

## IMPERIAL SEDUCTION AND “MEEK” FORMS OF SYMBOLIC OPPRESSION

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Even before it might become a mechanism of oppression, an aggressive military power, or any other historical reality, the empire is in the first place an idea able to fascinate and absorb human minds, an idea of irresistible *beauty*. This explains the creative, and at the same time toxic, and above all exceptionally durable power with which empires direct minds, not only of those dedicated to the task of realizing the imperial enterprise, but also of those subdued who become either obstructive, or – not so rarely – eager and consenting objects of imperial endeavors.

The imperial idea has a long-lasting genealogy, dating back to antiquity. Trying to understand contemporary circumstances, it is important to keep in mind the ideas which accompanied the Christianization of the ancient concept of the state. *Restitutio imperii* appeared as a return to the Golden Age. The imperial idea, already in Carolingian times, embodied the aspiration towards lost or forgotten values of civilization. Also in the history of the Iberian Peninsula, the figure of the “good emperor” canalized hopes for the emergence of a perfectly just instance, placed above any local conflicts, able not only to exercise mediation, arbitrate and adjudicate disputes, but also offering a palliative against the fear of abuse committed by local dominators, fear which grew proportionally to their increasing power. The emperor would become the missing instance to lodge an appeal against any kind of injustice. The myth of the restored empire became an imaginary panacea. It was believed to bring the universal triumph of order and prosperity over both moral and material deficiencies. This kind of notion circulated in manifold literature of “prophccies” and “visions” in the times of maritime

expansion, dating back to the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

The dream of imperial justice absorbed some elements of apocalyptic ideas and became a dream about the end of history, about stopping the eternal wheel of political and religious conflicts. In this form it appears for instance in the writings of António Vieira, a Portuguese Jesuit in the 17<sup>th</sup> century who, recalling the Book of Daniel and seeking inspiration in the millenarism of Joachim of Fiore, created a vision of a universal state unifying the whole of humanity, finally converted to Catholic Christianity, in an ideal state of justice guaranteeing universal peace and prosperity.

As far as the range of imperial domination was concerned, there would be no more war, ever. The imperial idea gave political shape to millenaristic dreams of universal peace. The world subdued to the moderating imperial power would be one in which "the lamb will lie down with the lion." Nevertheless, before the "millenary kingdom" could be fulfilled, some apocalyptic perturbations had to come about and pass. Vieira believed it was necessary to "align the fractured limbs" of the world to achieve its restitution to a state of primordial perfection, and this could not be done without suffering, so we should expect to hear moaning which nevertheless "also forms part of the harmony."<sup>2</sup> A new, better order imposes a thorough reorganization. Great pain is an indispensable condition on the way towards the realization of the ideal stage. Nevertheless, if the pain can bring fulfillment, is such suffering not worthwhile?

This is the source of the legitimization of imperial violence, violence of a twofold kind. Firstly, this is the legitimization of its own

<sup>1</sup> One example with long-lasting consequences in Portuguese culture which appeared in this period was the *Trovas*, a visionary poem in the form of a cycle of "dreams." Its authorship was attributed to a shoemaker from the town of Trancoso, Gonçalo Anes Bandarra. Starting with a general criticism of different aspects of social reality, such as abuse of power by clergymen and judges, female immorality, infidelity and dissolution, he reaches the conclusion about the lack of an "iron fist" in society. After this preamble, a series of visions predicts the advent of an inspired guardian of law and justice, an ideal emperor. After a string of Christian victories over the Infidels, all nations will finally recognize the domination of the ideal emperor to prosper under his divinely inspired rule.

<sup>2</sup> A. Vieira, *História do Futuro*, ed. M. L. Carvalhão Buescu, Lisboa: IN-CM, 1992, pp. 60-61.

