

## **Lígia Maria Pereira da Silva**

Instituto de Literatura Comparada Margarida Losa, Universidade do Porto

### **Cartographies of Testimony: the role of memory in the work of Lídia Jorge**

The memories that lie within us are not carved in stone; not only do they tend to become erased as years go by, but often they change, or even increase by incorporating extraneous features<sup>1</sup>.

1. In “Memória do Mal, Tentação do Bem”, Todorov reflects upon the twentieth century in Western Europe and its changes from totalitarian regimes to liberal democracies, positing memory as the means through which historical facts can survive and underscoring the autocratic attempts to control and dominate memory.<sup>2</sup>

Todorov’s reflection aptly highlights Lídia Jorge’s aesthetic preoccupation with the reconceptualisation of historical facts and her emphasis on the role of a fragmentary memory working against erosion and control. Affirming that all her novels are “murmuring coasts”, Lídia Jorge places her work in that “derradeiro estádio antes do apagamento” (*A Costa dos Murmúrios*, 259), where memory works not by interiorisation and preservation, but by dissemination. Therefore, the work of Lídia Jorge as a whole can be characterised as what I would call *cartographies of testimony*, because Lídia Jorge’s fictional universe, transcending the parameters of literary mimesis, revisits and at the same time bears witness to the changes in Portuguese society over the last thirty years, paying particular attention to the situation of women.

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<sup>1</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1989), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Memória do mal, tentação do bem: uma análise do séc. XX* (Porto: Asa Editores, 2002), p. 139.

In this paper, however, I will look only into *A Costa dos Murmúrios* as here the play of memory transforms the images which arrest the affects, circulating from image to image, in a continuous becoming. The narrator's continual process of deconstruction and her ongoing subversion of patriarchal colonial ideology and discourse move away from systematisation and thematization in the direction of a testimony, which locates the interpersonal and the ethical in language, producing a proliferation of signification.

Written thirteen years after the April revolution, which brought about the end of the colonial war and the independence of Mozambique in June 1975, *A Costa* reconceptualises that war and the crumbling of the Portuguese Empire. Reflecting the preoccupation of late twentieth century literature with the potential effacement and preservation of memory as an instrument of historical consciousness, the novel posits memory's task as that of preserving the scandalous dimension of imperialist rapacity and violence, in contrast with the demagogic ideal of the 'missão civilizadora', which was central to European and Portuguese colonial ideology<sup>3</sup>.

Paulo de Medeiros has argued that because the numerous critical studies of *A Costa dos Murmúrios* put an emphasis on History and on the impossibility of a single historical truth, critics have neglected the importance of memory and he suggests that fiction may help exorcise "private ghosts" and create "a national consciousness that would not succumb to amnesia"<sup>4</sup>.

Indeed, imagination, memory and witnessing are all combined in the same knot stressing the desire to break the silence on the Portuguese colonial

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<sup>3</sup> The Portuguese set out to build an empire in the fifteenth century with 'the mission' of civilising the 'indigenas', who could theoretically become Portuguese and enjoy the same rights by being baptised Christian and speaking Portuguese. (See article 2 of the *Colonial Act* in Joel Serrão e Oliveira Marques, *Nova História de Portugal* (Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 1990), p. 361. This so-called 'mission' only served to coverage Portuguese racial superiority and discrimination and later formed the basis for Gilberto Freyre's theory of Lusotropicalism, which advocates that the Portuguese, being more Christian than European, were different from other European colonisers and better suited to creating a racially harmonious empire. See Malyn Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (London: Hurst & Company, 1995). For a critique of the "missão civilizadora" and Freyre's view on Lusotropicalism, see Eduardo Mondlane, *The Struggle for Mozambique* (London: Zed Press, 1983), pp. 35-57.

<sup>4</sup> Paulo de Medeiros, "War Pics: Photographic Representations of the Colonial War" (*Luso-Brazilian Review*, 39, N.º 2, Winter 2002, 91-106), p. 54.

past<sup>5</sup> and disclosing an ethical time of narration, since through Eva Lopo's narrative it becomes possible to articulate the unspoken, clearly expressed in the novel as "murmúrios". Talking about her own process of fiction-making, Lúcia Jorge asserts her "desejo de permanecer junto de personagens quase mudas... em labirintos onde escute apenas o ruído do outro"<sup>6</sup>. It is this "ruído do outro", the Other being the black Africans or women, which Lúcia Jorge brings to her novel, where the performative position of the narrative subject entails "a radical and an-archival reference to the other"<sup>7</sup> by testifying against those who have profited from the oppression of others<sup>8</sup>.

