

**(Ship)wrecked Empires: on the Transatlantic
Image-nary of Ships and Shadows**

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Resumo

Naufrações, tanto quanto a navegação em si, sempre fascinaram, entreteram e aterrorizam gerações de viajantes reais e imaginários. Para os marinheiros tanto quanto para os ávidos devoradores de seus contos e angústias, o navio inspira, inseparavelmente, sonhos e pesadelos. O mar é um elemento sagrado e misterioso que gera um fascínio popular generalizado, e as histórias contadas sobre ele maculam a memória de muitos com imagens, mas poucas explicações, de sobrevivência, mistério e morte.

Eu analisarei como, do 'naufração' do colonialismo, das profundezas do Império levantaram-se nas ex-colônias de Portugal espectros tanto do naufrácio e quanto do desencalhe de identidades, histórias, e as histórias em geral, através de seu uso na literatura e no cinema, em uma memória coletiva do navio como uma representação do passado, presente e futuro dessas mesmas nações. Neste contexto, segundo o professor Paulo de Medeiros (2005), o naufrácio é "uma figura especial para variadas memórias pós-coloniais", e suas negociações.

Focando principalmente no Brasil e em Angola em relação à história da expansão Portuguesa e suas marcas culturais, institucionais e políticas (Lusotopia), eu explorarei temas e tendências a partir de estudos recentes, como *O Atlântico Pardo* de Miguel Vale de Almeida (2006) - uma "designação irônica [aludindo ao *Atlântico Negro* de Paul Gilroy] para o mundo criado durante o império Português, ou mais precisamente, a mais vasta narrativa hegemônica do suposto projeto miscigenação Português" (109); e as conexões analógicas entre o navio que afunda e o império, uma vez à tona, caiu.

Palavras-chave: Pós-colonialismo; cinema lusófono; triângulo transatlântico, naufrácio, identidade nacional.

Abstract

Shipwreck, as much as navigation itself, has always fascinated, amused and terrified generations of travellers both real and imaginary. For the sailors as for the avid home-bound devourers of their tales and travails, the ship inspires, inseparably, dreams and nightmares. The sea is an ever-sacred and mysterious element generating popular widespread fascination, and the stories told about it stain many a memory with images, but nary an explanation, of mystery, survival and death.

I am analysing how, out of the ‘wreck’ of Colonialism, the subsequent emergence from the depths of the Empire has raised in Portugal’s ex-colonies spectres of both the sinking and the refloating of identities, histories, and stories at large, through its depiction in literature and cinema, into a collective memory of the ship as a representation of the past, present and future of those same nations. In this context, the shipwreck is “a special figure for varied postcolonial memories” (Medeiros 2005), and negotiations.

Focusing primarily on Brazil and Angola in relation to the history of the Portuguese expansion and its cultural, institutional and political imprints (*Lusotopia*), I explore themes and trends from recent studies such as Miguel Vale de Almeida’s *O Atlântico Pardo* (2006) – an “ironic designation [alluding to Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*] to the world created during the Portuguese empire, or more precisely, the vaster hegemonic narrative of the supposed Portuguese miscegenation project” (109), and the analogical connections between the ship which sinks and the once afloat empire which has fallen.

Keywords: Post-colonialism; Lusophone Cinema; Transatlantic triangle, Shipwreck, National Identity.

Our port of departure for this investigation is the inspiring work of Zineb Sedira's¹ powerful and hauntingly imagery of her *Floating Coffins* exhibition (2009) – which she describes as “a space where life, death, loss, escape, abandoned and shipwrecked journeys meet . . . it's both a toxic graveyard and a source of survival and hope . . . [where] the sea becomes a space of 'decline' and an inactive landscape where lifeless ships . . . can be found rejected by the sea” (Iniva). My exploration touches upon some of the different relations between the sea, the ship, and the peoples connected with them within a diversity of perspectives through contemporary cinematic and literary texts.

Undoubtedly, when looking into anything related to seafaring, one is always confronted with a long line of trading and human migration history. From the explorations of Vikings and Polynesians, to the 15th and 16th century 'age of discoveries', when the Portuguese [from 1418] took a wealthy lead on the trade expeditions; or Spain becoming its strong adversary with Columbus's explorations [1492], and the first world circumnavigation [1521], to modern days cruise liners and shipping logistics.

