Missosso" III — (folclore) — O. Ribas

Em / /965

[signature]

Informação do graduado de serviço:

Ao Exmo Sr. Director, para apreciação.

Em 29/5/965

[signature]

Despacho:

Autorizado a entrada de todos os livros c/ excepção do indicado na alínea a)

Em 2/7/965

O Director,

[signature]

1064-11—MCV-Praia

Nota de pretensão do recluso José Luandino Vieira Mateus da Graça (PIDE/DGS, CTCB, PC34, NT4, 316)

As American writer Joyce Carol Oates observed in an essay published in the *New York Times* in 1987, "the cultivation of a pseudonym might be interpreted as not so very different from the cultivation *in vivo* of the narrative voice that sustains any work of words, making it unique and inimitable" (Oates, 1987). The statement perfectly suits the case of José Luandino Vieira. In fact, throughout his detention at Tarrafal, Vieira worked hard to improve his literary language and persisted in his quest for a style of his own, showing that, although indissolubly associated with certain political ideals, he was not a mere propaganda writer. *Papéis* shows how the author severely patrolled his own work: he would dispose of any literary project that he did not deem it worthy of a future publication[15].

Vieira worked at refining his style, striving to frame the inimitable narrative voice of Luandino, an act that had both literary and political implications. One of his greatest concerns was how to express in Portuguese the desires, ambitions, worries and anxieties that troubled his characters, inspired mainly by lower-class Angolan men and women who did not identify at all with Portuguese culture. To address this problem, he forged a unique literary language, which became the most distinctive hallmark of his entire literary production. It is a language in continuous evolution, which gained new elements as Vieira matured as a writer, so that one can spot some striking differences between the literary language of *Nosso Musseque*—the first novel Vieira wrote in prison in 1962—and that of the works of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In this regard, *Papéis* is a treasure trove, since it allows readers to reconstruct the path followed by the writer during the

[15] *Papéis* keeps track of many projects that were not developed beyond the stage of drafts, or that were completed but never published. For some examples, see: Silva 2015, 1024–33.

years of his most intensive literary production. Moreover, the book gathers countless examples of Vieira's reflections on the advances of his literary efforts, showing how he acted as a harsh critic of his own work.

> 19-11[-*1968*] – (1) Qto. a mim o problema principal é este: o que nos falta é o instrumento. A língua portuguesa literária não serve a realidade que enfrenta; o dialecto brasileiro macaquea-a; a linguagem popular é de alcance restrito como veículo de difusão e não está ainda afeiçoada pela prática escrita – creio que esta «prática» é o único valor de qto. tenho escrito. Daí a busca constante consciente e inconsciente dum modo de expressão (eu não tenho «dúvidas» quanto à realidade qto. ao que quero dizer; as m/ dúvidas são no como dizê-la. Aliás a isto se resume o problema de escritor: para além disto o problema é do homem). (*Papéis*, 868)

In this fragment—apart from meaningfully commenting on the 'instrument' he needs to portray the reality he has in mind—Vieira makes a curious distinction between the problems of the writer and those of the man, separating his own personality into two distinct entities. A careful reading of *Papéis* reveals that this is not an isolated case, but rather a tendency that can be traced throughout Vieira's entire incarceration.

> 3-2-63 [...] * Agora quando me lembro do conto «O usuku, kifumbe» parece-me que não fui eu que o escrevi. Ontem à noite ao pensar invadiu-me esse estranho sentimento: parece que sou 2 pessoas diferentes... uma que de vez em quando vem à superfície, faz uma coisa como aquele conto e depois recolhe ao silêncio, ficando apenas o Zé [...]. (*Papéis*, 128)

The ‘strange feeling’ experienced upon realising that he could be two different people at the same time leads to some reflections on Vieira and how he practiced literature in confinement. As already mentioned, although Vieira’s project of being a writer predated his incarceration, it is in prison that it assumed its definitive form. On the same lines, although the idea of Luandino had been part of his life since his childhood, it was during the years of confinement that it was developed to his full potential. What is more, one could say that the state of exception in which Vieira lived shaped Luandino, exacerbating the gap between the man and the writer. The more the possibility of living a normal life was negated to him, the more he found refuge in literature and the more his literary persona emerged. This is how Vieira explained this point:

> O Luandino é um *work in progress* desses 12 anos que eu passei na cadeia, partindo de uma coisa que eu já era: Luandino é muito anterior à prisão, mas coexistia com Zé digamos 50-50%. Eu trabalhei na montagem de caminhões no porto, depois passei a vender peças de caminhões, etc., [...]. Portanto, nessa época havia uma forte pressão da minha vida particular. O que me fazia ser um escritor, eu fazia em casa, à noite, e depois participava nas atividades da sociedade cultural, do cineclube, do movimento cultural clandestino, político e desportista também. A parte do escritor era Luandino. Quando fui para a cadeia toda aquela parte da vida [...] concreta, física, desapareceu. Deixei de ter. O que se acentuou foi a vertente do escritor. (*Interview*, 240)

The ‘work in progress’ described by Vieira in this excerpt was discontinuous and depended greatly on the different circumstances that the author had to endure. In the notebooks written in the prisons of Luanda, there are already some references to the “tendency to unfold the personalities of Zé and

Luandino, assuming Luandino as a character" (*Papéis*, 525), however this tendency was accentuated at Tarrafal. There, Vieira lived in both physical and mental isolation: removed from the possibility of a total life and cut off from the world, he withdrew in himself. Literature gained more and more space in his life, so that even his non-literary writing assumed literary traits: "7-5[-*1967*] – (1) Domingo passado a fazer correio. Escrevo demais, é uma tentação devido ao pouco falar. Meto demasiada literatura no que escrevo. Mas é que só disso vivo" (*Papéis*, 798).

Under these circumstances, the side of Luandino, the writer's side, became more intense and overwhelming. Some fragments among those written at Tarrafal testify of a dissociation between Zé and Luandino, with verbs and pronouns shifting between the first and the second person as if they were actual transcriptions of an inner dialogue[16]; in other fragments, any reference to Luandino is made "in the third person, as if he were another person" (*Papéis*, 892). This makes one think of Luandino as something much more complex than a simple pseudonym or nom de plume. Perhaps, the term alter ego, meaning literally 'other I' in Latin, is more appropriate in this case, since it "suggests the writer is not so much wearing a mask as becoming another person entirely" (Ciuraru 2011, xiv). This process of 'becoming another person' does not appear linear nor painless. On the contrary, from what one can grasp reading *Papéis*, it was often lived as a struggle between two forces, one that strove not to lose his grip on the real, concrete things of life, and the other that tended to thrive in a world made of words and literature. However, when the concrete things of life were reduced to the barrenness of the prison camp and the solitude he experienced, the most pleasing solution for Vieira was to keep hold of writing. As always, this was

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[16] See, for example, *Papéis*, 864—66.

both a personal and a political choice, since writing was Vieira's means to participate in the many battles of his era, and to try stir consciences, including his own:

> 3-11[-*1968*] *[...]* Escrever não resolve nada mas ilude-me. Não escrever ainda pior – ficaria com a consciência tranquila com essa decisão de «lucidez, liberdade, honestidade» quando nenhum homem em nosso tempo tem direito a esse luxo da consciência tranquila. (Tu lá sabes, Luandino!). (*Papéis*, 865)

Sometimes, however, Vieira was tempted to destroy all the material he had carefully put together, putting an end to his writing—the *luandinices*, as he sometimes calls them (*Papéis*, 528)—and, ultimately, putting an end to Luandino himself: "Domingo, 7[-*6-1970*] […] Decisão tomada: é preciso acabar com o Luandino. Escrever não serve para nada, primeiro. Segundo, o que eu escrevo muito menos" (*Papéis*, 958). As *Papéis* and the rest of Vieira's literary production testify, fortunately such destructive intentions were not so resolute as they appeared to be in the fragment quoted above. Despite the intimate conflicts he experienced, despite the depression[17] that afflicted him during his incarceration, Vieira did not put an end to the project of becoming a writer, of becoming Luandino. Although he was often tempted to abandon his literary work, eventually he never gave up writing.

[17] Although Vieira struggled to maintain his lucidity and peace of mind in order to make the best of the time he had to spend in prison, *Papéis* bears witness to the inevitable moments of despair and depression he went through. This is particularly true of the portion of the book corresponding to the period at Tarrafal, where he started to resent the weight of the years in confinement. As Vieira declared: "Os anos 69 e 70 foram anos muito difíceis. Também correspondiam a sete anos de cadeia. Ao fim de sete anos a pessoa começa a... eu digo isso porque notava também nos meus colegas: por altura dos sete, oito anos passa-se qualquer coisa. E eu passei um bocado mesmo por isso. Deve ter sido uma depressão. Além do que a saúde não estava boa, a saúde física, e nem a saúde psicológica. Isso também se sente até—acho eu—nos *Papéis da prisão*. A partir de certa altura nota-se uma diferença" (*Interview*, 226).

Papéis shows that, albeit the many difficulties that he had to face while incarcerated, Vieira managed to integrate the different strands of his identity. Instead of reading the dissociation he experienced according to a pathological paradigm, then, one can rather look at it as part of the process from which one of the most relevant narrative voices of literature in Portuguese emerged. After all, Vieira declared that the time spent in prison was very important for him and changed him deeply, leaving permanent marks on him (*Interview*, 243). The writer as we know him today is the result of the changes that he underwent during his prison time, of the 'work-in-progress' that he carried out in such a singular environment. According to the author's own perception of the question, at the end of the day, the man who was released from Tarrafal was not the same man who had been arrested twelve years earlier in Lisbon:

> o Luandino venceu. Foi uma derrota, a minha derrota é o que faz que o escritor se tenha sobreposto ao tudo. No fim, quem saiu [*de Tarrafal*], é já o escritor. Os anos de 72 a 74 foram muito difíceis para mim no que toca à adequação a uma vida concreta. Porque o homem concreto tinha desaparecido e agora ali eu tinha que construir de novo. Trabalho, emprego, regularidade, uma vida normal, de ser humano, que não seja um escritor separado e isolado e totalmente alienado do que é real, a construir-se nos 12 anos de cadeia. E aí, com certeza que vais notar, muitas vezes não sei se é ambiguidade, incerteza, sobreposição de vários... não se pode separar, claro. Sou isso tudo, como diz o João Vêncio: cada homem é ele todo. (*Interview*, 240)

Or, to say it using the words that Vieira used in his prison notebooks, "se eu fosse muito simples não prestava. Gosto-me assim complexo mesmo que doa" (*Papéis*, 750). When he was able to

return to Angola after the fall of the fascist regime in Portugal, he formally changed his name into José Luandino Vieira (Laranjeira 1995, 120).

Contrapuntal Reading

Most of the notebooks collected in *Papéis* display either the name Luandino Vieira or the initials L.V. on their covers. Marked with the name associated to Vieira's literary persona, the prison notebooks are more than just intimate diaries, they are the tools of the craft of writing. It is possible to think of the notebooks collected in *Papéis* as a writing laboratory, a hypothesis further confirmed by the multiple intersections between *Papéis* and Vieira's literary works. Such crossings occur on different levels, so that not only does *Papéis* shows how fiction written in prison is intimately interwoven with the author's life, but it also exposes the author's inner reflections about the meaning of his works. In other words, *Papéis* offers readers the possibility of following the evolution of José Luandino Vieira's literary writing from behind the scenes, thus disclosing references to real people and facts hidden in his works, while also constituting a metatextual reflection on them. Moreover, the book provides contingent elements that allow for a proper contextualisation of each novel, novella or short story, so that readers can cast a renewed look upon Vieira's literary project during the 1960s and early 1970s, that is, on the writer's most productive years. Given these premises, I believe that *Papéis* can be read as a counterpoint to Vieira's literary works, and that a contrapuntal analysis allows for an enhanced reading and understanding of both his fictional and non-fictional works.

Contrapuntal reading, a method that owns much to Edward Said, consists in taking into account intertwined perspectives to see how texts are shaped by their historical contexts, but also how they shape other texts and discourses, and how they legitimise certain visions of history and

culture. The metaphor of counterpoint comes from Western classical music, where it indicates a composition in which different melodies, though independent from one another, combine together to create a harmonious whole. In his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said conceives contrapuntal reading as a means to interrogate the cultural archive and analyse canonical Western narratives in the light of the interdependences that link them to non-Western narratives and experiences[18]. Although he applied it to the study of literature, the method that Said proposed is inherently political, as it aims to recover a silenced past, while showing how hegemonic narratives were forged, and how they underpin imperial ventures. Said's method emerges from his idea that "[…] the study of literature [*is*] essentially a historical enterprise, not just an aesthetic one"[19], an opinion in line with his efforts to convince his readers to acknowledge the essential connection between literature and the historical world (Said 1994, 13).

As I read *Papéis* and Vieira's fiction works together, letting one text enrich and enlighten the other, I adopt Said's method, adapting it to the peculiarities of my research. Going beyond the mere identification of intertextuality, I look for the harmonious whole, the larger structure of meaning that emerges from considering *Papéis* as a counterpoint to Vieira's fiction works. Reading this selection of texts contrapuntally reveals the extent to which history, the environment, the constraints of everyday life, etc. influenced José Luandino Vieira's literary production. For example, one can analyse if and how the bipartition that can be observed in the notebooks—and that corresponds to different locales of incarceration—reflects upon Vieira's fictional works.

[18] As Said observes, "as we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally,* with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts […]. At this point alternative or new narratives emerge, and they become institutionalized or discursively stable entities" (1997, 50)

[19] Excerpt from an interview of Tariq Ali to Said, see: TeleSUR English 2017, *Global Empire – A conversation with Edward Said*. Youtube video, min. 18:05. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvR3qeroQ2M (Accessed May 22, 2019).

Considering these two elements together and contrapuntally, it is possible to make some relevant remarks on Vieira's entire literary project and follow the transformation that his literature underwent.

As *Papéis* shows, Vieira felt that in Luanda, although imprisoned, he could still live "a full life" (*Papéis*, 860). There, he was supported by the love of his family and friends, and he felt integrated in an active social and political context, which could be fulfilling in spite of being highly violent[20]. According to Ribeiro and Vecchi (2015a, 22), the first phase of Vieira's incarceration corresponds to a time of accumulation of experiences and data that would be later used for his fictional writing. In fact, in the roughly four years he spent in detention in Luanda, Vieira dedicated himself to writing literature, but he also spent a great deal of time in interactions with other inmates, collecting popular songs, hearing the stories that the common prisoners had to tell, working for the success of the communication networks that constituted a bridge between the prison and the nationalist movements operating secretly on the outside, etc. Those years were, therefore, a period of relative calm and confidence in the future for Vieira and one in which the social interactions he enjoyed kept him confident[21]. Throughout this period, Vieira also succeeded in continuing to participate in the actual political struggle, both by sending out some messages that helped the underground nationalist movement and by raising other prisoners' political awareness.

In literary terms, these years correspond to works that have an overall optimistic and confident approach and that are more clearly politicised. The main purpose of the stories written

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[20] Vieira's experience in the prison of Luanda does not fit into the stereotypical image of the 'happy prison', which I discussed earlier in this work. On the contrary, while at Tarrafal corporal punishments were rare, in Luanda Vieira observed several episodes of torture and mistreatment, which made him describe one of the institutions in which he was held as a "realm of terror" (*Papéis*, 317).

[21] In a fragment dated March 1, 1963, Vieira reports on some students who had been arrested and with whom he had been able to talk. Seeing the young generations joining the struggle made him confident about the final victory over colonialism: "Não há dúvida que não podem nada contra nós!" (*Papéis*, 156).

in this period is to denounce the discrimination and violence that characterised colonial society in Angola: like classic tales and fables, they intended to transmit a moral message, which was both an invitation to consciousness and a call to action, to resistance. I am referring in particular to the short stories collected in *Vidas novas*[22], but the same description also applies to the novella *A vida verdadeira de Domingos Xavier*[23]. The structure of these stories is rather simple, as it is the language used to write them, in spite of the incipient introduction of words in Kimbundu and expressions reminiscent of a typically Angolan way of speaking Portuguese. The protagonists are brave men and women who, as "good Angolans" (*Vidas novas*, 113), heroically defy colonial authorities, regardless of the violent repercussions they might suffer[24]. Ultimately, one could say that, during this first phase, Luandino Vieira's literature serves above all a political purpose, that is, contributing to the struggle for independence and the emancipation of the Angolan people. It is, as Mário Pinto de Andrade described it, "a sociological portrait of resistance" (in Laban 1980, 223).

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[22] The short stories collected in *Vidas novas* were written in the Pavilhão Prisional da PIDE, in Luanda, between the months of June and July 1962. They precede, therefore, the project of the prison notebooks. See the editorial note in the volume *Vidas novas*.

[23] The novella was not actually written in prison, but it was completed just a few days before Vieira's arrest. However, there is a continuity between the period immediately before Vieira's arrest in 1961 and the time he spent behind bars. The writer described it as a period of *liberdade vigiada* (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015a, 16), i.e. of parole: he knew that, because of censorship and the repression associated with the colonial regime, he could not write nor publish the kind of literature he was interested in, unless he did it covertly. *A vida verdadeira de Domingos Xavier* was created under these circumstances. When he was arrested, he eventually "reactivated" the methods and techniques he had developed during that period of relative freedom which, ultimately, prepared him for the task of writing behind bars (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1042).

[24] Think, for example, of the heroic main character of "O exemplo de Job Hamukuaja", who bravely faces a violent torture session and also succeeds in convincing his white fellow prisoner to behave in the same way. The character of Job was inspired by the real figure of Godfrey Nangonya, a nationalist who was incarcerated with Vieira in the Pavilhão Prisional da PIDE in Luanda, and with whom Vieira exchanged information and notes, as shown in *Papéis,* 81—89.

The short stories included in *Luuanda* and *Velhas estórias*[25], composed in 1963 and 1964 respectively, were the last ones that Vieira wrote in Luanda. If compared to his previous stories, they already show a higher degree of complexity, both in terms of language and structure. They are probably affected by Vieira's increased familiarity with the Kimbundu language, which readers of *Papéis* can knowingly associate to his project of collecting popular songs and narratives among common-law prisoners. The stories change also because of the constant effort the writer put in improving his style, something that emerges clearly from the pages of *Papéis*:

> 25-2-63 *[...]* Estive a pensar que preciso de melhorar a m/ linguagem, elevando-a de modo a poder descrever situações, ambientes e personagens mais ricos e complexos, mas sem a tornar ininteligível ou menos concreta e sem perder a base popular... (para isso era preciso trabalhar muito... e a preguiça!) * Assim como no que respeita à elaboração do m/ trabalho literário uma maior vigilância do intelecto sobre a intuição inata, não no sentido de a «ordenar» ou «restringir» mas apenas para eu reflectir mais sobre os dados dessa visão intuitiva e refrear os impulsos para poder escrever com mais vagar, mais controlado, para aprofundar as situações, as personagens etc. O que me caracteriza, penso eu, é exatamente a intuição da visão global mais superficial, das muitas personagens a mexerem – e isso é o que de bom traz a intuição ao trabalho literário. Preciso de a «dominar» fazendo-a parar, para poder aprofundar – cada vez sempre mais em superfície (intuição), cada vez sempre

[25] The stories published in 1974 in the collection *Velhas estórias* were originally composed in Luanda's Cadeia Comarcã and, in the original intention of the author, they should have been published in an expanded edition of *Luuanda* (See: *Papéis*, 411–12). However, the project was aborted, probably due to the writer's deportation to Cape Verde. Eventually, between the years 1964 and 1967, Vieira revised and corrected the stories while he was imprisoned at Tarrafal. Because of the circumstances behind their conception and subsequent revision, the stories of *Velhas estórias* act as a sort of bridge between the two periods into which I am dividing Luandino Vieira's literary production.

mais em profundidade (razão) – aconselhava Gorki. *[...]* Domínio do trabalho literário – e não ser eu o instrumento. (*Papéis*, 151–52, emphasis in the original)

MASTERING THE LITERARY WORK

With his deportation to Cabo Verde, another phase of Vieira's incarceration began, a period of profound isolation and withdrawal. The optimism of the first years faded out to make room to a more detached attitude, which is testified in the prison notebooks by some bitter notes and commentaries[26]. Nevertheless—or, perhaps, also because of this—the time spent at Tarrafal corresponded to an intense literary activity. Indeed, it was not easy for Vieira to get used to the new environment, nor creating the conditions to dedicate himself to writing. At first, he felt he could not progress with his work so that, during the first years at Tarrafal, he decided to restrict his activity to correcting and editing some of the stories he had written in Luanda. This attitude would gradually make way to a renewed disposition towards writing.

> 18-[*6-1965*] *[...]* Sinto que toda a perplexidade deste ano (Ag. 64/Ag 65.) que me preocupava e anulava o trabalho de escritor se está tranquilizando, amadurecendo e sinto que esta experiência me foi muito valiosa, ainda que me tenha feito recuar um pouco na confiança em mim mesmo. A culpa era do meu idealismo, de um pouco de abstracionismo. Os homens reais são mais difíceis de amar. (*Papéis*, 673)

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[26] To get an idea of the overall tone of Vieira's commentaries on his emotional life while imprisoned at Tarrafal, see, for example, the fragment, dated June 11, 1969: "Sem notícias. Vagueio pelo campo como um fantasma. Procurei atordoar-me no estudo mas não passo da superfície das coisas e a memória nada guarda. * (Apenas para ti L. para um dia te contar como a dificuldade de todos os anos sem notícias tuas, as dificuldades em saber de ti e do Xexe [...]. O caso é que não há amigo que não me desiluda, que o seja como eu penso um "amigo" [...]. É amargura de mais para um coração tão fraco e sensível como o meu. E estes dias, estes dias, estes dias... E o meu feitio que só dores me tem trazido. Como hei de fazer para o futuro? Como aguentar tudo o que sinto em mim, agora e assim sozinho? Só.)" (*Papéis*, 901–2).

At Tarrafal, Vieira's approach to the notebooks changed, and readers can observe a further degree of fragmentation in the text. At the same time, some specific themes—inspired for example by his dreams[27] and childhood[28]—gain predominance over the commentaries about the contingencies of prison life. It bears noting that many of the works written at Tarrafal present a high degree of intertextuality as the same characters, events and settings reappear in different stories: while he was absorbed into his childhood memories, Vieira wrote a whole series of stories around the adventures of a children gang living on the shores of the lagoon of Kinaxixi[29]. Incorporating into his literature elements of his own biography, Vieira created a mythical universe populated by the legendary beings of Angolan folklore, together with characters inspired by his childhood memories, his carceral encounters and the figures that appeared in his dreams.