Drawing on Levinas's philosophy, particularly on his notion of ethical discourse and its relation to testimony, I contend that *A Costa dos Murmúrios*, as a whole, attempts to rescue a recent Portuguese past from forgetfulness, but also posits memory as imperfect and artificial: "porque a memória é uma fraude para iludir o olvido cor de pó" (73)<sup>9</sup>. In the game of memory there is a tension between a Saying and a Said, which calls for interpretation ad-infinitum, presupposing a notion of subjectivity as the relationship of the one-for-the-other, a relationship, which interrupts and prevents the egotistic

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<sup>5</sup> See the interview of Lúcia Jorge in Álvaro Cardoso Gomes, *A Voz Itinerante* (S. Paulo: EDUSP, 1993), where she speaks of prejudice against the memory of the colonial war in Portugal.

<sup>6</sup> Lúcia Jorge, "Romance e personagens ou o fascínio do outro", in *Maschere: Le scritte della donna nelle culture Iberiche*, ed. by Susanna Regazzoni and Leonardo Buonomo (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1994), pp. 91-95, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Fabio Ciaramelli, "Levinas's ethical discourse, between individuation and universality" R. Bernasconi and S. Critchley (eds.), *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 83-105, p. 90.

An-archival, in a Levinasian sense, means a state of being interrupted by the infinite alterity of the other, prior to all origin in consciousness and implying an awakening of consciousness in which my subjectivity as a self-enclosed consciousness is deposed.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of Literature and Witnessing in Portuguese Contemporary Fiction, see Urbano Tavares Rodrigues, "Literatura e Testemunho: Ambiguidades, Incidências e Variantes na Ficção Portuguesa Contemporânea", *Literatura e Pluralidade Cultural, Actas do 3º Congresso Nacional da Associação Portuguesa de Literatura Comparada, 1998* (Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 1999), pp. 361-366.

<sup>9</sup> See Luís Almeida Martins, "Lúcia Jorge, Notícia do cais dos prodígios", *Jornal de Letras*, 15 February 1988, pp. 6-10, p. 9, where with reference to *A Costa dos Murmúrios*, Lúcia Jorge contends that "Narrar é a última forma de contrariar o fim".

Self from returning to itself. According to Levinas, the centripetal movement of the self to Self is at the base of all individualism and indifference towards the Other, which are in turn the origin of all occlusive attitudes, violence, war and all forms of totalitarianism. Lídia Jorge also comes close to Levinas in her critique of all forms of violence and subjection in contemporary civilisation demonstrated by her reference, in the novel, to the Prague Spring in 1968 and Jan Palach's human pyre.

I argue that the division of the novel into two parts, the concise section called *Os Gafanhotos*, and a longer text, which continually disrupts the first is intimately related to the deposing of a self-enclosed consciousness. Evita, in the first part of the novel, becomes Eva Lopo, the narrator of the second part of the text, who, twenty years afterwards, recalls her experience at the end of the sixties, as the wife of a lieutenant in Beira, Mozambique. The split of Evita-Eva translates the main character's awakening of consciousness and her will to bear witness in a Levinasian sense, that is, to testify for-the-Other, meaning to respond in the face of the infinite alterity of the Other, which implies the dispossession of the subject and it is a sign to another in proximity and non-indifference.

By stressing a "força vital do conto" (258), *A Costa dos Murmúrios* points to a narrative desire similar to Levinas's metaphysical desire reaching out and liberating an other, while exposing the self and making it answerable. Read as a response<sup>10</sup> to the Other, the novel is grounded, not only in public documents of official memory, but also in subjective memories working against those memories which are ready-made by tradition and authority, and fed by the impulses of a totalising colonial History. *Os Gafanhotos*, the first section of the novel, works as a pretext for bringing to light or bearing witness to, the unsaid of the Said, because in Eva's words "os músculos invisíveis podem ter um desempenho especial na organização dos factos históricos" (189). The novel is structured then around the question of writing as a Saying, which precedes all Said and is articulated as a response to the unpredictable event of the Other.

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<sup>10</sup> "Response" here is taken in the sense of re-sponsibility, from the Latin *spondere*, or to take something into one's charge.

## 2. Unsayng the said

The double structure of *A Costa dos Murmúrios*, then, works as a strategy to undo an illusory and totalising historical perception and to continually put into question the possibility of the ‘knowledge of truth’, as Eva tells the author of *Os Gafanhotos*:

não se preocupe com a verdade que não se reconstitui, nem com a verosimilhança que é uma ilusão dos sentidos. Preocupe-se com a correspondência. (...) estamos longe do tempo em que se acreditava no Universo como uma criação saída dum espírito preocupado com a inteligência e a verdade (42).