As much as navigation itself, the shipwreck has always fascinated, amused and terrified generations of travellers both real and imaginary, for its mysterious and destructive nature. For the sailors as for the avid home-bound devourers of their tales and travails, the ship inspires, inseparably, dreams and nightmares. The sea is an ever-sacred and mysterious element generating popular widespread fascination, and the stories told about it.

From fiction or real life, tales of the sea stain many a memory with images, but nary an explanation, of mystery, survival and death. According to UNESCO's reports, “over 3 million shipwrecks are spread across ocean floors around the planet”, be them accidentally or purposefully sunken, they always reminds us of the painful reality that everything comes to an end, perishes, dies. Even those huge ocean monsters that once travelled through unknown and unconquered lands have to come to a point when they will only represent a distant past, a ghostly faint shadow of its previous glory. Nevertheless, its marks are going to echo throughout

time, as “a shipwreck by nature is testimony to trade and cultural dialogue between peoples. It also functions, however, as a time capsule, providing a complete snapshot of the life on board at the time of sinking.” (par. 2)

It is from this perspective of the operation that the (ship)wreck inflicts on containing, remembering, and forgetting of identities that we leave harbour.

Empires... Which empires?

The (ship)wreck is used in this work as a foreground image, as an excuse, to represent what is left of the apogee of a once dominant force, be it colonial and/or political. In the discussion of these (ship)wrecked empires, I am exploring how, out of the ‘wreckage’ of navigation and Colonialism, the subsequent emergence from the depths of a ‘semiperipheral empire’, to use Boaventura de Souza Santos words, has raised in Portugal and its ex-colonies spectres of both the sinking and the refloating of identities, histories, and stories at large, through its depiction in literature and cinema, into a collective memory of the (ship)wreck (and its absence) and the sea as representing the past, present and future of those same nations which I consider to be ‘empires’ on their own right, through their national sovereignty as independent States. Within that sovereignty I want to argue, even if taking the risk of oversimplifying a long and complex process, that “external colonialism [was] followed by internal colonialism, for colonial power to be followed by the colonality of power” (19), whereby the neo-intra-colonial powers can be recognised, to a large extent, in the form of the post-revolutionary regime in Angola, and the post-dictatorship in Brazil.

The importance of the ship as an asset for development or exploitation, and construction of identity or dismissal of it, is explored by James Duffy in his *Shipwreck and Empire*, where he talks about narrations of the ships in proud terms as “the sea roads of this empire were the routes of the multi-decked *naos* [carracks] that sailed from strange-sounding ports in Asia gathering treasures for shipment to Lisbon” (12). On the

other hand, he also reflects on the effects of the real shipwrecks for the Portuguese empire, relating their growing numbers to the decline of this empire. Duffy asserts that:

It is ironically significant that during the years of Portugal's disappointment and decline in the East her losses at sea of men and ships reached new and often frightening heights, it seemed as if the sea were taking a terrible vengeance for the earlier triumphs of the Lusitanians. (22)

This mythical oceanic avengement against the Portuguese took its toll, and still does according to Duffy, as:

by the 1660's Portugal saw herself so reduced in power that she was obliged to buy the protection of England at home and in the Orient in return for sizable territorial and trade concessions, and from that date her position in the East has been of secondary importance. (10)

Duffy also points out that the men in charge of braving the seas for the establishment of the extensive empire were let down by it, as they were "lured from their fields and homes by the false shadows of Indian gold, ... perishing from disease and shipwreck" (12), and poses a direct blame on the monarchy for this unfair and degrading situation:

From the first decade of India's discovery . . . it was apparent that [king] Manuel and his counselors had no real concept of how to exploit the commercial potentialities of the empire laid at their feet by heroic Portuguese explorers . . . The fluid wealth of the Indies benefited the Crown and certain favoured individuals for a brief while in the sixteenth century, and the luxury and magnificence of the court in Lisbon were renowned throughout Europe, but ultimately a great part of the Indies wealth came to rest in the banks of Antwerp and Venice, and Lisbon itself ceased to be the spice of Europe. (11-12)