Vieira's literary activity during the years of Tarrafal is not only intense but radically original. From *Nós, os do Makulusu* to the "Estória de família", all the narratives written at the work camp of Chão Bom are strikingly different from his previous ones. Characters are not reduced

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[27] In the notebooks written at Tarrafal, Vieira often writes about his dreams and the feelings that they arouse in him, trying to understand their deepest meaning. These dreams often involve female figures—including his wife, some friends and unknown women—and they are, overall, somehow painful and frustrating, which is understandable if one considers how, for years, Vieira was forced to totally repress his sexuality. Nevertheless, dreams were also a source of inspiration for the writer. See for example the case of Urânia, a girl from Luanda that Vieira barely knew but that, at Tarrafal, started to appear frequently in his dreams (*Papéis*, 713; 764; 779; 969). Perhaps to exorcise the phantom of Urânia, Vieira creates an elusive, mysterious and charming character with this name in the short story "Memória narrativa ao sol de Kinaxixi", one of the narratives of *No antigamente na vida*. The beginning of the story reads like this: "U ur ura Urano Urânia — um soletrado nome só e é a verdade mesmo? Ou lhe nasci ainda, mentira de minha vontade, sonho?" (*No antigamente*, 57).

[28] See for example the pages filled with the description of the games he used to play as a child (*Papéis*, 578–79), or the fragments in which he recalls events, habits and people that marked his childhood: "Sábado, 13[*-9-1969*] * Infância (a investigar junto do Pai): quando chegámos ao Braga, a casa era do Sr. Aguiar c⁄suas 2 filhas adolescentes. Recordo-me que uma delas – tranças? – é que me levou pela 1.ª vez ao cinema: «Aventureiros dos Mares do Sul», Tyrone e «Nacional». Até hoje «desculpo» tudo ao canastrão do Tyrone e fiquei sempre marcado com filmes dos mares do Sul. Do que me lembro, do filme: [...]. Depois a casa foi alugada para sr. Alcobia pai da Benvinda. Onde comi pela 1.ª vez funje com muamba de galinha" (*Papéis*, 909-10). For more examples, see also *Papéis* 836; 837; 908; 909; 911.

[29] I am referring in particular to the stories included in *No antigamente, na vida* and the novellas *João Vêncio: os seus amores* and "Kinaxixi Kiami!".

to types, heroes or villains, but are instead represented in all their human complexity; likewise, the structure of the story does not follow any linear pattern, as the writer upsets conventional chronological narrative and incorporates experimental techniques. Moreover, the political message is not explicit nor didactic and, in any case, it does not prevail over other aspects of the story[30].

The literary works produced during this phase are particularly interesting also from a linguistic point of view, as they follow and radicalise the path already traced in *Luuanda.* Vieira wrote in Portuguese, but his literary language became more and more experimental, marked as it was by a hybrid syntax, neologisms and words obtained by mixing morphemes of different languages. This created an insurmountable gap between his works and canonical Portuguese literature, a gap the writer was well aware of: "Sexta, 30[-4-1971] * *[...]* Deitado, subitamente imaginando o Macandumba na sua forma definitiva veio-me o pensamento: 'não tem nada a ver com a literatura portuguesa!'"(*Papéis*, 974)[31]. Vieira's use of language had a clear political drive, but the expressive means that he created was also deeply rooted in his literary and aesthetical conceptions, some of which emerged during the years he spent in prison. In this regard, the encounter in prison with the literature of João Guimarães Rosa was certainly a turning point. In a fragment dated May 25, 1971, Vieira dwelt on the peculiarities of his own literary style and his connection with Guimarães Rosa, about whom he wrote: "*[...]*A sua leitura foi um choque, uma revelação, uma espécie de encantamento que sacudiu no fundo de mim o que lá havia de latente e mais concorde com a m/ natureza"(*Papéis*, 971). Reading and studying the work of the Brazilian

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[30] Similarly, in his book *Luandino Vieira: o Logoteta* (1981), Salvato Trigo divides Vieira's production in two phases, one that includes *A cidade e a infância, A vida verdadeira de Domingos Xavier* and *Vidas novas*, and the other that begins with *Luuanda* and includes all the other works Vieira had published up to then. Trigo observes how, during the second phase, Vieira is more concerned with his literary expression than worried about the ideological content of his works, a characteristic that had dominated the first phase (1981, 320–21).

[31] *Macandumba* is a collection of three short stories written at Tarrafal prison camp between the year 1970 and 1971, eventually published for the first time in 1978. See: Topa 2014a, 166.

writer, Vieira found a legitimation[32] for the literary project he had in mind: mingling the elements of different languages that were part of the linguistic landscape of Angola, without mocking the people's way of talking or aiming at a realistic representation, but rather inventing a new, creative, expressive medium. The influence of Guimarães Rosa is palpable not only in Vieira's use of language, but also in his adoption of different literary techniques, such as that of the dialogic monologue, which characterises many of Rosa's works, including his masterpiece, *Grande sertão: Veredas* (1956) that Vieira read at Tarrafal[33]. José Luandino Vieira implements the technique of the dialogic monologue both in *João Vêncio: os seus amores* and "Kinaxixi kiami!", which were written at Tarrafal in 1968 and 1971 respectively.

From Kinaxixi to Angola

To illustrate the method of contrapuntal reading, I would like to focus on the novella "Kinaxixi kiami!", one of the last works Vieira wrote at Tarrafal. "Kinaxixi kiami!", which in Kimbundu translates as 'my Kinaxixi', is the story of Lourentinho and of how he happened to end up in prison. The *estória* is constructed around different temporal levels: it begins in the present, with a prisoner,

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[32] In June 1964, while in Luanda's Cadeia Comarcã, Vieira read for the first time Guimarães Rosa's *Sagarana*, which was lent to him by a friend. It was a revelation for the writer and a great source of inspiration. As Vieira affirmed in an interview, "the great lesson of Guimarães Rosa was his use of language. He confirmed my intuition. […] Guimarães Rosa reassured me that it was legitimate, in literary terms, to construct a literary language to achieve my objective. It represented a rupture…" (M. C. Ribeiro 2010b, 32).

[33] Apparently, the book circulated among several prisoners at Tarrafal, who appreciated it greatly (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1067). The critics of the time, however, were not always able to understand the literary revolution that Guimarães Rosa started. In this regard, see the fragment dated September 21, 1969: "Gaspar Simões persiste, nas suas crónicas, em desvalorizar o «Grande Sertão: Veredas» por, segundo ele, carência de elementos novelísticos afogados ou preteridos pela paixão linguística. Diz mesmo que não é verosímil aquela linguagem em rústicos. Não compreendo como ele pode insistir assim, nesta visão. Ou não leu ou lendo não «compreendeu». Enquanto não perceber que a linguagem é, no livro, também personagem de ficção, é matéria ficta, recriada portanto pelo autor. Que o romance se tornou assim mais autónomo, que o escritor ganhou mais liberdade – a de fazer inclusive também as ferramentas com que vai fabricar o objeto... Aliás eu estou convencido de que nós, os de Angola, lemos com mais facilidade este autor do que os universitários portugueses (recordo as leituras aqui na caserna sobretudo a compreensão e sensibilidade do Sousa)" (*Papéis*, 911).

Lourentinho, talking to another inmate. The story soon moves onto another level, that of the past, with the story of Lourentinho's adventures. The narrator tells of how he roamed through the country and discovered the remote vastness of Angola, although his adventures started in Luanda, on the shores of the lagoon of Kinaxixi, right in the centre of the mythical universe created by José Luandino Vieira. The text is a perfect example of the continuity that exists among most of the stories Vieira wrote at Tarrafal and, right from the beginning, it reveals a dense network of intertextuality. For example, when he speaks of his childhood memories and his childhood friends, Lourentinho is actually referring to events and characters that had already appeared in other stories written by Vieira[34].

The novella consists of a dialogic monologue, meaning that the presence of another interlocutor, though silent, has a role in the construction of the narrative. "Silêncio seu, assim, é segurança de cartão-e-imposto, autoriza vadiar a uso — não tem cipaio de rusgar por musseque do pensamento" (*Lourentinho*, 12)[35], says Lourentinho praising his interlocutor's attention, and feeling at ease to begin his tale. Soon identified as a white man from Luanda, the figure of the prisoner who listens quietly to the other's story makes one think of Luandino Vieira himself, inscribing the author's own experience of incarceration into the narrative[36]. In fact, the text

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[34] Notice, for example, the references to Candinho, Dinito, Xôa, Zeca and Xana, some of the children who appear in the stories of *No antigamente, na vida*¸ a collection of three short stories all set in the surroundings of the Kinaxixi lagoon.

[35] With this metaphor, Vieira refers to the racist anti-vagrancy laws that forced non-whites to carry a document of identification. In the absence of such document, people would not be authorised to move freely throughout the urban space and could be subjected to punishment by police and *cipaios* (native guards).

[36] *João Vêncio: os seus amores* shares many affinities with "Kinaxixi kiami!", including the prison setting and the narrative expedient of a dialogue between prisoners in which one of the voices is silenced. The characterisation of the silenced interlocutor in the novella, reinforces the idea that Vieira portrayed himself in this figure. See Part IV, pages 183—85.

overflows with autobiographical references[37], which are reinforced at the end by the addition of the date and location of writing: “Tarrafal, 28-6-71/6-7-71” (*Lourentinho*, 68).

Lourentinho’s own story is indissolubly connected to the story of a tree, the *mafumeira*, that saved him from drowning during a sudden flood when he was just a child. From that moment on, every time he happens to be near a *mafumeira* tree, Lourentinho goes through some kind of life-changing experience. His mother believed the tree was inhabited by the spirit of a *kianda*—a kind of mermaid or water spirit typical of Angolan folklore—but Lourentinho is convinced that the tree is a part of himself, a soul made of his own soul.

> Superstições gentias? [. . .] o problema sempre não é esse – se sereia existe. Todo o problema é só um teorema: pessoa existe? De verdade mesmo – dono e patrão e escravo, sua a vida por conta e risco, livre de nada mais? A si confesso: sereia, sereia mesmo, própria quianda cazumbil, quituta de miondona – não existe! O que tem somos nós mesmos divididos e multiplicados, muitos sítios, muitos tempos. (*Lourentinho*, 16)

When he grows older, Lourentinho leaves Luanda and travels extensively throughout Angola. Interposing his narration with comments of amazement such as “Angola é grande, irmão” (*Lourentinho*, 39), he describes to his interlocutor the different landscapes he saw and the different people he met during his rovings: Cuanhama shepherds, women of the South speaking Umbundu, black *assimilados*, both generous and wicked Portuguese settlers, a German man looking for

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[37] The author even places his own date of birth in the plaque that Lourentinho finds next to a *mafumeira* tree: “E rocei meus olhos, dei os passos e arranquei: gravado a fogo, em tábua do rijo pau-ferro, se lia o que o tempo me guardava: Kacy Bombax - 4/5/1935” (*Lourentinho*, 26).

cobras and fortune, in other words, a whole human mosaic spread throughout the great country of Angola. In this regard, the story constitutes an exception within Vieira's literary production, as it exceeds the limits of Luanda to include the whole country. Although partially set in the mythic universe that Vieira creates around the old Luanda and the lagoon of Kinaxixi, the story exceeds the limits of the city to include diverse geographic, linguistic, cultural and human landscapes. A lists of toponyms allow the reader to follow Lourentinho's itinerary and recreate in the text a map of Angola:

> Para o Sul, cruzeiros dos suis, sempre mais a fundo, Luanda ficando longe, mais perto do coração. Amar maior é sempre para lá. Corri Cela e Chela, laranjais de Camacupa [...]. (*Lourentinho*, 23).
>
> Mas fugi – a pé para Caluquembe. Aí, evitei rota batida dos Quilengues. De boleia, por picada: Bissapa – até na estrada para onde o sol se nasce. Cusse; Cusse, Cuíma; Cuíma, Huambo. Deixei terras sulenhas. No Dondo, voei de jipe, um Xico Benguela, agrónomo das horas vagas, o que ele era mais era um poeta. Caminho inteiro, para me alegrar, receitou até poemas de amigos lá dele, gente nova. Angola é grande, irmão! nuvens – de Kinaxixi nunca mais via, viagem ia [...]. (*Lourentinho*, 39)

Unlike the characters of other stories by Luandino Vieira, Lourentinho does not seem to be particularly politically conscious, nor is he involved with any political movement. Nevertheless, his story conveys a crucial political stance. As Michel Laban recalls, the story evokes "the diversity of Angola, a diversity in which each one can find his own place, regardless of one's ethnic or cultural origins" (2007, 104). Mapping the Angolan territory, its richness and diversity, is in itself

a political claim, a proof of the existence of the nation. Moreover, the awareness of such diversity is linked with Vieira's own experience of incarceration, since it was in prison that he had the opportunity of getting in touch with people coming from different regions and different backgrounds. Talking to them, collecting their stories, Vieira absorbed new layers of Angolan culture, which he later reversed in his literature. Leafing through *Papéis*, one can see how Vieira respected and admired his fellow prisoners' skills as narrators, and to what extent was he inspired by them:

> Quarta 24[*-3-1971*] * *[...]* O Sousa Alfredo e a sua extraordinária sabedoria natural. Dava um grande narrador. Vou tomando nota do que me conta: por exemplo a história do alemão que andava a comprar cobras e lagartos com seus vidros e palavras. Comentário: "Póp'la! O mundo tem pessoas!" "Angola é grande, mano!" (*Papéis*, 969)

In the novella, Lourentinho will use literally the same expressions that Vieira's fellow prisoner Sousa Alfredo used, and he will meet a German man roaming the interior of Angola looking for snakes who is strikingly similar to the one who Sousa Alfredo had met[38]. As one can see, some material transits from the notebook's pages to the novella, from real life into fiction. The story, however, does not draws from a unique source, but rather englobes different elements that Vieira

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[38] See also the fragment dated June 7, 1971: "Conta S. Alfredo, ex-guia, natural dos Dembos, Cambeji –espertíssimo com uma experiência notável e uma cultura integradíssima no seu ambiente. Que nos anos 50 percorreu a região dele um alemão c/seus ajudantes carregando vidros e vidros cheios de cobras. Que pagava todas as cobras que lhe levassem – e por bom dinheiro. Só as queria vivas, ele mesmo ensinou a caçá-las. Um pau, forqueta. Depois um laço. Até as mulheres – trad. inimigas das cobras – as caçaram. Surucucu 500 escudos! E a famosa cobra vermelha foi um show com o homem a rir na sua algaravia alemã aquimbundada – pagou 1500 escudos. Que levou um rapaz da região depois, com ele – o Mateus para a Alemanha" (*Papéis*, 979–80). Many details of this episode—such as the price the German used to pay for each snake, or the fact that he took a local boy back to Germany with him—pass from the notebooks to the story (*Lourentinho*, 52).

had been collecting since the beginning of his experience in prison. For example, *Papéis* shows how, as early as 1964, Vieira had been taking different notes on both the folkloric *kiandas*[39] and the *mafumeira* tree[40]. The very idea of a *mafumeira* tree inhabited by a supernatural spirit did, in fact, appear for the first time in a conversation that Vieira had with a prisoner named Anastácio, while they were both held at Luanda's Cadeia Comarcã, roughly seven years before "Kinaxixi kiami!" was written.

> 8-VII-64 Hoje de regresso do Hospital e sabendo que eu vivi no Kinaxixe (vinha a falar disso) um preso o Anastácio, perguntou-me se eu me lembrava da árvore que não queria sair qdo. acabaram com a lagoa. É o caso de uma gde. mufumeira que nem o tractor derrubou. Segundo o povo a cada golpe deitava sangue e o tractorista acabou por virar o tractor e morrer esmagado debaixo dele (isto é verídico). Que a árvore – concluí eu, vendo logo… – era a casa de uma quianda... – Ah! O sr. Graça sabe, é mesmo kangola (mukua-ngola=natural de Angola). E depois a conversa virou para quiandas e miondonas etc. (*Papéis*, 530–31)

In the epilogue of "Kinaxixi kiami!", one finds Lourentinho who, as a sort of Angolan Ulysses, longs to return to his Ithaca, to Luanda, to the Kinaxixi lagoon. When he finally succeeds in returning, he finds out how everything has changed: wild urbanisation and industrialisation destroyed the city and made his *musseque* unrecognisable, his mother died, his friends are gone. The Luanda of his childhood no longer exists and, although the *mafumeira* tree still resists on the

[39] See, for example, the information collected on the *kianda* both in Luanda (*Papéis*, 414–15), and at Tarrafal (*Papéis*, 584, 831).

[40] See in particular the fragment dated May 1, 1967, in which Vieira explicitly declares that he is collecting information for the sake of his story: "(2) Para a estória da sereia do quinaxixe: nome científico da mufumeira é kacy bombax" (*Papéis*, 796).

shores of the lagoon, it is now in great danger. In fact, one of Lourentinho's childhood friends, now an engineer devoted to the logics of progress, wants to tear down the tree as it stands in the way of his plans of modernising the neighbourhood. The engineer does not consider stopping when people tell him that the tree is inhabited by a spirit, nor when the *mafumeira* tree inexplicably starts to bleed, and not even when one of his workers dies while trying to cut it down. He is forced to stop when, at the end, Lourentinho gets on the tractor and, instead of pointing towards the tree, runs over him, smashing his legs and possibly killing him. This is the story of how Lourentinho ends up in prison, but it is also the story of how he saved himself, saving the tree that treasured a part of his own soul.

The closure of the story is, again, covertly political as it poses a series of thorny questions to the readers: is the recourse to violence licit when what we love is in danger? What are we willing to risk in order to protect what we consider most valuable? And, finally, are we prepared to suffer all the consequences of our acts? Unlike characters of previous stories by Vieira[41], Lourentinho is not a heroic figure, yet the calm and dignified way in which he accepts his prison sentence turns him into an example: "Eu? Aprendiz de vida – seta doida em procura do meu alvo: sereníssima paciência na alma, para o corpo só livre disciplina" (*Lourentinho*, 68).

CONTRAPUNTAL CRITIQUE (OR THE AUTHOR IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE AUTHOR)

With the analysis of "Kinaxixi kiami" I have tried to show how a reading that combines *Papéis* and the works of fiction written in prison by Vieira can provide a better understanding of the latter and, more generally, of the writer's entire literary project. *Papéis* can work as a counterpoint to

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[41] Think, in particular, of "O Exemplo de Job Hamukuaja" (*Vidas novas,* 103—13).

the reading of José Luandino Vieira's works, as it enlightens elements that help situate them in their context and grasp the process that shaped them. However, some may dismiss this idea on the ground that, to enjoy a literary text, one should not be bothered by external elements: literature is an autonomous form of art that does not need context to be better understood. The claim has a long tradition in literary studies, and it has been articulated by different movements of critics, as for example those linked to New Criticism[42] or, more recently, postcritique[43]. In a recent essay, the influential critic Rita Felski stood up against "several decades of historically oriented scholarship", longing for a more intimate and immediate connection with literary texts that does not aim at understanding them as artefacts entangled in historical, political and social nets. To her, 'understanding' a text means nothing more than "clarifying the details of its placement in the box", where the box stands for a demeaning metaphor of historical context (2011, 576–77). Felski is but a representative of a well-established trend in the Humanities. The claim that context helps to better understand a piece of literature is rejected by a significant number of scholars who worry that

> too much emphasis on context will make us lose sight of the unique features of a work of art or literature – that which makes it art or literature and not some other thing. In their view, there is a risk that the process of contextual analysis will

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[42] New Criticism emerged around the 1930s in the United States and had a long-term impact on literary criticism as a discipline. It is commonly associated with a sharp focus "on 'the work itself' and 'literature qua literature'", and with a lack of interest for "the historical conditions of literary production and reception; and […] the cultural relevance and political significance of literary work" (Hickman 2012, 2). As stated by Allen Tate, of the most representative among the New Critics, the main task of the critic was to establish and judge the specific objectivity of each literary work: "if we deny its specific objectivity then not only is criticism impossible but literature also" (1940, 456). In the same essay, Allen also attacks the historical method, claiming that it cannot be applied to the study of literature (Ibid., 458)

[43] Postcritique rejects what Paul Ricoeur called "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Felski 2015, 1), seeking an alternative to a method of reading and interpreting texts that aims at exposing their hidden truths and meanings. The aim of postcritique, as Felski argues "is to de-essentialize the practice of suspicious reading by disinvesting it of presumptions of inherent rigor or intrinsic radicalism—thereby freeing up literary studies to embrace a wider range of affective styles and modes of argument" (Ibid., 3). The focus, then, shifts from sceptical questioning to an affective approach to literary texts.

> dissolve the object of study, making it disappear in the tissue and noise of history. (Ladegaard and Nielsen 2019, 1)

Historical context is by some considered unnecessary and, likewise, any reference to the author of a literary work is deemed irrelevant if not prejudicial. Already in the 1970s, French structuralist Roland Barthes had famously proclaimed "The Death of the Author" (1977), basing his death sentence on the premise of the autonomy of the work of art and the autonomy of any linguistic act:

> as soon as the fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. (1977, 142)

As final products of the process that begins with the death of the author, texts should be let to speak for themselves. The author is but a function of the text, a necessary act of language and an immaterial entity, whose real life or human experience should not matter. He is, as Barthes writes, "in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now" (1977, 145).

Under this light, a work such as *Papéis*, as it brings forward biographical details about the author and forces readers to acknowledge the man behind the writing, may be considered interesting in itself, but dismissed as superfluous for a critical understanding of Vieira's literary works. I do not think this is the case. My own position as a critic in the long-standing debate on the importance or irrelevance of context for literary studies is that contextual elements are not

unnecessary tools for doing critique. On the contrary, I have often reiterated that an awareness of the context in which the work of art sees the light is crucial for its thorough appreciation. This is even more true in the case of works written under exceptional circumstances, as it is the case of most of Vieira's literary production. Certainly, reading Vieira's literary works without having a precise picture of the context can be a fully satisfactory aesthetic experience—and the fame and recognition achieved by Vieira long before the publication of his prison notebooks confirm this assumption. A reading that contemplates *Papéis*, however, can reveal original aspects and disclose unexpected connections between fiction and reality, between the writer's lived experience and the experiences he put into his stories, becoming a key to develop new approaches to Vieira's literature.