sacrifice, and secondly, the legitimization of sacrificing others. The empire is created in the first place at the cost of lives, suffering, or renouncement of its own denizens. They must be ready to a holocaust sacrifice on the altar of this holiest idea. There emerges a complex system of beliefs which we could call imperial messianism, speaking about the absolute necessity of the empire's existence and its even more far-reaching expansion, which is presented as a march towards the increasing good and prosperity of humanity. The victims who are an unavoidable cost of realizing imperial ambitions are exalted to the status of messiahs ready for agony and torment for universal salvation. At the root of imperial imagination lies a kind of perverse altruism. It is perverse because this altruism in fact reinforces the legitimization of violence. At the source of imperial imagination lies a perverse transmutation of altruism. It is perverse because this very altruism reinforces the legitimization of bloodshed in a special logic which we could call the cruelty of the martyr. If he himself is ready to accept agony, could it be wrong or in any way unjustified to condemn others to similar torment in the name of the imperial idea, which imperceptibly has been placed beyond censure or criticism?<sup>3</sup> The supreme target is the creation of an order at such a level of perfection that it is worth any price, even the lives of an unspecified number of human beings.

Nevertheless sanguinary violence presumably is neither a primary nor an essential attribute of all empires. Their fundamental feature is the promise of harmony, universal order, and participation in the wealth of civilization. The seduction of the imperial idea is of such a kind that, in favorable conditions, it might function without any physical forms of violence and exercise its power over minds even when any visible apparatus of oppression is absent. The empire may be simply that which is the most attractive. After all, it embodies the achievements and values of civilization, and at least some of the imperial messiahs do not come with empty hands. They bring great literature, fascinating ideologies, true or false values. This is why, even if they do not make use of force or compulsion, it is very difficult to oppose them in anything by assuming the defensive positions of local cultures.

The empire thus emerges as an option without alternative. Incorporation into it seems the only realistic solution, the only chance

of development, and to be outside the empire represents remaining on the margins of the world. If the empire is, in fact, a certain project of organizing the world, then one of its main characteristics is the capacity to create a non-homogeneous space, of introducing a differentiation between the center and the peripheries. All but automatically, the empire exercises violence by marginalizing, and a powerful imperial bugaboo is the justified fear of finding oneself on the margins, in the sphere of chaos surrounding the imperial enclave of order.

The empire organizes *oikumene*, creates and monopolizes the space of communication. This is why, at the same time, it can entice and terrorize, offering a choice between participation and exclusion, relegation into a virtual non-existence. No need to say that it is just an illusory choice; out of sight, there hides an easy to overlook but nevertheless crushing violence against all those "outsiders." Also the imperial denizens find themselves in a psychological situation which makes them totally incapable of breaking the established mental order. They, too, are victims of the empire, as they cannot deny their sacrifice, even though they are often asked to do so. Intellectually, they are unable to identify themselves otherwise than as the "troubadours of the empire," according to a wide-ranging metaphor which appeared in the title of the Polish translation of the book by Ewa Thompson.<sup>3</sup>

The empire gathers all reasons on its side, becomes the incarnation of irresistible superiority, in front of which everyone else is speechless. What answer could be given to the imperial proposal? All resistance against it seems not only useless, but also unjustified, so sooner or later it dies down, because it is difficult to legitimize it more convincingly, to speak louder than the reasons invoked by the empire. The wealthier the empire is in values of civilization, the more difficult it becomes to defeat it. It is possible to offer resistance against bare force. Where the "meek" forms of symbolic violence are at stake, however, it is very difficult even to become aware of the mechanism leading to the damage, not to mention offering any resistance to it.

<sup>3</sup> E. Thompson, *Trubadurzy imperium. Literatura rosyjska i kolonializm*, transl. by A. Sierszulska, Kraków: Universitas, 2000; originally: *Imperial Knowledge. Russian Literature and Colonialism*, London: Greenwood Press, 2000.

Presumably, the imperial idea is immortal. Most likely, the empire did not disappear with decolonization; it only became invisible. It transformed and modified its procedures. Its wickedness no longer consists in oppression or direct exploitation; it has more to do with the mechanism of creating waste – and to each waste its dumping site, as Zygmunt Bauman says.<sup>4</sup> The empire is a monstrous project that divides the available space into the center and the peripheries. And the contemporary world by no means appears – at least not everywhere around the globe – as the polycentric order which is supposed to characterize the new, postcolonial and post-imperial era. The world is still divided into the privileged, prosperous center, and the non-prosperous, stagnant, at least temporarily redundant peripheries. Where this modern design is being realized, says Bauman, something must be qualified as waste. The world trimmed to the ideal outline generates exclusion and multiplies “wasted humans.” Everything which is situated outside the perimeter of the empire automatically changes its ontological status, is reclassified as waste, while the mental and intellectual monopoly exerted by the empire sanctions the imposition of this new classification.