The ship, and its wreck, is a figurative image to foreground, in my discussion, what was once a dominant force at sea and has lost its power and succumbed to the forces of nature and time, turned into ‘ruins’ of its ‘apogee’, nonetheless important ruins. Important within the context, according to Prof. Paulo de Medeiros, that “ruins, all sorts of ruins, form a privileged space for the construction of postcolonial memories” (152), and its negotiations. Hence it is within the fact that “in the five centuries in which Portugal figured as an imperial nation, colonialism assumed different facets and took on many forms and varying degrees of importance” (153). in all its different fronts of colonisation, that I will be approaching the discussions to follow from a perspective where, in a Transatlantic dimension, I argue, the ship and the shipwreck become a less material and more visual reference of the ‘wreck’ within the countries, cultures and texts explored here. It becomes, in most cases, a less spatial and touchable, and more socio-political and psycho-cultural image of what I am aiming to represent and discuss.

This image of the shipwreck has a dramatic effect in my analysis as it “symbolizes not only the tragic cost of the colonial enterprise but its very failure, and thus in a sense it ought to remain hidden so as to prevent it from disrupting glorious claims of imperial power” (153). The nary presence of the ship or its wreck in some of the texts studied will also reflect the way different post-colonial powers are dealt with in these texts, relating to them as tools of forgiving or remembering.

I use Medeiros’s term ‘imperial power’ here with a view of extending the meaning of ‘imperial’. Starting with the monarchic bygone Portuguese ‘empire’, which could be said to “stand for a past that cannot be erased and that must be taken into account in the construction of whatever form of new collective identity formerly colonized peoples will develop” (153). I am investigating a more modern notion of ‘empire’, in a corporative way, regarding Angola and Brazil post-colonial history through cinematic depictions of their inherited ‘empires’.

As explored in many texts across time, “ships were the living means by which the points within the Atlantic world were joined. They

were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected” (Gilroy 16). And in order to agree with their role in the worlds’ mobility, “they need to be thought of as cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of the triangular trade” (17). In that sense, the sea and its related assets are ever so present in the imaginary of the peoples who live in coastal countries for different reasons (profit or exploitation) and from different perspectives (space of freedom or constraint). They have inhabited Lusophone (more specifically here Portuguese, Brazilian and Angolan) texts for centuries, and are still working as a background for different approaches and arguments, with more or less emphasis, depending on the texts studied.

Mostly used in cinema as a background image of nostalgia, longing, belonging or escape, the sea is barely navigated, never sailed, never actually used, as if the sea itself, and ships and boats as well, are hazardous, still evoking images and memories of the ones taken from their places and shipped to their new destinations and destinies, which makes the inlanders portrayed in these texts, in most cases, never to depart from their shores again. This is the case for the Portuguese film, set in Mozambique, *A Costa dos Murmúrios* [The Murmuring Coast] (2004), by Margarida Cardoso, which according to Isabel Moutinho “revisits the past, that of the colonial war in Mozambique, by trying to remember some truth about it” (76), as most of its truths are portrayed through the testimony of the main character (Evita/Eva). In the film we do not see ships as such, but the sea becomes a character again as from the beginning (at Evita and Luis’s wedding) to the end (when Eva recognises the dead ensign), the sea is ever always present, as a remembrance that it is the carrier of death and destruction, both in the past and present time.

This dislocation of perspective, whereby most Lusophone film/documentary directors avoid the ‘cliché’ of the sea, and the ship, as spaces of discovery of the other, and freedom of movement and possibilities, choosing to work with characters and settings which present stories set in the ‘dry’ urban landscape of cities and their suburbs has a reason. According to Manuel Mozos on the *Náufragos* [Castaways] segment of *Um Filme*

Português [A Portuguese Film] (2011), regarding the Portuguese, they “don’t like to look at themselves. It’s difficult for them to face mirrors . . . The History of Portugal: great heroes, great battles, we always won, or almost, great conquerors, great discoveries, etc. There’s even a fantastic side to it, almost grandeur, but really isn’t always like that. Thus, how come being so great we don’t see any of that anymore? So maybe we became a little bit ashamed, I mean, I can’t even understand myself . . . Perhaps it’s the genotype of the ones living here.”