After all, context has always been a relevant part of the studies on José Luandino Vieira, as the writer's entire production is immersed in the Angolan milieu and most of it relates directly and quite explicitly to a specific historical period. Thus, the majority of critics have read Vieira's works within the context of the end of colonial rule in Angola and the emerging of the new nation, highlighting the political function of Vieira's literature and the language he developed, widely seen as a literary representation of a new Angolan identity[44]. Even those who engage in analyses based on essentially literary elements—i.e. the creative use of language, the study of narrative functions, etc.—are forced to come to terms with the context in which Vieira's literature is immersed[45]. Moreover, virtually all the studies mention some biographical details about José Luandino Vieira,

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[44] Among other possible examples, see: Apa 2010; Chabal 1995; Chaves 2005, 2012, 2014, 2016; Chaves, et al. 2007; Laranjeira 1995, 2000; Macêdo 1992; Mata 2001, 2014; Melo e Castro 2014; Ornelas 1990; Passos 2015; Padilha and Ribeiro 2008; Reisman 1987; M. C. Ribeiro 2010b, 2016; C. P. Ribeiro 2015; Topa 2014a, 2014b; Topa et al, 2015.

[45] See, for example, the works by Salvato Trigo (1981) and Joelma dos Santos Gomes (2009), which focus respectively on the creative literary language developed by José Luandino Vieira and on the role of the silence interlocutor in the novel *João Vêncio: os seus amores*.

namely referring to his Portuguese origins, his participation in the struggle for independence of Angola, or his attachment to the city of Luanda and its *musseques*, where the author spent his childhood. Childhood is indeed a much-explored theme because of the predominant role that children gain in many of his works and, on a more biographical level, because of the influence that this period had on the cultural formation of the author. This is how Brazilian critic Rita Chaves presented the writer in a recent article:

> [...] José Mateus Vieira da Graça, son of Portuguese parents, born in Portugal, from where he arrived [*in Angola*] when he was still a child. The childhood he spent in humble neighbourhoods, in communion with black and *mestiço* children and with the poor people of the city, would leave strong marks on him and would be converted into a powerful experience. The memory of this experience would constitute one of the facets of the narrator that his texts introduce to us. (2016, 78)

Chaves defends the recourse to biographical data in literary analysis as she is interested in literature as a "human experience" (Ibid.): within this framework, contextual and biographical elements can be used as tools that allow some crucial issues to emerge and be developed at the moment of the literary analysis.

However, unlike his childhood, which has received great attention, José Luandino Vieira's experience of incarceration has been often overlooked by critics. This is due in part to the difficulty of finding information on Vieira's imprisonment as, before the publication of *Papéis* in 2015, only a few details and anecdotes had been published in a number of scattered interviews. The great majority of critics acknowledges that Vieira was arrested because of his political activities and spent more than a decade in prison, yet this information is rarely used critically to inform one's

analysis of Vieira's works[46]. Even the numerous stories[47] that are set in prison or make references to the carceral environment have seldom been read through these lenses. This has led to some misinterpretations, as it is the case with some analyses of *João Vêncio: os seus amores*. The novel, written at Tarrafal between June 27 and July 1, 1968 (Silva 2015, 1032), recurs to the narrative device that I have previously defined as dialogic monologue, meaning that the discourse of João Vêncio, a prisoner who speaks from his cell, is shaped by the intervention of a silenced interlocutor who is in prison with him. Alfredo Margarido saw in this interlocutor a "white and Portuguese lawyer" (1981, 63), whom the black prisoner reduces to silence subverting the customary colonial hierarchy of speakers. More recently, American critic Steve Butterman also identified João Vêncio's interlocutor as his attorney, presumably following Margarido's lead. He then claimed that the very structure of the story

> consists of a man convicted of a crime relating his 'story' […] to a white Portuguese attorney. An inversion of the silence imposed upon traditional African orature, it is the lawyer whose questions implicitly direct the discourse of the narrator. […] However, it would be false to assume that the authority has been totally muted, for our protagonist is still *responding* and is therefore to some extent *directed* by the

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[46] An exception comes from Salvato Trigo, despite the fact that the critic claimed to situate his work "at the level of the autonomy of the literary text before the historical, ideological and sociological structure that begot it" (1981, 324). Trigo draws from Roland Barthes' figure of the 'logothete', the creator of new languages, to describe the creative processes that characterises Vieira's literary language. As, according to Barthes (1989, 4), a logothete must recur to a series of operations in order to create, including self-isolation, Trigo imagines that Vieira had found the isolation necessary for his work in prison: "Prison, where Luandino wrote all of his texts certainly provides to the writer the isolation that cannot be interrupted but by meditation and a total abandonment to language. Reflections on the language that most suited the African literature of Portuguese expression were, therefore, the main relief to the writer's lack of psychological and sentimental comfort […]" (1981, 454).

[47] Several of Vieira's works are set in prison or refer to carceral experiences. For example, the novel *João Vêncio: os seus amores* or the short-stories "O fato completo de Lucas Matesso" and "O Exemplo de Job Hamukuaja" (*Vidas Novas*), "Estória do Ladrão e do Papagaio" (*Luuanda*), "*Muadiê Gil*, o Sobral e o Barril" (*Velhas estórias*) and "Kinaxixi Kiami!" (*Lourentinho, Dona Antónia de Sousa Neto & eu*).

> questions, comments, affirmations and occasionally, criticism of the attorney-ethnographer. (Butterman 2000, 202–3)

By reporting these examples my objective is not to discredit the work done by other critics nor to point out their 'mistakes'. Rather, I would like to show to what extent the analysis of a literary work can change when one considers Vieira's own experience of incarceration and the impact it had on what he wrote. In fact, there is a great shift in perspective whether we consider João Vêncio's silenced interlocutor as an attorney-ethnographer or as a prisoner, one that shares the same condition of deprivation of liberty, of violence and abuse suffered by the narrator[48]. Imagining that the silenced interlocutor is a literary counterpart of José Luandino Vieira himself—that is, a prisoner just like João Vêncio—means removing the distance that separates the two characters, and observe how the relationship between narrator and narratee[49] emerges from a pact of solidarity and companionship that would not subsist had one of them been an attorney, an 'authority'. By introducing his silent counterpart in the novel, Vieira is positioning himself among those who did not conform to the way of life imposed by the colonial rule and were therefore punished. He is not looking down upon his characters, rather he is positioning himself as part of this incarcerated community which, as he claimed, was nothing but the Angolan nation. Vieira perceives himself as part of this national community and, through his literary work, he assumes for himself the role of its interpreter. The cultural material—words, idiomatic expressions, songs,

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[48] In her analysis of *João Vêncio*, Joelma Gomes reveals how, at the very beginning of the novel, some textual markers confirm that the silenced interlocutor is a prisoner held in the same prison as the narrator (2009, 74). She fails, however, to make the connection with Vieira's biographical experience. As far as I am aware, only Layss Pinheiro (2003, 84) and Fernando Martinho (1979, 11–12; 2015, 164) explicitly relate the narratee in *João Vêncio* with José Luandino Vieira.

[49] As explained by Schmid in *The living handbook of narratology* "The term "narratee" […] designates the addressee of the narrator, the fictive entity to which the narrator directs his narration" (2013).

tales, proverbs, etc.—that he collects while living with other prisoners coming from different regions of Angola stood at the base of his literary practice and, even when this may bring to mind the work of an ethnographer, it would be more correct to speak of autoethnography[50], as the author is always, implicitly or not, included in the picture he draws.

Going back to the novel *João Vêncio* and looking carefully at the text, one will notice that there are some elements that indicate that the silenced interlocutor takes notes while he is listening to João Vêncio's tale[51], which may be a plausible description of Vieira's actual behaviour in prison, as he used to write down on his notebooks what he thought could have some interest for his literary work. On the same lines, the glossary included at the end of the novel *João Vêncio* is revealing of Vieira's working method. Introduced ironically as "*Apontamentos para um glossário para uso exclusivo do autor*", the glossary is clearly available to all of us in spite of its name, and it has—rightfully—been interpreted as a device through which Vieira winks an eye at the reader, playing with the "tension between truth and verisimilitude" (Pinheiro 2003, 84). However, looking at the glossary after having read *Papéis*, one notices how it is not so different from the many lists of words and expressions in Kimbundu or in other languages that Vieira collected throughout his time in prison[52]. It is possible to trace many other connections with *Papéis*; observe, for example, how some of the terms included in the glossary are marked with initials that may refer to the fellow prisoner who was the source of the information[53]. In this case—as in many others—*Papéis* gives

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[50] Described as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (Ellis et al. 2011, 1), it is related both to ethnography and autobiography.
[51] "Não escreva, senhoro. Fico àrrasca: balelagem de sungaribengo e o companheiro julga é ouro? Jingondo só..." (*João Vêncio*, 56).
[52] See for example the collection of words from Kimbundu (*Papéis,* 409–11), or the Cape Verdean Creole glossary at pages (Ibid., 572–73).
[53] Consider, for example, the word "*cassanda*" or "*güeta*", which are marked with the initials FPC: these may refer to Fernando Pascoal da Costa, who was imprisoned at Tarrafal together with Vieira and whom the author consulted sometimes on linguistic issues. In this regard, look at the fragment dated May 5, 1966, whose very structure follows

the opportunity of looking behind the scenes of Vieira's writing: this does not compromise the pleasure of reading the stories, but rather emphasises the tensions between fiction, reality and verisimilitude that constitute the entire literary project of the Angolan writer. In an interview published in 2006, Vieira was asked if he identified with João Vêncio's interlocutor. Without hesitation, he replies: "Sim, era eu". The writer then added:

> João Vêncio, a questão das histórias dos amores [...] fosse só para contar isso, se calhar não escrevia. Mas como disse, há algumas palavras que irradiam, e depois saem estrelas. A história de João Vêncio também é a história da linguagem. [...] No fundo, é também a história de um processo histórico em que as pessoas vão absorvendo como uma esponja, e algumas coisas ficam, e depois o resultado, aquele texto não tem correspondência com realidade nenhuma". (in David 2006, 145–46)

When he says that the result has no correspondence with any reality whatsoever, Vieira seems to be referring to his literary language. In fact, although he incorporates lexical and syntactic elements of Kimbundu and other languages to reproduce an Angolan way of expression, Vieira is not interested in creating a naturalist register since, as he declared in an interview with Laban (1980, 27), an audio recorder could have done that better than him. Instead, he worked creatively with language, employing wordplays throughout the text, building neologism, adulterating words. Starting from a multilinguistic context such as that of the prisons of Luanda and the camp of Tarrafal, where native speakers of different languages mingled, and drawing from his imagination as well as from his personal pre-incarceration experience, José Luandino Vieira forged a language

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that of an entry in a glossary: "Kinaxixi – segundo o velho P. Costa vem de kina – cova, buraco: e xixi – água nascente ou depositada em buraco" (*Papéis*, 745).

that is just his own. However, claiming that "the result has no correspondence with reality" Viera could also be referring to how he modifies the reality that surrounds him when he puts it into literature. He plays with the materials at his disposal, blurring the lines between what is taken from real life and what is mere fiction, thus arousing issues of representation and self-representation.

PART VII

SUBJECTIVITY AND REFERENTIALITY

MISOSO IETU, KIDI

The connections between Vieira's prison notebooks and his fictional works testify to Vieira's 'creative use of reality'. Identifying all of these connections would be virtually impossible, as the amount of written material, corresponding to more than a decade of a man's life and writing, is not only voluminous, but also particularly dense, built as it is on an elaborate network of intertextual references. I have tried to point out some cases that I believe are representative of Vieira's working method, illustrating how some elements pass from real life to the pages of the prison notebooks, and from there to literature. Apart from the analysis of "Kinaxixi kiami" and of some aspects of *João Vêncio: os seus amores*, I have referred earlier to the case of "Muadiê Gil, o Sobral e o barril", a story inspired by Vieira's friendship with a common-law prisoner in Luanda's Cadeia Comarcã[1]. In that case too, names, characters, events and locales that had a true connection with real life experiences were incorporated in the plot of the story. Overturning the famous wording, any resemblance to actual persons or events was no coincidence at all.

The same can be said for the "Estória do ladrão e do papagaio", the last story I will be referring to. The circumstances behind the composition of this story are well documented, as Vieira

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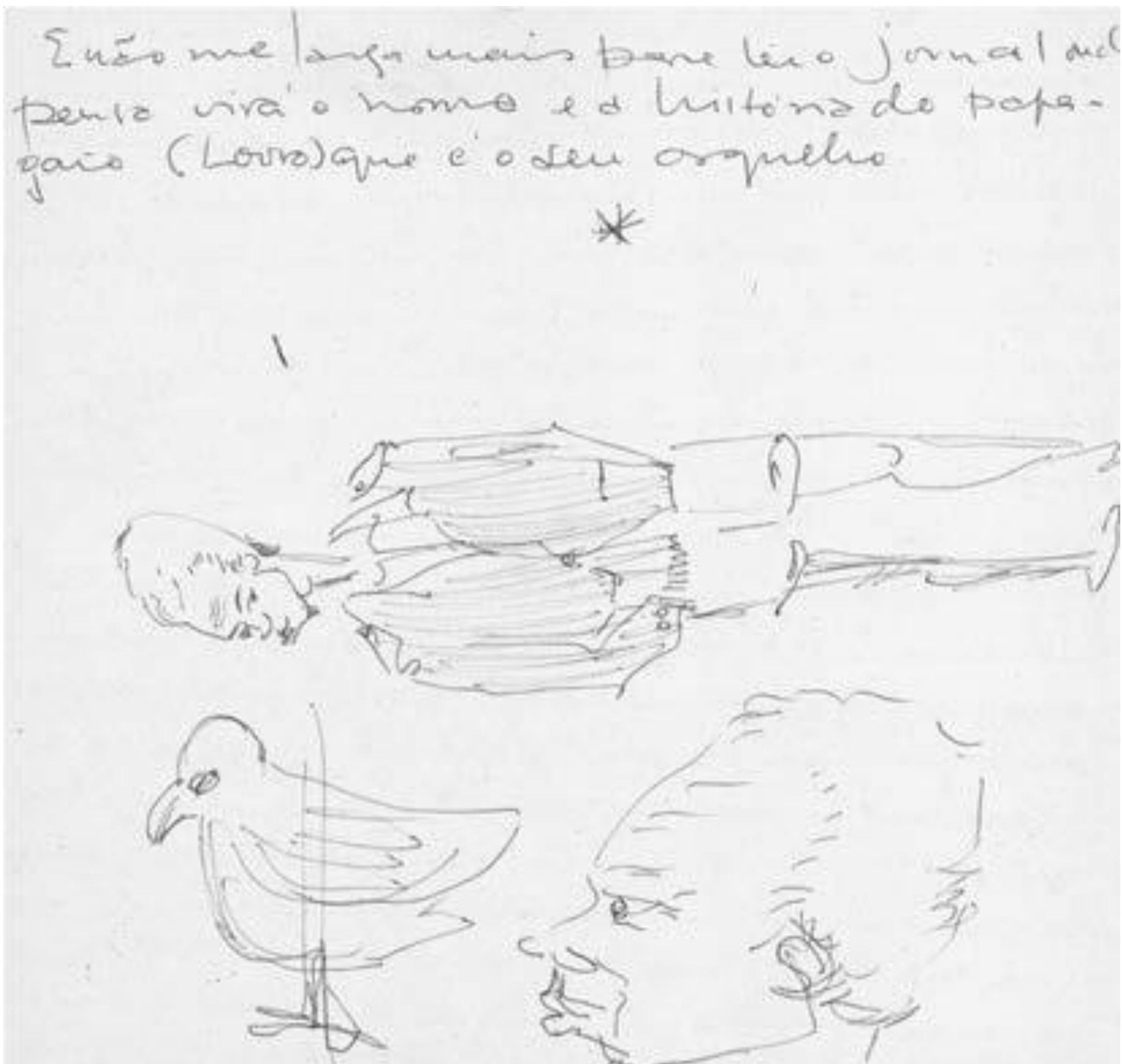
[1] See Part IV, page 103.

wrote about the progress of his work in his prison notebooks. Readers of *Papéis* learn that the story was completed on September 1, 1963, and that the writer offered it to his wife as a present for their wedding anniversary (*Papéis*, 354–55). From the beginning, the short story was intended to integrate a collection on the city of Luanda, which was eventually titled *Luuanda* and whose troubled story I have already discussed. Apart from giving such contextual information, *Papéis* also allows readers behind the scenes of writing the story, revealing the episode that triggered it. According to the notebooks, on July 31, 1963, Vieira met a young man named António Fernandes Garrido at the Cadeia do Comando da PSP in Luanda, one of those jails where political and common-law prisoners lived together. The writer was not only fascinated by the reason of Garrido's incarceration—that is, the very uncommon crime of killing a parrot—but also by the boy's physical aspect and way of talking. The boy, in fact, kept repeating an unusual expression, *por acaso* (as it so happens):

> Chama-se António Fernandes Garrido. Pergunta-me sempre se tenho «jornal d'hoje». Ontem perguntei-lhe porquê? – Por acaso é para ver se vem o nome dos detidos! Disse-lhe que só a «província». Agora não me larga. A razão: quer ver o nome dele no jornal! *[...]* Coxo duma perna, recordação de paralisia infantil. Está preso porque matou um papagaio! *[...]* Pergunto-lhe, olhando p.ª a pele bem clara e o restante aspecto: – É cap´verde? – Por acaso, sou mestiço! – De Luanda? – Por acaso de fora de Luanda! «Tudo por acaso... » E não me larga mais para ler o jornal onde pensa virá o nome e a história do papagaio (Louro) que é o seu orgulho. (*Papéis*, 350–51)



Drawing by José Luandino Vieira. *Garrido and the parrot* (*Papéis*, 351)

Lame and mestizo, the boy Vieira met in jail has much in common with Garrido Fernandes Kam'tuta, the main character of the "Estória do ladrão e do papagaio", who is caught and brought to jail after stealing a parrot. Apart from the small discrepancy between the crime committed by the real Garrido and the one committed by the fictional character, the other details correspond: the

name, the boy's light brown skin, his lame leg, and even his desire to see his name printed in the newspaper or that peculiar way of saying things *por acaso*:

> Na boca estreita de Garrido Fernandes tudo é por acaso. (*Luuanda*, 61)
>
> [...] os casos que adiantara pensar naquela hora fugiram, essas manias que o nome dele ia sair no jornal, notícia de roubo de papagaio. (*Luuanda*, 104)

Once again, the short story is partially set in a prison in Luanda, so that the description of the environment, and the behaviour of both guards and prisoners is shaped by Vieira's own carceral experiences. For example, the character of the guard Zuzé seems to be inspired by one of the guards of the PSP prison on whom Vieira intended to write a story (*Papéis*, 53), while there are plenty of references to the habits of everyday life in the prisons of Luanda. Among these, Vieira does not miss the occasion to point out the habit of forcing black prisoners to clean white prisoners' cells (*Luuanda*, 50), a racist practice that had profoundly shocked him (*Papéis*, 411).

On another level, *Papéis* constitutes a source of metatextual reflections on Luandino Vieira's literature. Throughout his prison notebooks, Vieira wrote extensively about his own literary work, commenting both his thematic and formal choices. See, for example, how in a fragment dated September 19, 1963, he acknowledges the need to polish, revise and correct his style:

> Ontem estive a pensar no trabalho literário. Devo escrever a novela «Benvinda» para pôr à prova aquele estilo, para ver se pode servir para todos os casos. Se não tenho de o abandonar. Ou antes: devo fazê-lo evoluir para um mais depurado, mais sóbrio, sem tantas faltas de gosto e pormenores de circunstância. A propósito: «O ladrão e o papagaio» necessita de uma boa limagem nesse sentido. Estou no perigo

> de cair noutra espécie de exotismo. Impõem-se muita vigilância e um maior aprofundamento dos dados, rejeitando s/ piedade aqueles que não são significativos. (*[...]* Outra coisa: a referência à «prisão Pê-Esse-Pê» é apenas um «bonito» - cortar tudo isso!) (*Papéis*, 362)

Among the 'corrections' that Luandino Vieira believes necessary to improve his work, special attention is given to those details that could be perceived as a form of exoticism and that must be removed. Notice how, in the last line of the fragment reported above, Vieira writes that the reference to the PSP prison where he met the young boy who inspired his story needs to be eliminated. But why? The answer is unsure, but it may lie in the last paragraph of the *estória*, that reproduces the popular formulas that opened and closed traditional Angolan tales, the *misoso*.

> Minha estória. Se é bonita, se é feia, os que sabem ler é que dizem. Mas juro me contaram assim e não admito ninguém que duvida [...]. E isto é a verdade, mesmo que os casos nunca tenham passado. (*Luuanda*, 105)

Claiming it is telling the truth, although the facts it narrates are not real, the last sentence of the story appears puzzling, even more so if read in the light of what emerges from *Papéis*—that is, knowing that some of the facts narrated in the story are actually inspired by real life events. To distinguish fact from fiction in absolute terms becomes more difficult than one could imagine.

If the boundaries between what is true and what is not true are tenuous, the frontiers between literary and autobiographical writing are also unstable. In this regard, it is interesting to discuss here Vieira's own conception of autobiography, which is particularly original and unconventional. During an interview granted to Michel Laban in 1977, Vieira answered some

questions about his novel *Nós, os do Makulusu*[2], observing that he considered his work autobiographical, though in a very special way:

> [...] não é aquilo que me sucedeu na vida, o que está lá relatado é autobiográfico neste sentido: é aquilo que, enquanto outras coisas me sucediam, eu gostava que me estivessem a suceder. Quero dizer, recordo-me que, mesmo desde criança, isso se passa comigo: constantemente, enquanto estou a agir, estou simultaneamente a imaginar uma ação que, englobando elementos do que eu estava a fazer, não é exactamente como estou a fazer, gostaria que fosse de outro modo. [...] Muitas vezes, isso prejudica o acto de viver; já estou a contrapor a essa vivência uma outra que é puramente fictícia e que eu considero biográfica verdadeiramente, porque se passa de tal modo ao mesmo tempo que, às vezes, tem muito mais valor, muito mais peso na minha vida isso, do que realmente aquilo que eu fiz [...]. (Laban 1980, 11)

The purely fictional is considered by Vieira truly autobiographical, as he feels to have lived it intensively. One could describe this practice as a kind of daydreaming that eventually resulted in a literary experience, although the process implied much more than mere reverie. Vieira dates the habit back to his childhood, but one could suppose that the practice gained more weight and intensity because of the specific circumstances of prison life[3]. Forced to spend much of his time in idleness and having been deprived of his “concrete, physical life” (*Interview*, 240), Vieira replaced it with all the lives he lived in his writings. For the writer this ‘imagined reality’ was as true as

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[2] The novel was written at Tarrafal prison camp between April 16 and 23, 1967.