According to Eva, there is no one possible truth, only the correspondences permitted by acts of memory in the form of a testimony, which is opposed to the certitude of representation. Although Eva acknowledges that what she reveals are “imperfeitas lembranças” (85), she, nevertheless, fights against total oblivion, emphasising the importance of bearing witness: “É preciso testemunhar” (232). Eva’s conversation with the author of *Os Gafanhotos*, disrupts the hubris of the apparently sacred harmony of the first text, and also questions the possibility of the universal Truth predicated on the grand narratives of Western humanism, which have given rise to the rational, imperialist logoi of European colonialism.

Leela Gandhi, discussing postcolonialism as the “theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath”,<sup>11</sup> argues that the colonial civilising mission was motivated by a fear of alterity, underpinned by the concept of the self-sufficient and rational Cartesian subject. According to Gandhi, drawing on Lyotard’s observations on the grand narratives of Western humanism, postcolonialism links with postmodernism, in the attempt to analyse and resist the exclusion of particular cultural identities seen as detrimental to the universal one. According to Gandhi where the poststructuralist account of Enlightenment humanism stresses that its Kantian motto ‘Dare to know’ is rooted in the self-enclosed, rational ego of Western humanism, poststructuralism and postmodernism could bring the possibility of a different kind of

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<sup>11</sup> Gandhi, Leela, *Postcolonial Theory: A critical introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 4.

knowledge whose motto would be ‘care to know’. Gandhi relates this ‘care to know’ to the Levinasian concept of ethics, based on the need to dethrone the sovereign ego.<sup>12</sup> Although she does not examine further this relationship between Levinas and the possibility of a different kind of subjectivity and knowledge, I argue that it highlights Lúcia Jorge’s concern throughout the novel with subjectivity, knowledge and the importance of bearing witness. Lúcia Jorge’s argument against a universal and restrictive form of knowledge is powerfully conveyed by the comparison between science and crime, in relation to the experiments on human bodies performed in Auschwitz:

Os carrascos de Auschwitz poderiam ter estado perto duma importante descoberta no domínio da Bioquímica, e a prova é que se haviam interessado tão vivamente pela decomposição dos corpos. Assim, a ciência e o crime poderiam ter entre si apenas uns passos de dança ou umas flexões de ginástica (141).

By asserting that “Entre o bem e o mal uma mortalha de papel de seda” (141), Lúcia Jorge is pointing out the narrow divide that exists between Good and Evil, because intelligence and knowledge can also be at the service of evil. Lúcia Jorge takes a stance against the absurd belief, underlying Western humanist philosophy, that the progress of Good, transformed into power in all domains of science and knowledge, corresponds to a defeat of evil. Good and Evil turn into power at the same time and all forms of the manichean struggle between Good and Evil are merely illusion, because their relationship is inextricable. As demonstrated by the atrocities committed against thousands of human beings in Auschwitz in the name of science, the Good appropriating power can lead to violence and inhumanity. A parallel is drawn implicitly by Lúcia Jorge with the colonialist mentality and the so-called ‘civilising mission’, which was constructed along the axis civilised (Good)/savage (Evil), and which was undertaken in the name of progress using the Good of (Western) Civilisation to justify immoral acts.

In contrast with the “dare to know” as a form of power, it is a ‘care to know’, which leads Evita in her quest to find out about the poisoning of the black people by methyl alcohol and to unveil the atrocities perpetrated by her husband during the war. These are the truths, which enable Eva Lopo to

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 23-41.

move outwards, towards the Other, in her inexhaustible attempt to uncover the half truth hiding beneath the “*verdade deslumbrante d’Os Gafanhotos*” (85). Eva’s ‘care to know’ is also translated by her ‘care to unknow’<sup>13</sup> the Truth conveyed by a knowledge, where the different and the multiple are contained under the One: “*Querer desconhecer não é uma cobardia, é apenas colaborar com a realidade mais ampla e mais profunda que é o desconhecimento*” (130).

Eva’s care to ‘unknow’ or dismantle the Truth delivered in *Os Gafanhotos* (the Said) is connected with a wider critique of knowledge and truth as sealed and static concepts, because they are the realisation of a free will which seeks to conquer the world and comprehend the universe. When Helena de Tróia asks Eva why she is sad, she answers that what she sees in her face is not sadness, “*um subterfúgio pacífico de descomprometimento*” (101) but cynicism, which leads “*ao afastamento da casota quente e fofa*” (101), disrupting and creating unrest in her self-contented Being.