In the same documentary, another director, Jorge Silva Melo, points out to the relationship between the (overdue) end of the imperial era and the emergence of a “Portuguese cinema [which] starts being interesting in the early 60s . . . at a time of great dismay, when the empire was going away. There’s one thing I often think about: cinema is an imperial art. It’s simultaneous with the colonial war, the Portuguese cinema reappears – 1961.” Meanwhile, Joaquim Sapinho evokes questions about the absence of the sea as he argues that “all these centuries of History and relationship with the sea, it’s as if they’re gone, and all that’s left are the surfers . . . Because surfing is as a contemplative activity, like cinema”, and as a contemplative art it has a focus, which in this case is centred in more urban and recent issues than those related to discoveries and the colonial war. As to confirm this presupposition, in the segment *Paisagem Identidade* [Identity Landscape], Saguenaill stresses that in Portugal, “this so-called ‘planted by the sea’ country, mythically turned to the discoveries and the maritime adventure, the cinema rarely turn to the sea. It’s all turned to the interior . . . so the landscape in the Portuguese cinema pointed to the idea of closure.” The closure referred to by Saguenaill would have a direct relation with the ‘glory of losing’ that João Botelho mentions in the same segment. Botelho reflects on music and cinema asking, and answering, the question: “Why do we have fado and Spanish have the flamenco? The root is probably the same: the Arabs mixed with the sailors. But they’re more aggressive, they have a life pulsion that we don’t have. We almost have a pulsion of death. Oliveira’s wonderful idea of shooting a film about the Portuguese defeats is a Portuguese idea. It’s the glory of losing. The

Spanish have the glory of winning. There's something different about us." This difference, represented in Fado, as much as cinema itself, insists in proclaiming and disclosing a disruption in the bygone order of power, a longing for the lost glory. In Lourenço's words², "the amputation of our secular imperial space would cause what, in clinical terms or weather, it's called depression . . . where our sense of reality and complexity of the world wrecks" (12-14). In relation to 'Europe', this wrecking would turn Portugal into a "kind of village proudly happy in its marginality" (21).

If not in the cinema, the ship that is often related to this 'marginality', or subalternity and, in Santos's terms, 'semiperipherality' of Portugal, can be found in many literary texts, one of them being José Rodrigues Miguéis's eponymous short story in *Gente da Terceira Classe* [People of the Third Class] (1983) (first published in 1962), which, through the environment of a 'cruiser', portrays some tales of the 'third class' country to which Portugal, and its people, have been relegated in relation to the rest of Europe: the accommodations of the ship in which Miguéis's omniscient character travels, in the third class, are described as a "floating tomb which a veterinarian would have condemned as unfit for cattle butchery" but is in fact acknowledged by a steward to be the perfect fit, "just for Spanish and Portuguese"(12-13)³. The criticism regarding Portugal's position in relation to the non-Iberian Europeans is made clear as Miguéis takes the side of the vulnerable as his character (and himself in real life) emigrates to the United States in the English ocean liner (RMS) S.S. "Arlanza": "I never felt so close to all of them, so supportive of everyone, nor so far away from the hostile and weird world up there. It is this that I run from; it is them that I run to . . . (I begin to understand, in amazement, what moves me: a desire for identification with the poor of this world...)" (14).

If Miguéis criticism comes from a different era, the position of the Iberian Peninsula within the United Nations is still a concern through the physical drifting of Portugal, and Spain, suggested by José Saramago's *A Jangada de Pedra* [The Stone Raft] (1986) of Lourenço's *nação-navio* [nation-ship], a nation whose people's is born 'embarked', inspired by

Fernando Pessoa's *navio-nação* [ship-nation] (14) demonstrates a discontentment and a desire to be set apart from those considering them of a lower rank, both economical and in Saramago's case, geographical. This erratic drifting and free floating of a 'raft', not of a *naus* [carrack], towards the West, symbolises the recuperation of a social, political and cultural history of the two Iberian countries as once imperial, colonising, powers through their return to the sea, and settling in the 'new world' of their 'discoveries'.