[3] See, for example, the fragment dated March 20, 1971, in which Vieira alludes to be spending his time daydreaming: “Queria passear sozinho, preciso de solidão – para os sonhos cruéis, maus, ignóbeis por vezes, que sonho acordado? É um modo de viver”. (*Papéis*, 968)

reality itself, or even truer than reality itself, as it resonated very deep with him. It was not only imagined, abstract, but experienced, concrete:

> [...] realmente é uma coisa vivida, ainda que não tenha sido vivida na realidade. Foi vivida talvez com mais intensidade no plano da imaginação ou da criação do que se a tivesse vivido na realidade. Na realidade sempre somos distraídos por outra coisa. Ali [*na escrita*] estava a viver de uma maneira altamente concentrada. (Laban 1980, 33)

On these premises, one can better understand the saying in Kimbundu that opens *Velhas estórias*—one of Luandino Vieira's short-story collections—and that reads like this: "*Misoso ietu, kidi; muenhu uetu, makutu*", that is, our stories are the truth, our lives are not true.

Read in the light of the conception of autobiography that I have described here, the saying becomes more meaningful and seems to condense in a few words the relation between life and writing that characterises Vieira's literature. It points out that both 'reality' and 'truth' are not absolute concepts, but that they can acquire rather different meaning according to the larger body of principles and beliefs in which they are immersed. Perhaps this explains why, when writing the "Estória do ladrão e do papagaio", the author decided to eliminate the reference to the PSP prison in Luanda, where he had met the boy who inspired his main character. Instead of winking at the reader[4] by introducing a mention to the place of confinement where he was actually being held—

[4] Consider that, unlike other works by Vieira which were published years after his release from prison, the story was launched still in 1963. At the time, identifying the reference to the PSP prison in Luanda and connecting it to the author's biographical experience would have been quite easy.

that, in this sense, is nothing but ‘a frill’ (‘*um bonito*’)—Vieira preferred to stick to the story that he had re-lived in his imagination, a story that to him was more authentic.

It is interesting to notice how *O livro dos guerrilheiros* (2009), the last book published by Vieira before *Papéis*, questions once more the feeble boundaries between real life and fictional stories. The book begins with the declaration of a former guerrilla fighter who has decided to give an account of his experience during the struggle for independence. The narrator is ready to talk about his and his friends’ lives, claiming that he will not lie— “não reivendico licença de mentir” (*Guerrilheiros* 2009)—but warning his readers about the nature of the ‘truth’ he will be telling:

> [...] a verdade de suas vidas sempre não é possível de escrever, ainda que desejada; mas, menos ainda, desejada se possível. [...] a verdade não dá se encontro em balcão de cartório notarial ou decreto de governo, cadavez apenas nas estórias que contamos uns nos outros [...]. (Ibid.)

PUTTING EXPERIENCE INTO WRITING

Autobiographical studies have often focused on drawing the exact limits of the genre[5], describing what essential requirements a text must meet to be classified as a proper autobiography, and even defining who are the subjects that are fully entitled to produce an autobiography[6]. However, in the

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[5] I have discussed this issue in an earlier session of this work. See Part II, pages 50—52.

[6] For example, in an article first published in 1956 and meaningfully titled “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography”, Georges Gusdorf—who is considered a pioneer in the field of autobiography studies (Loureiro 2001, 135)—claimed that autobiography is a prerogative of the Western, male subject. He wrote that “autobiography is not to be found outside of our cultural area; one would say that it expresses a concern peculiar to Western man, a concern that has been of good use in his systematic conquest of the universe and that he has communicated to men of other cultures; but those men will thereby have been annexed by a sort of intellectual colonizing to a mentality that was not their own”(1980, 29). In opposition to this claim, Olney shows how important have autobiographies been in the United States, where they have contributed to establishing a new literary canon characterised by the presence of women and Afro-American writers (1980a, 15–17).

last decades, a shift in the critical discussion has opened up more space to consider the ever-growing amount of texts that, without fitting within the limits of autobiography proper, do engage in some form of autobiographical narration[7]. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson identify at least fifty-two genres of life-narratives (2001, 183—207), while James Olney observes that, when it comes to writers[8], "the tendency is to produce autobiography in various guises and disguises in every work" (1980b, 236). In this regard, in an essay dated 1980, Olney brings forth the example of Paul Valéry, explaining why he agrees with the French poet when the latter described one of his lyric poems as his own autobiography[9]. Notice that the poem bears no connection with Valéry's life, nor is it in any way an act of remembrance; nevertheless, the critic accepts and endorses the definition of autobiography on the ground that for the poet

> words and rhythms happened […] like any other event, only they happened, as it were, from within, and the self of his autobiography, therefore, is created by language and its forms, not the other way around. (1980b, 257)

It may be interesting to think of José Luandino Vieira's own conception of autobiography in the light of this approach. More than just imagined, the fictional stories he wrote were truly experienced by the writer: they 'happened from within' and shaped the self that put them into

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[7] Among this new wave of critical studies, see: Gilmore 2001; Smith and Watson 2001; Kadar et al. 2005; Brown and Reavey 2017; Novak 2017. Significantly, many among these new studies prefer using terms other than autobiography, so they define their objects of study as 'life narratives', 'life-writing', or even using creative designations such as "'meta-autobiography,' 'autotopography,' 'creative non-fiction,' 'false novel,' 'autofiction,' 'biofiction,' 'auto/biografiction,' 'autobiographical non-fiction novel,' 'auto/biographic metafiction,' or 'heterobiography'"(Novak 2017, 2).

[8] In his essay, Olney clarifies that his considerations on the ontology of autobiography are referred exclusively to works produced by autobiographers who think of themselves as writers (1980b, 236), since this implies not only a particular relation with language, but also the possibility of understanding the autobiographical work in the light of a writer's entire literary project.

[9] Specifically, he is referring to Valéry's poem "*La Jeune Parque*" (Olney 1980b, 249).

writing. Considering that what matters in autobiographical narratives is not the strict adherence to facts, but rather the relation between consciousness, creativity and "the way experience is transformed into literature" (Olney 1980a, 10), one can come to appreciate Vieira's claim about fictional stories being as true and authentic as any faithful account of one's life.

With the publication of *Papéis* in 2015, however, the ground for the discussion changed, as different kinds of autobiographical writing are now at stake. Unlike Vieira's fictional works, in fact, the texts collected in *Papéis* are inextricably associated to their author's life and historical experience and refer to real facts and real people. Moreover, the prison notes are assembled in such a way that readers almost have the impression of dealing with historical documents: the editors, together with the author, decided not to correct misspellings, linguistic inaccuracies or inconsistencies as these were considered an integral part of the text (Ribeiro, Silva, and Vecchi 2015, 37). This choice contributes to making the text appear more 'authentic' in the readers' eyes, "it confirms the metonymic impression between word and experience […]" (Ibid., 35). Yet, although autobiographical, *Papéis* is far from being a prototypical example of autobiography. A classic and influential definition of the genre is the one provided by Philippe Lejeune, who described autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (1989, 4). Surely¸ the notebooks collected in the 2015 edition of *Papéis* were written by a real person and concern a significant portion of his own existence, but unlike autobiography proper, *Papéis* could hardly be defined 'a narrative', because of the fragmentary and discontinuous nature of the texts it collects. Finally, it is not retrospective, as it corresponds to a practice of writing that

eliminates—or, better, reduces[10]—the distance between the development of the action and the act of writing: as in a diary, the writing seems to grasp the events 'in real time', as they happen.

On this subject, I agree with Paul de Man when he says that "autobiography […] is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" (1979, 921). This approach gives credit to the richness and complexity of the practice of life-writing, a field in which "each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm [*and*] the works themselves always seem to shade off into neighboring or even incompatible genres" (Ibid., 920). Only an unrestrained and flexible approach can account for the peculiarities of a book such as *Papéis*, which may be described as emerging from the intersection of different genres. For example, *Papéis* is not a diary, although the prison notebooks have much in common with the practice of diary writing, both in terms of organisation of the material (e.g. daily entries) and because they worked as an emotional relief valve for the author, who confessed his intimate thoughts and feelings to the white page, something that is usually associated to personal diaries[11]. Looking at the last page of the last notebook—that is, the one in which Vieira puts an end to the experience of the prison notebooks after more than a decade[12]—it is possible to see how Vieira

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[10] As Andrea Salter observes, "diary-time is not […] the same as experiential or 'lived time'. Diaries are a form of representation and there is always some kind of time-lag between 'the moment of writing' and the 'the scene of what is written about' […]. Succinctly, it 'takes time' for diarists to represent in writing their account of experiences" (2008, 182). On the same lines, but talking specifically about Vieira's notebooks, Ribeiro and Vecchi note that "the immediacy of writing is but apparent […]. That is, the short distance between life and writing is more of an optical illusion than a real fact" (2015a, 23).

[11] According to the definition of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Techniques* (Abbott 2010), "a diary or journal is a record, kept intermittently, of thoughts, feelings, or events. Entries may be dated or undated. Personal diaries […] are characteristically private and inward-looking".

[12] The interruption of the project of the prison notebooks does not coincide with Vieira's release from prison, but it is determined by a change in the circumstances of his imprisonment and the great emotional repercussions this had on him. In a private communication, José Luandino Vieira explained that the last notebooks ended when the director of Tarrafal prison camp told him that he had initiated the formal procedure to request his early release. From that moment, Vieira claims that he "felt released, both emotionally and psychologically" and interrupted his normal prison routine, thinking that he would soon be out. Finally, it took more than a year for his actual release. However, during this last period, the censorship was looser than before, and he could take notes of what mattered to him in his letters to his

himself associated the term 'diary' to intimacy and personal, private confessions: "28-6 [*a*] 6-7 [*1971*] **[...]* E o diário acaba aqui. Continuá-lo-ei. Não sei. Parece-me que tomarei daqui em diante só nota do que for material literário. *E me vou deixar de intimidades*." (*Papéis*, 980, my emphasis). Retrospectively, however, Vieira prefers using the terms 'notes' and 'notebook' instead of diary, as they better illustrate the diverse material collected in his prison writings[13]. This inclination is reflected in the subtitle of *Papéis*—that is, *Apontamentos, Diário, Correspondência*—which distinguishes between notes and diary, allegedly using the latter to refer to intimate writing, while the former covers all the rest of the multifarious material, excluding correspondence. The distinction between the two words—and consequently between different approaches to writing—reiterates the plurality that marks the book's uniqueness. As the editors of the *Papéis* declare, establishing what genre the book falls in would be impossible or, in any case, pointless. They write that "the dialectics between fragment and project creates a plurality of forms and genres. One can detect hints of diaries, shreds of autobiography, sketches of novels, echoes of letters, confessional tones, traces of poems, songs, anecdotes, essays" (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015a, 14).

The plurality that the editors identify corresponds to the different motivations that justified the writing of the notebooks and that, as I have already said, are as diverse as their contents. If one were to identify a common purpose behind Vieira's prison notebooks, it would be that these were

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wife. As he claims: "Até ao último dia, anotei sob forma outra, na correspondência, o que me interessava. Não há cadernos posteriores, há centenas de páginas de cartas de e para a Linda".

[13] Vieira still uses the term diary in some occasions, but it seems to prefer the word "apontamentos" (notes). When asked about the genesis of the notebooks, he replied: "Isso começou no Pavilhão Prisional, depois quando me levaram para outras cadeias eu levava aquilo comigo, se tinha alguns, e continuava com o mesmo modelo. No Tarrafal, eu levei uns papéis, os que tinha comigo levei. Mas depois lá, em certa altura, já não tinha muito papel, tive que passar para o papel de linhas, o mesmo papel que servia para escrever as cartas para a família, para os amigos, serviu para anotar... como é que se diz?, o diário. *Mas não é um diário, não, são apontamentos*" (*Interview*, 224, my emphasis).

a support for memory. As the author claimed in the brief presentation he wrote for *Papéis*, as soon as he was arrested he knew that he would have to put his life on hold for several years and that "from then on, it was necessary for memory to replace it" (*Papéis*, 9).

MEMORY, DO NOT BETRAY ME

During his years in prison, Vieira took notes of what happened around him and what he did not want to forget, both for intimate and political reasons, but also because he sensed that this material could come in useful for his literary projects. According to recent interviews with the writer[14], this last reason was for him the most important one: collecting literary material was what really motivated his effort of—and the risks he took in—creating, writing, hiding and smuggling the notebooks out of prison. As he declared:

> nunca tive a sensação que aquilo, que aqueles papéis todos que eu escrevia fossem documentos históricos. Para mim, eram documentos literários. Esse seria talvez o último pensamento que eu tinha sobre esse material: esse é material que vai me servir para fazer a minha literatura. (*Interview*, 228)

Many fragments in *Papéis* testify to this intention of collecting material in order to inform his literature. For example, in the entry dated May 30, 1969, Vieira begins questioning the use of taking notes of what happens around him (*Valerá a pena apontar as patacuadas de ontem?)* and goes on describing a disagreement he had with some fellow prisoners, whose accusations were

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[14] See, for example, the interview included in the volume of *Papéis* and the one at the end of this work, dated 2015 and 2017 respectively.

very likely to have upset him[15]. Towards the end of the fragment, he says he hopes he won't forget those years and concludes: "Memória, memória, não me atraiçoes e vai peneirando tudo para que o essencial, o típico fique – e os anos perdidos assim sejam anos ganhos" (*Papéis*, 896).

The author appeals here to memory, seeks her benevolence, and invokes her to sift through his recollections until only the essential and the typical shall remain. What he expects and hopes to see emerging at the end of this process is literary material— "at least one character" (Ibid.)— the one thing that may turn his miserable experience into something meaningful. The invocation to memory shows how aware Vieira was of the importance of letting time pass before he could really use that material: memories—as well as strong emotions—needed to settle and decant so that his perception of the events can be altered and, reconsidering his own words, he could then grasp the essential, the inner meaning.

Going through his notebooks some time after having written them[16], Vieira read things differently. Using the notebooks as supports for memory he was able to reconsider what was happening around him and tried to make sense of it, a practice that had an impact both on his literature and on how he approached and reassessed his entire carceral experience, his relationship with others and with himself. Allowing memories to settle down, Vieira could also see more clearly the rationale behind his own behaviour as well as others', identifying to what extent these were

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[15] The quarrel started because of the accusation of Vieira's participation in a scheme to create an apartheid state in Angola. At this regard, see Part IV, pages 106—9.

[16] The practice of re-reading and re-evaluating what he wrote in his prison notebooks—which eventually led to the publication of *Papéis* in 2015—was contemporary to the writing of the notebooks themselves. This is made evident by some additions made by the author to previous entries, such as the one that can be found at the bottom of the fragment dated September 23, 1965: "Anos da L. Dia triste. Mandei um telegrama que mesmo sincero me parece, à reflexão, uma «defesa» votada a insucesso da juventude que perdemos nestes anos separados. Mas confesso que não tenho tempo nem disposição para aprofundar este pensamento. De qualquer modo estou mesmo convencido que é assim: ganhe-se algo com a perda de anos e se o espírito se souber manter jovem, pode-se ser jovem muito tempo depois da juventude física. *[O que não serve de nada (4-1-66)]*" (*Papéis*, 715, my emphasis).

influenced by the dynamics of prison life[17]. This may explain why, in spite of the conflicts described in *Papéis*, Vieira was in good relationship with all his fellow-prisoners at the time he was released from Tarrafal, and still is many years after. Notice how one of the latest works published by the author, *O livro dos rios* (2006), is dedicated "without any doubt to those of Tarrafal", and how Vieira affirms that *Papéis* itself is a tribute to his former fellow-prisoners:

> Este mesmo diário é, sem sombra de dúvida, dos do Tarrafal! E sobretudo aos mesmos com quem eu choquei, porque esses é que fizeram com que eu melhorasse a minha percepção do que ia ser Angola do futuro. Porque as contradições que se jogavam naquele momento jogam-se ainda hoje. Nenhuma foi resolvida porque não podem ser resolvidas neste curto espaço, neste curto tempo histórico. E isto vivia-se diariamente! Umas vezes surdamente, em pequenas coisas mesquinhas. Isto está refletido nos *Papéis* e felizmente que todos nós, os que saímos do campo, até hoje, dos que estamos vivos, nenhum de nós está zangado com o outro! (in Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1055)

When investigating the role of the prison notebooks as a support for memory, it is necessary to point out that many events were reported hastily and with few details, so they may appear rather cryptic for the reader. For the author, however, they work as "mnemonic signs" (Lejeune 2009, 170), as allusions that trigger a whole series of connected memories[18]. As Lejeune affirms, "there

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[17] Talking about the environment at Tarrafal, Vieira observes: "Era para nos prender a nós próprios, facilitava o tipo de trabalho que [*as autoridades*] quisessem fazer. Fechados, exilados, cada um com a sua...ascendência racial, social, política, regional, tudo! Tudo nos separava. E tudo nos juntou. Isso que nos separava juntou-nos ali... Agora, o modo pacífico como tudo aquilo foi sendo resolvido, sem nunca deixarem de jogar as contradições de classe, de raça, de instrução, de tudo, é obra de qualquer coisa que era superior a isso que nos fazia no dia-a-dia estar amuados, ou zangados, ou irritados uns com os outros" (in Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1054)

[18] See, for example, the already mentioned episode of the *funje*, Part V, page 148—49.

is a gulf between the diary as it is written and the diary as it is read (by someone else, or even by oneself later)" (2009, 169). This characteristic prevents us from reading *Papéis* as transparent and unambiguous documents[19]. Whether a thorough understanding of the context in which they are immersed helps to uncover hidden meanings and references, there remains a wide shadow zone that is constitutive of the text.

Alterations and Historical Accuracy

The non-transparency of the notebooks relates also to their handling of time. Although they are supposed, like diaries, to record the 'here and now' (Tamboukou 2015), the notebooks are crossed by temporal vectors that go in different, and sometimes opposite, directions. There is the past, both distant and near; there is the present of the writer, an ever-fleeting present that changes under the eyes of the readers, as one daily entry follows another. Finally, the notebooks also implicate a constructive dimension that refers to the future, to the time when there will be freedom, when the stories can be written and published without censorship: "Valerá a pena, anotar coisas assim? Só o futuro o dirá." (*Papéis*, 716). The entanglement of different temporalities is what constitutes the basic matrix of the notebooks. This is a characteristic that the notebooks share with diaries for, as Lejeune writes,

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[19] The same could be said of the interviews with the author. Although I have recurred extensively to interviews throughout this work, I am aware that they are not transparent documents, nor that they are always entirely reliable. In fact, comparing different interviews to José Luandino Vieira, one notices that incongruences may occur over time. Inconsistencies of this kind may be attributable to how human memory works, since "memories can change over time and they are influenced by new events. Recollections of the original event can change over time. They can be incomplete, distorted, or even more complete" (Van Giezen et al. 2005, 936). The extent to which memories are distorted depends also on the importance of the information, so that researchers find "a higher degree of consistency for the central core of information compared to specific details" (Ibid., 937). This applies to the case of José Luandino Vieira, whose interviews can present some discrepancies as far as details are concerned; nevertheless, the essential, the core of information, remains unchanged. However, and notwithstanding the fact that memory is not always reliable, the possibility of the interviewee deliberately altering the fact shall not be dismissed.

> keeping a diary is surfing on time. Time is not an objective, continuous thing that the diarist tries to portray from the outside using tiny discontinuous brushstrokes, as a novelist would. He is himself caught up by the movement he is sculpting, moving along with it, emphasizing certain lines and directions, transforming this inescapable drift into a dance. (2009, 182)

The complex way in which the passing of time is reflected in the original prison notebooks refers directly to the actual practice of writing. *Papéis*, however, involves a retrospective gaze on the material contained in the notebooks, and on Vieira's entire carceral experience. This implies that the material in *Papéis* is assembled according to the criteria established by the author today, in the present, several decades after his release from prison[20]. The gap that exists between the time of the writing and that of the publication allowed Vieira to thoroughly reconsider the material included in the notebooks since—to recover the metaphor quoted earlier—memory had time to sift through his recollections, letting the essential emerge. This process is inevitably conditioned by the awareness of how both Vieira's personal history and the history of his country developed after he put an end to the experience of the prison notebooks. Therefore, another temporal dimension is added to the already multi-layered structure of the notebooks: to the ever-fleeting present of the writing, one has to adjoin the present which has been frozen by the publication of the book.

The operation of selection, assemblage and montage of the notebooks' material that resulted in the publication of *Papéis* is underpinned by an autobiographical gesture. Converted into the editor of the notes he had accumulated in prison, Vieira intervened on the text, selecting

[20] The editorial note included in *Papéis* states clearly that the original notebooks were revised and reorganised by Vieira and the editors in order to correspond to "the present will of the author" (Ribeiro, Silva, and Vecchi 2015, 34).

what to include, adding explanations when these were indispensable or removing direct mentions to people to protect their identity[21]. As one can read in the editorial note, the edition "respected, as far as possible, the original manuscript. However, and due to the complexity of the document, some editorial alterations were made, under the author's guidance and supervision" (Ribeiro, Silva, and Vecchi 2015, 35). Alterations are signalled by graphic symbols, as for example "[...]", which indicates that a part of the text has been intentionally left out by the author. Tracking down these 'holes' in the text can help us to figure out what kind of material Vieira did not find apt for publication and, possibly, let us infer the subject of the missing information from the context. In some cases, only a portion of the fragment is omitted so it is possible to deduce that Vieira eliminated some intimate information about, for example, his relationship with L./K. or other women[22]. In other cases, however, the omission concerned the whole fragment, making any guess about its content a complete shot in the dark. Consider also that there is no indication of how significant the elision was, so that there is no way to know whether only a few lines or entire pages of the original text have been omitted. Such alterations reaffirm the non-transparency of *Papéis*, where the immediacy of the writing and the impression of total adherence to reality can sometimes disguise delicate issues of self-representation, and different strategies to face them. Moreover, they confirm how the author in the present contributed to shape the image that readers have of him in the past and, vice versa, the subject in *Papéis* informs readers' current image of the writer. As Jean Starobinski notes in a text about autobiography "it is because the past 'I' is different from the present 'I' that the latter may really be confirmed in all his prerogatives" (1980, 78). As in any

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[21] In the original manuscript, Vieira had already encrypted proper names to protect the identity of the people he mentioned from the police or from anyone else who had happened to read the notebooks (Ribeiro, Silva, and Vecchi 2015, 36).
[22] For examples of cuts of material concerning the author's relationship with his wife, see: *Papéis* 898; 899; 901; 907. For other examples, see: *Papéis*, 726; 729; 748.

other form of life-writing, "the past can never be evoked except with respect to a present: the 'reality' of by-gone days is only such to the consciousness which, today, gathering up their present image, cannot avoid imposing upon them its own form, its style" (Ibid, 74).

