

Little White Colona: A Memoir
An Analysis and English-language Translation of Isabela Figueiredo's
Caderno de Memórias Coloniais (2010)

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Introduction

I.

The Historical Context of Mozambique

With the encouragement and patronage of the outward-looking Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460), seafaring Portuguese explorers first arrived in earnest on the African continent in 1415, conquering the area of the modern-day Spanish dependency of Ceuta on the northern coast of Morocco. Over the next almost-century, various state-sponsored maritime campaigns established Portuguese trading and slaving posts (as well as Catholic evangelizing campaigns) along the west coast of the continent, into what were then known as Upper and Lower Guinea and even into what is today Angola. In 1498, under the leadership of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese succeeded in not only rounding the Cape of Good Hope of modern-day South Africa (itself achieved first by Bartolomeu Dias in 1487), but furthermore in continuing up Africa's eastern flank (making a notable stop on Mozambique Island on the coast of the Indian Ocean), and on to the economic promised land of India. They would soon later reach as far abroad as Japan, China, and the East Indies, leading the vanguard of western European mercantile and colonial expansion. In 1572 da Gama's epic feat would be commemorated and mythologized by the doyen of Portuguese literature, Luís de Camões, in the epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusíads*), inspired in great part by the Greco-Roman tradition.

From approximately 1498 to 1580¹ the Portuguese and their seaborne empire dominated the maritime trades of slaves, sugar, spices, and other commodities of non-European provenance. But the roots of this phenomenal expansion can be traced back the aforementioned mainland

¹ Portugal was annexed by Spain in 1580 after the former's defeat two years prior at the Battle of Alcácer Quibir (in modern-day Morocco) by a joint army of Moors and Ottoman Turks. Until Portuguese sovereignty was restored in 1640, this dynastic configuration was known as the Iberian Union (*A União*

west African adventures as well as to the Portuguese and Spanish colonization of the Atlantic islands of the Canaries (in the first decade of the fifteenth century), Madeira (1420s), the Azores (1430s), and the Cape Verdes (1460s). According to Pereira (1956), as cited by researcher Walter Rodney,

Within a few years of the organization of the Santiago administration [in Portuguese Cape Verde] in 1466, the adjacent mainland from Senegal to Sierra Leone was the sphere of slaving operations designed to supply labour to the Cape Verde islands, Portugal, Madeira, and the Canary Islands; and by the beginning of the sixteenth century the Senegambia and Upper Guinea could together provide upwards of 3,500 captives in a 'good' year. (1969: 328)

It is with this early precedent of adventure and plunder, predating the colonial campaigns of the English, French, Dutch, and others by many decades - and in some cases, more than a century - that the Portuguese were able to maintain *de facto* rule over such a far-flung sphere of influence for the better part of six hundred years. In fact, since they were the European trailblazers of Africa, leaving not only varying deposits of their culture and language but also their progeny in the form of creole children, their precedent as intermediaries between all outsiders and the natives of the region was secured: "...many of the resident 'Portuguese' traders [in West Africa] were in fact mulattos of Portuguese and Mandinga extraction" (Rodney: 333).

Although the territory of Mozambique was only sparsely inhabited by actual Portuguese or Portuguese-descended people throughout the many centuries since their first contact in 1498, due to its strategic location on Africa's southeastern coast it served as an important entrepôt between West and East, again with the Portuguese and their usually mixed-race descendants functioning as important middlemen. This was especially the case for the long sea journeys from Portugal to their colony and trading center of Goa, on India's western coast. According to Guinote, between 1497 and 1650, Lisbon dispatched 1,033 of these long trade journeys, collectively known as the *Carreira da Índia* ("India Run"), made by fleets of ships of the

Portuguese armada (1999). The principal point of contact was with the aforementioned Ilha de Moçambique (Mozambique Island, also known as the Isle of Mozambique), in the territory's modern-day northern province of Nampula, previously established centuries earlier by Arabs and Persians. It was these well-established Muslim trade monopolies that the Portuguese very actively endeavored to usurp upon their arrival in the region. Henriksen explains, "The Portuguese strove primarily for mineral wealth from coastal bases to pay Indian merchants for spices and wares; it was at the beginning of a policy of trade, not territorial domination. Their slender wedge of penetration up the Zambezi Valley was driven by a commercial impulse" (Henriksen 1978: 17). The overlay of hatred for the non-Christian and hitherto predominant "Moors" - only recently expelled from the Iberian Peninsula - was certainly a motivating factor as well. With the demand for East Indian and farther Eastern commodities in ever-heightening demand in Europe, this "commercial impulse" was to prove irresistible to intrepid Portuguese merchants who had for centuries sought to circumvent Ottoman and other Islamic obstacles on the overland route from Europe to the fabled riches of the Indies. African slavery in Mozambique, however, was not to come into significant practice by the Portuguese until the early 19th century as a means to circumvent the trade's abolition and prosecution by Britain, starting in the 1830s and primarily on the west coast of the continent (Henriksen: 65-67).

Later, as of the end of the 18th century, Mozambique's political focus shifted southward, to the regions surrounding the new colonial capital of Lourenço Marques (now Maputo, after the river and region of the same name) built on the coast of what was known by English-speakers as Delagoa Bay. Due to its large deep-water harbor, the city's strategic location as a point of entry to the Indian Ocean for South Africa, the Rhodesias, and other nearby states or colonies was to prove highly significant for economic reasons. And as this economic focus shifted, so did

Portuguese influence become truly and deeply felt. But as for the original points of colonial contact far up the Mozambican coast and especially in the vast central and northern hinterlands, they were to fall by the wayside as backwaters and/or undergo rather drastic processes of assimilation into their diverse surrounding milieus². Henriksen remarks, “As late as 1890, Portugal’s hold on Mozambique was pitifully infirm and confined to a half-dozen deteriorated forts or emaciated garrisons” (92). The northern reaches (with a few minor exceptions) of the territory thus remained relatively untouched by European ways and influence before the twentieth century and even well into it; in the words of Isabela Figueiredo, a native of Lourenço Marques born to Portuguese parents, to her, in the 1960s and early ‘70s, the North was “the land of Makua and Makonde” (2010: 64), two ethnic groups that were highly and intricately implicated in the nationalist movement of the same period. In the years following the fateful meeting of European powers at the Berlin Conference³, the humiliating (to the Portuguese) British Ultimatum of 1890, and the subsequent Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of 1891⁴, the Portuguese empire (soon to be reconfigured as a fascist republic in 1926) “renewed [its] commitment to Mozambique” (Henriksen: 95) for a number of reasons, both economic and political, not to mention ideological and borderline mythological. States Jerry Dávila, “Salazar’s Estado Novo, which immersed itself in the imagery of the country’s golden age of seafaring

² Henriksen (1978) describes in detail the fascinating phenomenon of the *prazos*, or vast feudal estates in the Zambezi Valley, on which settler-merchants of Portuguese extraction eventually assimilated almost completely into the local Bantu cultures and lifestyles (65-74).