In Eva’s view everything that can be “*objecto de conhecimento*” (131) understood as appropriation and possession should be destroyed “*para se colaborar com o silêncio da Terra*” (131), that is, to collaborate with all those Others who never have the chance to speak<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, she manifests her appreciation for “*os países de vocação metafísica total, os que não investem na fixação de nada*” (131), which can be related to Levinas’s understanding of truth and diachronic time as “*a time that can neither be present, nor represented by memory*”<sup>15</sup>, because it is a time, which overflows synchronic history, in which everything is retained and connected.

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<sup>13</sup> Ana Paula Ferreira argues that Eva questions the possibility of direct knowledge and that her “will to unknow” follows Foucault’s claim in relation to the “will-to-know” as an instrument of power and control. See Ana Paula Ferreira, “Lídia Jorge’s *A Costa dos Murmúrios*: History and the Postmodern She-Wolf” (*Revista Hispánica Moderna* XLV 2, December 1992), pp. 268-78, 273.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the deaths of the black men happen “*no segredo da terra*” (62). There is a reversal in the common use of Terra and terra. The capitalised term referring to Mozambique and all the conquered land and the noun with a small letter refers to the earth in general as can be seen in the following example: “*Se a Terra tivesse memória, quantos cantos da terra ficariam isentos da lembrança dessas cenas de degola? Poucos...*” (138).

<sup>15</sup> Adriaan, Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997), p. 100.

For Levinas, diachronic time is a time of responsibility, in opposition to the time of essence in which all details are retained and connected in a Said, which is the essence of essence. Diachrony is refractory to thematisation, because the Other is irreducible to an eternal present and truth has to be understood as a progression which always remains open. In the novel, the strategy of continually emphasising “Evita era eu”, which functions like a desterritorialising refrain, points to the temporal lapse, which provides transcendence and responsibility, the heteronomy of being for-the-other. The split Ev(a)-ita, or in Levinas’s terms “la dénucléation de l’être”, means disinterestedness and an openness to consciousness, where “the Other pierces the skin of my world when she visits me as an absolute stranger coming from beyond”.<sup>16</sup>

Eva’s “dénucléation” or the movement of differentiation and her involvement with the exterior is manifested by an *errance* outside totality, expressed in the second part of the novel by the impossibility of reconciling her points of view with those of the author of *Os Gafanhotos*.

*Os Gafanhotos* is a short story, a “relato encantador” (41) about Evita’s wedding with the lieutenant Luís Alex, a former student of mathematics, who left Lisbon and his dream to find a Universal solution to his equations, in order to fight in the colonial war in Mozambique. The entire action of the short story is condensed into two days and all the scenes take place on the terrace, facing the Indian Ocean, on the top floor of the sumptuous *Stella Maris*, the place where the commissioned officers live with their wives. *Os Gafanhotos* clearly bears witness to the triumph of the *Stella Maris*, as the symbol of a Colonial Empire, but paradoxically, like Evita’s wedding cake after its heyday, it is nothing but crumbs (27) and it is metaphorically compared to a “coliseu romano em ruínas” (14).<sup>17</sup> This comparison is all the more striking, as from the vantage point of the terrace, the numerous dead bodies that appear below on the shore and the *dumpers*, which transport the corpses, are viewed with indifference but also with pleasure, fascination and sexual excitement.<sup>18</sup> This “arreatador espectáculo” (21) gives rise to a series of

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>17</sup> This analogy is made clear when Eva suggests to the author of *Os Gafanhotos*: “Deixe a ruína pegar com a deslumbrante noite d’*Os Gafanhotos*” (193).

<sup>18</sup> Ana Paula Ferreira contends that behind the methanol poisonings there are



speculations about the reason for the dead bodies and a lieutenant readily explains the incident in terms of ethnic enmities:<sup>19</sup>

São os senas e os changanes esfaqueando-se. Que se esfaqueiem. São menos uns quantos que não vão ter a tentação de fazer aqui o que os macondes estão a fazer em Mueda. Felizmente que se odeiam mais uns aos outros do que a nós mesmos (17).

However, the narrator questions this ready clarification, saying “Assim, pelo menos, tudo ficaria explicado” (19) and the use of the conditional tense, denies that self-satisfying explanation. Yet, there is no conclusive and direct answer. Everybody on the terrace readily accepts Major Forza Leal’s explanation that the blacks stole and drank poisonous methanol, thinking it was white wine. If this were the case, it would be an instance of native stupidity and so the Portuguese would be exempted from any responsibility, but according to the narrator, in spite of their coldness and distancing from that “hunting scene”, the question remains:

Como o conhecimento tinha dado origem à frieza e ao distanciamento, aquela parecia-lhes ser uma cena de caça. Ora muito bem – mas como resolver a situação da colónia? (24).