Paul Eakins has observed that the risk inherent to "the shift from a documentary view of autobiography as a record of referential fact to a performative view of autobiography centred on the act of composition" is that "the reality of the past seem[*s*] quite simply to vaporize" (1992, 143). However, focusing on the author's subjectivity and on the practice of writing should not make lose sight of the historical scenery in which both subject and practice are collocated. Showing that Vieira intervened on his prison notebooks does not make them less true to history. On the contrary, although subjective and somehow 'constructed', *Papéis* works as a key to the understanding of history, more so if one considers that its accuracy is further backed up by numerous historical records. As historian Jaume Aurell observes, autobiographies can be considered

> as a valid form of history or, at least, as 'unconventional history'. This concept may be understood as a negotiation with history that […] posits the 'subjective' as an effective form of knowledge, and engages the constructed nature of the text. (2006, 434)

Papéis is a unique document for those interested in a social history of Angola, as it provides important insights on an almost unexplored aspect of the nationalist struggle: the experience of prisoners. *Papéis* shows from the inside how colonial prisons and prison camps worked, which dynamics governed their functioning, how sociability among prisoners was articulated and how prisoners found means to resist and counteract the repression they were subjected to. José

Luandino Vieira affirmed that, during his time in prison, he did not think his notebooks had any particular historical significance, as these had for him a literary value; nevertheless, to the question if he intended to contribute to the history of Angola with the publication of *Papéis*, Vieira answered:

> foi um dos argumentos para mim próprio para o fazer, até que resistindo até o fim, até hoje... Ao mesmo tempo, a ideia de que isto vai contribuir era a parte que respondia 'sim'. Agora não, mas se calhar daqui a cinquenta anos começa alguém assim: 'não o fulano nunca foi preso, nunca esteve na PIDE, não sei o que', e de repente nos *Papéis* está lá: hoje saiu fulano de tal, hoje entrou fulano de tal. [...] ainda ninguém me disse: fizeste mal em publicar. Algumas pessoas disseram 'ah, não era bem assim', mas eu não inventei, escrevi naquele dia. (*Interview*, 223)

Vieira does not claim to be necessarily right, but he does claim that he is not making anything up: he is just being true to what he wrote decades ago, when the events about which he wrote were taking place. In spite of the alterations that have been made to the original text, accuracy is regarded as an ethical assignment and responds to the desire of respecting the experience of those who, in Vieira's words, were not making history but suffering it in their own flesh (*Interview*, 228). With this expression the writer referred to the community of prisoners and, more generally, to the entire Angolan people, or to use an expression that often recurs in Vieira's vocabulary, to the entire Angolan nation.

Different critics[23] identify a special link between representations of the self and representations of the nation in autobiography. According to Leigh Gilmore, autobiographical discourse stimulates an identification between the story of the nation and writers' personal trajectories since it "offers writers the opportunity to promote themselves as representative subjects, that is, as subjects who stand for others" (2001, 4). In spite of often portraying an exceptional and extraordinary life, the subject of the autobiographical text comes to 'stand for others' and is seen as representative of a whole community. As the genre promotes the transformation of the private into public discourse (Ibid.), one's individual story may "become a synecdoche for the history of the nation itself; for instance, a story of an honourable struggle against externally imposed justice" (Ryder 2006, 16–17). The case of José Luandino Vieira can be framed within these parameters. It is the writer himself who overlaps his personal story—and that of his fellow-prisoners—with the story of the nation, claiming that his situation "was the same situation of the Angolan nation, nothing more" (Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1053). In this case, his identification with the destiny of the nation lays also on the widespread metaphor of colonised subjects as inmates of oppressive carceral institutions, something that can be observed also in other autobiographical works written by former prisoners, such as Nelson Mandela's *Long walk to freedom* (1994), on which I would like to spend some words.

Anti-apartheid fighter, leader of the African National Congress (ANC) and first black president in the history of South Africa, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela is a world-wide known figure, and his extraordinary life experience has often come to represent the story of his country which,

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[23] Apart from the authors mentioned in these pages, see also: Smith and Watson 2001.

in less than a century, went from colony to white-supremacist republic to multiracial democracy[24]. Because of his commitment to the struggle to overthrow white rule and the system of apartheid, Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison—from 1962 to 1990—including eighteen years at Robben Island prison, known for its inhuman living conditions and brutal system of hard-labour. Writing, studying and engaging in political discussions with his fellow-prisoners[25] were some of the means through which Mandela tried to resist and overcome the carceral regime, preparing also for the life that expected him out of prison. Among his prison writings, there were a number of political documents, as well as more personal and autobiographical notes which, nonetheless, had a clear political significance. In fact, Mandela's attempts at writing his own autobiography in the late 1970s can be framed within the larger context of the ANC political struggle and reveal much about his duties as leader and symbol of the party. As Steve Davis argues, the idea of writing an autobiography of Nelson Mandela came from his comrades Walter Sisulu and Ahmed Kathrada[26], who

> saw the need to bolster the image of the ANC by raising the profile of its most potent symbol. Their plan was to write a biography that detailed Mandela's life

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[24] On South Africa's political transition, see: Bouckaert 1997.

[25] At Robben Island, as Crain Soudien claims, "the prison evolves into a space of intense, often uncomfortable, but generative learning. In this space, simply also being in each other's company, prisoners explored, in ways and on a scale not seen regularly, the limits of their identities as South Africans. The debate was about both the politics of different organisational approaches and, crucially, about the self" (2015, 356–57). Disagreements and disputes over identity or other crucial issues were common among South African freedom fighters, as groups with different social, ethnic, intellectual and political backgrounds were converging in one political movement. Just like what I have outlined in the case of Angola, different ways of imagining the nation were at stake. Due to his charismatic personality and the prestige he had acquired in the struggle, Mandela acted as a mediator among different positions. Although he did not easily step back from his ideas, Mandela was 'completely committed to inclusion' (Ibid., 364), and worked hard not to leave any group—both racial and political—out of his project for the future nation.

[26] Both activists were arrested in 1963 and sentenced to life imprisonment together with Nelson Mandela during the famous Rivonia Trial. See: Alexander 2013, 149–52.

from childhood through imprisonment, and publish the manuscript prior to his 60th birthday in 1978 (2014, 174).

Mandela's comrades would also contribute to the actual writing of the text which, unlike a common autobiography, was the result of a collaborative process of writing: Mandela would let his drafts circulate among his comrades, who would leave comments and suggestions (Allen 2011; S. Davis 2014). In 1976, a prisoner succeeded in smuggling the manuscript out of Robben Island, but eventually this text was never published[27] and Mandela resumed writing only two decades later, after his own release from prison. *Long Walk to Freedom* was finally published in 1994, the same year he was elected president of South Africa. The timing and tone of the narrative make it clear that, in this case too, Mandela intended to make a strategic use of his autobiographical narrative; moreover, *Long Walk* was again an exercise in collaborative writing, although very different from the one who had taken place at Robben Island. The publication, in fact, counted with the help and collaboration of several professional writers, including novelist Nadine Gordimer and American journalist Richard Stengel[28]. *Long Walk* was a huge editorial success, a global bestseller (Allen 2011), and, in 2013, it was even adapted into a major international movie production. Since its publication, it has attracted the attentions of scholars and historians, who have used it as a source for their studies[29], but it has also appealed to the public at large, being for many readers

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[27] For the whole story of Mandela's prison manuscript and its different copies, see: Allen 2011. A copy of the surviving manuscript is now held at Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory, Johannesburg, while a digital copy is available at the webpage of the centre. See: Mandela, n.d.

[28] The extent of Stengel's contribution to Mandela's autobiography is not clear. Some critics believe that "notwithstanding the participation of his ghost writer, it is a safe assumption that the book's 600-odd pages are a faithful reflection of Mandela's own conception of his life and personality […]" (Lodge 2006, 187). Others affirm he had a crucial role in crafting the text, and especially in turning it into an attractive product for Western readers (S. Davis 2014).

[29] Among many other possible examples, see: Legassick 1998, 2002; Motsa 2009; Soudien 2015; Suttner 2003, 2014, 2016.

"internationally and inside South Africa, […] their introduction not only to Mandela, but to the history of resistance" (Legassick 1998, 450).

Being aware of the great symbolic importance of "how he represented himself and how he was understood by others" (Suttner 2014, 354), Mandela used the platform provided by the book not only to retrace his outstanding personal trajectory, but also to build consensus around his latest political achievements. In fact, the book emphasises Mandela's commitment to compromise and reconciliation as the base upon which to build a new South Africa, fostering an attitude that was highly controversial at the time—and still is today[30]—since it was seen by some as detrimental to the interests of black South Africans. Recurring to the writing of the self as an opportunity to explain the reasons behind his political and personal decisions,

> [*Mandela*] surely must have been conscious of just how tightly welded his life's story would be to the officialized narrative of the nation's path to liberation. He had to have been cognizant of the possibility that his 'long walk to freedom' would be superimposed on the nation's arduous journey to democracy, his trials and triumphs sutured into its mythology. Such, after all, is the fate that befalls all fathers of nations. (Yaziyo 2019)

Long Walk retraces Mandela's life starting from his childhood in the countryside, going through his formation as an anti-colonial and anti-apartheid activist, to his years in prison and final liberation, metaphorically retracing at the same time the history of the nation (Simakole 2012, 13), from a distant past in which the life of South Africans "was shaped by custom, ritual, and taboo"

[30] For accounts of resentment towards Mandela's emphasis on reconciliation and forgiveness rather than on reparation and justice see: Msimang 2015, 2019.

(Mandela 2013, 11) to a modern time carrying "the hope that a new South Africa was about to be born" (Ibid., 554). The phases of the autobiographer's life correspond to moments in the history of South Africa, and the long time spent in confinement becomes a powerful symbol of all the violence and abuses endured by the black majority during the struggle against racism and apartheid. There is, therefore, a sense of accomplishment and of closure when, by the end of the narrative, Mandela has been released from prison and can take part to the first democratic elections in the history of his country. When he decides to vote close to the burial site of the first ANC leader, the narrator feels that this "brought history full circle" (Ibid., 617) and, as he swears as president of the reborn nation, he is "overwhelmed with a sense of history" (Ibid., 621). Overlapping his own history of great achievements to the history of the nation and reaffirming the importance of both resolution and compromise to attain political change, Mandela conveys a sense of hope for the future that awaits his country. There is great excitement for what is about to come: in fact, the second to last chapter ends with Mandela encouraging his fellow-nationals to overcome divisions and "[…] unite and join hands and say we are one country, one nation, one people, marching together into the future" (Ibid., 620).

It is on very different premises that *Papéis* can come to stand for the history of Angola. After all, not only are the histories of the two African countries different although intertwined, but also *Papéis* is a very different kind of book from *Long Walk*. Unlike Mandela, José Luandino Vieira did not use his prison notes to elaborate an orderly chronological narrative in which he could speculate about the past in the light of the present but, instead, he reassembled his texts presenting them in an edition that reproduces, as far as possible, the original manuscript. The text has then a precarious and unstable, rather than thoughtful and orderly, character. Moreover, rather than aspiring to describe the author's entire lifespan, *Papéis* only focuses on a limited yet crucial

period. The twelve years covered by *Papéis* were particularly significant both in the life of José Luandino Vieira—who admitted that no other period in his life had such an impact on him—and for the fate of Angola, which was in the middle of a brutal war against Portugal. The book captures a time soaked in tensions: things are falling apart, and the old order is already inevitably broken, but the new order has not yet emerged, and the future is still uncertain. This is true both for the nation and the writer. By July 1971, when he interrupted his prison notebooks' project, Vieira still did not know when he would be released, nor what would happen to him after leaving Tarrafal; meanwhile, in Angola, the war went on amidst the alternate victories and defeats of either party, making the situation confused and the final result unpredictable. It is not surprising then that, after more than a decade of prison writing, José Luandino Vieira concluded his last prison notebooks interrogatively and with a feeling of disquiet: "Quando chegará? Como virá? Tremo" (*Papéis*, 980). Although these last words are most probably referred to his wife—who was supposed to visit him at Tarrafal for the second time in eight years in July 1971—they resonate with the readers and evoke other meanings. One could even read in them a certain trepidation and apprehension for the future of Angola: when will the independence arrive? How? What is the nation going to be like?

There is no closure at the end of *Papéis*, no sense of accomplishment or of having completed a full circle. Even if read in the light of our current understanding of the history of the nation, with the awareness of the defeat of colonialism and the achievement of independence, the years portrayed in the book still look like an open wound, as they carry the seed of a future that brought more violence and did not deliver all the promises of change that were expected. However, it is precisely this openness that allows readers to appreciate the information that the book brings and use it as a key to reevaluate the story of José Luandino Vieira and the history of Angola. It is this openness that allows readers to approach *Papéis* looking for what, in there, is still alive:

Isso emociona-me porque há sempre qualquer coisa mesmo em atos que estão absolutamente passados, arrumados, catalogados, esquecidos; há qualquer coisa que ainda está vivo e que, de repente, nos emociona de novo (Vieira in Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1075).

EPILOGUE: A SITTING HORSE

Drawing by José Luandino Vieira. *Cavalo sentado* (*Papéis*, 327)

In early June 1963, José Luandino Vieira and other prisoners were suddenly transferred to the Cadeia do Comando da PSP[1], a prison whose appalling living conditions Vieira describes in his notebooks (*Papéis*, 323). After spending a few days adapting to the new environment and without writing a line, Vieira returned to his notebook and wrote down several fragments under the same entry, as if he was trying to make up for the lost time. He also added some loose slips of paper to the notebooks, writing: "6-11-63 *[...]* Velhos papéis que têm muito valor porque me relembram mtas. coisas. Arquivo-as" (Ibid., 324). Among them, one finds the curious drawing of a horse unnaturally sitting on a tiny stool, the legs kicking in the air to show an uncontainable desire to move and, at the same time, the impossibility to do so (Ibid., 327). A note by the author informs us readers that he had made the drawing to illustrate the cover of António Jacinto's own prison notebook, and that the idea came from an expression—*cavalo sentado*—that the poet used to refer to himself (Ibid.). Vieira's sitting horse is almost a visual oxymoron, it is the image of pure energy forced to restrain itself. As such, the image is representative of all the prisoners who, during the liberation war, were forced into inertia within the walls of a prison, when people on the outside were actively fighting on the battleground or, less heroically, simply struggling to go on with their lives.

Beyond the beautiful drawing and the compelling metaphor, this fragment is interesting as it indirectly alludes to the fact that, apart from Vieira, there were other prisoners who kept their own notebooks and dedicated part of their time to writing. Some months after the episode I have recalled here, Jacinto showed some poems to Vieira, presenting them to his friend as his first compositions in over two years. Vieira did not miss the chance to copy them in his *Caderno 6*

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[1] See Part V, footnote 5, page 121.

(Ibid., 372—75), so that, unpublished until now, Jacinto's poems are finally made available to all readers. This is by no means the only example of poems or other literary compositions written by some among his fellow prisoners that Vieira included in *Papéis*. There are poems by Amadeu Amorim and Manuel Alegre, traditional tales by Augustinho Mendes de Carvalho, lyrics by the common-law prisoners of Luanda, and many other pieces of literature. Even beyond the limits of the circle of few so-called 'intellectuals', writing was a widespread and transversal practice that, at different levels, concerned a large number of prisoners. Vieira got to the point of talking (somehow wryly, it must be said) of a "writing fever" when referring to the Angolan prisoners at Tarrafal (Ibid., 715). Each one with his own motivations and according to his own inclination, many prisoners introduced writing in their daily routine: they wrote, they exchanged written material[2] and their notebooks circulated surreptitiously within prison.

As I have previously suggested, writing in prison could be considered part of a strategy of resistance, a strategy to create a space in which the prisoner can be his own master. When he was questioned about the meaning that writing had for him while incarcerated, Vieira answered: "[…] às vezes diz-se 'era para resistir!'. A esta distância é muito difícil perceber se era para resistir ou se era para fugir. Não sei se a escrita era uma evasão, se era um ato de afirmação" (in Ribeiro and Vecchi 2015b, 1050). Probably the answer stays somewhere in between these two options: writing can be both a means to escape and resist and, in any case, it can allow prisoners to transcend—at least for a moment—the carceral environment, building a bridge towards the outside and towards the future. Therefore, even when they focus on the miseries of life in confinement, prison writings

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[2] Not only did Vieira recognise the literary qualities of many among his fellow prisoners (See: *Papéis*, 583), but his own literary works circulated among other prisoners. See, for example, the fragment in which he reports the opinion of a prisoner who had read *Luuanda*: "30-X [-*1964*] «Luuanda». Impressões de Amadeu Amorim: Linguagem doce, estilo «nosso». Há lá um bocado de nós próprios. Aqueles problemas existem. Não sendo verdade são histórias verdadeiras. *[...]*" (*Papéis*, 586).

imply a constructive dimension that refers to the future, to life after prison. The future is constantly evoked, imagined, feared and desired:

> 4-5-63*[...].*Quando olho para o tempo até onde me recordo (1938?) e vejo a imensidade de experiência, o enorme peso de todos esses dias e factos sinto uma vertigem, assusta-me a ideia de tanto tempo já passado porque quanto mais é passado menos é futuro e eu queria ainda fazer muitas coisas *[...]* (*Papéis*, 272)

The allusion to the future can refer to different dimensions, including the writer's personal expectations, his domestic horizon and literary plans, as well as the collective project of building a different future for Angola. In this regard, Vieira was aware that the construction of a national future passed through the revaluation of one's history and culture: it was necessary to appreciate the value of the native culture, it was necessary to find a new way to narrate the national past. The prison notebooks are, consciously or not, an attempt to respond to these urges: while they serve as a support to Vieira's personal memory and as a depository from which to extract material for his literature, they also preserve the memory of a community who participated in the struggle from behind bars. They are an archive that brings precious material to the study of Angolan culture and literature, and that can help rethink the history of the liberation war.

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The archive occupies a central place in contemporary critical thinking. From the beginning of the 20th century up to now, a vast number of artists and outstanding intellectuals—among whom Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Andy Warhol, to mention but a few[3]—have speculated on

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[3] For an overview, see: Merewether 2016.

the concept, focusing their attention both on the archive as a collection—a physical[4] accumulation of scripts, documents or images—and on the process through which institutions or individuals decide to store and preserve historical knowledge and memory. It is a common understanding that the archive is not an objective nor complete representation of history: the archive is made of traces, of fragments, and it is structured according to the interests and internal logic of the individual or institution that created it.

In his essay "The Body and the Archive" (1986), American artist and critic Allan Sekula shows how, in the 19th century, the police were among the first institutions responsible for the creation of vast, modern archives. They soon realised the potential of technology—e.g., of photography—as a means to drastically enhance the archive and turn it into an effective instrument for the administration of punishment and the maintenance of the established order[5]. Thus, in a context that pushed toward the rationalisation, standardisation and bureaucratisation of practices of control of the social body, sophisticated systems of identification and classification of criminals came into existence, combining the use of photographs, written texts and other personal data[6]. Referring to the importance that police archives acquired during the 19th century, Sekula speaks of the emergence of a "truth apparatus", of "a bureaucratic-clerical-statistical system of 'intelligence'" whose symbolic artifact is "the filing cabinet" (Ibid., 16). The development of these

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[4] With the advent of digital technologies, the archive does no longer necessarily have a physical dimension. It is uncertain, however, whether this technological shift can fill the lacunae of non-digital archival processes. See: Camacho, 2018.

[5] This kind of archive mapped both deviance and conformity, outlining the contour of normality and that of criminality. In line with Michel Foucault, Allan Sakura argues that: "[…] the position assigned the criminal body was a relative one [*and*] the invention of the modern criminal cannot be dissociated from the construction of a law-abiding body—a body that was either bourgeois or subject to the dominion of the bourgeoisie. The law-abiding body recognized its threatening other in the criminal body […]" (1986, 15).

[6] As Sekula writes of a context in which the pseudoscientific ideas of physiognomy and phrenology had great relevance, he refers to methods of classification that included anthropometric descriptions, such as the measurement of the skull. See, for example, the method elaborated by French policeman Alphonse Bertillon (Sekula 1986, 27—33).

new systems and techniques implied that the truth was made to weigh on the body of the prisoner, the criminal, the unworthy. The archive kept traces of this process.

It may be interesting to reflect on this in relation to José Luandino Vieira's case. During my work, I have occasionally referred to archival documents to back up some information that emerged from *Papéis* or to provide further details on a particular topic. Meticulously produced by a multitude of prison guards and other officials, these documents originally integrated the vast archives of the Portuguese political police, on which the lives of thousands of men and women depended. For example, each decision that concerned a prisoner arrested by the PIDE—from authorising a family visit, to granting an early release on probation or extending one's sentence by adding new security measures, etc.—was taken on the basis of the documents that the police had gathered on him or her. As Paul Ricoeur observes while reflecting of the concept of archive, it is important to expose "[…] the ideological character of the choice that presides over the apparently innocent operation of conserving these documents, that betrays the stated goal of this operation" (in Merewether 2016, 67). It is important to notice, then, that rather than mere collection of information, the PIDE archives[7] were part of the complex bureaucratic machinery that sustained the existence of the regime by imposing surveillance and repression.

In this light, when I say that *Papéis* can be considered an archive that can help rethink the history of the liberation war, I am also implicitly placing it at the opposite end of the spectrum from the archive created by the police: *Papéis* is a counter-archive, an alternative source of

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[7] After the end of the dictatorship, the PIDE/DGS archives have been rearranged and, since the 1990s, they are available for consultation to the public at the Lisbon-based "Torre do Tombo", where they have been fuelling investigation on the history of the Estado Novo both in the metropole and in the former colonies. For more information on the PIDE/DGS archives, their custodial history and their contemporary scope and contents, please refer to: Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, "PIDE 1919-1976. Description level". Available at https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=4279956 (Accessed December 12, 2019).

information, images and discourses. As such, it can shed new light on a series of unexplored aspects and themes, and challenge the narrative that comes through the 'official' records. Though constructed and subjective, *Papéis* can be an effective form of historical knowledge that is not merely self-celebratory, nor does acritically revere the 'heroes' that took part to the liberation struggle. Instead, while it shows practices of solidarity among prisoners and, in general, among opponents of the colonial regime, *Papéis* also exhibits the contradictions and tensions inherent in the process of formation of the new nation and the new citizens. In this sense, it "[…] contains the potential to fragment and destabilize either remembrance as recorded, or history as written" (Merewether 2016, 10). Defying the dominant narrative about the war of independence, the writer calls for a serious debate on what it means to be Angolan and points to the necessity of being united to achieve meaningful changes. As Angolan poet Arnaldo Santos suggested during the presentation of *Papéis*, the book contains material that Angolans can use to create a renewed social and political climate (Fundação Gulbenkian 2015, min. 38:34).