But on the other hand, the empire also lures with its invitation to build a community. The only flaw lies in that this is not an actual community, based upon the partners' equal status. For analytic purposes, the Lusophony project is a good example as one of the postcolonial projects which Europe currently offers to Africa. It is based upon the pure appeal of language and culture; apparently it does not hide any plans for direct domination. Is it an exaggeration, then, when Alfredo Margarido, one of the few Portuguese critics of the Lusophone project, states that its real target is to maintain the colonized in their eternal place?<sup>5</sup>

The Lusophony project is based on creating a belief in the existence of a “community of experiences and historical destiny”

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<sup>4</sup> Z. Bauman, *Wasted Lives. Modernity and its Outcasts*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, pp. 19–25.

<sup>5</sup> A. Margarido, *A Lusofonia e os Lusófonos: novos mitos portugueses*, Lisboa: Edições Universitárias Lusófonas, 2000.

(*destino histórico*) whose vehicle is supposed to be the Portuguese language. Speech is supposed to possess the almost magical power of transforming and unifying identities. It is enough to speak Portuguese, regardless of ethnic origin, cultural background, religious beliefs or geographical location, to belong to a certain imagined community, postulated largely *against* what really happened in history. This peculiar incarnation of the ancient idea of *renovatio imperii* tries to erase the memory of wrongs and abuse, accentuating rather the nebulous and open category of "historical destiny." Lusophony incarnates the millenaristic hope of closing history and reaching an ideal state of harmony of which Vieira dreamed. It promises an escape from the world of chaos which is contemporary Africa to the space of order stretching away under imperial supervision. It introduces an illusion of order to the African world, unable to find its own ordering key. Even if the order, the sense of safety or belonging should reveal itself to be a mere illusion, even though it appeals to people who live in a hopeless world where "things fall apart."

Staring at the ideal permits one to squint one's eyes to block out the blatant injustice which happened in the past and still happens today. For, after all, as Margarido remarks, the Lusophone community lies entirely in an imaginary world. It presupposes an unclear form of solidarity which should appear as a consequence of "shared historical experiences," but for the enormous majority of Africans, Lusophony does not create any opportunity of participation in the metropolitan world, it does not open borders and, expressly, it does not give them the right to participate in the material well-being of the center. It is nothing but a nebulous promise that the peripheries, which thus accept being bound to this center, will be allowed to participate in the same "historical destiny," whose fulfillment lies somewhere on the horizon of the times.

Lusophone discourse often makes use of the same metaphors and a characteristically lyric mood in describing the Portuguese imperial past. A book by Aires Gamciro could be an obvious example: the author, in a direct reference to the classical poets from the golden era of Portuguese nationalism and colonial domination, such as Teixeira de Pascoais, tries

to enumerate the distinctive traits of “being Portuguese.”<sup>6</sup> He describes the national figure as an archetypal “constructor of bridges” and a creator of “universal brotherhood.”<sup>7</sup> This vision, inspired directly in the positive, idealistic resources of imperial imagination, permits to erase the memory of physical and symbolic violence which was the price of the attempts to realize this utopia in a past which is after all not so remote. The turn of the millennium brought the return of imperial messianism, which was fortunately not totally overlooked by Portuguese intellectuals. Lusophony, according to the expression used by Eduardo Lourenço, is at the same time “image” and “mirage.”<sup>8</sup> This author, famous for a book published in the mid-1970s, *Labirinto de Saudade*, which was an attempt to perform “collective psychoanalysis” of the Portuguese nation,<sup>9</sup> also today takes the risk of diving into a “subconscious still imbued with colonialism.”<sup>10</sup> The Lusophony project is nothing but a “symbolic and unconscious habitation of those imperial spaces, more at the level of dream than at that of reality,” and an escape from the sense of loss which would arise from a final renouncement of the imperial project.<sup>11</sup> Alfredo Margarido compares this state of a nation deprived of its empire to the situation of a person who has suffered an amputation but still feels pain in the removed limb by an absurd reaction of the nervous system, unable to adapt to the new situation.<sup>12</sup> But he also denounces the “missionaries of Lusophony” in much stronger terms, saying directly and without the slightest consideration for the rules of political correctness, that the purpose is to remove the figure of the colonizer who maintains the mechanism, owing to which the colonized himself, dubbed here bluntly “the slave” (*o escravo*),

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Teixeira de Pascoais, *Arte de Ser Português*, Porto: Edição da Renascença Portuguesa, 1915.