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genocidal intentions against Mozambican males and “The sight of the dead bodies becomes, in fact, a sexually enticing spectacle soon to be accompanied by the viewing pleasure of a green rain of locusts hovering just below the hotel’s terrace”. See Ana Paula Ferreira, “Lídia Jorge’s *A Costa dos Murmúrios*: History and the Postmodern She-Wolf”, p. 270.

<sup>19</sup> At least ten major ethnic groups and dozens of subgroups inhabit Mozambique and one of the strategies of the Portuguese was to turn ethnic groups against each other. According to Frelimo (Mozambique Liberation Front, organised in June 1962 in Dar-es-Salaam presided by Eduardo Mondlane), this strategy allowed the Portuguese to conquer the land and later to manipulate political and economic alliances. See Frelimo, *História de Moçambique* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1971), p. 34. In 1974, Frelimo’s guerrilla movement, the backbone of which was the Maconde group settled in the northern plateau, had reached Tete and more than one fifth of the territory was already liberated. See Mário Azevedo, *Historical Dictionary of Mozambique* (New York and London: The Scarecrow Press and Methuen, 1991).

According to the General, the Colony would survive through a systematic containment of the demographic explosion of the African people and another officer mentions sterilisation, which could be made compulsory, by removing aseptic medical services, or persuasive, offered in exchange for a radio. These explanations are immediately put into question by a pilot who laughs and the emphasis on his derisive laughter is highly expressive as is the narrator's assertion that: "A um piloto não se podem dizer certas fantasias porque ele conhece a Terra" (25). The possible solution for maintaining the Colony which the officers put forward, is reduced to a mere fantasy, a product of their own imagination, and although there is no direct link between the conversation among the officers and the dead bodies, the narrator's ironic comments point to a close relationship between them.

At the point when the wedding guests start dancing on the terrace in the absence of real accompanying music, lulled only by their internal imaginary music, in perfect harmony, the irony becomes particularly intense. They are all depicted daydreaming in a scene, which corresponds closely to Bergson's analysis of the comic. Bergson contends that if we stop listening to the music in a room, where people are dancing, the whole scene appears ridiculous. He urges us to step aside and "look upon life as a disinterested spectator: many a drama will turn into a comedy".<sup>20</sup> Lídia Jorge is here inviting the reader to keep a critical distance as if s/he were the spectator of this drama turned into a dark comedy, born of the incongruity and absurdity of their silent dancing, while down on the streets the *dumpers* are quietly removing the dead corpses. It is at this moment, that the yellow-toothed major suddenly raises the question of guilt: "E a culpa? E a culpa?" (28), and a paratrooper immediately blames the *blacks*, reversing the role of the victimisers and the victims:

Deles da qualidade dos *blacks* que nos calharam em sorte! [...] Se tivéssemos tido uns *blacks* fortes, tesos, aguerridos, nós, os colonizadores, teríamos saído da nossa fraqueza. Eles é que são os culpados, e se lhes parecemos fortes é porque eles mesmos são extremamente fracos. Só temos de os recriminar... (28).

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<sup>20</sup> Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An essay on the meaning of the comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1911), p. 5. See Lídia Jorge's article on laughter based on Bergson's theories, "Sobre o riso", *Jornal de Letras*, 9 March 1993, p. 32.

The paratrooper's all-enveloping imperialist attitude reverses the situation by transforming the Colonisers into victims and denying their responsibility for the crimes committed, demonstrating how everything is perceived from the centrality of the coloniser's totalising and egological perspective. In Levinasian terms this reductive attitude reflects a Being who finds the Universe in himself and always returns to his finite, solipsistic interiority, that is, he is unable to get out of himself, preventing the ethical movement from the Same to the Other, and thus, leading to violence.

The unreality of the paratrooper's intervention is, however, betrayed by the use of the impossible conditional clause, because if their enemies had been stronger, they, the colonisers, would have overcome their own weakness, which effectively means that in reality they did not. There is also a moral weakness, implied by the questions the narrator formulates about the reason why the corpses had been so swiftly cleared away, and he adds "Essa era uma pergunta colectiva mas que só alguns formulavam" (21). The truth in relation to the murders by methyl alcohol is avoided and even silenced in the *Stella Maris*, because they are devoid of all moral consciousness, the primary condition of disclosure and proximity to the Other. Therefore, *Os Gafanhotos* already betrays a subversive tone, also implied by the use of the conditional tense,<sup>21</sup> dramatising a decaying harmony and an underlying violence, which will be fully developed and disclosed in the second part of the novel.