³ The so-called “Scramble for Africa” officially began with the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, wherein the precedent of “effective occupation” by European colonial administrations was established and thus the late-colonial and modern-day boundaries of the states of the continent were provisionally drawn (see below note).

⁴ Whereupon Portuguese military forces staked their claims to regions of the newly British-claimed territories of the Rhodesias (now Zimbabwe and Zambia) and Nyassaland (now Malawi), erstwhile fantasies of realizing a *mapa cor-de-rosa* (“pink map”) representing an unbroken band of Portuguese-controlled, Atlantic-to-Indian-Ocean territory were squelched by superior British military presence. Ana Paula Ferreira notes, “The 1890 Ultimatum by its long-time protector, England, for Portugal to occupy *de facto* its share of the so-called Dark Continent prompted the colonial initiative out of sheer national humiliation” (2007: 23).

colonial expansion in all of its Christian, crusading zeal. To outside observers, Portugal seemed lost in time” (2010: 17).

By the time Premier António de Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970) took command of the Portuguese Republic in the early 1930s, the *metrópole* or motherland itself was perhaps the most backward and insolvent country in Western Europe. With its colonial holdings and residual (though still questionable) Portuguese culture still more-or-less intact in the *Ultramar* (Overseas Territories⁵) - at least along their seaboard regions and, occasionally, in small hinterland enclaves - the southern African territories of Angola and Mozambique became a promised land for the beleaguered, ancient nation’s underemployed and impoverished masses. Hence the great colonization campaigns of the “Third Empire”, which began in great haste in the early-to-mid 20th century. This migration southward continued in earnest until the empire’s very downfall between 1974 and 1975, by way of military coup in Portugal itself (April 25, 1974) and a slew of consolidated nationalist liberation movements in the colonies⁶ that had coalesced into armed conflict by 1961 in the case of Angola and 1964 in Mozambique.

In a rare flash of awareness and foresight, the Portuguese anthropologist Jorge Dias had reported in 1957 that “many of those in charge [in Mozambique] who live in the area believe that we will not be around twenty years from now” (cited in Vale de Almeida 2003: 57). Clearly there had been trouble brewing among the diverse indigenous populations from long before this

⁵ Note that between 1838 and 1951, the terminology used for Portugal’s extra-European holdings shifted status variously between “colonies” and “provinces”. Finally, in a last-ditch attempt to appease widespread calls for the empire’s dismantling, the term “states” was attributed from 1972 until almost all territories were officially independent by 1975 (see below note).

⁶ Before their respective declarations of independence between 1974 and 1975, there were three rival liberation movements in Angola (MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA); 1 major (though oftentimes fractured and soon-to-be contested post independence) movement in Mozambique (FRELIMO); 1 representing both Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau (PAIGC); and 1 representing São Tomé and Príncipe (MLSTP). As for the remaining Portuguese colonial territories, Goa (aka Portuguese India, *Índia Portuguesa*) had been annexed by the Indian Union in 1961; East Timor was absorbed by Indonesia in 1974 until its independence from that nation in 2002; and Macau technically remained under Portuguese rule, though with semi-autonomous/joint-Chinese administration, until 1999, when it was fully annexed by the People’s Republic of China.

date. Yet in spite of the warnings, the Portuguese administration pressed ahead with its policies of chartered companies aimed at generating unprecedented levels of mineral-based wealth, white settlement - “so as to relieve unemployment and to hold the territories in the teeth of burgeoning nationalism on the African continent” (Henriksen: 134) - and furthermore to justify the very retention of the Portuguese colonies and thus its very nationhood, *sui generis* and *ad infinitum*.

II.

War, Decolonization, and Exodus

As discussed above, it is not surprising that the relatively un-Portuguese regions of the northern two-thirds of colonial Mozambique were breeding grounds for the liberation movement that was to become known as FRELIMO, *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (Mozambican Liberation Front).

Comparing the case of Angola to its former sister colony on the Indian Ocean provides certain productive insights. In his essay, “The Limits of Nationhood”, Patrick Chabal presents the following thesis question: “...why [did] the anti-colonial movement in Angola [remain] divided between the MPLA and the FNLA, and eventually UNITA, while in Mozambique the majority of these relatively disparate groups of anti-colonial forces came together in 1962 into one broad coalition, FRELIMO?” (Chabal 2002). He lists the four most important factors as the following: 1.) the difference in outside countries engaged in the respective conflicts (Zaire and Tanzania, respectively); 2.) the lack of “dichotomized international constraint” (i.e., involvement of the larger U.S./Soviet global conflict) in the case of Mozambique; 3.) Mozambican groups were simply not as divided culturally or ethnically as in Angola; and 4.) out of the three belligerent parties in Angola only the FNLA “was able to get early endorsement by the newly

created OAU [Organization of African Unity]” whereas FRELIMO had this tacit support as a means of consolidating various interests into one coalition of nationalists (113). Despite these “advantages”, however, the process of decolonization of Mozambique was nevertheless fraught with turmoil and violence, particularly in its formative years in the early 1960s.

Other explanations for the relative solidarity within FRELIMO can be found in Henriksen. He attests to the fact that less Protestant missionaries and white settler restiveness than in the case of Angola led to a less vociferous, turbulent, and furthermore belated manifestation of Mozambican dissent (155). But this general Mozambican unrest among the various indigenous ethnic groups - like that of Angola - ultimately had its roots in the blatant exploitation of black labor committed under Portuguese rule, particularly since the introduction of foreign-financed chartered companies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the concomitant *shibolo* system of forced labor linked to labor and migration agreements with Mozambique’s white-ruled neighbors to the south. In the words of pre-independence FRELIMO leader Eduardo Mondlane, “Mozambican unity was born out of toiling together in the deep, hot, narrow and dust-ridden shafts of the gold, diamond, and coal mines of the Transvaal and Orange Free State” (Henriksen 166).

After Mondlane was assassinated in 1969, apparently by agents of the Portuguese secret police PIDE⁷, his Defense Minister Samora Machel took control of FRELIMO. Both hailed from the southern region of Gaza but, as Mondlane had spent most of his adult life as a student and academic in Europe and the United States, Machel had had much more of a presence on the ground level, spending long periods of time in the movement’s military training camps across the border in Tanzania. Researcher João Cabrita notes, “The revolutionaries’ Marxist outlook developed only after Mondlane’s demise, though attempts have been made to present it as a

⁷ *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado* (1945-1969). For more see Cabrita (2000: 58-62).

legacy of the original Frelimo leadership” (2000: 67). Thus polarized was the movement towards the far left, purportedly non-racist and multi-ethnic, but virulently anti-colonialist. Figueiredo recounts her personal knowledge of the results of these policies post-independence:

The *brancos* who stayed in Africa became easy targets of revenge. They were suspect. Their movements and words were observed by the institutions, by the neighborhood committees, by the neighbors. They had to be careful with what they said and did. Any slip-up would be considered an act of colonialism, and for this there would be no mercy; its cost was high. They were constantly denounced. (126)

As for the vast majority of white Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique who opted not to stay in Africa under black majority rule, a vast exodus ensued. Eduardo Pitta reports: “Over 140 days, between July 17 and December 3, 1975 (Angolan independence was on November 11, which did not stanch the exodus), hundreds of planes evacuated half a million exiles to Portugal. Portuguese society would never be the same again” (2010, my translation). What these *retornados* had waiting for them back in motherland - which many of those born in Africa had never seen - left much to be desired: social upheaval, political and economic instability, and, for them in particular, accusations by metropolitans of exploitation, decadence, and brutal fascism perpetrated against Africans. Figueiredo explains her personal experience: “...they saw [us] as people who had come to rob what little they had, those *retornados*, all high and mighty like princes who lost their thrones and now have to reclaim it, they figure, ho ho! Because nothing stirs up desire like losing it all, and lose they have, big time” (123).