This reference to the 'new world' reappears in other Lusophone literary texts which cultivate a direct relationship with the ship, and Portugal's ex-colonies, namely Angola and Brazil. In Angolan writer José Eduardo Agualusa's *Nação Crioula* [Creole] (2002), the eponymous 'ship-nation' will be a tool for a commentary on one of the darkest sides of colonisation: slavery, and the negotiation of its memories and consequences through the letters and voyages between Portugal, Angola and Brazil of a Portuguese adventurer and abolitionist (Fradique Mendes), and an Angolan ex-slave turned slave master (Ana Olimpia Vaz de Caminha). In Lobo Antunes's autobiographic *Os Cus de Judas* [South of Nowhere] (1983), the ship is of a military nature, taking the already 'shipwrecked' men to the last mission for the coloniser: containing the insurgence of the Angolans.

On the other hand, there are some exceptions to this approach, where the ship/boat and the sea will have certain positive significance for successful telling of the story. The Portuguese film, set in Cape Verde, *O Testamento do Senhor Napumoceno* [Napumoceno's Will] (1997) by Francisco Manso, is one where the boat will serve as a way of escape for Napumoceno to visit the United States, and an idyllic background for his love affairs; the shipwreck can be seen as an allegory for the social change element as the symbol of the colonial power (slavery, navigation, commercial exchanges/exploitation) which is now wrecked, and also of the bankruptcy of the *Estado Novo*; as much as much of Cape Verde state being born from these wrecks as a Phoenix. In the Brazilian documentary *Cartas para Angola* [Letter to Angola] (2011) by Coraci Ruiz and

Julio Matos, the boats at sea becomes one of the characters, and the boats also make the recovery, link, in a poetic and symbolic way of (re)connection between the real life characters, people from Brazil, Angola and Portugal, who even if separated by an ocean exchange correspondence making “their stories intertwine and tell about migration, nostalgia, belonging, war, prejudice, exile and distance. The search for identity and flow of memory are driven by the line of affection that binds the seven pairs of speakers” (Laboratório Cisco). This documentary is an exceptional source of images and discourses from, to and for the *Atlântico Pardo* [Brown Atlantic] discussed by Miguel Vale de Almeida, where the ‘Black Atlantic’ peoples of Paul Gilroy (1999) and the historical ‘white coloniser’⁴ are diluted by the sea they navigate to give birth to a brown (*pardo*)⁵ population. That is, out of the Eurocentrism of colonial times, “in a tangential relationship to it . . . [on a] “in between” or hybrid position, one of practice and negotiation” (102) as argued by postcolonial studies most multifaceted scholarship.

Is the sea that I see the same sea that you see?

My intention here is not to try to avoid or deny the negative and/or positive history and connotations of the ships from the trade routes of the Transatlantic Triangle (i.e.: Transatlantic Sugar Trade 19th Century = Cuba/New England/Baltic Coast; or Transatlantic Slave Trade from 16th to 19th Century = Angola/Portugal/Brazil) and its Middle Passage⁶, but rather to shape this triangular experience into a more positive possibility as a Transatlantic Cultural Trade Triangle, where countries such as Brazil, Portugal and Angola could start to take an equilateral position in terms of their production of a transnational and transatlantic renegotiation of memories and stories within their “capacity to construct and represent a society, its identity and culture” (Ferreira 145).

In that sense, it is important to keep in mind that within the recognition of an affinity amongst Lusophone peoples around the world, and beyond of a notion of *Lusofonia*⁷, I am bringing *Lusotopia* to my discus-

sion, not as in a Luso utopia, but as in a time/space of Luso convergence where performed physicality is not always necessary, and where the performance of a common language is just part of a bigger picture. To bring this notion of a time/space, I recur to the work of João de Pina-Cabral in his article *Lusotopia como Ecumene* [Lusotopia as Ecumene], where he asserts that *Lusotopia*:

owes itself not only to the sharing of a language, but also the sharing of a significant but undetermined number of cultural codes, or even the sharing of a number of civic institutions and policies . . . [hence] lusotopia is ecumene - a world of human co-habitation with its own characteristics that distinguish it from other ecumenes . . . [making it] a space/time vaguely identifiable, whose existence is dependent upon its occurrence . . . As ecumene, therefore, lusotopia is the network constituted by continued identities which find their origin in the Portuguese expansion of the sixteenth century, but that immediately thereafter acquired their own complexity and dynamics (6-15)⁸.