<sup>7</sup> A. Gameiro, *Lusofonia e identidade na diáspora*, Lisboa: Edições Paulinas, 2000, pp. 166–168.

<sup>8</sup> E. Lourenço, *A Nau de Ícaro, seguido de Imagem e Miragem da Lusofonia*, Lisboa: Gradiva, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Idem, *Labirinto de Saudade. Psicanálise mítica do destino português*, Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 1978.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, *A Nau de Ícaro...*, op. cit., p. 166.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 180.

<sup>12</sup> A. Margarido, *A Lusofonia...*, op. cit., p. 54.

is induced to renounce his own autonomy to continue serving Portuguese interests. The overdeveloped myth of Portuguese speech is nothing more than an instrument of manipulation.<sup>13</sup>

The Lusophone project is addressed first of all to the African intelligentsia, a group which only emerged after decolonization. Its character as a group and the circumstances of its emergence paradoxically make it a "posthumous child" of the Portuguese colonial empire. In the times of political domination of the Portuguese over the African territories, their inhabitants had access exclusively to "rudimentary school" (*escola rudimentar*), since 1956 euphemistically called "adaptation school" (*escola de adaptação*).<sup>14</sup> Colonial schooling was designed to eradicate individuals from their traditional cultures, giving them no effective access nor full right to participate in Portuguese culture. This access, paradoxically, only started to be possible after decolonization. The 1980s marked the start of a wide-ranging program of scholarships, opening access to the metropolitan universities to the inhabitants of the former African colonies.<sup>15</sup> The time had come to play the game according to the strategy of the pure appeal of civilization values.

An additional dimension which should be taken into account lies in the genealogy and complex personal situation of people to whom

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 76–77.

<sup>14</sup> Outside the main centers, this educational system depended entirely on the Catholic Church, whose program did not foresee offering the Africans anything more than the strict minimum. The words of the patriarch of Lisbon, cardinal Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira, may be a good example of this attitude; he was talking, in 1960, about the necessity of creating schools in Africa in which to show to the native (*indígena*) "the way towards human dignity." See P. Karibe Mendy, *Colonialismo português em África. A tradição de resistencia na Guiné-Bissau (1879–1959)*, Bissau, Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa—Lisboa Imprensa Nacional—Casa da Moeda, 1994, p. 316; see also R. A. H. Robinson, *Contemporary Portugal*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979, p. 101.

<sup>15</sup> During the decade 1985–1995 the Portuguese state financed nearly 10,000 scholarships for students from the former colonies. Already during the decolonisation process, immediately after the Carnation Revolution, an institution was created responsible for organizing further Portuguese presence in the former colonies, which was supposed to be reshaped into "cultural, scientific, technical and economic collaboration" (Gabinete Coordenador para a Cooperação; at the beginning of the 1980s this body developed into Instituto de Cooperação Portuguesa).



those endeavors were addressed. Comparing the characteristics of Portuguese colonization with the situation in South Africa, Luis Polanah calls attention to a significant fact determining the personal situation of many inhabitants of the Portuguese colonies and their descendants. Calvinist settlers did not usually come with the aim of "civilizing" the local population; their ambition was to create a new home for themselves, a homeland free from religious persecution. The paradigm of their imagination was the myth of the Promised Land, in which they arrived as a new Chosen Nation. Consequently, they could occupy the territories without interfering with numerous African tribes which inhabited them, by assuming the form of a closed, impermeable community. But the imperial myth of the Portuguese, speaking about creating a universal brotherhood and universal evangelization, induced them to build closer contacts with the local people and mix with them, also in the biological sense. However, they always considered Portugal to be their homeland.<sup>16</sup> This was how the local Creole society developed, formed by Africans interconnected with Portuguese by blood relationships, which, while existing *de facto*, was extremely unwillingly recognized by the colonial administration. In spite of the painful and humiliating condition of bastards, these persons, often also excluded from the traditional tribal system, were naturally inclined to accept the belief that Portugal was also their homeland, especially in a situation of supposed equality of rights and reparation which emerged after decolonization, facing the opportunity of gaining access to metropolitan education, and even more after the advent the Lusophony project fully "valorizing" the African. Bastards could at last turn into rightful sons. The psychological implications of such situations are easy to comprehend.