III.

Figueiredo & Fuller

The world described by Isabela Figueiredo in *Little White Colona (Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* - literally, “Notebook of Colonial Memories”) is one perhaps quite unknown to the English-speaking reader. Nevertheless, other works have attempted to relate analogous experiences in formerly British and other European colonies in Africa. There are indeed striking general similarities between the Portuguese colonial experience and those of other Western European powers, particularly in regards to the relations between colonizer and colonized, white and black, self and other, home and abroad. There were, conversely, also many differences.

According to Godwin and Hancock:

A number of commentators have attempted to explain [the] strong element of consensus by reference to racial solidarity, or to the fusion of class interests within a racial framework, or to the merging or predominance of particular traditions or cultures. The racial unity argument has the advantage of visibility and logic: that is, the Whites *appeared* to act in concert as a self-conscious and privileged racial minority and, in view of that minority position, it made sense for them to do so. (1993: 18)

While this description could just as well be applied to the case of mid-20th century Mozambique, it is, in fact, in reference to neighboring Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) of the same era, both clearly structured along similar lines of economic favoritism skewed almost exclusively towards those of European background. Comparing these two particular territories provides such a wealth of fascinating similarities that although contact between the Anglo- and Lusophone constituencies may have been separated by history, jurisdiction, culture, and language, it is clear that both groups were motivated by common interests and buttressed by almost shockingly similar power structures and hierarchies.

In British-born but African-raised memoirist Alexandra Fuller's account of her own childhood in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia⁸, a highly constructive literary analogue to Figueiredo emerges. Not only are the two close contemporaries (Fuller was born in 1969 and Figueiredo in 1963), but their narrative parallels are also quite astounding. Furthermore their perspectives and insights as females in the context of their respective societies offer a rare glance at the daily happenings within their families, homes, and relations with other colonials, as well as with indigenous Africans. And both bear constant witness to their parents' tragically unstable and destructive behaviors. Figueiredo:

I recall the conversations heard among the women. I wasn't old enough to understand, or so they thought, and so they spoke about what [my father] did in the shantytowns before my mother got there, and all the mulatto heirs he must have left there before getting married. (2010: 9)

And Fuller, speaking on the events after the death of her baby sister:

Sometimes Mum and Dad are terrifying now. They don't seem to see Vanessa and me in the back seat. Or they have forgotten that we are on the roof of the car, and they drive too fast under low thorn trees and the look on their faces is grim. (2001: 95)

Whereas Figueiredo's father is presumably a sex addict, if not a dyed-in-the wool chauvinist, both of Fuller's parents are openly alcoholic, both cases as seen in multiple instances throughout the respective texts. What's interesting is the way in which Gilberto Freyre's celebration of miscegenation within the context of "luso-tropicalism" - the legend of the *garanhão desbragado português*, the "Portuguese wild stallion" - might be confirmed in the case of Sr. Manuel Figueiredo and the foregone conclusion of the existence of his mixed-race offspring. Rogers and Frantz note in their *Racial Themes in Southern Rhodesia* that, in that particular territory, "Sexual relations between Europeans and Africans appear to have been relatively infrequent...judging by the statistics...Liaisons between European men and African

⁸ *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* (2001)

women seem to have been more frequent prior to 1900 than in later years” (1962: 282-83). Even Charles Boxer, the British historian and critic of the then-nascent (in the 1950s and 60s) concept of luso-tropicalism, concedes that “the Portuguese did mix more with coloured races than did other Europeans, and they had, as a rule, less colour prejudice” (1961: 137). Thus, Gilberto Freyre’s attestation that Britons and other non-Portuguese colonizers were doomed to fail in the tropics due to their disinterest in similar proclivities might find a case in point in Mr. Tim Fuller’s ostensible sexual disinterest in African women and loyalty to his British wife. That is, if one can look past the fact that the latter has, to our knowledge, remained in Africa to this day whereas the former never returned again, despite all the quintessentially “luso-tropical” behavior he was purportedly involved in.

Comparing the minutiae of the two texts reveals some additional shocking similarities and parallels. In Fuller, she and her white Rhodesian compatriots derogatorily refer to the indigenous liberation fighters as “terrs”, a corruption of “terrorists”. In Figueiredo, the perfect equivalent is *turras*, a corruption of the Portuguese *terroristas*. Both the Rhodesians and white Mozambicans were not only running their societies in tandem as they both eventually came to terms with the black liberation movements closing in on them, but also adapting their respective systems of perceiving and describing the world in parallel and thus, in certain contexts, in almost exactly the same fashion.

Another fascinating linguistic-historical overlay can be found in the English word “picanin” (variously, “pickaninny”) used by Fuller (145) in her narrative to refer somewhat neutrally to African children. The word traces its origins to the English creoles of the West Indies, wherein it had been borrowed from either the Spanish *pequeño* or Portuguese *pequeno* (or, more likely, *pequenino*, in its diminutive form) - “small, little, wee; tiny” - during the era of the

Atlantic slave trade. In both cases (those of terms for “terrorists” and blacks in general), the use of such diminutives in both English and Portuguese equally plays into the power dynamics of master and subaltern.

Aesthetically speaking, compare Fuller’s “truly stunning, low-hanging, deep-bellied sunrise” (283) to Figueiredo’s “curry-scented paradise of never-ending, salmon-colored sunsets and red earth...(27)” The authors’ usages of color and odor capture their shared general geographic region in distinctly familiar terms of psychic positioning.

Both authors clearly identify with the Africans around them to an extent that their parents are ostensibly unable. While Fuller states, “My God, I am the *wrong* color...White. African. White-African” (10), Figueiredo recalls selling mangoes, unbeknownst to her parents, alongside Africans: “I was a little black *colona*; I just happened to be the daughter of brancos. A little black blonde girl” (35). Their identification with and abilities - to an extent - to relate with the indigenous majority allow them both a certain license in their respective memoirs, one perhaps derived from their already subaltern roles as women in highly paternalistic societies, but in part also owing to their young age. Power is partially theirs, by virtue of their being white and European, but not so fully as to prevent them from seeking and inhabiting such roles as “black blonde girl[s]”, if only for limited periods of time and only in certain contexts. Speaking on his experiences as a youth during the 60s and 70s in colonial Angola, the author António Mateus recalls, “...the violence of racism is in the generation before mine, in the older folks. It’s a guttural racism, verbally violent in its usage and humiliation” (Ribeiro 2010, my translation).