Based on that assumption, my focus here is the representation of certain Lusophone traits and preoccupations that are prominent through the works of some filmmakers and their productions. I make an analogy to the same processes described by Pina-Cabral of *Lusotopia* in music when considering that the individuals responsible for registering stories/histories through the cinematic medium act as writers and composers, in the sense that,

the mutual and laminated processes that created . . . musical affinities and that prolonged them during the next five centuries are not, in any way, of single direction. The musicians that carry forward this line of descent are usually unaware of the network of interconnections that is activated by musical practices they internalised (16).

In the same way, Lusophone cinema will have this interconnectedness because as Pina-Cabral continues to argue, in:

our current post-colonial world, the lusotopic literature is written in a kind of delocalised space that reflects the globalisation of the lives of the inhabitants of our modern cities. It is not, therefore, an inversion of direction, but a growing transnationality . . . lusotopia is as much a territory of encounters as of conflict and fear [...] lusotopia is not a utopia” (17-18).

Examples of this interconnectedness are express in many of the films produced within the Lusophone world, as in a transnational sharing of ideas and issues. It is certain that the issues involving the concept of transnational cinema will always involve a certain level of criticism and hesitation due to its constraints and ambivalences in regards to the political, economic and ideological exchanges made by it. According to Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, drawing some of their arguments on Tim Bergfelder (2005), the transnational (in comparison to the generalising term ‘globalisation’) is more concerned with “the scale, distribution and diversity of such exchanges and their impact at a local level as well as an understanding that they may have effects within and beyond the nation-state” (12). Departing from that principle, we can understand the reasons, beyond technical and financial, for productions such as *O Testamento do Senhor Napumoceno*, or the more recent *O Grande Kilapy* [The Great Kilapy] (2012), by Angolan Zezé Gamboa, set in Angola, to employ the collaboration of Lusophone actors from different countries in them. That could, theoretically, allow the film to reach a greater audience, such as the Brazilian, who will appreciate and empathise closer with its content through their familiarity with those actors and situations, confirming a notion of Lusotopia, which will go beyond a notion of Lusofonia. And whilst agreeing that films that are “co-productions are no guarantee for multilateral views on the complex bonds and historical relationship between Portugal and its ex-colonies,” I want to suggest that there, within

the scope of recent cinematic productions, would lie a real possibility of “a transnational cinema coming to terms with the burden of lusophony” (Ferreira 24).

Based on this claim, I want to propose that even geometrically, and geographically (as in the cartographic map) speaking the tips of this triangle, just about touching each of the countries it means to represent, specifically here Brazil, Angola and Portugal, allow them to ‘share’ its shape, and also the notion of a geopolitical confluence in terms of the Lusotopia of their cinematic productions. My point is that, from an artistic point of view, there, in that transatlantic immensity lie a possibility for navigating and renegotiating of differences and contentions through this cinematic dialogue of remembering and forgiving, in order not to forget their shared presence. As argued by Medeiros, “remembering is as much about preserving a certain knowledge of the past as it is about forgetting. What one chooses to remember – and memory is always a process of selection – necessarily involves the wilful forgetting of certain elements of the past” (151).

Hence, I want to suggest that even though this geometrical and geographical triangle is not of a perfect shape in real life as it can be on a map, its different tips are going to manifest and (re)negotiate their past, present and future within the imageries with which some of their cultural representatives (writers/photographers/film makers) are spreading, sharing, articulating ideas and ideologies, memories and stories, inside and outside the circuit of the triangle.

Within the scope of this triangle, as said before, the shipwreck becomes a metaphor for a more aground representation of the wreck, be it institutional and material, or human.

Rust in Pieces

If Zineb's *Floating Coffins* was a source of photographic inspiration, in terms of cinematic titles it can be said that *Ruínas* [Ruins] (2009), by Manuel Mozos have directly influenced this study is the material and institutional way of looking at the wreckage. In *Ruínas*, Mozos explores the fragmentation, decay and neglect of different sectors of Portuguese society, and according to Alexandre Costa, it is a "film about a disappearing country," with spectres and remains populating a world where the main characters are the "abandoned buildings and structures with all the memories they associate with" (par. 1)⁹. It is not a film of reflections on any 'semiperipheral' positioning or representation of Portugal, instead it is an honest portrayal, from within, of "fragmented memories of a recent past, which seem to be about to fade, together with the ruins we see" (par. 3). We are not given explanations for the buildings or abandoning of these obsolete structures as Mozos makes an option "for a free association of his images" (par. 5) through the individual narratives and songs we hear in the background, which I call the 'voices of the past'. Half way through the film, through the scene of the wreckage of a ship, *Amoníaco*, we are confronted with the truth that *Ruínas* is a film populated by ghosts and questions of the destiny of a country, once an empire.