This is already hinted at, when the narrator remarks that all that had happened in the obscurity of the terrace would not finish there, because "Tudo estava por começar como no momento em que a tempestade inicia o primeiro sopro" (14). In fact, Eva's "storm" is already prefigured by Evita's inner revolt compared to "um lago agitado por vagas" (17), which contrasts with the emphasis in *Os Gafanhotos* on harmony and peace. In opposition to the waves, which reached the terrace "sem espuma" (38), Ev(a)-ita's deconstruction will perform a significant agitation leaving a bitter aftertaste comparable to the foam on the sand left by the waves.

*Os Gafanhotos* works as a totalised and finished whole, as Lídia Jorge was careful to convey by ending it with the word "FIM", like "uma imagem

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<sup>21</sup> For instance, when the narrator refers to the impossibility of forgetting: "a noite poderia ser eterna e não se pensaria nem no destino remoto do Império nem no teatro próximo da ventosa Mueda" (31).

de cinema” (29) in a Hollywood film, where the story is perfectly woven and its conclusion is ready-made for the spectators. Nevertheless, Eva breaks that system of totalisation, since her answers, presumably to the questions of the author of *Os Gafanhotos*, which are omitted in the text, open onto an infinite deferral of narrative closure and disturb the crystallised surface of “a noite sintética dos *Gafanhotos*”.<sup>22</sup> This process of perpetual unsaying, “Devolvendo, anulando *Os Gafanhotos*” (259), through which Eva recaptures the past, has also to be examined in relation to the different notions of time enumerated when Eva recalls her History classes at the university. It is in relation to time that Eva’s considerations of History, truth and writing are most clearly articulated.

According to Eva’s lecturer, the concept of History is related to several concepts of time, all of which point to a “temporalidade do absoluto” (211), such as that which informs the blind captain’s speech at the *Stella Maris* about the eternity of *Portugal d’Aquém e d’Além Mar* (211). First, the lecturer defines a linear time “um novelo de fio” (194), then, a manichaeistic division between good and evil, an endless straight line “em tempo de orgulho” (194) and finally “uma espiral” (194) coiling around itself. In opposition to all of these definitions, one of the students offers a vision of artistic time, which is of major importance to our understanding of the concept of literary creation expanded in the novel, since it points to a subjective and psychological time:

O tempo da forma dos objectos, da sombra dos objectos, do cheiro e do gosto dos objectos...o tempo psicológico dos bolos de Proust, o que varia afinal conforme o homem, o gato, o cão. O artista reconhece que o mesmo objecto tem vários tempos diferentes, e mais do que isso – cria os tempos diferentes com intencionalidade (194).

For Lídia Jorge, as for Proust, a taste, a sound or a smell have the power to evoke a past experience, a time of *jouissance* and dispossession, which leads to interiority. In this passage, Lídia Jorge refers to Proust’s madeleines,

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<sup>22</sup> This is a direct allusion to the ‘longa noite do fascismo’ with its obscurantist connotations and its reference to the silence and censorship imposed on the Portuguese under the Salazar regime.

which the narrator tastes in his aunt Léonie's bedroom and which trigger an array of childhood sensations passing through his mind.<sup>23</sup> As Levinas contends, in Proust's *La Recherche* "tout se passe comme si un autre moi-même doublait constamment le moi... Le mystère chez Proust est le mystère de l'autre".<sup>24</sup> The Proustian reference, common to both Lídia Jorge and Levinas, acquires a particular significance, as it points to an inner time and to Proust's *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, which deals with the importance of time and memory, as well as the role of art in creating a renewed vision of the world.

In contrast to a fixed and static notion of linear time, Eva's time reflects a subjective apprehension of experience, "um tempo relativo" (196) or an interior time, which includes a multiplicity of sensory impressions and memories. Therefore, Eva affirms that in *Os Gafanhotos* "tudo é exacto e verdadeiro, sobretudo em matéria de cheiro e de som" (41), because all the images in her mind are evanescent and are reduced to the level of an "abstracção imaginada" (91).