As authors, it is no surprise that both experienced a passion for books at a young age. On the escapism of reading, Fuller explains: “I shut my eyes and spread myself out so that my sweating skin can cool; the world of Narnia [of C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion the Witch and the*

Wardrobe] is more real and wonderful than the world I am alive in” (65). And Figueiredo: “A book could conjure up a different world that I could escape into. A book was a just place. Because that was the problem. Between the world of books and reality there was a colossal distance” (27).

One marked difference between the two authors and their African experiences, however, is that Fuller returns regularly to visit her parents, permanent residents in Zambia working in animal husbandry, whereas Figueiredo ostensibly expects to never return to her native Mozambique. Fuller:

I fly home from university at least once a year, and when I step off the plane in Lusaka and that sweet, raw-onion, woodsmoke, acrid smell of Africa rushes to my face I want to weep for joy...The incongruous, lawless, joyful, violent, upside-down, illogical certainty of Africa comes at me like a rolling rainstorm, until I am drenched with relief. (287)

And Figueiredo:

The displaced, like me, are people who might not ever return to the place where they were born, who have cut off all legal ties to it, though not sentimental ones. They are unwanted in the countries where they were born, because their presence brings bad memories. (133)

Of course these differences are highly linked to the political realities of Zambia’s and Mozambique’s respective histories and policies of decolonization, but they are also related to each of the author’s family histories in Africa. And in this sense Figueiredo’s case is clearly the more tragic: “In the land where I was born,” she says, “I would always be the *colono*’s daughter. I would always be tainted” (133).

There is indeed such a nexus between both the contextual and geographic proximities of the two narratives that they literally overlap in time, as Fuller attests:

We could see the Mozambican hills from our house. Our farm ended where the Mozambican hills started.

In 1974, the civil war in Rhodesia was eight years old. In a matter of months, terrorist forces based in Mozambique under the new guerilla-friendly Frelimo government would be flooding over the border to Rhodesia to conduct nightly raids, plant land mines, and, *they said*, chop off the ears and lips of little white children. (52)

One can imagine - not unrealistically whatsoever - a five-year-old Alexandra Fuller staring off to the east towards Mozambique in 1974, where an eleven-year-old Isabela Figueiredo was seeing the only world and lifestyle she ever knew begin to unravel.

IV.

The Memoir As Confession

And yet we have all known flights when of a sudden, each for himself, it has seemed to us that we have crossed the border of the world of reality; when only a couple of hours from port, we have felt ourselves more distant from it than we should feel if we were in India; when there has come a premonition of an incursion into a forbidden world whence it was going to be infinitely difficult to return. (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry 1967: 13)

As is often the case of memoirs, their authors have lived through such extenuating or otherwise difficult circumstances that their memories of the same are highly imprinted upon the very fabric of their characters and personalities. The process of chronicling life-altering events thus serves both a cathartic and an archival function; a good memoir is a perfect mixture of life story and history. And since they frame such intimate portraits of an individual perspective over set periods within a lifetime, perhaps the memoir is an ideal nexus for simultaneously analyzing the history, culture, language, and psychology of a “nation” or a “people”, however loosely or strictly those terms might be defined.

Isabela Figueiredo’s memoir is a work of brutal honesty, as well as a scathing criticism of her compatriots’ hypocrisy and abuses of power. Figueiredo simultaneously channels her perceptions of her native land (i.e., Mozambique itself, as she was, in fact, born there) through

her parents. And, later, she struggles to define and redefine her imposed identity as a *retornada*, a “returnee”, an ex-colonial permanently “back” in the motherland...despite never having been there before. Professor Isabel Ferreira Gould calls the nascent phenomenon of *retornado* literature in the last decades “narratives of decantation” (“*narrativas de decantação*”, in Ribeiro 2010), as they “decant” or expose otherwise nostalgic and revisionings of late-colonial Portuguese life. Indeed, in her text Figueiredo makes constant mention to the rose-tinted glasses worn by many who had fled, especially those of her parent’s generation who had, either literally or figuratively, bet the farm on a new life in southern Africa. She writes, “...according to what I’ve come to understand many years later, the other whites that were also there never practiced colon...colonili...colonialism, or whatever it was. They were all really buddy-buddy with the pretos, paying them well, treating them better, and they are really missed” (49).

Figueiredo reflects, “He gave me his hand. He picked me up. Listened to me. The father that I have betrayed (82)”. Perhaps it is the act of writing her memoir that she feels that she has betrayed her already deceased father, but a constant theme throughout the text is that, simply by sympathizing and relating to individual Africans and non-European (or non-Portuguese) peoples as a whole, she is committing an act of treason. As if somehow her tacit and undivided allegiance to Portugal - personified by her father - would have prevented the downfall of colonial rule. Later she confesses, “...they would never imagine that I could have a truth that was solely mine, outside of their shadows” (100).

Definitions of Figueiredo’s status remain a constant source of confusion for her as well as her interlocutors, as she indeed represents the final generation of “pure” Portuguese colonials to be born outside of Portugal itself, the *Metrópole*, the metropolis or mother country. It is for these reasons that I have chosen to translate this work, for it is a story of great interest to our modern

globalized world and its implications for power, sovereignty and the definitions of foreign/native. Furthermore, it speaks volumes to the impossibility of defining things in pat terms amidst such complexity, amidst such humanity. The scholar Ana Paula Ferreria adds a poignant and contextually appropriate final note: “Only by appropriating the conceptual platform of Lusophone Postcoloniality to recognize what is beyond repair and perhaps reparation, that is, to confront the history of racism delivered in, with, and sometimes against the former imperial language in its most prized cultural products, literature being one of them, can one vigilantly inhabit the postcolonial, multicultural(ist) but certainly not ‘raceless’ present” (2007: 38).

Translator's notes

Good translators choose words and phrases by reference not to some abstract system of intellectualized rules, which most of us have never internalized in the first place, but rather to “messages” or impulses sent by the body: a given word or phrase *feels* right. Intuitively, not just for the translator but for all language users, sense is not cognition but sensation. (Douglas Robinson 1991: xii)

As with any work of translation, the following work attempts to capture the essence of the original while simultaneously and appropriately adapting it to the target language and, moreover, the general readership of the same. Bermann notes that “translation participates in an ongoing creative process, in which the outlines of a greater human language are drawn through the work of translation itself, as each new rendering contributes to the virtually endless delineation of language and understanding” (2005: 6).

I chose this text of *Caderno das Memórias Coloniais* to analyze and translate because it helped me to understand how, in the case of Portuguese colonialism, which has been noted for its “creativity” by such chroniclers and academics as Gilberto Freyre⁹, could have endeavored to maintain such an ultimately unsustainable geopolitical project in Africa and for so many centuries. I was perplexed with the amount of resolve that the various Portuguese political configurations invested in maintaining their *de facto* rule, particularly between the 90 years of 1885-1975.

