Mozambique and the World of the Portuguese Language: 
What Relation, What Future? 
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I must confess that to propose this topic as a debate, I did it with the only desire to hear, from other frameworks that use the Portuguese language as a tool in their work, for example with the case in the departments of the university of Wisconsin, what they think when they look at us. Us as African countries with a universally diverse linguistic culture, sustained with a Bantu base, but with Portuguese as the official language? What do they think of us In the presence of English speaking countries, such as France and Spain, are we, countries of Portuguese expression, in a community with narrow ties of cooperation and fraternity, or of part of a postcolonial community with hegemonic agendas?

With the case of Mozambique, whose culture is mixed with southern, eastern regions and the Indian ocean, thousands of kilometers, by Timor Leste, the question that arises, in terms of the Portuguese language, is what ties do they need to have as a country to gain full autonomy and participation within the Lusophone communities? This also brings up another question: what is in fact the Lusophone community, is it the CPLP (Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa)\(^1\), and, in the strict sense and not singularized, the PALOPs (Países africanos de Língua Portuguesa)\(^2\), an acronym created by a renown writer Luis Bernardo Honwana\(^3\), that are

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\(^1\) CPLP: Community of Portuguese language countries, a multilateral forum aiming to foster cooperation amongst the nine sovereign states in which Portuguese is an official language.

\(^2\) PALOP: Portuguese Speaking African Countries

\(^3\) Luis Bernardo Honwana: journalist, author, and public official who was one of Africa’s outstanding short-story writers, especially known for his poetically insightful portrayals of village life in Mozambique.
represented in a badly constructed band?

I believe that we are in the presence of a series of misconceptions that Starting with this constrained and naive expression PALOP. It seems to me that it is just a categorizing label. It is like a sign on the road disfigured by tropical bad weather; and because of this the conductor doesn’t know where to lead. Instead of leading everyone to a common sacred ground these disfigured labels and signs are creating distances and different paths. This assertion flourishes when the knowledge, in several cultural disciplines, of each country member, has to pass through the lens of the former colonizer. Their values are legitimized through the former colonizer.

Today, Cape Verde, as isolated islands, enters into my country through Creole music, through the station of RDP-Africa radio, through the voices of Cesária Évora, Bana, Tito Paris and others. Outside of music, Cape Verde is no more than a cluster of islands with people speaking Portuguese whose worries are turned to Europe and other latitudes of migration. The question that immediately arises is to know if the cultural product that we create and are put at, at the disposal of the former colonial power, legitimizes the universal culture of Cape Verde?

Looking at Guinea Bissau, the images that RTP-Africa- a Portuguese television channel for the African continent-, that are presented, suggest a state on it’s way to bankruptcy, a country of intense drug trafficking, and a state disfigured by a cycle of internal conflicts perpetrated by the militants. And the ridiculous thing about it, is that every time conflicts get worse, Guinea Bissau fits deeper into the CEDEAO, Comunidade de Estados de África Ocidental⁴ with the French as the dominant expression, creating distance, consequently created by the lack of interlocking realities, with those in the PALOP. Our view is only based on the strict and shapeless frame of a Portuguese speaking country, and not a country that is highly culturally

⁴ CEDEAO: Economic Community of West African States
mixed in the gulf region of Guinea. Is the life and culture of Guinea in the Portuguese language or in the multifaceted cultural framework of the Gulf of Guinea?

São Tomé, an island country, constantly strays away from our horizon when speaking of the CPLP community. Occasionally there is news, but more to do with political character than cultural. The historical memory that is based upon the forced labor for plantations, and the multiculturalism of which the island is known for, is going to blur with time. Today youth and communities have difficulties locating the country, other than being featured in the equator region. São Tomé is usually set as a country for a tourist destination.

Angola is the economic power that tends to stand out in African horizon. The influx of capital makes it the center of great interests to gravitate to. Culturally, Angolan music, more than literature, has won, along with Cape Verdean music, an unprecedented presence. It’s important to say as a side note, in my modest understanding, that the music could be a cultural expression that cheats the fascistic canons of a Eurocentric culture, which is still dominant. As much as no one likes it, Cape Verdean Creole is unavoidable and, thanks to music, they have full citizenship. The universality that France gave to Cesária Évora⁵ gave a lot of contribution so that Cape Verdean music could transpose the barrier of the Portuguese language. In Angola, the urban Angolan rhythms celebrate an autonomy that liberates them from the collective forces of the rest.