Only sensations are capable of being truly apprehended by "uma memória fluída" (42), stored up in our minds. Eva's recollections of the past, triggered by *Os Gafanhotos* which is compared to a "lâmparina de álcool" (41), express an incessant gnawing of the past into the present and the future in a continual and fluid Saying and Unsayings, because Evita tells her groom "a memória não tinha fim" (26) and memory itself is compared to the constant movement of turbulent waves running through Eva's mind:

as ondas indo e vindo, e voltando, as ondas que não consistem em nada além da própria água, e contudo se agitam como se fossem independentes, e tivessem existência própria. Apetecia troçar das ondas que se não viam, mas se imaginavam (102).

This image perfectly translates the expanding and contracting movement of Eva's recurring thoughts filtered through her fluid consciousness and memory, which narrow or magnify the development of their content in an

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<sup>23</sup> See Marcel Proust, *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), vol. I, pp. 142-145.

<sup>24</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Noms Propres* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1976), p. 120.

unfolding contiguity. In face of the impossibility to reconstruct the truth or verisimilitude, Eva tells the journalist “Preocupe-se com a correspondência” (42) as it is the only means of apprehending the real, which is “disperso e irrelevante” (85) contrary to a coherent and impersonal truth, which “deve ser unida e infragmentada” (85). Unlike *Os Gafanhotos*, where at a surface level only the truth is important (85), Eva’s narrative creates the possibility of an atemporal aesthetic truth by recreating a past freed from the demands of veracity, because “[...]há momentos em que não importa a verdade. Digo já então que tudo são folhas e tudo é volante como as folhas” 144). In Eva’s words, “Evita seria para mim um olho ou um olhar” (43), an aesthetic perception or a way of seeing otherwise, of capturing the external reality to be transformed into an internal object of consciousness and only then translated into words, after being invested by affective and aesthetic transformations.

As Eva remarks, when referring to the death of a pilot: “Enquanto os pilotos e os co-pilotos se despenham e os aviões explodem com o fogo, os sabonetes deslizam e a manteiga escorre” (115). In other words, these are the “teiasinhas” (185), which are not caught in a fixed Said and ceaselessly enter into the veracity of a Saying, which is never indifferent as Eva observes: “A indiferença dos actos uns pelos outros, na simultaneidade, não é a melhor prova do bondoso caos? (115).

In the novel, the *Stella Maris* not only becomes the symbol of the decaying Portuguese colonial empire, but it also serves as a micro-cosm of the “greater family” or the nation, characterised by unequal and oppressive relationships. This becomes more apparent when Forza Leal “naturally” slaps his wife, Helena de Tróia and the bruises of his five fingers on her face can be compared to the five escutcheons on the Portuguese coat of arms (32-33). The repetition of the word “naturalmente” to describe the slapping denaturalises the scene, reinforced by Eva’s ironic remark that “a união deles era um triunfo” (68) and they were the symbol of “uma alegria doméstica triunfante” (69).

The sacrosanct family institution, one of the pillars of the nation and of morality, is unveiled as the site of brutality and cruelty, as if the “natural” difference of women gave their husbands the right to abuse them. To treat women as an entirely different group is to violate their irreducible singularity to better universalise and control their needs and to suppress their particular experiences, because they do not fall within the parameters of masculine

“normality”. This corresponds exactly to Levinas's definition of violence, when each Other is treated as part of a universal theme and the needs of the Other are rejected, which in extreme cases may end up in murder, as is exemplified in the novel with the poisoning of the Africans.

The parallel between the violence and power perpetrated against women and Africans is already apparent, but the analogy at the end of the novel allowed by the play on “costas” and “costa” reinforces it. While the women in the middle of the hall “faziam uma sebe de costas” (257), Mozambican people metonymically become *A Costa dos Murmúrios*, pointing, in both cases, to a cultural, composite, muffled and marginalised other. By connecting women's and black people's “difference” or otherness, which sanctioned their subjugation and oppression, Lúcia Jorge is condemning violence and oppression in all its forms pointing to a broader ethical question, which concerns the humanity of the human being. In contrast to an ethics where the face and the uniqueness of each individual prevails, the novel stresses the injustice of reducing human plurality to a mere multiplicity constituted by an undifferentiated whole.

Eva brings to light the simultaneity of the facts in order to disrupt a deceptive sense of totality, or “bondoso caos”, which relegates to the shadows certain stories and details, which memory is then ceaselessly excavating like “uma agulha de gramofone raspando a água”<sup>25</sup> (108). One of these stories refers to lieutenant Zurique's wife, whose anal sphincter is torn in the act of giving birth to her baby in a private white clinic, an episode which is brought to light, because “os músculos invisíveis podem ter um desempenho especial na organização dos factos históricos” (189).