Given the unfamiliarity that the average English-speaking reader might have with the realities of overseas Portuguese life and culture, my attempt is to nevertheless show without

⁹ Brazilian anthropologist and social theorist (1900-1987). In his treatise, *The World the Portuguese Created (O Mundo que o Português Criou, 1940)*, he states, “*Essa unidade íntima, de sentimento, e externa, de cultura nas suas formas mais evidentes e concretas, é consequência dos processos e das condições de colonização portuguesa que na Ásia como no Brasil, nas ilhas do Atlântico e até certo ponto na África, desenvolveram nos homens as mesmas qualidades essenciais de cordialidade e de simpatia, características do povo português - o mais cristão dos colonizadores modernos nas suas relações com as gentes consideradas inferiores; o mais transbordante de simpatia naquele sentido fixado por Cooley: a capacidade do homem de projetar-se pela imaginação na posição de outro homem e de experimentar - experiência vicaria - sentimentos e estados de espírito alheios.*”

necessarily telling - to let the story speak itself through the narrator, through the author herself. Gayatri Spivak notes, "...the translator must not only make an attempt to grasp the presuppositions of an author but also, and of course, inhabit, even if on loan, the many mansions, and many levels of the host language" (Bermann and Wood 2005: 95). Though I sometimes feel as if I indeed hold the Portuguese language on loan, it being one I started to learn only in my mid-twenties, I have nevertheless felt very comfortable in Figueiredo's mansion, welcome even.

The style of what I have re-titled in English as *Little White Colono* reflects its perspective of a young, pre- and early-onset-pubescent perspective of the author in its directness and naiveté. Armed as such, her ironic tone reveals scandal after scandal, injustice after injustice, and monstrosity after monstrosity. What is of constant interest, though, is the way in which Figueiredo has managed to capture the very visceral sights, sounds, and other senses of her life as a child and young adolescent during Mozambique's late pre-independence era. It is to her credit that such senses seem to transcend language, time, and culture and speak directly to very powerful gut-feelings, as if they were our own, shared traumatic memories. As noted by Robinson above, it was necessary that I rely on and balance both my sensate and cognitive impulses throughout.

Regarding my choice of translation for the memoir's title, the word *colona* literally refers to a female colonist (masculine *colono*), namely Isabela Figueiredo herself. In an interview with the author, she states, "The issue of being a 'little white *colona*' was highly present, highly urgent; it completely vexed me. I also consider this publication to be a way to free myself more from it."¹⁰ Thus, I have taken the author's own lead in my work as her translator in that I too have been vexed by the complexities and contradictions of Portuguese colonialism since its onset,

¹⁰ In *Isto é a sério*: "A 'pequena colona branca' era uma questão demasiado presente, demasiado urgente; ocupava-me totalmente. Também considero que esta publicação é uma forma de me libertar mais dela."

as I have studied it both academically in the United States and in the context of living and working in the Republic of Cape Verde, over the last five years.

As for the choice to leave the terms *branco/a* and *preto/a* (or *negro/a*) untranslated from the original Portuguese, this was more of a challenge and, to a certain extent, an ethical struggle. In a few cases I did translate these terms to “white” or “black” (e.g., “the black man”, referring to all black Africans), but in general I felt it appropriate to keep these terms in their specifically Portuguese meanings and within that particular context of colonization and settlement in Africa. I wanted to give the reader the impression that these contextualized terms had already entered into the English lexicon.

While the highly pejorative word “kaffir”¹¹, often used rather than “nigger” in southern Africa by English-speaking whites (and with just as much potential derision as the latter), was an option in a few cases, the oftentimes negative connotations implied by *preto* or *negro* alone matched the original’s intended and actual meanings. These “meanings”, of course, are ones of highly entrenched racial prejudice on behalf of the white settlers to the extent that these beliefs were expressed rather casually and at times *without* any intended derision but rather as generic demonyms. In other words, based on my understanding of the original text, at times *preto/negro* means simply “black”, at times it means “negro” or “colored” (in the sense of their modern mid-

¹¹ The etymology of this term is highly curious, if not wildly ironic: “From the Arabic *kafir* ‘unbeliever, infidel, impious wretch,’ with a literal sense of ‘one who does not admit the blessings of God,’ from *kafara* ‘to cover up, conceal, deny, blot out’. Technically, ‘non-Muslim’, but in Ottoman times it came to be used almost exclusively for ‘Christian’. Early English missionaries used it as an equivalent of ‘heathen’ to refer to Bantus in South Africa (1792), from which use it came generally to mean ‘South African black’ regardless of ethnicity, and to be a term of abuse since at least 1934” (from <http://etymonline.com> via Klein 1971). The Portuguese cognate *cafre*, may or may not hold the same degree of negative connotation as in English, but rather has historically referred in a more generic sense to any member of an indigenous or autochthonous group, though especially those of southern African and Bantu origin due to its original application by Arabs in that region. It can be found as the root of the verb *cafrealizar-se*, typically rendered in English as ‘to go native’.

to-high-level pejorative senses in American English), and at times it means the superlatively offensive “nigger” or “kaffir”, depending on the context. Historian Charles R. Boxer adds,

The Portuguese habit of referring to Indians, Sinhalese [Sri Lankans], and even to Chinese as ‘Niggers’ [*cafres*] was fairly widespread and lasted longer than is usually realized. Indeed, this was one of the causes of the Maratha war of 1737-40, which was partly originated by the European-born governor of the Province of the North [of Portuguese India], Dom Luís Botelho, publicly terming a leading Maratha General, Bagi Rao, a Nigger: ‘a word which they interpreted as slave, for they were assured that this was what we called the Kaffirs of Moçambique’. It remained for [Prime Minister] Pombal, in this respect at any rate an enlightened despot, to decree that anyone using such injurious epithets would be severely punished. This celebrated decree of 2 April 1761 informed all the colonial governors that henceforth the Crown would make no distinction between its Asian and European vassals on grounds of colour but only according to their personal merits. (1961: 129)

But whereas “Asian and European” vassals were henceforth - at least in the form of decree - afforded this equanimity, such a right was never extended to those of black African extraction and only under certain circumstances to *mestiços* of mixed parentage.

My hope is that the below glossary will clarify any other lexical issues that were deliberately left untranslated.

With my sustained gratitude to all those I have acknowledged above, any and all errors herein are solely my own.