Mozambique, having ethnic music, but music without an urban sentiment, doesn’t win space in the dominant spheres in the Portuguese speaking communities. The future of its’ music passes through other Bantu patterns of the southern region; the doors have been open in that sentiment as music has followed its natural course. I can say the same for fine arts. Since the colonial period, certain lines were designed in the world of fine arts, fleeing, consequently, tax

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⁵ Cesária Évora: Popular Cape Verdean Singer
impositions. The painter Malangatana, and the writer Chissano, would be, in part, the biggest
people responsible for the opening of new openings in fine arts. Finally I want to say, that fine
arts and music have been cultural expressions that flee the norms of the communities. They win
self-autonomy.

This is the scenario of the PALOPs, distinctive countries, with self-agendas, and weak
multicultural communication. The want, the force, and based on only one instrument which is the
official common language, to make these five African countries, one unit, is utopian, and closes,
to what it seems to me, consciously and unconsciously, post-colonial efforts of legitimizing other
vested interests. Portugal, the old colonial power, has committed, to my view, a big historical
error in looking to the African countries through the unique and reducing angle of a language,
forgetting that those countries have their own identities and linguistics universes that are very
distinct. In colonial time, and with specific objectives, Portugal had institutions geared towards
social studies, anthropological studies, and medical studies of the African countries. The
arguments that the *Escola dos Altos Estudos do Ultramar*\(^6\), for example, produces, are still in our
historical archives and are considered important resources at the university level.

But the April revolution\(^7\) and the socialist projects of the PALOP dissipated that universe.
On Portugal’s part, the former colonies, despite the ideological point taken, continued in the
Lusophone world because they opted for Portuguese as an official language. They forgot that
Africans should not be considered as simple as reflected in the thoughts of the old colonial
powers. On the other side of the coin, the African countries distance themselves from their
universal culture by choosing an ideological sphere that neglected the cultural diversity of their
languages that make up the mosaic geography of their countries, in an attempt to recreate their

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\(^6\) A post graduate school created to promote academic cooperation and international exchange
\(^7\) April revolution: also known as the Carnation Revolution, started as a military revolution and quickly turned into a massive civil unrest. (see references)
Portugal doesn’t recognize the cultural reality of the African countries. They think, wrongly, it’s clear, that the Portuguese language is instrumental enough to form a cord with an international legitimacy. They thought to themselves, by direct history, to be the financial power of the African Portuguese speaking countries. With that historical legitimacy they thought they could enter into the European world. In all the African Portuguese speaking countries, the teaching is done according to the standards to the Portuguese languages of continental Portugal. The production of schoolbooks goes through Portuguese\textsuperscript{8} companies. The legitimization of an African writer needs to go through the literary authorities of Portuguese.

A book produced in Mozambique doesn’t circulate in Portugal and is less circulated in other African Portuguese speaking countries. Only the book edited by Portuguese editors have free circulation in the African countries. Even the Orthographic Agreement\textsuperscript{9}, a Brazilian literary production, like the African Portuguese speaking countries, needed to pass through the colonial Portuguese strainer. I can confess that our development in literature in relation to Brazilian literature is about 50 years minimum behind.

We can extend this analysis to film production. For many years, the public authorities of Portuguese cinema had to, through agreements, assesses the production and dissemination of new cinema in the African countries. And the most ridiculous thing in these fascist politics is that they never had a training policy for local screenwriters to follow “the rules”. They are focused on the formation of cameras, lighting, people who work with sound and others. Distribution and the subtitling of films, until a few years ago, had rights reserved to Portugal.

\textsuperscript{8} Referring to Portugal portuguese
\textsuperscript{9} Orthographic Agreement of 1990: is an international treaty whose purpose is to create a unified orthography for the Portuguese language, to be used by all the countries that have Portuguese as their official language. (See references)
About theatre and dance, that open door created for other creative liberties that were created through Portugal. In this framework, and by diffusion, the middle class of our countries “revise” themselves in the aesthetic paradigms imposed by Portugal. It is still important to keep in mind that a majority of scholarships for studies, since the eighties, were sent to Portuguese universities.

But Brazil enters the African space differently. The first big public confrontation between these two big figures, Brazil and Portugal, occurs precisely in the framework of the Portuguese language. Since 1911 Portugal and Brazil haven’t come to an agreement in terms of eliminating differences in spelling in alignment with the Orthographic Agreement. Every time there would be an attempt to create a common orthographic agreement in the Portuguese language, the more distance it created between the two countries. Until the independence of the African countries, Portugal did not worry about this disagreement and distance, because it knew it had the African countries and Timor Leste on a “leash” because they had control through language.