The African intelligentsia may be, as Margarido suggests, an example illustrating the "Stockholm syndrome" in which the hostage shows signs of loyalty to the hostage-taker. The intelligentsia were

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<sup>16</sup> L. Polanah, "Patriotismo e falsificação histórica. Uma análise da formação da identidade nacional em Moçambique e Angola," *Factos & Idéias* 3 (1986), pp. 4-5.

educated to believe in the existence of a "Lusitanian" community, eradicating the traditional culture and identity. This is why they gladly sign declarations of solidarity and participate in Lusophone festivities and celebrations. So if we could talk about oppression in this case, it seems at the same time that this oppression is somehow paradoxically accepted by the former colonized, who perceive the project of creating a common imaginary space as advantageous to themselves, regardless of the unsatisfactory or manipulative forms of actual realization of this supposed solidarity.

Lusophony is also an invitation to discussion, except that this discussion follows the conversation rules dictated by the former metropolis. Learning a European language<sup>17</sup> means the possibility to participate in a space of communication which offers a wider scale than just the local one. Now the African can speak with his or her own voice, giving his or her own answer to the colonial discourse, he or she may ask the empire to account for past injustice. Undoubtedly this could bring liberating results, but an inverse mechanism could also be set off. To initiate dialogue with the empire, it is necessary to speak (or continue speaking) its language, fit into the categories of its discourse, use the metropolitan forms of communication. So it is true that the African can speak, but not necessarily with his or her own voice. For this reason, the alluring prospect of coming into being in the space of communication created by the empire, which still offers its language as

<sup>17</sup> Knowledge of the Portuguese language in the colonized countries was always far from universal, and, contrary to what Lusophone propaganda states, also today the majority of inhabitants of the former African colonies by no means speak Portuguese. A study by Heimer in 1972 indicated that only 1% of the population in the colonies spoke Portuguese at proficiency level, 4% were relatively fluent, 16% reached the intermediate level, but 24% did not know more than the basics, while 53% did not know Portuguese at all. An official "research mission" (composed, which is symptomatic, of politicians, not anthropologists) which visited Guinea Bissau in the mid-1980s stated that "Portuguese is spoken by slightly more than 10% of the inhabitants, concentrated in the zone of the capital," and even the local Creole dialect is used by no more than half the population, suffering strong concurrence from such languages as Balanta, Fula, Mandinga or Manjaco (A. Guterres, E. Marçal Grilo, L. Lamas, R. Carneiro, *A Educação na República Democrática da Guiné-Bissau. Análise sectorial. Conclusões de uma Missão de Estudo que se deslocou à Guiné-Bissau em Março/Abril de 1985*, Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1986).

a supposedly universal instrument, is revealed to be a trap when all is said and done. It diverts attention from local problems and African reality; as the ultimate result, the African intelligentsia drop out of communication with other Africans. Dialoguing with the metropolis, it is easy to neglect the much more urgent and vital task of dialoguing with one's compatriots. In fact the task is even more difficult, as the voice of the émigré intelligentsia is not welcomed by local political elites, which would prefer to marginalize and discredit the "deserters," who are no longer recognized as part of their own community by those who remain in Africa.<sup>18</sup> Incidentally, maybe they are not entirely wrong. The African intelligentsia, formed in the metropolis and still living in diaspora on metropolitan territory after obtaining an education, take on the disturbing profile of clientele. As Inocência Mata states, this is an intelligentsia not only in exile, but also stateless and without homeland (*apátrida*) – an intelligentsia who "know that there are no conditions for returning."<sup>19</sup> Eagerly accepting the benefits of the arrangements they are offered and the possibilities of taking the floor, they nevertheless remain dependent on those possibilities and arrangements. They can express themselves exclusively in the metropolis and for its use, because in their countries of origin the willingness to listen to their discourse is scarce. Exactly in the context where they should speak louder, they remain mute.