Indeed, the full potential of Vieira's latest work still needs to be further explored. This is even more true as 'the archive' does not seem to have reached its final and ultimate configuration. In fact, the author is planning to release more unpublished material, namely personal correspondence and annotations dated from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s[8]. As far as I am aware, the project is still in its very early stages, but hopefully this new material will eventually be made available to the public. This will broaden—both temporally and thematically—the limits of Vieira's archive and increase its complexity, thus expanding the range of opportunities for research. Following the path traced by *Papéis*, this future publication is likely to have an impact

[8] I owe this information to a personal e-mail received by the author on May 2, 2019. See also: (*Interview*, 222).

on how the years of the struggle for independence are perceived today and how they will be remembered in the future. It becomes clear that the writer's whole project aspires to connecting the past, the present and the future—*ontem, hoje, amanhã,* as Vieira used to write on the cover of his prison notebooks several decades before the idea of publishing his personal archive was even formulated.

In the form of traces, of fragments that rise from oblivion, Vieira brings into the public debate of our time the experience of the liberation struggle as seen through his own eyes, as well as through the eyes of his fellow prisoners and other people he met. He shows how, through troubled times, and holding on to an ideal, people managed to act, to resist, to preserve the sense of the struggle in spite of the several limitations they suffered. They even managed to write, to make literature. Thus, returning to an expression that had ultimately come to embody the spirit of a time, José Luandino Vieira has decided to entitle his future publication *O cavalo sentado*.

This interview was realised between September 11 and 12, 2017, in Vila Nova de Cerveira (Portugal), where José Luandino Vieira currently lives. The conversation began with Vieira joking about the fact that he still had mixed feelings on the publication of *Papéis*, and that sometimes he regretted not having burned his prison notebooks. He then alluded to more unpublished material. The transcription picks up from here.

ES: O Luandino pensa publicar o resto do material?

JLV: Eu vou publicar em cinco volumes. Este que está são dois[1]. Tenho um antes e mais dois depois. O primeiro é toda a atividade clandestina até ser preso. Estes dois—falta o início, não é?—é durante a prisão até sair. Depois é os anos da atividade clandestina em Lisboa, de 1972 a 1974, quando tínhamos o comité '4 de fevereiro' do MPLA. E acaba com a proclamação da União dos Escritores Angolanos.

ES: Você continuou escrevendo...

JLV: Ficção?

ES: Cadernos.

JLV: Não. Ficção continuo a escrever, diários já não. O que fiz foi guardar toda a documentação. Tenho agora umas cem daquelas caixas grandes de arquivo morto cheias de papéis.

ES: São cartas e outros documentos?

[1] Refere-se a *Papéis*, que reúne dois dos cinco volumes que o autor pretende publicar.

JLV: Cartas com escritores, ou carta para escritores, os escritores angolanos, alguns escritores portugueses. Tem correspondência, tem recortes fundamentais para a história da literatura angolana... e, isso já me custava, mas tinha que recortar alguns sobre a minha obra e bom... fiz isso mesmo a pensar em contribuir para a história da literatura angolana. Parece que não é preciso, porque ninguém está interessado.

ES: E a publicação dos *Papéis* foi para contribuir à história angolana?

JLV: Foi. Quer dizer, foi um dos argumentos para mim próprio, para o fazer, resistindo até o fim, até hoje... Ao mesmo tempo, a ideia de que isto vai contribuir era a parte que respondia 'sim'. Agora não, mas se calhar daqui a 50 anos começa alguém assim: 'não o fulano nunca foi preso, nunca esteve na PIDE, não sei o que', e de repente nos *Papéis* está lá: hoje saiu fulano de tal, hoje entrou fulano de tal. E isso me faz pensar que as dúvidas que eu tenho são apenas dúvidas minhas. Porque na verdade ainda ninguém me disse: fizeste mal em publicar. Algumas pessoas disseram 'ah, não era bem assim', mas eu não inventei, escrevi naquele dia.

ES: Me interessava perguntar sobre o processo material de construção dos cadernos. Todos os cadernos têm capa, têm citações, parece que tem um 'projeto editorial'... Você fez os cadernos todos de uma vez, ou criava um caderno por vez?

JLV: O processo material. A partir do momento que estive autorizado a escrever, eu pedi papel para escrever. O papel que a minha mulher me trouxe são aquelas folhas que dantes se chamavam linguados. Que são folhas de papel que nas tipografias serviam para provas tipográficas. Mais estreitas e mais compridas que, dobradas ao meio, fazem aqueles cadernos. De maneira que eu fui tomando notas sobretudo nessas folhas. A partir do momento que iniciei naquelas folhas, depois já não quis mudar para folhas de papel de correspondência. Alguns cadernos têm algumas folhas

com linhas, com papel de escrever cartas, mas as primeiras folhas que chegaram, esses linguados de tirar provas tipográficas, sem linhas, num papel que se assemelha até a papel higiênico, que é papel de má qualidade, foi aí que eu comecei. E então, continuei. Os cadernos foi já numa fase posterior e não foi determinado por divisão por datas, ou por locais onde estavam a ser escritos. Mesmo só por questões puramente materiais: uma, duas, três, quatro, seis folhas, uma capinha. E então fiz aquelas capas, também para facilitar o empacotamento, para fazer sair os cadernos num saco clandestino que permitia aquilo dobrado, mas não permitia comprido. Então está ali uma condicionante que é o papel que me levaram primeiro e depois eu pedia sempre 'traz-me mais daquele papel' e era assim que eu fazia os cadernos.

ES: E o título?

JLV: Ontem hoje amanhã. Esse surgiu logo. Aquilo era: o hoje eram aquelas notas diárias, as questões do passado são o ontem, o futuro nunca é hoje ou ontem é o amanhã. No fundo era já para brincar aos editores, já estava a editar aquilo numa forma. E a parte material é essa. Às vezes nota-se a diferença da estereográfica, conforme a caneta que eu tinha. Isso começou no Pavilhão Prisional, depois quando me levaram para outras cadeias eu levava aquilo comigo, se tinha alguns, e continuava com o mesmo modelo. No Tarrafal, eu levei uns papéis, os que tinha comigo levei. Mas depois lá, em certa altura, já não tinha muito papel, tive que passar para o papel de linhas, o mesmo papel que servia para escrever as cartas para a família, para os amigos, serviu para anotar— como é que se diz? —o diário. Mas não é um diário, não, são apontamentos.

ES: Os últimos três cadernos não têm capa. Por quê?

JLV: Porque ainda estavam só naquela forma. Aliás o último dos últimos tem a forma de A4, com linhas, e diz 'Notas Breves'. Porque também aquele modelo foi se esgotando na própria matéria

que eu escrevia. Porque o corte de vir para Cabo Verde determinou que pouco a pouco eu fosse reduzindo as anotações a questões que eu não queria esquecer. Porque as reflexões, se é que se pode falar assim, os meus pensamentos, estão nas cartas para a minha mulher. À medida que eu fui conseguindo convencer as autoridades... porque primeiro era uma carta de quinze em quinze dias, e eu escrevia cartas grandes, e eles 'ah, quando chega a censura, não temos tempo, as cartas atrasam'. E eu, como escrevia todos os dias, disse: 'eu escrevo todos os dias e à medida que vou escrevendo entrego as cartas para a censura, quando chega o dia de enviar está tudo censurado'. Claro, isso só me deu a vantagem de escrever com toda a tranquilidade em vez de três, cinco linhas, dez linhas. E tinha a vantagem de, quando a censura cortava, me chamavam e diziam 'isto não pode ir'. Guardava essa carta e copiava para outra sem aquela parte cortada. Resultou que tenho algumas cartas com as linhas anotadas. De maneira que, à medida que fui diminuindo as anotações, notas breves e pensamentos nos caderninhos, é sinal que fui aumentando isso nas cartas à minha mulher. E por que que pude aumentar? Porque, entretanto, já estava lá há 8 anos, 7 anos. Eu penso que muitas vezes na censura, o chefe dos guardas dizia ao diretor 'Não, eu já li isso' e punha o carimbo. Então... os presos têm que ter muita paciência. Aliás, para tudo, a paciência é fundamental. Isso não é querer ser oriental, mas paciência é fundamental na guerra e na paz. Assim que cheguei ao campo, disse 'eu não saio daqui, a gente não sai daqui, antes de dez, quinze anos'. Vamos fazer isso com toda a paciência. E fui pacientemente ganhando a confiança de A e de B, impondo um tipo de comportamento para tirar os escolhos que pudesse haver pelo caminho. E depois... pacífico. Passei dois anos a domesticar um pardal... Os guardas diziam 'esse tipo não está bem'... Mas isso criou um clima em relação a mim que me permitia... não é que eu escrevesse diretamente as coisas, mas escrevia de tal maneira nas cartas para a minha mulher que já não dava origem a segundas leituras, o que estava era tido *ipis verbis*. E não, o que está nas cartas muitas

vezes remete para coisas que eu não podia escrever. Por exemplo, o dia que castigaram o Ilídio Machado, em que lhe perguntaram se a sopa era boa, ele disse ‘Tá quente, senhor diretor’ – infração disciplinar. Eu não podia pôr isso. Nunca mais me esqueço o que que pus, pus: ‘hoje no refeitório, durante o almoço, sucedeu uma coisa interessante, esqueci de comer a sopa porque estava a olhar para o sol que entrava pelas grades e desenhava as grades encima da nossa mesa, os outros não davam conta e continuavam a comer a sopa, mas custou-me um bocado comer a sopa com o desenho das grades encima da sopa’. Se não lessem as cartas despreocupadamente diriam ‘o que quer dizer com isso’, mas como só liam ‘o sol hoje entrava pelas grades’ iam adiante, à procura de alguma coisa concreta. Criado esse clima, comecei a não ter razão para anotar nos diários, porque ia escrever aquilo nas cartas que eram a minha atividade diária de escrita. Aliás, vou te mostrar, a caligrafia perfeita, não há erros, hoje quando olho para aquilo eu me pergunto ‘como é que escrevia tudo tão direitinho?’.

ES: Teve um momento que você parou de trocar cartas, lá no Tarrafal.

JLV: Bom, isso foram quase dois anos quando começaram a cercear a correspondência e as encomendas não chegavam. Os anos 1969 e 1970 foram anos muito difíceis. Também correspondiam a sete anos de cadeia. Ao fim de sete anos a pessoa começa a... eu digo isso porque notava também nos meus colegas: por altura dos sete, oito anos passa-se qualquer coisa. E eu passei um bocado mesmo por isso. Deve ter sido uma depressão. Além de que a saúde não estava boa, a saúde física, e nem a saúde psicológica. Isso também sente-se, acho eu, nos *Papéis da prisão*. A partir de certa altura nota-se uma diferença.

ES: Uma das perguntas que queria fazer—mas você em parte já respondeu—era sobre como escolhia o que escrever nos cadernos. Que tipo de coisas você anotava?

JLV: Não, não escolhia, não tinha essa preocupação. Quando me fechavam, eu pegava naquilo e ia escrevendo. Seguramente era o que me lembrava; mas não tinha a preocupação de saber isso é importante, isso não é importante. Como lembrava eu escrevia o que se passava. O que de algum modo me tinha tocado ou não me tinha tocado. É só isso. Podes perguntar: 'mas para que que eu fazia isso', 'qual era o sentido disso'. Não era com o sentido do resultado que deu, de publicar, daquele volume pode vir a interessar para a história ou para a história da literatura. Não, para ser sincero, era material literário. Porque no fundo de tudo, mesmo lá quando chegava ao fundo de mim, a conversar com o António Jacinto à volta do campo, eu chegava sempre à conclusão que a única coisa que eu posso dizer que sou é escritor. Político, militante, essas coisas... Com o Jacinto chegava mesmo a essa conclusão, nunca fui outra coisa senão escritor. Aquelas anotações, os cadernos, são parte do ofício do escritor. Só que o escritor é essa pessoa compósita que tem isto e aquilo. Há as partes pessoais, há as partes políticas, portanto, não tinha uma finalidade pré-determinada.

ES: Nos *Papéis* várias vezes você fala de 'arquivar' documentos. E essa preocupação com os arquivos retorna também em outros escritores da época. Por exemplo, vi citados 'os arquivos implacáveis' num texto do Carlos Ervedosa[2]. O que eram os arquivos implacáveis?

JLV: Esses arquivos era para mais tarde. Porque eu era muito novo, mas não era muito parvo. Mais tarde, caso houvesse qualquer controvérsia ou alguém viesse com qualquer coisa controversa, teríamos os papéis, os arquivos implacáveis. Por exemplo toda a correspondência com o Carlos Ervedosa e Fernando Costa Andrade eu tenho tudo, daquela época que se promoveu a coleção de autores ultramarinos na Casa dos Estudantes do Império. E com este, que ainda está vivo, Adolfo

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[2] See: Ervedosa 1980, 94.

Maria, que fazia parte do nosso grupo, que fazia parte daquele projeto. Estão lá as intervenções dele nesse projeto editorial que nós tínhamos em Luanda, mas a PIDE foi e acabou logo com aquilo. Portanto a CEI apareceu-nos como um sucedâneo, uma substituição do que nós queríamos fazer e colaborámos com a CEI. Porque nós não éramos da CEI, estávamos em Luanda, não éramos estudantes universitários, os estudantes universitários estavam em Lisboa e em Coimbra.

ES: Os arquivos implacáveis não tinham a finalidade de guardar documentos para depois, para a história, digamos.

JLV: Não. Não, para a história não. Se era para a história era para '*la petite histoire*', para uma história pessoal. Não era com um sentido de 'esses são documentos históricos', são documentos literários.

ES: Então você não acha que os *Papéis* são um documento histórico?

JLV: A partir do momento em que agora estão publicados, se não queimarem todas as bibliotecas e jogarem tudo fora, se calhar ficam para a história. Agora, não foram escritos com essa finalidade, toda aquela atividade que está lá refletida nos *Papéis da prisão* não foi com o sentido de serem documentos históricos. Obviamente que compreendíamos que estávamos na história: não a fazer a história, estávamos a sofrer a história. Mas, a maior parte do que lá está escrito, se calhar tem menos importância de que a minha ficha do Tarrafal, feita pelas autoridades: nome, idade, alcunha, não sei que, não sei que, entrou, foi julgado no dia tal, o tribunal decretou isso... isso é que é para a história. Não há duas leituras. Está correto. Está correto, porque eu já conferi. Se é possível fazer essa distinção, nunca tive a sensação que aquilo, que aqueles papéis todos que eu escrevia fossem documentos históricos. Para mim, eram documentos literários. Esse seria talvez o último pensamento que eu tinha sobre esse material: esse é material que vai me servir para fazer a minha

literatura. Porque já quando estava em liberdade, desde os meus quinze ou dezesseis anos, já tinha a mania de guardar as coisas, papéis. Sempre fui muito arrumadinho.

ES: E os cadernos que você escreveu em Luanda chegaram a circular fora da prisão?

JLV: Não, não, aquilo foi guardado. As coisas que eu consegui tirar das cadeias de Luanda, a minha mulher guardou religiosamente. Não passava sequer pela cabeça, porque eram coisas muito íntimas: era tudo, era a totalidade da vida dos presos. E depois, como só saía dessas cadeias através da rede clandestina que nós tínhamos montado, era um perigo. Claro, quando era preciso sair informações, pequenos bilhetes, para entregar a alguém ao sair, isto está lá refletido. Quando foi daquele grupo do Lobito, de Benguela... mas a pergunta era sobre?

ES: Notei que você anotava os nomes de todos os que saíam ou entravam na cadeia. Queria saber se a sua mulher depois comunicava essas coisas para fora.

JLV: Sim, nas visitas nós comunicávamos. 'Vi a mulher de fulano' 'Está bem'. Mas também era difícil porque o guarda ficava sempre atrás de nós. Nos sentávamos no passeio, num banco de cimento, e ele ficava atrás e, claro, ouvia tudo. Era uma hora de visita às sextas-feiras. Eu estava a tentar... já não consigo me colocar bem bem naquela situação, mas seguramente que, por exemplo, toda aquela parte dos tunisinos, marroquinos, eu guardei aquilo tudo egoisticamente pensando 'isso é material'. Porque nós pensávamos 'esses são mercenários, vieram aí como mercenários'. Mas estabeleceu-se aquela cumplicidade e começámos a nos preocupar pela vida deles. Desconfio que mataram. Além do mais eram os primeiros árabes que nós víamos. Nunca tinha visto um árabe. Eu quase não tinha saído de Luanda.

ES: Não soube mais nada deles depois?

JLV: Nada, nunca soube. Ainda anotei no livro um endereço, mas não conseguimos, não conseguimos... Mas isso sucedeu também com o grupo de compatriotas de Cabinda, que também nunca mais... Aqueles que me contavam histórias na Comarcã, aquelas histórias que já agora desenhei...

ES: Queria que contasse mais sobre o projeto do cancioneiro.

JLV: Esse sim. Desde que comecei a ouvir “Os prisioneiros do ritmo” na Casa de Reclusão eu pensei ‘ah, um dia eu vou publicar um cancioneiro popular com estas canções’. Foi na prisão de 1959, quando estive na Casa de Reclusão: aquilo estava cheio de presos de delito comum, alguns mais tarde vieram a ser grandes cantores populares. Parece que há sempre uma certa ligação entre lúmpen e música popular. E aí sim, eu tomei logo notas dessas canções e assim que cheguei à Comarcã, recebia cigarros e ‘comprava’ aquela gente toda com cigarros. Claro, alguns faziam logo ali as canções deles só para receber os cigarros. E ficou. E tenho esse cancioneiro que é valiosíssimo: canções para Holden Roberto, canções para Agostinho Neto... E eles entravam na sala deles, era numa sala com grades, e iam buscar um barril onde faziam as necessidades, punham uma tampa em cima e ficavam a batucar. E um deles imitava locutor de rádio: aqui é rádio tal. Eu lembro de um conjunto que se chamava ‘Os prisioneiros do ritmo’: nome fantástico! Cantavam as canções que já eram conhecidas, Muxima do Ngola Ritmos, etc., mas também canções novas. E isso era dedicado aos políticos que estavam lá. Cantavam canções que nunca tínhamos ouvido: ‘Agora para o senhor Ilídio Machado vamos cantar...’ Porque quando os políticos foram para lá, eles passaram a ter colchão e cama. Antes dormiam todos no chão. Quando os políticos foram lá metidos com cama e colchão, deram também cama e colchão para eles. Eu lembro de um bandido que estava lá e disse ‘Eh pá, isso da política é uma coisa boa! Mal foi começar a política e já temos cama!’. Quando nós chegámos lá, já sabíamos que nem sempre valia a pena confiar neles, porque

podiam denunciar uma pessoa por um cigarro, não é? Mas quando começaram a ver essas mudanças, nós ganhámos outro estatuto. Respeito, e às tantas, até direito à 'emissão radiofónica'. E eu aproveitava para tomar nota das canções. Na cadeia Comarcã, fiz saber ao Amaral e a todos os outros: 'vocês escrevam e tragam'. 'Ah, mas eu não sei escrever'. 'Escrevam como falam'. E assim que eu fiz o cancioneiro. Tenho andado desde que saí do campo, desde que voltei para Angola, a tentar que alguém se interessasse por aquilo para publicar o cancioneiro popular das cadeias já que eu não tenho formação musical nenhuma. Ninguém se interessa. Não sei, se calhar sou romântico, ou populista... é o que costumam dizer: 'isto é populismo'. Tá bem.

ES: É uma pena porque as canções são muito interessantes...

JLV: Pois! Estão lá! Foi uma das coisas que se discutiu quando se fez os *Papéis da prisão*. Eu disse: 'não vale a pena pôr isto nem, acho eu, todas aquelas histórias em quimbundo'. 'Não, não, vale a pena'. 'Estou de acordo'. Mas agora tenho o problema de escolher trezentas páginas, reduzir aquilo a trezentas páginas para se traduzir para espanhol e mais[3]. Como é que se faz isso? Eu não sei, o que que eu corto? Eu pego naquilo para cortar dizendo 'isto é pessoal', mas se calhar o que é pessoal é que interessa... É difícil. Não sei se eu posso estar a desculpar-me para a minha preguiça, mas a dúvida que eu tenho sobre ter publicado, pois, reflete-se nisso: como é que seleciono aquilo que interessa? E para quem? Para os estudantes, para os acadêmicos, para o público? As canções devem estar, não devem estar?

ES: Queria que você falasse um pouco mais do convívio com os presos de delito comum em Luanda. E também do convívio com os presos políticos no Tarrafal. A propósito, o que é que

[3] Refere-se a uma versão reduzida de *Papéis* destinada a ser traduzida em várias línguas.

significava exatamente presos políticos? Várias vezes nos *Papéis* têm referências a pessoas presas e classificadas pela PIDE como presos políticos, mas que se calhar eram só camponeses que estavam no lugar errado no momento errado.

JLV: Ah, sim. Presos políticos significava isso mesmo a partir de 1961: eram aqueles que eram presos por motivos que não tinham a ver nem com roubo, nem com outros crimes... Por exemplo, quem reclamava contra as condições de vida, ou não aceitava ordens, passava para a PIDE. Para saber como é que falavam assim, se tinham ligações etc. Mas no Tarrafal eram presos políticos julgados pelo tribunal militar. Aliás só os julgamentos do Tribunal Militar é que foram para o Tarrafal. Os outros julgados por tribunais administrativos, tribunais civis, ou com simples notas de exílio e deportação, foram para os campos do Missombo e São Nicolau. E nós estivemos muito tempo sem saber para onde nos iam mandar porque havia muitas complicações: para já éramos brancos, e depois éramos 'intelectuais'. Mandar para o Missombo não dava, porque aí os presos estavam até com família e vão juntar intelectuais com a massa e o que sucede é que os organizam. Portanto não dá. Vão para Portugal, para Caxias. Caxias era para presos políticos portugueses. Não os vamos mandar para lá. Então andámos ali de cadeia em cadeia, da PIDE para a Judiciária, da Judiciária para PSP, da PSP para a CCL, até que às tantas, 'vão para o Tarrafal'. E lá fomos, para o Tarrafal, como decisão da metrópole. E chegámos lá e encontrámos os presos do Processo dos 50, só presos políticos. Em Luanda era mais fácil porque, para já estávamos em Luanda, depois havia as visitas, depois havia a vida à volta que a gente ouvia e via; mas depois ali era só presos políticos. Estávamos da FLNA, da Unita, do MPLA, e foi preciso encontrar um menor múltiplo ou um mínimo denominador comum para que a vida... E foi isso que a gente aprendeu sobretudo, foi a conviver com todas as diferenças. Em relação aos que vieram do MPLA, eram presos políticos da camada dos assimilados. Portanto, muitas coisas me chocaram porque refletiam a ordem

colonial e os preconceitos coloniais e tudo ao contrário. Quando estávamos em Luanda isso diluía-se porque havia os 'prisioneiros do ritmo', os malandros, a vida era total. E ali nós estávamos condensados só duma camada e além das diferenças políticas e ideológicas havia ainda as diferenças humanas: os católicos, havia os protestantes, depois havia os da FLNA, a maior parte animistas. Isso no convívio e todos juntos na mesma caserna é difícil de gerir e na vida do dia-a-dia levantam-se questões. Para além das questões idiossincráticas: cada um é cada um. Quem entra, sei lá, já com paranoia, depois só desenvolve mais a paranoia dentro da cadeia. Os preconceitos também. Os meus estão lá refletidos. Leio aquilo tudo e penso: 'ih, que intolerante, pá!'. É uma intolerância total! Mas no final eu sempre consegui, acho que consegui sempre—como é que vou dizer? —adocicar essa... não é desilusão, é uma certa amargura, por aquelas pessoas serem ainda ou já assim... Eu gosto sempre de lembrar uma frase, acho que é de Lenin. Ele quando começou a revolução em 1917 parece que abriram as cadeias e libertaram os presos e deram armas aos presos. E o Trotsky terá dito: e tu vais fazer a revolução com estes? Ao que o Lenin respondeu: não, para estes. É um salto no humanismo muito grande, não é? Fazer a revolução para os patifes, transformá-los... é preciso calma. Mas lá [*em Tarrafal*] cheguei a ouvir coisas que me chocaram.