Eva's narrative is woven with multiple “teiasinhas”, or the trace of a Saying, which enters the “teia da História” (185) by fracturing it with apparently insignificant details, such as the news of Bernardo's death, which Eva refuses

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<sup>25</sup> The comparison of memory to a needle is strikingly similar to that of Virginia Woolf in *Orlando*: “Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither” (1942: 46). For an insightful study of the role of memory in *A Costa dos Murmúrios*, see Paulo de Medeiros “Memória Infinita” (*Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 2, Spring 1999), pp. 61-77. See also “Hauntings: Memory, Narrative, And the Portuguese Colonial Wars” (*Cadernos de Literatura Comparada*, Instituto de Literatura Comparada, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, December 2000), pp. 47-76.

to reduce or enclose in the synchrony of a memorable past, which will fade into the memory of those unconcerned for the Other: “Um desaparecer suave, para quem imagina que a água invade os tecidos como uma esponja a bebe, e depois a escorre, sem alarde nem dor” (88). Although the past comes involuntarily to Eva’s mind, in the form of smells and colours, as with Proust’s narrator and his childhood sensations, it also involves the recollection of deliberate, self-conscious and burdensome memories. Voluntary memory and the “correspondências” it allows, emphasise that Eva is less interested in reconstructing history as a story with cause and effect, than in presenting associations of events about the Portuguese imperial past and the colonial war, which are rescued from forgetfulness by means of memory and narration.

Although subject to the fragile reliability of memory, Eva’s testimonies are a means through which historical events can survive and they express the troubled state of her consciousness: “É possível que a baba verde em que envolvo os testemunhos e a sobrevivência tenha a ver com essa aula”<sup>26</sup> (196). Eva needs to bear witness in order to survive, and although she is aware of the limited ability of language (232) to express the atrocities committed during colonial times, she is incapable of remaining closed in on herself, a position which expresses a restless concern for the Other.

Persecuted by guilty feelings, Eva affirms that: “a culpa é um corpo celeste que existe para além de nós” (124), echoing Dostoyevsky in *Brothers Karamazov*: “Chacun de nous est coupable devant tous pour tous et moi plus que les autres”.<sup>27</sup> It is this sense of responsibility for one’s own relationship

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<sup>26</sup> João de Melo contends that the literature of the colonial war is characterised by a specific historical consciousness and by the attempt at proximity to the Other, because “o olhar desse povo deu-nos um sentimento de culpa que só o testemunho dos nossos livros viria a resgatar”. See João de Melo (ed.), *Os Anos da Guerra 1961-75: Os Portugueses em África. Crónica, Ficção e História* (Lisboa: D. Quixote, 1988), p. 25.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (Paris: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p. 228. It is noteworthy that Lídia Jorge recalls Dostoyevsky’s sentence in referring to the lack of responsibility endemic among the characters of *O Jardim sem Limites*, which according to her is characteristic of modern times and depicts the opposite of Dostoyevsky’s consciousness. See Maria João Martins, “O rosto dos outros”, *Jornal de Letras*, 6 December 1995, pp. 14-16, p. 14.



with the world, which transforms Eva's private confessional mode into a heavily staged testimony with clearly public concerns in which she bears witness to the evil of Being through which the Other is shut out.

Called by "as figuras inocentes do destino" (247), the narrator is compelled to respond to those whose immemorial voicelessness cannot be represented by the memorable time of essence. The beyond essence, as the one-for-the-other, requires ambiguity, refusing the last word, which dominates all meaning and the ultimate truth in the synchronic Said, which is enclosed within a Totality. Although writing sometimes takes this ambiguity or ambivalence to extremes, it always points to "[A] tal pequena, humilde e útil correspondência que não nos deixa navegar completamente à deriva" (43). These correspondences partake of the non-representational aesthetics of the novel, where the real world is held in suspension or it emerges as it were between parentheses, since "a estética consome o desastre e redime-o em grandeza" (210). The work of art transfigures events, it is in itself a form of exorcism and when historical visibility is fading away it offers a resistance to indifference and oblivion, because memory is one of the essential elements of art, or as Eva contends:

Era bom e definitivo imaginar que tudo iria embrulhado no novelo escorregadio do esquecimento. [...] Há momentos porém que agitam o banho tépido como uma vaga (164).

Therefore, saying otherwise or bearing witness to buried outlines of historical reality, which take on fictive factuality, Eva, uses her shattering and subversive laughter to disrupt a Said, which through art, does not turn to ashes, but is "kindled out of dust".<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, "Magic", *Poems 1906 to 1926*, trans. J. B. Leishman (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 321.