The former metropolis and its institutions control the circulation of the printed word, e.g., organizing – and without much effort monopolizing – such events as "African literature fairs," take decisions

<sup>18</sup> I. Mata, *A Suave Pátria. Reflexões político-culturais sobre a sociedade são-tomense*, Lisboa: Colibri, 2004, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 32 (author's emphasis). This essayist and scholar from the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, perhaps one of the most important African voices today, is herself an example of this African intelligentsia settled in the metropolis. After her studies, she never returned to São Tomé, accepting a position at the University of Lisbon. She also became an active participant in the official discourse of Lusophony, and she is often regarded as a "spokesman" of São Tomé in different contexts. Even if she stresses the positive aspects of emigration as an enriching experience, she considers it as "eternal exile," "without the prospect of return" (*ibidem*, p. 35). What is symptomatic, she talks about her "sentimental journey" to her native island as a member of a committee which accompanied Portuguese prime minister António Guterres during the official state visit he paid to this country in April 1999.

about making communication channels available, such as, for instance, the satellite television channel RDP África.<sup>20</sup> Offering media together with the content they carry in a ready-to-consume state, so to speak, the metropolis controls what could really endanger its symbolic domination: the possibility that the peripheries of the former empire, i.e. different African countries, will start to collaborate more and more among themselves, outside any control or interference from Lisbon. They might indeed transform the Portuguese language – the former instrument of colonial domination – in their own *koine* and by its means create a completely separate, genuinely African system of coordinates, breaking away from the European center and continuing without its mediation.

In a book that followed, published in 2001, Mata cherishes the hope of such a scenario of disintegration of the imperial conglomerate due to a process of pluralistic, cultural, ideological, and socio-political fragmentation of Africa.<sup>21</sup> In her view, it is possible to see some particularisms take shape, earlier enshrouded in the artificial vision of the “community of historical experience,” a consequence of the fact that the Portuguese empire once came into being. Dialogue inside Lusophony is possible and meaningful only as part of a constant remembrance of the past. Till now, all the Africans’ attempts to speak with their own voice have remained incessantly bound to these common roots. Even when this assumed the form of common contestation of the colonial reality during the Salazar regime, all the voices referred to Lisbon, which continued to be the natural center of convergence, and the rising literatures took the form of a “system of communicating tubes.”<sup>22</sup> Now, however, things are starting to change and the internal diversity of Africa is emerging; Africa could be perceived as an undefined, vague nebulosity only when juxtaposed with another cultural block such as Europe.

Mata, realizing the paradigm of a European philologist in which she has been educated, tries to pinpoint the beginning of African

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, pp. 38, 52.

<sup>21</sup> I. Mata, *Literatura angolana: Silêncios e Falas de Uma Voz Inquieta*, Lisboa: Mar Alcm, 2001, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 13.

national literatures, citing different symbolic facts and dates, such as the year 1849, when José da Silva Maia Ferreira wrote the poem "Espontaneidades da Minha Alma – às Senhoras Africanas!", 1930, when the first local newspaper *O Comércio da Guiné* appeared, or 1962, when the anthology *Poetas e Contistas Africanos*<sup>23</sup> was published. Certainly none of the indicated events is proof of the rise of a fully operating literary system, a coherent system of communication between authors and readers. In the meantime, a much more basic question still needs to be asked: Should we expect African identity to express itself in the most powerful way in the domain of literacy, to a certain degree genetically foreign to African cultures, which are based upon oral tradition or spectacle and participation? Isn't it already a form of acculturation to imitate the gesture of the writing man? It is nevertheless the Africans themselves who should answer the question in what form and through what medium to express their own identity. Maybe it is possible to "dance out" more than it's possible to "speak out" in Portuguese; maybe the medium will be, after all, the Portuguese language. But the decision must be taken autonomously by Africans and with a view to their own interests, and not under the influence of the undoubted temptation contained in the invitation to Lusophony coming from the former metropolis.

Meanwhile, the African elites cherish the hope of affirming their countries abroad through artistic and cultural activities, thanks to which Africa could mark its existence in the global circulation of images and ideas. But once again these hopes are bound to the metropolis, which appears as the most convenient place for revealing these talents and appraising them. It determines the choice of language, the forms and the content of artistic expression. African cultural products arouse interest, sometimes even enthusiasm among the metropolitan audience. But this success is only seemingly a victory. The culture created for sale on the European market, whose standards are still dictated by the white man's taste and by what pleases and displeases European audiences, is

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35–43.

transformed into mere folklore, losing its natural functionality. It does not express the Africans any more and it does not seek to solve the problems which are troubling them.