ES: Isso está lá nos *Papéis*. Uma certa desilusão com certas ideias.

L: Também porque alguns iam saindo, aquele universo ia ficando mais concentrado e o ar rarefeito... Pronto, às tantas, por volta de 67/69, era só o mínimo de convivência, de cortesia... mas acho que também são muitos anos de cadeia: tinha descrença, desilusão, cada um começou a pensar como é que eu saio, como é que não saio, não tínhamos notícias, não sabíamos de nada, isso ia minando a esperança, para usar esse vocábulo, a esperança das pessoas... Depois quando chegou uma leva com estudantes universitários, aquilo reanimou tudo, mas nessa altura, em 72, eu saí.

ES: E essas diferenças com os outros presos...

JLV: Estamos a falar de política e não dos *Papéis* e assim não vale...

ES: Essas diferenças alguma vez o fizeram duvidar do que aconteceria depois?

JLV: Não, não. A gente via que as coisas não iam ser simples como a gente pensava que iam ser. Não é simples, esquemáticas: faz assim, faz assim e dá esse resultado. Não. A gente pode fazer tudo certo e o resultado sair errado. E pode fazer tudo errado e o resultado sair certo. Que é o caso de uma luta, uma revolução... A questão da independência do país, é uma coisa enorme que... quer dizer, os miúdos angolanos agora ficam muito admirados em saber que os portugueses mandavam assim...

ES: O Luandino já viu o documentário *Independência. Essa é a nossa memória*?

JL: Já vi. Está muito bem feito, eu não sei qual é a sua opinião. Está muito bem feito, ainda não está equilibrado, ainda não é uma visão muito ampla da luta de libertação que a FLNA teve, a UNITA, o MPLA, mas há uma coisa que em nenhum outro documento aparece, que é: espremido aquele documentário, fica o povo. Aqueles depoimentos daquelas pessoas, aqueles velhos... Já tem havido vários documentos, são mais em relação aos intelectuais, sobre isto ou aquilo... Mas quando chegas no final deste: é o povo. Eu gostei muito. Também porque não é muito apologético. E o trabalho da associação de documentação que produziu aquilo tudo, a associação Tchiweka, é digno de respeito porque é feito quase sem meios.

ES: Para voltar aos *Papéis*, como você definiria o texto? Você acha que tem qualidades literárias em si?

JLV: Qualidades literárias, não sei... Agora, acho que é exagerado pegarem naquilo e tentarem enquadrá-lo num gênero literário. Se há lá pelo meio textos com qualidades literárias, isso deve-se ao fato de que foi escrito por um escritor. Mas não foi escrito para ser literário. Isso podia ter

resultado mesmo sem a intenção do autor, é verdade, mas tudo junto... Agora hoje, nessa época do romance pós-moderno...

ES: O que me fez pensar numa narrativa é o final. O final é mesmo um final de romance, você não acha?

JLV: Qual é o final?

ES: É pouco antes da sua saída. Quando espera pela chegada da sua mulher...

JLV: Ah, é que eu fiquei à espera de sair um ano. E já estava mesmo pensando: nunca mais saio. Assim que a ordem de soltura apanhou-me, estava eu a trabalhar na oficina, a fazer cestos, coisas assim, e chamaram-me, o escrivão disse: 'vai sair'. Eu disse 'está bem'. 'Vai arrumar as suas coisas e vai-se embora'. Eu disse: 'não, agora vou arrumar as minhas coisas'. 'Então não sai mais?' 'Não, só depois do almoço. Vou almoçar com todos'. Disse ao Jacinto: 'almoçamos com todos'. Almoçámos, nos despedimos, arrumamos as malas e saímos. O que disse ao diretor foi: 'então, fiquei tanto tempo à espera e agora estão com pressa? Tenha lá calma!'... Então o fim, o final, é literário?

ES: Eu acho que sim.

JLV: Bom, agora vou reler. Mas em relação a essa tese: seguramente quem faz um doutoramento vai encontrar, sei lá, Kristeva e não sei quem mais, esses teóricos todos... Deve haver teóricos que deem suporte a analisar aquilo como sendo um romance pós-moderno... Ok...

ES: Os trechos que foram encenados pela companhia de teatro[4] tinham muitas qualidades literárias...

JLV: Eu não consegui ainda falar com o Jorge Silva Mello, mas uma coisa que eu quero lhe dizer, além de agradecer mais uma vez, é que ele me deu um guião. Foi mais uma consequência da publicação dos *Papéis*, que eu continuo sempre na dúvida se devia ou não devia ter publicado, mas pelo menos teve consequências. Me obrigou a ir buscar a caixa do terceiro volume [do *Livro*] *dos Rios*, para escrever. Ontem estive com isso, 'tenho que acabar isto'. Fez-me regressar à literatura. Eu já tinha chegado à conclusão de que a minha trilogia eram dois volumes e acabou.

ES: E agora está pensando em continuar...

JLV: Sim, já consegui montar um esquema em que consegui isolar-me.

ES: Você veio para Vila Nova de Cerveira para escrever?

JLV: Não, eu quando vim, vim para descansar. Depois das eleições de 1992, quando recomeçou a guerra, todos os cargos já estavam atribuídos, eu tinha sido substituído em tudo, o que pensei foi 'bom, eu vou descansar'. Arranjei uma bolsa de criação literária que me deu a Embaixada de Portugal por um ano e vim. Vim, instalei-me aqui perto. Uns amigos me trouxeram para visitar o convento e disseram 'se quiser ficas ali'. Achei isto tão bonito, com o rio e tudo, e fiquei. Depois fui à Fátima várias vezes para visitar a minha mãe, e a minha mãe me disse: 'Já não trabalhas?' 'Não'. 'Já estás reformado?' 'Já'. 'Já foste substituído nas tuas funções lá, não deixas o teu nome mal?' 'Não'. 'Então, ficas aqui para fazer-me companhia'. O meu pai tinha falecido há uns três

[4] Refere-se a uma leitura encenada de trechos de *Papéis da prisão* feita pela companhia de Jorge da Silva Mello na fundação Gulbenkian em Lisboa no dia 7 de julho de 2017. Mais informações em: "Tenho trinta anos, estou na cadeia há quatro", *Fundação Gulbenkian*. Available at https://gulbenkian.pt/agenda/tenho-trinta-anos-estou-na-cadeia-ha-quatro/ (Accessed November 11, 2019).

anos. Eu disse: ‘está bem, mas vamos fazer um acordo. Eu fico e a mãe promete que vive até os 100 anos’. ‘Está prometido’. Cumpriu. De maneira que fui ficando. Eu ia a Luanda, voltava, entretanto, as coisas lá ficaram muito... Eu já não tinha casa, nunca fui de acumular riquezas, meu filho teve casa, as mulheres com que eu vivi todas ficaram com as casas onde vivíamos. E eu fiquei muito satisfeito, porque eu gosto de viver assim. Mas foi porque a minha mãe me pediu. Eu quando disse ‘vive até os 100 anos’ pensei ‘era bom, mas mais um ano ou dois e depois volto’. Foram 20 anos.

ES: Você não tem saudades de Angola?

JLV: Tenho, sempre vou lá. Uma das coisas que fazem diminuir as saudades foi esta política desde a paz. A política da reconstrução nacional que destruiu e reconstruiu o país, obviamente. Mas podia ter sido reconstruído de maneira que quem já lá estava não se sentisse estrangeiro. O que importa é o modo, não é o fato de se desenvolver. É o modo. E quem já enriqueceu depois disso, acha muito bem que o modelo seja Dubai... Essas são questões que eu falo porque estamos aqui a conversar, senão ficava calado...

ES: Para voltar à conversa sobre a prisão... Enquanto você esteve preso, tinha outros cadernos onde escrevia literatura?

JLV: Ficção? A ficção eu fazia em outros cadernos. Alguns sobraram, outros ofereci para leilões para angariar dinheiro para presos políticos. Mas tenho alguns originais. Do *Nosso musseque* tenho mesmo os originais. Umas laudas de papel de 50 linhas com uma letra muito pequenina. Um dia eu mostro, já percebi que está interessada...

ES: Sim, também porque fico pensando como nessas condições da cadeia, você conseguiu fazer umas coisas tão bonitas.

JLV: Como é que vou dizer... Sabe cozinhar? Quando chega em casa, não fez compras nenhumas e abre o frigorífico e só sobrou isto e aquilo e depois pega e sai a melhor comida do mundo com o que restou? É isso. A gente só tem uma esferográfica, umas folhas de papel, então tem que dobrar, tem que fazer o 'A' assim, depois passar o vermelho à volta. É como a estética da pobreza. Quem cozinha percebe, eu tinha que fazer os meus cozinhados com aquilo que tinha.

ES: Falando de comida, lembrei de um aspecto do livro *Memórias do cárcere*, do Graciliano Ramos. Uma das coisas que Graciliano repete durante o livro todo é que ele não conseguia comer na prisão, a comida vinha com bicho, lhe dava enjoos terríveis e ele ficou muito doente. Aí eu li um depoimento do António Cardoso descrevendo umas situações parecidas com as do Graciliano. Mas o Cardoso dizia que Luandino não se importava com isso, mesmo que a comida fosse péssima. que o António Jacinto sofria bastante com isso, mas que o Luandino conseguia comer tudo. E eu reparei que quando há alguma referência à comida nos *Papéis*, muitas vezes são referências positivas. Por exemplo: hoje comemos funji. Nunca tem queixas.

JLV: Pois se calhar em todos os diários de todos os outros havia: comida horrível... Mas também 'hoje comemos funji', como é que os angolanos comiam funji? Também a história disso é preciso explicar. Tinha que haver um propósito: alguém fazia antes um requerimento ao diretor a pedir que como é o meu aniversário, para festejar, que nos permita que nós cozinhamos, nós batemos o milho.... Mandávamos vir o milho, batíamos o milho, fazíamos a farinha, depois fazíamos o funji. Lá nos davam a autorização para comprar um frango, depois assávamos o frango e aquilo dava para comer e cantar e conviver. Uma grande festa! Com um frango e um bocado de funji! Eu ponho essa nota, hoje comemos funji: essas palavras querem apenas dizer esse sentimento de conforto espiritual que era estar ali e comer funji, uma comida da nossa terra. Porque quando era cachupa eu não punha.

Uma vez até para ter direito a umas cervejas nós tivemos que jogar futebol com o pelotão que fazia a guarda do campo. O tenente disse: ‘ah, os meus soldados, coitados, jogam um com os outros, não têm habilidade nenhuma, vocês jogam bem, vocês podiam jogar com eles’. No dia aprazado, o tenente vem dizer que o diretor aceita o jogo entre os presos e os soldados com uma condição: os presos não podem ganhar. Eu disse: ‘Está bem, a gente não ganha, mas em contrapartida temos uma reivindicação que é: para não ganharmos, cada um de nós deve ter direito a comprar uma cerveja’. Que era uma coisa que o diretor não queria. Foi um castigo para jogar de maneira a empatar o jogo. ‘Ah, mas vocês têm que perder’. ‘Não disseram que nós tínhamos que perder, só disseram que nós não tínhamos que ganhar’. ‘Ah, não, isso vai dar problemas’. ‘Senhor tenente, como é isso? Então, a palavra de um militar português...’. ‘Ah, pois, vocês levaram-me...’ ‘Levaram não, eu disse que nós não ganhávamos...’.

ES: E vocês empataram?

JLV: Empatámos e com muito custo, porque foi muito difícil. Se não a gente ganhava por muitos...

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ES: Uma das perguntas que queria fazer era sobre o Luandino. O Zé fala com o Luandino nos diários, como se fosse outro, como se houvesse duas personalidades. E as cartas algumas vezes são assinadas por Zé, outras por Luandino, e outras por Zéluandino.

JLV: Eu notei isso... Aqueles anos todos que passei e que estão ali refletidos, são anos de construção no sentido do Luandino. O Luandino é um *work in progress* desses 12 anos que eu passei na cadeia, partindo de uma coisa que eu já era: Luandino é muito anterior à prisão, mas coexistia com Zé digamos 50-50%. Eu trabalhei na montagem de caminhões no porto, depois passei a vender peças de caminhões, etc., depois passei para uma empresa de tratores, máquinas

de remoção de terra, foi por isso que fui parar a Cambambe e à construção da barragem de Cambambe, era tratorista, o que eles chamavam '*service engineer*'. Portanto, nessa época havia uma forte pressão da minha vida particular. O que me fazia ser um escritor, eu fazia em casa, à noite, e depois participava nas atividades da sociedade cultural, do cineclube, do movimento cultural clandestino, político e desportista também. A parte do escritor era Luandino. Quando fui para a cadeia toda aquela parte da vida—como é que eu vou dizer, concreta, física—desapareceu. Deixei de ter. O que se acentuou foi a vertente do escritor. Aquelas notas e aqueles cadernos, como eu disse, é Luandino, é para recolher material. Daí que, ao longo dos *Papéis da prisão*, nas cartas que estão ali transcritas, uma vez apareça Luandino e, ao escrever para a minha mulher, muitas vezes dizia 'isto é o Luandino'. Ela percebia muito bem que havia esse Luandino, que já vinha dos meus catorze, quinze, dezesseis anos, no fundo era assim um personagem incluído no homem concreto que era o marido dela. E por isso é que depois, ao longo dos anos... Tu disseste que acaba literariamente? O Luandino venceu. Foi uma derrota, a minha derrota é o que faz que o escritor se tenha sobreposto a tudo. No fim, quem saiu, é já o escritor. Os anos de 1972 a 1974 foram muito difíceis para mim no que toca à adequação a uma vida concreta. Porque o homem concreto tinha desaparecido e agora ali eu tinha que construir de novo. Trabalho, emprego, regularidade, uma vida normal, de ser humano, que não seja um escritor separado e isolado e totalmente alienado do que é real, a construir-se nos doze anos de cadeia. E aí, com certeza que vai notar, muitas vezes não sei se é ambiguidade, incerteza, sobreposição de vários... não se pode separar, claro. Sou isso tudo, como diz o João Vêncio: cada homem é ele todo. Expliquei-me?

ES: Muito bem. Outra pergunta sobre os materiais diferentes que entram nos *Papéis*. Além das canções, você recolheu também muitas brincadeiras de criança. E essa questão da infância,

também na sua literatura, é sempre muito presente. Como é que isso fazia parte da sua vida na prisão?

JLV: É muito importante a parte da infância e a parte da primeira adolescência porque foi nesse período que adquiri aquilo que posso chamar a minha cultura angolana. Portanto, pode ter sido dos quatro, cinco, seis anos. A minha língua materna, a herança cultural da parte dos meus pais, da parte portuguesa, enfrentava-se diariamente com a rua. Com os miúdos colegas angolanos. E portanto, eu tive que adquirir a língua, o quimbundo, que eu falava até entrar para o liceu e que depois perdi, e tudo quanto está culturalmente ligado ao quimbundo. Claramente a linguagem é o primeiro, o mais importante, depois toda a vivência que era rua, aquele musseque. É muito importante essa época, até eu ir trabalhar, com quinze, dezesseis anos. Foi o período que eu adquiri os elementos da cultura angolana que ainda hoje persistem. São aquelas coisas que da infância e adolescência vão para mais tarde. Quando fui trabalhar numa empresa inglesa essa parte da cultura que eu tinha adquirido na infância e na adolescência deu-me a capacidade e a tranquilidade para entender o que se passava no mundo de trabalho colonial. E portanto, do lado dos angolanos. Lá estava, eu não me interessava pelos engenheiros da barragem, mas pelos operários. Então a infância e a adolescência foram a sustentação da cultura angolana que depois eu fui ampliando. A segunda influência que depois foi fortalecer isso foi ir para o campo. Foi chegar ao campo e estávamos lá todos outra vez. Neste caso, os da FLNA, os Bacongos, os da UNITA do Sul, e nós do MPLA da parte central. Várias línguas, várias maneiras de ver, mas o que nos unia a todos era—nem havia dúvida para ninguém—uma consciência, mesmo inconsciente, de que estávamos ali todos pela mesma coisa. Havia um substrato cultural que era muito, mas muito mais tranquilo e mais forte do que o substrato político, ou social. Isso a propósito de infância, vê lá o que eu falei.

Assim não dá. Vou ser telegráfico. Mas esta entrevista é uma espécie de confissão, porque me ajuda a refletir sobre isso.

ES: Durante este ano li vários textos teóricos sobre escrita e trauma que argumentam como, em situações difíceis, traumáticas, a escrita vira uma forma de terapia. Eu queria saber o que era para você a escrita, nesses momentos difíceis, se era uma forma de terapia.

JLV: Está a pedir que regresse àqueles momentos em que estava a escrever e tente perceber se eu o fazia para combater ou me livrar de qualquer trauma ou para evitar... Não, no sentido de catarse não... Aquilo que eu disse sobre os *Papéis da prisão* serem para mim sobretudo apontamentos para futuros trabalhos literários já define um pouco porque que eu escrevia. Agora, o peso da realidade naquilo que eu depois anotei nos *Papéis da prisão*, tanto quanto eu possa recuar aos sentimentos daquele tempo, não ficou nada que me possa habilitar a dizer que em qualquer dia eu ia escrever para compensar qualquer coisa. Às tantas já era inércia. Eu já tinha aquele hábito, todos os dias escrever, e escrevia. Tanto assim que hoje dou-me conta dalgumas coisas: por que que eu escrevi aquilo? Mas era... não parece questão de trauma, não. Eu concordo com um colega meu de cadeia que dizia assim: a cadeia não faz mal nem faz bem a ninguém. Quem era mau, fica pior. Quem era bom fica melhor. Não é bem assim, mas... Não entrei com trauma e, acho eu, não desenvolvi nenhum trauma ao longo dos anos da cadeia. Tanto assim que depois não me recordo de ter feito ações ilegítimas, ilegais, estapafúrdias. Tenho sido sempre bem-comportado. Se calhar é esse o trauma: a cadeia domesticou-me. Mas não, eu escrevia por disciplina, disciplina literária. Pensava eu que aquilo me ia servir para outras coisas. Tanto assim que penso eu que se vê isso, porque não havendo outro propósito que não fosse já esse hábito, essa rotina, esse desiderato último de material literário, porque poucas vezes discuto comigo próprio algumas coisas... Sobre escrita e

trauma... Não, nem para me aliviar do trauma nem para compensar, nem escrevia por ter outro trauma qualquer.

ES: E sobre a presença da prisão na sua literatura? Sempre há referências a prisões nos seus livros.

JLV: Mas isso já é anterior.

ES: Anterior e posterior. Tem também no *Livro dos rios*. Tem lá um depoimento de um preso do campo de São Nicolau ou do Missombo, agora não estou a lembrar.

JLV: No *Livro dos Rios*? Também já não me lembro... Mas isso é natural porque o espaço físico onde eu passei a minha infância até os quinze tinha a parte da esquadra. Portanto era uma cadeia omnipresente para todas as coisas. Eu fui lá parar aos nove anos porque atirei uma pedra e sem querer matei o gato do subchefe da polícia. Um gato que é uma coisa com sete fôlegos, eu atirei uma pedrita, bateu-lhe não sei onde e morreu logo. O subchefe chegou à casa, viu aquilo, ele morava em frente ao meu pai, a uns dez ou vinte metros. Disse ao meu pai: 'Olha, o teu filho matou o meu gato. Eu vou levá-lo preso'. E meu pai: 'Leve-o, põe na prisão'. E levou-me para a prisão e fiquei lá duas horas ou coisa assim, que era uma maneira de castigar. De maneira que eu costumo dizer que eu comecei logo, preso aos nove anos. E o gato ainda por cima de um subchefe de polícia! De maneira que a prisão deve estar. Também porque doze anos são doze anos, mesmo tendo vivido até essa idade que eu tenho, aqueles doze anos... não há nada na minha vida, nem que eu viva mais vinte ou trinta, que possa adquirir tamanha marca dentro de mim. Felizmente, marcas boas. Cada dia na prisão são mil dias na memória, na vivência. Num universo fechado basta uma ligação com alguém esse alguém é um grupo social, é um gênero. De maneira que é uma vida muito intensa. Parecendo que é uma vida totalmente vazia, é uma vida muito intensa e marca muito. Não no sentido do trauma, no sentido de experiência de vida. Desde que se encara a prisão como nós a

encarávamos: podíamos estar mortos, podíamos estar presos, podíamos estar liberados, podíamos estar no exílio: tudo fazia parte das contingências da luta de libertação nacional. Da independência.

ES: Hoje estive a reler os *Papéis* e encontrei essa frase: "Escrever não resolve nada, mas ilude-me"[5]. Como você explicaria isto hoje?

JLV: Ah! Isso é devido à oscilação psicológica que o preso sofre desde de manhã até à noite. Há momentos de desânimo... Eu nunca me questionava quando estava a escrever. Mas depois, andando à volta do campo, pensava: o que que eu escrevo? E daí que possa aparecer... Até hoje estou convencido que escrever não resolve nada. Mas, resolve... Portanto esse 'ilude-me', essa segunda parte da frase, tem alguma razão. É a parte da ilusão que toda a vida humana tem, que toda atividade humana tem, senão não fazíamos nada mesmo. Se isso fosse rigorosamente correspondente ao que eu pensava, nem escrevia. Nem escrevia, mas escrevi. Se estava a escrever, já resolvia qualquer coisa. Ainda que eu não saiba o que era. Trauma, não era. Isso se calhar era dos anos 1970, 1969, era uma difícil situação que eu me encontrava. Difícil por falta de correspondências, essas coisas... foi um período difícil.