Glossary of Mozambican-Portuguese terms

25th of April/April 25th, 1974 - date of the popular, military-led uprising in Portugal against dictatorial rule, heralding the start of the process of decolonization and independence of its overseas colonies in Africa and elsewhere

branco - white (colonial Portuguese) male

branca - white (colonial Portuguese) female

colono/a (/ko-ló-nu/na/) - colonist

cantineiro - (usually) non-African proprietor of a country general store/tavern

capulana - traditional Mozambican woven garment

FRELIMO - *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*, the Mozambique Liberation Front, the consolidated political movement that led both the guerrilla activity from 1962 until independence in 1975 and also represented the post-independence governance of the new nation

Lourenço Marques - former, colonial name of what is today Maputo, capital of Mozambique

mainato - a black servant, butler, or errand runner; in the case of females (**mainatas**), may also be applied to a laundress

metical (pl. **meticais**) - currency of Mozambique

negralhada or **pretalhada** - fairly pejorative term referring to black Africans *en masse*; compare to the English mass demonym “Jewry”

patrão - boss; literally “patron”

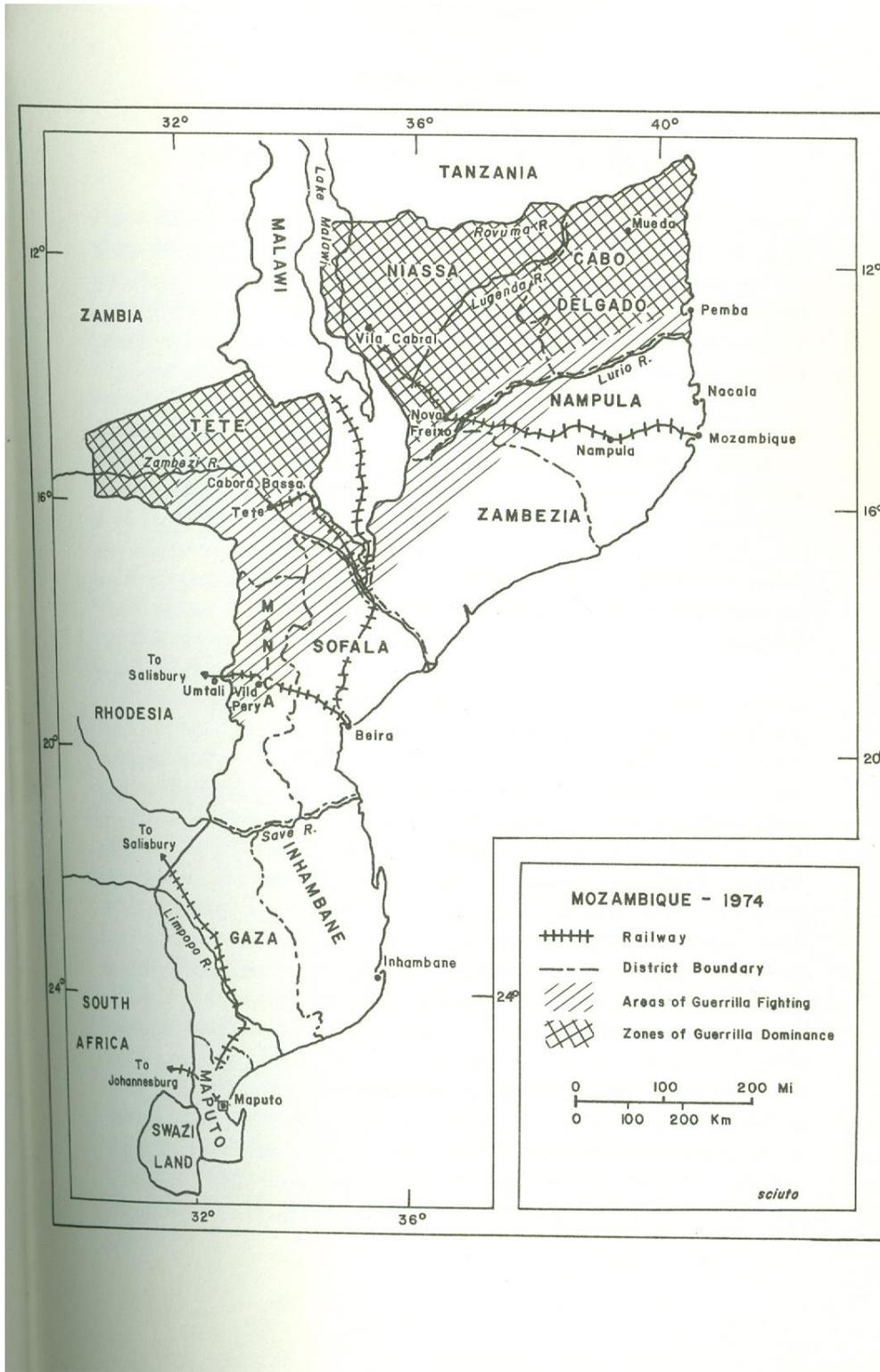
penalti - a soft drink or juice spiked lightly with alcohol

preta or **negra** - black (native Mozambican) female

preto or **negro** - black (native Mozambican) male. Note that these are the literal Portuguese words for the color black. The latter is pronounced /né-gru/ as opposed to “negro” (/ní-gro/) in English, which itself was borrowed either from Spanish or Portuguese¹² in the context of African slavery.

¹² http://etymonline.com/index.php?term=Negro&allowed_in_frame=0

Map of Mozambique in 1974¹³



¹³ In Henriksen (1978).

Little White Colona: A Memoir

À memória do meu pai.

To my father's memory.

Each time I opened a drawer or poked my head into a closet, I felt like an intruder, a burglar ransacking the secret places of a man's mind. I kept expecting my father to walk in, to stare at me in disbelief, and ask me what the hell I thought I was doing. It didn't seem fair that he couldn't protest. I had no right to invade his privacy.

Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*

Human memory is a marvelous but fallacious instrument(...)The memories which lie within us are not carved in stone; not only do they tend to become erased as the years go by, but often they change, or even increase by incorporating extraneous features.

Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*

He said it loud, in a strong, cheerful voice, real close to my head, “Hello!”

It was such a big, imposing hello that it would’ve been impossible for me not to respond. I recognized his voice, and, still in my sleep, I thought, It can’t be you; you’re dead.

And I opened my eyes.

1.

Manuel left his heart in Africa. I also know people who’ve left two light automobiles, an all-terrain vehicle, a pick-up, a van, two cottages, three farms...as well as an account in the Banco Nacional Ultramarino, all the money already converted into meticaís.

Who hasn’t left their multiple hearts someplace or another? My own, I switched it for a mere blood-pumping organ many years ago.

2.

The brancos would go after the pretas. The pretas were all the same so the brancos didn’t even bother to tell the Madalena Xinguiles apart from the Emília Cachambas. Maybe they noticed the difference in the color of their *capulanas* or the shape of their tits. Either way, the brancos moseyed on down into the shantytowns, whether actually knowing the way or not, to get to that black muff. They were real adventurers, I tell you. Go-getters.

The pretas had big loose pussies, said the brancos’ wives on Sunday afternoons. All of the ladies would be as thick as thieves under the cashew tree, their bellies stuffed with grilled prawns while their husbands did their guy stuff and left them to run their mouths. After all, a woman needs to run her mouth with other women. So, right, the pretas had loose pussies - but the brancas really called them “private parts” or “dirty bits” or “hoo-has”. That pretas had loose pussies was the explanation for why they gave birth the way they did: face-down on the ground,

any old place, like animals. Their pussies were loose, you see. Brancas', no; theirs were tight, because they weren't easy sluts; because unto their holy ports only their husbands would find their way, and at that with difficulty, for they were tight and serious, as it was important for each one to make known to the others. *They* limited themselves to the fulfillment of the obligations of matrimony, always with sacrifice, for fornication was painful - and avoidable - and thus the brancos went after the pretas. Pretas weren't serious; they had loose pussies and yowled like bitches in heat and really enjoyed it. They weren't worth a damn.