The empire made the language of Camões flourish following the standards of the capital that the empire enforced. Today, with the agreement already ratified by most of the countries, we still see the unhappiness of the ratification. There still exist resistance to the agreement. Those who specialize in language also meet resistance to the agreement. The truth is, the big worry that Portugal has is in losing the leadership, it has in terms of language, and the future of where the language is heading. This is the only argument in which Portugal can sustain its history as a financial power and colonizer. To lose this power over the Portuguese language would be a bad blow to Portugal because it will have nothing else to keep their position, as a post-colonial power, in control.

But the ongoing historical winds are not compatible with these mannerisms. The most
aggravating part of this tragicomedy is the perception, induced or not, no matter the case, is that certain elite Africans let these things pass through the community through an agreement. I talk about Mozambique. Since the debate about the agreement came to be visible and people started to pay attention to the debate, the feeling that the whole city and a lot of literate and elite people are in agreement is that this agreement comes to shut out the local variants of the Portuguese language, leading the African countries to assimilate to what Portugal and Brazil are imposing. And they forget to look at the essential aspect, that the orthographic agreement only changes spelling, and the difference in spelling doesn’t have the power to change the different identities in the African countries.

It doesn’t have to do with an agreement on the side of semantics, syntax, lexicography; it has to do with, simply, with orthography, on how to write this word and that word. This does not affect the other differences in the languages. From our part, African countries, they need to see our nationalism, our pride of our contribution to the Portuguese language, and the necessity to acknowledge both aspects. From Portugal and Brazil come various commentaries about the silent consonants, the hyphen application, and other technical aspects of the agreement, always ending with the Portugal pride being hurt when something in the language is changed from the classic version.

But no one, which is heartbreaking, was concerned about the more than 60% illiterate population in Mozambique and whether they had grasped the new orthographic platform, not even looking at how it would change the learning of the Portuguese language. The local press worries about what the orthographic agreement is doing but not what it is not doing for the African communities: it’s eliminating the idea of localism, and the words which are conquering the Portuguese language. That is for me what calls into question the Lusophone community, the
unawareness of what is going on within each community. We do not all exist in Harmony. We exist yes, as sovereign states that cooperate at different levels and as individuals who understand universal forums.

Brazil plays today, in relation to the African countries, two different parts. On one side we have Brazilians that are African descendants, and on the other is the capital of Brazil. In regards to the population of African descendants, the second country, after Nigeria, is Brazil with the large population of black people in the world. They find that recent African countries are denied legitimacy, and the support for research activities. The intellectual Afro-Brazilians circulate their literary and scientific productions by the African countries, leaving that “fashion of marginality” that they are placed in.

Editors with a mannerism related to the reality of a black person start to win legitimacy and in the public. They go against the marginalized fringes of Portuguese and European literature. Some intellectuals have looked at this racial verbalization as a rekindling of a black chain, of black consciousness that was made in the 50s and 60s. But we forget that Brazil has peculiarities that are important to respect and support in the good that they bring.

On the other side, there is the big Brazilian capital that in the Lula era \(^\text{10}\) “founded” the great African population. For this big capital, the unknown Africa starts to occupy an important part of the business of Brazil. But they have still not been on the cultural agenda. Famous Brazilian editors (publishers) still do not allow themselves to be felt (published) in African markets. Brazilian writers like the Portuguese, have the European market and are reaching for the

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\(^\text{10}\) Lula Era: He is often regarded as one of the most popular politicians in the history of Brazil and, at the time of his mandate, one of the most popular in the world. Social programs like Bolsa Família and Fome Zero are hallmarks of his time in office. (See in references for relation with African countries)
American market. The south-south cooperation\textsuperscript{11} in the various cultural disciplines is still a utopia. It is important to say that the pivotal role that Portugal wanted to play faded for the fact that the country wanted, and with all legitimacy, to leave the outskirts in which they were founded in.

It was from the eighties of last century Portugal, with a host of writers like Jose Saramago, António Lobo Antunes, Virgílio Ferreira, Maria Velho da Costa, José Cardoso Pires, Lidia Jorge, Teolinda Gersão, Mário Cláudio João de Melo and others in the great literary salon of Paris, and under the leadership of a great intellectual, a delegate in UNESCO, Eduardo Prado Coelho, leaves the sheltered ball of a country of poets and nostalgia evoked in Fado\textsuperscript{12}, and throws himself to the great world of literature. So we lose the thread with Brazil, because the only literature that came to us was only that of Saramago, Cardoso Pires, Lobo Antunes, Lídia Jorge- that passed through colonial Mozambique-, the big Baptista Bastos, Journalist and write, among others. The others reflected on the Portugal image. To be a big writer in the time was to cite a Portuguese writer.