[*Luandino mostra um caderninho com um calendário desenhado na primeira página. No dia anterior, tinha afirmado que, desde a época da prisão, tinha continuado a desenhar calendários mensais e a riscar dia após dia*]

ES: Esse é um dos calendários.

JLV: Isso ficou, isso é trauma. Isso é trauma, certeza, porque é a dificuldade de me convencer que não tenho o tempo todo... Eu não fico bem se de manhã não riscar um dia, esse já está, mas não

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[5] See: *Papéis*, 865.

desenvolvi nenhuma ansiedade em relação ao tempo que resta. Eu às vezes dou comigo a pensar fazer coisas e depois penso ‘para isso era preciso vinte anos’. Depois faço as contas e digo ‘vinte anos não dá. Vamos ver se arranjo um projeto que desse só para dez’. Só dez anos, se não der, não sucede nada, vou morrer. Mas sem problemas... Não tenho problemas com o tempo. Ou se calhar tenho tais problemas que isso se reflete nisso. Quando eu começo a dizer: ‘não, não quero fazer nada disso, não devia ter feito isso [*publicar os Papéis*]’.

ES: Isso se vê já nos *Papéis*. Várias vezes você diz que queria fazer um auto-de-fé com tudo o que tinha escrito.

JLV: E fiz vários ao longo da vida. Queimei muita coisa e hoje arrependo-me. Por exemplo os meus jornais quando eu tinha a quarta classe. Portanto aos dez, onze, doze anos, eu e o António Cardoso, mais outros que depois alguns entraram para as fileiras nacionalistas outros seguiram a vida de ‘cidadãos normais’, fazíamos um jornal manuscrito. Tinha duas, quatro, oito, doze, quatorze páginas. Era em papel de cinquenta linhas, chamava-se *A voz da quinta*, e é aí que começámos a publicar contos, poemas nossos. E eu fazia os desenhos. Então, na parte de desporto, o desporto eram jogos de futebol de botão. Jogava-se com botões, antigamente, a gente roubava até os botões, aqueles botões dos casacos da mãe, quadrados, que faziam bons guarda redes porque se punham de pé. Um botão daquele de pé ocupava a baliza... Então, fazíamos o campeonato, havia repórteres, eram só três ou quatro que escreviam tudo com vários pseudônimos. E os desenhos dos guarda redes a defender ou de alguém a chutar era eu que fazia. E aí que eu comecei a assinar Luandino. Começou com os desenhos, não começou com a prosa. Eu vejo isto na minha biblioteca de infância, da juventude. Os livros tinham a minha assinatura como Graça. Também me chamaram assim no campo, uns poucos. O diretor proibiu que pusesse Luandino. Fui proibido de assinar como Luandino em tudo. Então era Graça. Para os caboverdianos, no crioulo é difícil de

dizer Graça, fiquei Ingrácio. O cozinheiro me dizia: nhô Ingrácio. Mas já estou a divergir... Queimei esses jornais. Alguns salvaram-se porque estavam com o Cardoso e o Cardoso tinha isso numa mala com a mãe dele, que viveu até os cento e tal anos... Então a mãe do Cardoso guardou, penso que ainda há um ou dois números. Bastava haver um ou dois... Pois no Liceu voltei a fazer, mas aí fazia banda desenhada. Um jornal em banda desenhada no meu quarto ano de liceu.

ES: E isso também foi queimado?

JLV: Eu penso que ainda tenho.

ES: Você estava dizendo que a prisão o deixou mais disciplinado. Foi uma disciplina imposta do alto ou auto imposta?

JLV: Autodisciplina. Eu já era disciplinado. Eu lembro muito bem que quando trabalhava entre 1957 e 1961, eu vivia na calçada da Missão, trabalhava quase junto da marginal, e fazia sempre o mesmo caminho. Lembro-me perfeitamente que vivi anos e anos a chá frio. Eu fazia todas as manhãs uma garrafa de um litro e meio de chá, ficava no frigorífico, vinha a pé do trabalho, almoçava sempre em casa, a mesma coisa: chá frio. E voltava. Às vezes eu ando a pensar: como é que eu era tão rotineiro? E depois chegava a noite e eu ia sempre ao cinema. Houve um ano que eu vi mais de trezentos e tal filmes, mais que um filme por dia. Quase todos os dias ia ao cinema. Perfeitamente aficionado. E via todos os filmes. Lembro-me de um filme americano *Show Boat*, 'o barco das ilusões', com a Ava Gardner e o Howard Keel, em que cantava aquele grande cantor negro, meu primeiro cantor negro americano de ópera, Paul Robeson, que aparece em vários poemas daquele tempo. E nesse filme ele só tinha uma pontinha, estava sentado num rolo de cordas, num daqueles barcos de roda do Mississipi obviamente, e passava esse barco, o barco das ilusões, e ele cantava *Ol' man river*. Um spiritual. E eu fui todos os dias ao cinema e à quinta-feira

fui à matiné e à noite, e no sábado fui à matiné e à sessão da noite, portanto vi o filme sete, oito, nove, dez vezes. E muitas vezes chegava àquela parte em que ele cantava e depois eu saía. Só para o ouvir. Então, ponho-me a pensar que eu era muito disciplinado. Sempre fui disciplinado. A minha mãe também nunca teve problemas nenhum comigo, nunca teve problemas disciplinares no liceu nem nada. Fui sempre de quadro de honra. Eu tinha que fazer isso que era para ter isenção de propinas. Porque senão o meu pai não tinha dinheiro para me manter. O meu pai era sapateiro. Não tinha dinheiro para me manter no estudo, as propinas eram altas, era uma das formas de seleção do colonialismo. E então sempre fui muito disciplinado. A minha mãe dizia-me que nasci e tal e depois nunca mais se preocupou comigo. Quando a minha mãe ia à cadeia me dizia: 'Então, nem te pergunto se está tudo bem. Eu já sei que tu estás bem em qualquer lado'. Depois, tive que me autodisciplinar em alguma coisa. Por exemplo, em liberdade eu posso responder-te de qualquer maneira e virar as costas e ir embora porque tenho espaço. Na cadeia, a gente não pode. Quando há uma divergência, se essa divergência começa a caminhar para uma divergência insanável é preciso ser disciplinado, é preciso ter a capacidade de à noite pedir desculpas. Essa é uma coisa que na vida real a gente não faz. Desencontra-se, depois cada um vai para o seu lado e depois são dez anos que estou zangado com aquele. Ali não dá para ficar zangado dez anos. Nem dez minutos. Nesse aspeto é autodisciplina, o controlo dessas atitudes, e o simples fato de viverem mais de oitenta pessoas num espaço pouco maior que isso. Ou há disciplina ou...

ES: Não foi uma disciplina imposta pelos guardas ou pelas autoridades?

JLV: Não, a disciplina imposta pelos guardas era estarmos fechados. Lá dentro era conosco. Aquele espaço que está cercado também é conosco. Eles ficam do lado de fora a ver se houver qualquer problema lá dentro. Da disciplina imposta: correspondência duas vezes por mês é disciplina. 'É o dia quinze, no dia anterior ao dia quinze tragam as vossas cartas'. E depois a

censura faz a censura. O sistema de segurança era: meio pelotão da tropa, que era o ponto máximo da segurança daquilo tudo, segurança do ponto de vista físico e militar. Depois à volta do campo, caboverdianos no talude durante o dia, durante a noite os guardas caboverdianos eram substituídos por soldados do destacamento. Dentro do perímetro do campo, de um lado eram caboverdianos e do outro guardas da PSP angolana, portanto europeus da polícia angolana, que estavam ali, esses eram que mantinham a disciplina dos presos angolanos e guineenses. Angola que pagava as despesas todas. As despesas vinham do orçamento da província de Angola. Por isso é que nós tínhamos uma certa capacidade de reivindicação. Quando os guineenses reivindicaram o diretor disse: o dinheiro que o governo de Bissau manda não dá para mais do que isso: arroz e peixe, peixe e arroz. E o arroz não nos deixam comprar, vem da Guiné. E não era arroz... Aquela colônia produzia muito arroz: quando carregavam um barco de arroz para Portugal, os sacos sempre deixavam cair arroz, tanto que o cais ficava sempre cheio de arroz misturado com a terra. Então aquilo era tudo apanhado, era peneirado, e essa trinca, que só pode ser trinca, não pode ser o arroz inteiro porque não passa, a trinca sai dos sacos, o arroz inteiro é difícil, então o que vinha da Guiné para os presos era trinca que tinha sido obtida por peneiramento do embarque do arroz para Portugal. Morreram dois guineenses, de vitaminose. E o médico militar ele próprio disse: ‘Ou vocês dão uma dieta decente ou vão morrer todos’. E aí o diretor concordou com o médico e mudou a dieta. A todos passou a ser distribuída uma mão cheia de amendoim por dia. E isso deu logo todo o suplemento de ferro e tudo, nunca mais tivemos ... Nós comíamos outra dieta porque o dinheiro vinha de Angola... Mesmo assim era arroz com peixe, atum. Às vezes uma semana inteira com atum guisado, bife de atum, ao ponto de nós reclamarmos. Há uma certa anedota porque o cozinheiro era caboverdiano e um dia, coisa inconcebível para nós, angolanos, ele peitou o diretor. O diretor chegou lá reclamando e ele: ‘Diretor, eu fui cozinheiro do bispo, agora vai dizer que eu

não sei cozinhar?'. Porque as diferenças de estatuto social, de classe, em Cabo Verde eram muito mais abatidas. O fundo cultural dos caboverdianos era de tal maneira forte que as diferenças de classe e raça eram muito tênues. Portanto ali estava em jogo a dignidade dele, a dignidade profissional dele. Um maltrapilho a falar com o diretor... Mas, não tivemos problemas médicos por causa da alimentação porque mesmo que houvesse escassez de legumes, as mulheres das povoações ao redor tinham autorização para vir à porta do campo e o guarda ia conosco e a gente podia comprar bananas, ou ovos. O resto... Leite era preciso ter, como eu tinha, um acordo. Depois, as famílias mandavam algum dinheiro e havia a possibilidade de fazer compras, comida... Nós não vivíamos com muitas necessidades além do haver uma caixa comum para comprar sabão em barra, os dentífricos, óleo... Quando nos deixaram ter um fogãozinho adquiríamos petróleo, esse fogão antigo punha-se petróleo e o petróleo era pulverizado, a gente acendia ... Não dava para cozinhar, mas dava para algumas coisas... Por exemplo, numa certa altura criámos umas galinhas com restos de comida, a cooperativa nossa galinha, então havia ovos. Ovos e ovos. Então fomos autorizados a ter o fogão com uma frigideira para fazer um ovo estrelado. Dependia também muito das ações militares... Conforme a coisa estava a correr na Guiné, Angola ou Moçambique, assim apertava a disciplina do campo ou não. Na medida em que a psicossocial ia dando resultados, aquela política que introduziram de recuperar psicossocialmente as populações, fazer os aldeamentos, juntar as pessoas e pôr a água, pôr luz, eliminar a possibilidade da guerrilha ficar com o povo, no meio do povo. E nós íamos percebendo: aconteceu qualquer coisa...

ES: Havia alguma solidariedade com os guardas?

JLV: Solidariedade não. Quando havia mudança de guardas era preciso uns dois ou três meses para eles deixarem a parte formal, da disciplina... Mas depois eles estavam ali tão isolados como nós.

ES: E nas prisões em Angola?

JLV: Em Angola não. Em Angola a rede era só mesmo dos presos, até porque os guardas era todos os dias que mudavam. Ali [*no Tarrafal*] eles vinham por dois anos e, ao fim das tantas... Havia um chefe dos guardas que não tinha família e que ao domingo à tarde aparecia de calções, chinelos, rádio na mão. 'Ah, vim ver como é que vocês estão'. Nós estávamos na caserna, um a jogar xadrez, outros deitados, outro a ler. 'Posso ficar aqui?'. 'Fica à vontade'. 'Posso jogar aí?'. 'Você é que sabe'. Sentava, jogava umas damas... O problema é que ele trazia o rádio. Então quando chegava assim a meio do domingo dizia: 'vou ouvir'. E punha-se a ouvir o Sporting-Benfica, o relato do futebol! Então éramos nós mesmos que ficávamos atentos, não fosse vir o diretor e apanhar o chefe de guardas aqui a permitir que os presos ouvissem o futebol! Mas é que às tantas ele dizia, 'Oh esqueci, devia ter desligado. Bom até amanhã'. Não é que houvesse solidariedade, mas o meio geográfico e a situação criavam um relaxamento, quer da parte dos presos quer dos guardas. Por exemplo, o pobre do Barreira tinha vinte quatro anos, ia à Praia, sozinho, com a espingarda, para levar três presos de Angola à consulta. Chegava lá, marcava as consultas, ficávamos ali, depois tínhamos que almoçar. Quando chegava a hora do almoço, ele podia ir à pensão, requisitar os almoços que depois vinham trazer para comer no hospital. Se ele quisesse almoçar na pensão podíamos voltar e almoçávamos todos. O que é que ele fazia: perguntava-nos o que é que vocês querem? Deixe-nos aqui no hospital, não vamos fugir do hospital. Porque nosso canal de comunicação e informação era ali no hospital. Aliás, no frigorífico onde estava o sangue, tinha lá já umas cervejas geladas porque já sabia que iam chegar os angolanos! Então a gente ficava numa espécie de sala ao lado da secretaria, longe do público do hospital. Nessa vinha a comida, que era de uma pensão, de um hotel, portanto comíamos bem, tínhamos as cervejinhas ali, e ele não tinha que ficar ali todo o tempo. Dizia: 'Vocês prometem? Quem é que assume a responsabilidade?'. De

modo geral eu dizia: ‘Mendes de Carvalho que é mais-velho’. Mendes de Carvalho dizia: ‘Seu Barreira pode ir. Não vamos fugir, não vamos sair do hospital, nada’. E ele ia namorar. Dizíamos, deixe-o namorar um bocado. O desgraçado estava lá metido no Tarrafal e ir à cidade era também encontrar-se com alguma moça. Depois quando voltava: ‘Então passou-se tudo bem?’. ‘Se passou, e consigo?’. ‘Ah, eu só fui almoçar ao hotel’. ‘Está bem, está bem’. E não passava disso. Nós passamos a palavra aos que chegaram depois em 1969. Também dizíamos: ‘Olhe, o chefe da caserna é aquele senhor, é mais-velho. Se vocês tiverem algum problema, é com ele’. Eu fui logo aconselhado a não resolver nenhum problema sem primeiro falar com o chefe da caserna. E diziam: ‘Ah, os presos de Angola! Não vai nenhum para a cela disciplinar’. Pois não. Nós estávamos organizados e tínhamos autodisciplina cada um, depois uma certa disciplina comum.

ES: Pelo que eu li, o António Cardoso passou muito tempo na cela disciplinar...

JLV: O Cardoso, isso foi depois de nós já virmos. Ficou muito mais isolado, vieram elementos mais-novos. Quer dizer, eles já eram de uma outra conjuntura em Luanda. O Cardoso sempre foi indisciplinado. Tínhamos sempre que o controlar para nunca pôr em causa... A única disciplina que ele aceitava era essa quando ele percebia que ia pôr em causa os outros. Parava. Mas, por exemplo, nós lhe dizíamos: ‘Tu não podes enfrentar um protestante que só leu a Bíblia, toda a imagem histórica do mundo, da história da humanidade, a base dele é a Bíblia. Tu não podes avançar e dizer que isso é tudo mentira. Tentar doutriná-lo, assim não dá’. Mas, essa é uma questão de cada qual. Eu fui sempre disciplinado, por natureza, mais a minha educação e a questão da cultura angolana. Porque as pessoas daquela parte lá de Luanda são muito alegres, mas também têm muita autodisciplina. Há muita autodisciplina no viver da cultura angolana. O respeito pelos mais-velhos, por exemplo. Eu era o único mais-novo e ainda por cima branco que podia encher o balde do chuveiro... Aquilo era um balde de vinte cinco litros que a gente enchia de água, que tinha

um chuveiro com uma torneira em baixo, com uma corda, depois era preciso içar, amarrar, então era este o nosso chuveiro. Um velho de sessenta, setenta anos como é que ia encher aquilo e depois pôr lá em cima? Quando chegava a altura desses velhos tomarem banho, tinha toda uma série de tabus: os pais não podem ver os filhos e os filhos não podem ver os pais, os primos, os tios, também eles não podem, as relações todas de parentesco. Então, eu sendo novo e sendo branco, chamavam-me. Lá ia eu, enchia, subia, e os velhos despiam-se, tomavam o seu banho e eu ficava ali, na conversa. Tinha que haver um fundo cultural que permitisse eu estar ali, porque eles não chamavam os guardas para fazer isso, nem outros. Por exemplo não chamavam o Cardoso, porque o Cardoso não acreditava nessas coisas. Não é que ele não tivesse respeito para os mais-velhos, tinha o mesmo respeito que eu tinha. Mas faltava-lhe qualquer coisa, cultural, que eu tinha que fazia com que eu pudesse estar ali com aqueles velhos a fazer isso. E isso servia-me para reforçar a minha própria base cultural. Eu ia apontando coisas e me comportava de maneira que ia deseuropeizando a cultura que eu trazia de base da família. O Tarrafal também serviu para isso, para acrescentar mais uma camada africana em cima da cultura angolana que eu já tinha.

ES: Foi porque havia presos de vários lugares?

JLV: De vários! Eram do norte, do sul, eram analfabetos, Febel[6], meu mestre não falava português, kikongo, umbundu, quimbundu, jovens, velhos. O Teodóro Cassinque da Unita tinha 20 anos. E o chefe da Unita já tinha sessenta e tal. E era professor primário. Era o Chingunji[7]. Aquilo era a nação, a nação angolana estava lá. De maneira que isto foi uma dádiva, uma dádiva que a vida me deu. Foi poder estar na nação, num concentrado como hoje já ninguém pode ter. Aquele

[6] Trata-se de Febel Luginça

[7] Trata-se de Eduardo Jonatão Chingunji

concentrado durante oito, nove, dez anos a mim deu-me uma facilidade de convívio que eu chego em qualquer lado, em qualquer sítio de Angola, eu começo a falar e sinto-me em casa. Há a coisa inicial, mas porque sou branco. Depois começo a falar e às tantas... Há mais perguntas?

ES: Há muitas mais, mas vou tentar reduzir... Ontem quando eu perguntei da comida, você contou aquela anedota do funji. Uma pequena coisa que ali está escrita como 'Hoje comemos funji' significa todo um dia festa, de trabalho... Toda uma séria de coisas que nos *Papéis* não estão e que só você pode saber. E tem umas entradas nos diários, quando você só escreve 'Nada'. Ou 'Nada (mentira!)'. O que é que há atrás disto?

JLV: Nada é chegar a noite e pensar: este foi um dia que não tenho nada para escrever aqui para aquele fim último que era a recolha de material. E depois o entre parênteses 'mentira' é porque se não houve nada é sinal que eu estive embaixo da árvore, sentado, mais ou menos todo o dia, a pensar na mulher, no filho, na política ou qualquer coisa. Factualmente, no espaço do campo: nada. Também na minha relação com os meus companheiros: nada. Estes dias são os dias que eu seguramente estava a educar o passarinho, ou a tirar por exemplo uma flor de acácia e a fazer o jogo como nós fazíamos em criança... Só nesse sentido. Por isso que depois entre parênteses 'mentira'. Se calhar, aquele dia foi muito mais rico do que os outros dias em que eu anoto: se passou isto, se passou aquilo.

ES: Isso não faz parte da autodisciplina de escrever alguma coisa, qualquer coisa, cada dia?

JLV: Era a disciplina, mas era também o hábito. Inércia. Eu chegava, lá pelas seis e meia, sete horas, acendiam-se as luzes, cada um ficava no seu canto a fazer as suas coisas, e eu com certeza que ia ler ou ia escrever essa anotação nos cadernos. Depois passava a fazer a carta. Poderia ser interessante nessa data onde diz 'nada', ir ver a carta para a minha mulher. E se calhar são quatro

ou cinco páginas. A confrontação das cartas com os diários de prisão na parte do Tarrafal... Se eu andasse a estudar, ia fazer isso.

ES: E a confrontação com a sua ficção desses anos?

JLV: Sim, por exemplo há os três contos do *No antigamente, na vida* que são respostas a uma dor interior. Há um conto que se chama "Estória da água gorda". É um conto em que há uma criança com uma raiva e um ódio contra a mãe e isso foi uma maneira de me libertar—aí está, se calhar serviu de catarse, mas não, não foi nesse sentido. Esse personagem foi sendo construído dentro de mim ao longo de muitos anos a partir do conto "Kinaxixe" do Arnaldo Santos. Uma maneira de mostrar aquela infância que eu vivi, em que nós não éramos criancinhas tão criancinhas. Maus como são os adultos ou pior. *Nós os do Makulusu* é uma espécie de reflexão sobre a base social do movimento de libertação na cidade. E depois, o *João Vêncio* é uma espécie de tentativa de súmula, sob a designação de ambaquismo, das camadas linguísticas que fui adquirindo até aquele momento. Depois a partir do *No antigamente, na vida* sinto que há em mim uma descompressão, mas é uma descompressão de material literário e também material cultural acumulada. Tanto assim que aquela última estória que escrevi na cadeia que é "Estória de família sem história"[8], já é uma... não diria uma ironia sobre os assimilados, mas já foi ditada por um olhar histórico sobre a própria sociedade que estava a participar da luta de libertação nacional. Essa estória. Mas a que a antecede, "Kinaxixe Kiami!" eu pensei que é a primeira—não sei se é—a primeira tentativa de pôr o problema ecológico. Porque é a história de alguém que acha que o espírito dele, uma parte dele é uma árvore. Ele e uma árvore compartem o mesmo espírito. E ganha essa ideia porque aos nove anos foi uma árvore que o salvou de morrer afogado. E depois, sempre que encontrava a árvore

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[8] "Estória de família", publicado em *Lourentinho, Dona Antónia de Sousa Neto e Eu.*

em outros sítios sucedia qualquer coisa, primeiro uma espécie de experiência mística, ele ia debaixo daquela árvore e ficava transformado. E o livro acaba com a árvore a vingar-se: o tratorista vira e morre porque queria deitar abaixo a árvore onde moram os espíritos. Não sei se lembra dessa história...

ES: É a estória do Lourentinho?

JLV: É. Eu gostei muito e a acabei e depois saí. Essa foi a última que eu escrevi. E até hoje eu gosto muito desse livro, porque acho que o resto tudo já está ultrapassado, mas que naquele há lá elementos que ainda são de literatura universal. Mas isto é vaidade pessoal: pode apagar, pode riscar, pode transcrever.

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