Within the scope of these ghostly physical ruins across Portugal, we are next presented with the human shadows of the empire through Pedro Costa's trilogy *Letters from Fontainhas: Ossos* [Bones] (1997), *No Quarto da Vanda* [In Vanda's Room] (2000), and *Juventude em Marcha* [Colossal Youth] (2006). Fontainhas was a slum neighbourhood in Lisbon built and inhabited mainly by working-class "Cape Verdean immigrants and their descendant" (Ferreira 222), which started being demolished during the shooting of *No Quarto da Vanda*. Even though *Juventude em Marcha* can be seen as a certain redemption of the social abyss portrayed by the two previous films (mostly through Vanda's addiction positive treatment), it still leaves us with a strong sense of neglect through the marginalisation of the immigrants and their languages, in this case Creole. Not even the

re-housing of Fontainhas inhabitants to its 'cousin' Casal da Boba, a new purpose-built development, built over the biggest landfill of Lisbon, releases us from the impact of the images of Costa's trilogy which show the landscape of Lisbon's ghettos of human and urban wreckage.

In the case of Angola, there are actual wrecked ships, and they are mostly afloat, resulting on "a new tourist attraction, yet another means for neocolonial exploitation of the past . . . [where] the ghosts of colonialism have turned into yet another neocolonial commodity" (Medeiros 160). That can be witness in the ship graveyards on the North offshore and sands of the Praia de Santiago, or Shipwreck Beach, or Karl Marx Beach (named after Karl Marx, the biggest ship on the coast). An ironic 'coincidence' on itself to find *Marx* rusting under its own unseaworthiness, as a reflection of the failure of Marxism in Angola.

Even although we can see urban wreckage in our next film, the wreck we are exploring in the Angolan context is also the human, mostly defined by the end of two main historical events which have acutely marked identity building in Angola: the colonial war (1961-74), and most poignantly its follow up, civil war (1975-90).

O Herói [The Hero] (2004) is a co-production between Angola, Portugal and France, filmed entirely in Angola, which follows the 'human wrecks' of three main characters: Joana, the teacher of the young boy Manu, who represents the future of the country, and is searching for his disappeared father, an ex-soldier; this ex-soldier could well be Vitório, our hero, a war veteran victim of a landmine (which is a recurrent case in post-war countries such as Angola).

The 'heroes' here are trying to survive, always seeking: for a lost father figure, for love, for a job, for a prosthetic leg; and in this search they pass by the wrecks of some of the, once, Portuguese colonial institutions. However what makes *O Herói* a remarkable film, in Carolin Ferreira's view is that such "Luso-Angolan productions offer a greater variety of approaches towards the question of identity . . . [and it] is as much the product of historical clashes, as a result of the creative symbioses of African and European cultures, races and languages," showing that once

the blaming game has subdued, an inevitably hybrid identity could easier engage with stronger notions of a new African identity, achieving the encouraging effect produced by Zezé Gamboa's film which "develops a positive perspective of reconciliation by using the remembrance of anti-colonialism as a bridge to the future" (170). In *O Herói*, this is possible through the recovery of Vitório's prosthetic leg and of his dignity by his obtaining a job at the end of the film. Gamboa manages to transform Vitório's personal achievements into a positive allegory of a possible positive future for Angolan society and some of its wrecked institutions (family, hospitals, schools, politics, etc.) at large.