Participation in the communication space whose centers are situated in Europe is based upon a choice dictated by a genuine fascination with Western culture, the world of writing and literature, sophisticated ideas and material well-being. This choice is at the same time deliberate and compulsory, because in actual fact the choice is between wealth and poverty, hope and desperation. The condition of the "rhetorical deconstruction of the imperial space," as discussed by Ewa Thompson,<sup>24</sup> in the African case would consist in agreeing to replace the manipulated images of the past, as proposed by the metropolis, which kept silent about facts of oppression and cultural confrontation to accentuate the grandeur and splendor of the Lusophone idea, as well as the hypothetical shared construction of a unified Lusophone world based on brotherhood. These images should be replaced by more realistic but far less attractive images of the present. These however do not have an allure which could compete with the old ones; many – or maybe most of them – would be images of failure, collapse, disappointment, hopelessness. It is so much easier to gaze towards the European world of wealth and well-being, expecting against all despair the fulfillment of the imperial promise of participation. This is precisely why pure imperial seduction is a peculiar form of constraint without a perpetrator, constraint which it is impossible to resist. Now, when the colonizer is absent, many peoples are unable to find a different solution than to be colonized all over again, adopting the beautiful idea of *restitutio imperii* incarnated in new, enticing forms, apparently free from the phantasms of domination, such as the "community of speech."

Ultimately the empire seems to be a peculiar "self-rebuilding reality," waiting for the moment when the center, in one way or another, would see an interest in reinforcing its influence upon the life of the peripheries. At this moment its inhabitants are downgraded to the role

<sup>24</sup> E. Thompson, *Trubadury imperium...*, op. cit., p. 312.

of superfluous and undesired “wasted humans,” who should be kept far from the European coast, but the possibility is not to be excluded that in fact they are waiting for a future recycling. Maintaining the presence of European languages on African territories, an endeavor to which, as we have seen, quite substantial effort is being devoted, may veil something more than just a spontaneous, humanitarian impulse or the absurd reaction of a body unable to get used to the absence of its amputated limb. In the contemporary world, “meek” forms of violence appear with growing frequency. They are perverse, clever and veiled, and maybe this is why they may prove to be more effective. Bauman alerts that even offering mere material humanitarian aid may create a dependence of the beneficiaries and destroy their chances for independent development, and the “humanitarian assistant, whether hired or voluntary, [is] itself an important link in the chain of exclusion.”<sup>25</sup> The proposal of “community of speech” offered by the metropolis to the former colonized may also prove to be a more or less clever idea on how to lay down comfortable and stable foundations to take advantage of the resources of the African world, for instance in a situation when new needs arise or an unexpected upturn in the economy appears. Meanwhile, Africa lost its opportunity to “push through” towards real autonomy, an opportunity created by decolonization; it did not take up the challenge of attempting to break its own peripheral character.

Lusophony as a project of communication based on the Portuguese language is supposed to help break the wall of silence of the former colonized. And indeed, many forms of African discourse can be heard, the African word resounds loudly – in literature, journalism, and academic discourse. Nevertheless this dialogue is still conducted between the metropolis and interlocutors who are chosen by the dominating, European side, adopting a discourse which remains within the framework established by European culture. The African intelligentsia in diaspora are still not heard from the African perspective, as if

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<sup>25</sup> Bauman, *Wasted Lives...*, op. cit., p. 77.

separated by a glass wall from the African reality. Apparent talkativeness masks substantial muteness consisting in the inability to formulate a convincing project for Africa. The intelligentsia of the former African colonies admittedly have risen and it cannot be denied that they are carrying out an important mediation between the African world and Europe. However, and this should be viewed as worrying, they are appearing more in the role of experts for the metropolitan political power. This leads to the pessimistic hypothesis that, at least so far, the African intelligentsia have not accomplished what should be their main reason for being: They have not exercised their natural function as leaders and originators of positive changes, playing the most important role in the process of the spiritual emancipation of Africa.