The Camões Institute, the institute dedicated to give a “spirit” to the Portuguese language, through the formalization of Portuguese writers in the world, injected elevated sums of money in the disseminations of Portuguese writers by the African countries. The editorial momentum was felt in the Portugal sphere. Some literatures of African countries were published. It is in this context that appears the Camões award, who, similar to the Cervantes em Espanha award, aims to reward writers that have distinguished themselves in terms of Portuguese-speaking countries. It is a prize done without preparation, in my eyes, because the African

\textsuperscript{11} South-South cooperation: is a broad framework for collaboration among countries of the South in the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and technical domains. Involving two or more developing countries, it can take place on a bilateral, regional, sub regional or interregional basis.

\textsuperscript{12} Fado: is a music genre which can be traced to the 1820s in Portugal, but probably with much earlier origins
countries don’t have and still don’t have literature with muscles or strength, in quality or quantity, to meet the height of the prizes awarded.

That fact that a Lusophone community exists, the biggest worry should be to fill the public libraries and school in the African countries. But it has yet to occur. The expansion of the network of schools is not compatible with the height or growth of the networks of libraries. Today we have Portuguese speakers who have serious issues with writing, understanding and interpreting the Portuguese language. These gaps, that basic teaching should bridge, are made to seem to be taught at the higher levels of teaching, like in a university. Outside the curricular framework, illiteracy reaches unimaginable levels in society.

In fact to have a Lusophone community, the biggest investment into preserve the Portuguese language would be the support of the basic spelling of the national languages, the production of grammar and dictionaries in those languages, and the collection and systemization of oral literature. When there is a deep recognition of the mother tongue, is when the Portuguese language can flourish. It is a fact that the Portuguese language is the official language, but the learning of it, is when Portuguese becomes a strange language, because it does not add the cultural values of others from the beginning, nor in the early stages of school. It does not yet have full citizenship to thousands and thousands of African homes that have, in other languages, 24 in the case of Mozambique, a real existence but a denied citizenship, in terms of language. Without the valorization of the national languages, the Portuguese language loses its cultural legitimacy. It would be only a language with a political aspect. What I have explained took me to, the subject of literature and the challenges that are in the national identity, a subject that I will present, informally, in another occasion, but for now that matter is just touched upon lightly under the subject that is presented.
Fátima Mendonça, a student of Mozambican literature and other African literatures, presented during the IV meeting of the *Encontro de Professores de Literaturas Africanas de Língua Portuguesa*, in Minas Gerais, Brazil, the text, *Tópicos para a discussão- Os críticos, a crítica e os conceitos do Sul*, which I consider important and which stretches the frame to the topic under discussion. Quoted:

The point of crossing for many communities, the scene of fighting between hostile kingdoms, victim of the borders created by the Berlin Conference, for a fact a Portuguese colony, but also, *et pour cause*, of other powers and economic interests, with a late independence obtained with weapon force, comes the territory of linguistic and cultural crossroads. Mozambique shares, with other countries in the region, a common cultural history and the Portuguese colonization has added features that are integrated within how they appear.

Adding to that still are the oral forms, in general, are recognized as belonging to an African poetic or austroafricana in the narrower sense, but integrated at the same time in mozambicanity. Thus the study of some forms in circulation, which are assumed to, mozambicanity, of rural or urban songs sung in African languages, patent one prosodic common to Mozambique and its’ neighboring countries (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia or Malawi). This does not happen with literature written in Portuguese, which can not escape the need to theoretically prove their autonomy in relation to the spectrum of their “parent” (Portuguese), confined by totalizing visions of their post-colonial views leads to the controversial expression of Portuguese literature (language) as: Literature of PALOPs or Lusophone literatures. What I consider important, and that has been suggested in previous reflections on the Mozambican literature, is that there needs to be research oriented toward incorporation of a national literature, including all of the elements that contribute to its recognition as an
independent literary system, whether textual (the texts themselves), para-textual (a theme within them) or extra-textual (your article ... or with the various elements of reception: critical, awards, education, publishing, translations, etc.).

It appears in the text that it is there is more than to label or add African countries in an abstract universe of a common language, it is important to single out each country. It is in my assumption there that the whole of them is strengthened, and then magnifies. It is the individualization of the states in the cultural field that the Portuguese language is strengthened. Our great historical error was to want to look at the countries as one instead of individuals in their natural sediment. But I believe that universities have a key role to play in this phenomenon.
References/Resources