The Brazilian neighbour of the aforementioned films is *Terra Estrangeira* [Foreign Land] by Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas. Released in 1996, it is a direct and poignant exposition on the socio-political and economic-cultural struggles in Brazil at the beginning of the 90s. Coming out of a 20-year-long military dictatorship, the country witnessed the overnight release, in 1990, by its democratically elected president, Fernando Collor de Mello, of a regeneration plan for Brazilian economy. This plan was called *Plano Collor* [Collor Plan], and based on drastic manoeuvres which brought disenchantment to the great extent of the population, as people lost their savings and social security, and had their wages and bank/saving accounts frozen. Consequently, it also brought up a film industry production crisis. Another, more long-lasting, repercussion was the beginning of the first real long-lasting Brazilian diaspora, whereby in "1990, some 1.3 million Brazilians had "gone missing" in the nation's federal census and were presumed to be living outside Brazil", as a reflection and continuation of the process started in the 1990s, by "2009, more than 3 million Brazilians were living abroad" (Margolis xi), resigned to flee the country seeking for better opportunities and equality elsewhere. It is to this social and human wreckage, 'foreign generation', to which *Terra Estrangeira* alludes.

A co-production between Brazil and Portugal, it goes beyond the mere financial and technical partnership as it portrays lusotopic characters from the three tips of the triangle proposed by this article: Brazil,

Angola and Portugal. What we see in the film is a number of Brazilian citizens attempting to rebuild their lives in Portugal, and their interaction with other Lusophone characters. The dream of the other, older empire is still within their ideals for substituting their failed new one, the Brazilian, as they “turn the ancient colonizer Portugal again into a possible reference for identity construction” (Ferreira 205), even if at the cost of “living from outside of the law” (208).

We follow their personal encounters, whilst ultimately focusing on a ‘romantic’ couple, Alex and Paco, who will reconfirm Salles Gomes’s assertion “that the difficulty in constructing a proper [Brazilian] national identity [has always been] based less on a sense of indebtedness to Europe than on a feeling of alienation,” whereby they would have an empty notion of themselves: “we are neither Europeans, nor North Americans, but lacking an original culture, nothing is strange to us, given that everything is. The thorny construction of us is developed within the dialectic of being or not being.” Hence, the characters in *Terra Estrangeira* will find themselves in a total “state of gloomy instability,” which only stresses the fact that “the fatherland (*patria*) (*sic*) loses its significance as territorial reference in the film and is redefined by the characters’ journey in which other emotional communities are delineated” and questioned (Ferreira 210).

As if to mark the importance and timelessness of the lusotopic issues dealt with by the film, this loss of territoriality and identity is always left afloat and hanging, as the film ends with the uncertain fate of the Brazilian couple, who head from Portugal into Spain, illegally; as tenuous shadows of the relation(ship) between their wrecked past and their image-nary future.

Notes

¹ Born in Algeria a year after its independence from France, she was raised in France and resident of the UK, Sedira is a first-hand witness of cross-country identity, and develops work within themes regarding its issues. For *Floating Coffins*, Sedira filmed/photographed ships and interviews in Mauritania (on the North-West African coastline), and for my work I'm taking the same cross-country perspective and looking into the intertwined transatlantic relations between Brazil, Portugal and Angola through films and literature.

² My own translation.

³ My own translation.

⁴ Note here the irony of the 'whiteness' of the Portuguese coloniser when within "the chromatic idiom of racism, the Portuguese are often referred to as "dark" in comparison to their northern European counterparts." (Almeida 2006, p. 114, note 3)

⁵ According to Almeida (2006), 'pardo' is "(an old Portuguese word for "gray") in former Anglophone colonial contexts. The word is used to define (and self-define) Brazilians who do not want to be labelled as "Black." (114, note 3)

⁶ According to Theodoro Walker, this triangular route between England, West Africa and the Americas, "the term *Middle Passage* refers to the transatlantic crossing from Africa to the Americas experienced by commodified human cargo en route do New World slavery" (10).

⁷ I am approaching very few sources for Lusofonia due to our constraint of space, and also parting from the principle that, according to Almeida, "the creation of a political and cultural community of Portuguese-speaking countries [CPLP] – has no real acceptance in Brazil" (114, note 3), which agrees with Omar Ribeiro Thomaz's criticism towards Mário Soares's views of the CPLP being regarded as "a Portuguese way of being in the world" (In: Bastos et al 59), as postulated by Gilberto Freyre's *Luso-Tropicalismo*.

⁸ My own translation.

⁹ My own translation.

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