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# Heranças pós-coloniais nas literaturas de língua portuguesa



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Book cover, image: *untitled* | 2018 | Nu Barreto (courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris)



# AFRICAN LEGACIES IN PORTUGUESE: “WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN A SPACE THAT IS BIGGER THAN US”

Felipe Cammaert

In his expressively titled 1984 essay, “From the fiction of empire to the empire of fiction” (1), Eduardo Lourenço wrote about Portuguese decolonization:

We have to get used to the idea that we have always inhabited a space that is bigger than us, and which, for this very reason, lacks a subject. It is the element of truth in our imperial fiction. Let us come to terms, today, with the fiction of that truth. And let us adapt to this fiction at home and abroad. (Lourenço, p. 269)

In the essay, Eduardo Lourenço argues that in Portugal in the 1980s the perception of decolonization was dominated by a “de-dramatizing” of the colonial fact, under the cover of the Salazarist, imperialist notion of a “different colonization”. Lourenço criticizes the argument (advanced at the time in an editorial in the newspaper *Expresso*) that a “Luso-African space” would persist after the overthrow of the Portuguese colonial empire. For Lourenço, it manifested a tendency to “treat the empire of fiction as a substitute for a lost historical reality” (Lourenço, p. 268).

In my opinion (and noting the historical context of Lourenço’s essay), in terms of Portugal’s relationship with its former African colonies the idea of “living in a space that is bigger than us” is echoed in the latest volume of the MEMOIRS Collection, *Heranças Pós-coloniais nas Literaturas de Língua Portuguesa* [*Postcolonial Legacies in Literature in Portuguese*] (orgs. Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and Phillip Rothwell, Porto: Afrontamento, 2019).

The “empire of fiction” that Lourenço discusses has its contemporary manifestation in the concept of “Lusophone Africa”. In the preface, the editors of *Heranças Pós-coloniais nas Literaturas de Língua Portuguesa* problematize this idea:



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Lusophone Africa was and is an operative concept, no longer as a colonial claim or a post-colonial hangover, nor as a fixed and absolute territory that determines nationality, but as a post-national flow in which individual identities cannot be contained by straightforward or ideologically motivated determinations. Culturally speaking, Lusophone Africa can be seen as an aggregative term that in no way subsumes being Angolan, Mozambican, São Toméan, Guinean or Cape Verdean (Ribeiro and Rothwell, p. 14).

The 22 texts on Lusophone Africa in the MEMOIRS collection span the empire of fiction that Lourenço outlined in 1984. But of course, in this collection it is not a question of seeing "Lusophone Africa" in terms of the "Luso-African space" critiqued by Lourenço. On the contrary, the post-colonial approach taken in the collection (which, in broader terms is akin to that of the MEMOIRS project) can replace the fallacious and colonial fiction of the Portuguese empire.

It is no coincidence that *Heranças Pós-coloniais nas Literaturas de Língua Portuguesa* is structured around three essentially spatial sections. In "Maps" (Part I), there are six panoramic essays on the literatures of São Tomé, Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. "Cutouts" (Part II) contains eight thematic approaches by authors from these countries, while "Transits" (Part III) point to the extended space of Portuguese-language literatures beyond Africa today, and in the diasporas. The volume presents a diverse range of authors both in terms of origin (Africans, Europeans, Latin Americans) and in terms of the generations and specialties from which they come. The collection presents a plural Lusophone space. The cover of the book, too, by the Guinean artist Nu Barreto, points to the cosmopolitan character of African artistic expressions in the current moment. However, more than highlighting individual contributions, I want to emphasize the organic quality of the volume in the transnational context of African literatures in Portuguese.

The texts that make up the fourth volume of the MEMOIRS collection respond to a need to ensure that the concept of "Lusophone Africa" that unites them can be read with a "flexible multiplicity" (p.15) that responds to the artistic production of Portuguese-speaking African countries today. The MEMOIRS project is dedicated to representations of post-memories of European colonialism in Europe. The project could not, however, fail to consider that other space, the African, which is both the real and metaphorical origin of many of the memories transferred between post-imperial generations and contemporary European society.



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Almost sixty years after the beginning of the struggles for independence, through this volume dedicated to the state of criticism of African literatures in Portuguese, MEMOIRS has revived Eduardo Lourenço’s argument that the Portuguese must recognize that “we have always lived in a space that is bigger than us”. It is a vast and multiple space, I would add, which appears in the immaterial territory of post-colonial literatures in Portuguese.

Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and Phillip Rothwell (orgs.), *Heranças Pós-coloniais nas Literaturas de Língua Portuguesa*, Porto: Afrontamento, 2019, Coleção MEMOIRS.

Translated by Archie Davies

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(1) Eduardo Lourenço, “Da ficção do império ao império da ficção”. Originally published in *Diário de Notícias* on the 24th April 1984, and collected in the volume *O Colonialismo Como Nosso Impensado* (ed. Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and Roberto Vecchi, Lisboa: Gradiva, 2014)

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4

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