The brancas, on the other hand, were honest women. What kind of threat did a preta really pose to them? What difference was there between a preta and a she-rabbit? What branco would recognize children by a black mother? How could a barefoot preta with her saggy tits, straight out of the bush, knowing only how to say, "Yes, *patrão*. Sure, *patrão*. Money, *patrão*," with no ID or papers...how would she be able to prove that the boss was her baby's father anyway?

What preta would want to take a beating for that? How many half-breeds knew their father? The brancos showed up in the bush and bought beer, tobacco, and *capulanas* by the yard for the pretas who struck their fancy. Whether they were willing or not. After then they'd zip up and quickly get the hell out of there, back to their honest family homesteads. How could anybody ever keep track of those men or of their names? The brancos kept their wives somewhere downtown, or back in Portugal. And to their wives they returned.

Those rolls in the hay out in the shantytowns never haunted a man's future, because a preta never had the power to claim paternity; nobody would've listened to her.

But a branco could, if he wanted to, marry a preta. This would bring up her social standing considerably and she could even be accepted among the whites, within reason, you

know, since she was Simões' wife, so out of respect to Simões...That was frequently the case of the *cantineiros* and farmers, far away from the city, men relatively cut off from decent colonial society, who sooner or later went native.

For a branca, to get together with a black man was social suicide. A black man, a negro, no matter how civilized, would never be civilized enough. My father was revolted at the sight of a branca with a negro, well after the 25th of April, back in Portugal. He glared at the couple as if he had seen the devil. I told him to stop staring. Why do you care? I'd say. He told me that I didn't get it, that a negro could never treat a branca well, like she deserved. That they were different, other, these people. Another culture. Dogs, really. Oh, I didn't understand. I didn't get it. I was a "commie." How did I get to be such a little commie, by the way?

3.

Fuck. My father liked to fuck. I never saw him doing it, but it was obvious. Anyone who took a good look at my father could see right away the way his eyes would smile in unison with his mouth, the virile sensuality of his hands, arms, feet, and legs. You could hear it in the quick and smart-ass way he would respond to you, with a permanent and dubious wit. You could just tell that this big fella liked to fuck. I didn't know, and yet I knew it. When he would lift me up in the air like I was nothing, or carry me around piggyback, I felt so weak in the midst of such complete strength. Dominated. Possessed by him.

I never understood anything about fucking until I was seven years old. At least not on a conscious level. I was totally unaware of its existence or even of the meaning of the word and, obviously, I had no idea where babies came from either. Even much later, I still thought that babies were born upon the event of a man's and a woman's marriage; at that moment, God

would make the woman “with child”. I never said “pregnant”. Nor did I even know that word, and the first time that I said it, my mom slapped me. I ought to learn not to say bad words.

My father’s sexuality was a question that dawned upon me, albeit vaguely, after I had turned seven. At some point I started to notice that my parents would close their bedroom door at night. And that my mother would seem to be crying. One night I got up, knocked on their door and said, “Stop doing that to mom.” I had no idea what they could’ve been doing to make my mother suffer like that, but I didn’t want it to happen, much less if by my father’s hands. I knew that whatever it might be that they were doing, if the door was closed, it couldn’t have been good.

Later, a big book appeared under my parent’s bed. It was by Dr. Fritz Khan and its title had the word “sexual” in it. When I opened it, I saw that inside were illustrations of naked men and women, with their pubic hair and private parts totally exposed. There were lots of completely shameful illustrations that I will pass on describing in detail. I read the book while spread out along the width of my parents’ bed, with my chin propped up on the edge of the mattress and my arms hanging down in order to turn the book’s pages as it lay on the ground. When I heard my mother’s footsteps, I slid the forbidden book back under the bed and faked reading some other, innocuous one. I had thought of everything to cover my tracks, but my parents figured out at some point, since after a while old Dr. Fritz was no longer under the bed and it took me quite a bit of snooping around to finally track it down in the wardrobe. Taking it out of there and re-hiding it turned out to be a much higher risk than existed before. But I managed to read the entire thing, despite the difficulties - my mother had so much to do in the yard - and I learned that sex was hard work, ultimately very dirty business, despite any interesting prospects that might emerge in its practice.

The biggest shock that I suffered when I became conscious of my father's sexuality happened on the day that, with my ten-year-old eyes, I saw him cat-calling a girl that was passing by. It was at the gas pump on the way out of Lourenço Marques, right after the junction at Matola. I see him there, outside of the car, his arm propped up on the window, waiting for the black boy to come pump gas - my father makes his moves on this girl. What shame! My own father! I was so ashamed!

These days, my mother says that she knew perfectly well when he would be out with another woman. But she made out like she had no idea. She kept mum. What other choice did she have?

A few years ago, she told me that the police showed up at our house to speak with him about a certain case in which he had done an installation in a certain house...that he might have had a thing with the lady of the house, a married lady. I imagine my mother's face and that of the cop: "Look, ma'am, we just want to ask your husband some questions about a complaint that was made against him". And I can see my father there too, back at that lady's house, all smiles, a self-satisfied seducer, throwing some innuendo at her, all alone at home. She may have even encouraged him and then he made a move with her consent, who knows. Or worse, he simply made a move on her with no pretext. Knowing my father, that seems less probable, though. He liked women, to use playful, wicked talk with them, double entendre. He got off on the game of seduction, so he must have started from there in this case too. I want to believe that it must have been like that. But that time it ended badly.

I recall the conversations heard among the women. I wasn't old enough to understand, or so they thought, and so they spoke about what he did in the shantytowns before my mother got there, and all the mulatto heirs he must have left there before getting married. His sojourns to the

bush would be quite frequent. For my father, as is already known, liked to fuck. The brancas, when they would get together, spoke of the slutty pretas and the ease with which they had children, one after the other, since they are so loose, and they just plain like it...and the brancas hinted to what was said about the characteristics of the male sex organ of the negro and thus would return to the theme of the negras liking to do that...and this conversation always seemed suspect.

A branca would never admit that she liked to fuck, even if she did. And not admitting it was a guarantee of faithfulness to one's husband, to the entire blessed society. The negras fucked - everyone and their cousin, they did - the negros and the brancas' husbands, for a little cash, of course, for food, or out of fear. And some of them might even like it, and they screeched, because the negras were animals and could screech. But, overall, the negras screeched because they gave themselves license to do it, to open their legs, to have big, loose pussies.

4.

He took pleasure in living and he liked to eat, drink, and fuck, as I have already explained.

Lourenço Marques, in the 1960s and 70s, was a vast concentration camp that smelled of curry.

In Lourenço Marques, a branco could sit down at a beautiful terrace at a fancy or a laid-back bistro, and at any time of the day, could taste the best whiskey soda on the rocks while nibbling on prawns. Like we do here in Portugal after work at bars at the Cais do Sodré, their interiors lined with second-class tiles, with folks downing a pint of beer, and stuffing themselves with lupini seeds.

The wait staff was all black and we would leave them a tip if they had smiled at us, had been quick in their service, and had called us *patrão*. I say "we" because I was there. No white

ever liked to be served by another white, particularly since both sides would have anticipated a bigger tip.

My father, to whom fell the task of electrifying the Lourenço Marques of the 60s, never wanted white employees, because he would have had to pay them an arm and a leg.

I remember well listening to him at the table, chatting about the issue with my mother, about certain brancos that had come to him asking for work, that they would be a good addition, yes, sir...but their asking salaries were double or triple what dad was willing to pay. So no, he preferred to go it alone and keep an eye on his innumerable projects, where he had left his innumerable pretos. He had twelve in the office on 24 de Julho Street, plus twenty in the Sommersfield district, plus seven in a villa in Matola...and so he would run around the city all day, from one side to the other, keeping up with the work of the *pretalhada*, putting them in order with a few swats and strokes of his wide hand, plus a few kicks. In sum, with a pedagogy of ass-whooping.

A branco would end up being way too expensive to my father, because you could never give another branco an ass-whooping, and he would never do to insert tubes through a wall and then stick electric wires through the same; a branco was meant to be a boss, to give orders, to supervise, to assign work to the bums who did nothing unless they were made to by force. What was said at the dinner table was that the black bastards didn't like to work, that they would make just enough money to eat and drink for the following week, and mostly to drink. Afterwards, they'd bum around their huts, sprawled out on a mat in a swarm of fleas, fermenting cashew and sugarcane grog, while the pretas worked for them, kids on their backs. The brancos respected the blacks' women, much more than the men themselves. It was frequently the case that my father would give extra money to the women, when he'd go looking for the men at their huts, and find

them three sheets to the wind. It was money so the women could eat and for them to feed their children.

The black man occupied the lowest rung of society. He didn't have rights. He would have charity, if he deserved it. If he was humble.

This was the natural and unquestionable order of relations: the preto served the branco, and the branco ruled over the preto. To reign supreme, my father was already right in the thick of it and discouraged the competition; no more brancos, thank you!

Moreover, white employees brought their bad habits with them; a negro, despite any bad habit he might acquire, there were always ways to kick him of it.

In Mozambique there was no television and, thus, we didn't have to put up with the racket of the daily news. Nor the morning, afternoon, or evening shows. There were radios, though - which, in Portugal, were called *telefonias* - and towards these everybody craned their necks to hear the local station or the one from Portugal on shortwave. That one was much more stuffy and official, sending out its statutes to whomever might have been listening; especially since that meant you had a better radio, not just a little transistor or a so-called Xirico.

There was only one station for the blacks, on which they spoke their own language and played their own music. None of the whites ever listened to that one, even though they might tolerate it at their work sites, since the *negralhada* was always better inclined to work their hammers along with the rhythm of the *marrabenta* and the *batuque* and the incomprehensible, rambling talk in Landim. This way the cables and wires kept on creeping into the bowels of the buildings, as it had to be.

At restaurants in Lourenço Marques, people preferred to sit outside because the ceiling fans inside were useless and air conditioning was a rare luxury. They'd chat for long hours about the colonial *faits divers*, drink up "the good stuff" and, eventually, go fuck each other, at home or outside of it, whether legitimately or not.

In Mozambique it was easy for a branco to feel the pleasures of life. Almost all of them were bosses, and those who weren't already had strong ambitions to become so.

There were always many pretos, all of them ultimately bums, stupid, incompetent, and lazy, asking for work or doing what had been ordered of them without raising their eyes. We had a word for a dedicated preto, though, a faithful one that would tip his hat and bow as we passed by, whom we could trust at home with our kids and to leave him alone with our belongings: He was a good *mainato*. He would be provided with a khaki uniform and sandals. We would give him food, which he'd eat at the table in the yard or in the kitchen, and when the *patrão's* clothes went threadbare, we would give it to him. Nobody ever wanted to lose a good *mainato*.

The blacks would start to ask for work at our doors from the time they were children, boys and girls. They'd knock on the gate, we'd open it, and there they'd be, starving little snott-nosed kids in tatters, barefoot, throwing out the few words that they knew: "Work, *patrão*." Kids my age or younger. I would open the door on them and stare, speechless. I didn't understand. I'd call my mother, who would quickly shoo them away, "Go away! There's no work here!" and I would go back to my room to continue reading Dickens or whatever it was. I didn't understand.

The pleasure of reading a book cushioned any humiliation it may have otherwise caused me, and it was always much better than playing alone with critters or waging a make-believe war with the rosebushes. A book could conjure up a different world that I could escape into. A book was a just place. Because that was the problem. Between the world of books and reality there

was a colossal distance. Books could contain squalor, malevolence, and extreme misery, but, at a certain point, there was always some kind of redemption. Somebody always took a stand, fought, and died, or would otherwise save himself. Books showed me that in the place where *I* lived, there was no redemption whatsoever. That this curry-scented paradise of never-ending, salmon-colored sunsets and red earth was an enormous concentration camp for anonymous blacks without a right to any possessions, to their own bodies, to their existence.

If you, on any given morning - honestly and without prejudice, defensiveness, or spite - looked upon the eyes of a preto while he bore holes into the unfinished walls of the brancos' buildings, you would never forget that silence, that boiling cold hatred and filthy misery, that dependence and submission, survival and defilement.

There were no innocent eyes.

5.

Fucking. Its discovery became something that made me both ashamed and desirous of it.

I was about seven or eight years old.

One of the rare occasions that I ever played outside of my yard was when my father wasn't home and my mother must have wanted to get rid of me for a while. I recall being on a swing that was jerry-rigged on the branch of a cashew tree, pushed by a little boy from the neighborhood who was more or less my same age. The cashew tree was next to the foundation and the walls that were being erected for a new house for other *colonos*, and it was never removed, even after the new house's construction was finished. Ironically, it was to be Dona Prazeres' house - Mrs. Pleasures. The kid was white, the son of trusted neighbors, good people from Portugal with whom we got along well. He asked me, "Do you wanna play 'fucking'?" Play fucking?! So here was a game that I didn't know, that I had never played before at school

and really didn't know what it could be. I should say that Luisinho himself only had a vague notion of what it was, though he did know more than I. I was curious, so it never crossed my mind to say no. I asked him how it was done and he explained: "We take our clothes off and I get on top of you". The whole thing was a little fishy, what with the taking off of clothes and him getting on top of me, but I agreed to try it all the same. I wasn't just curious though. I had a feeling that this was something that we shouldn't be doing, something that should be really cool...and so of course I wanted to try it. I was a curious and adventurous kid, an only child that played with ants.

Luisinho recommended that it'd be better to try it inside. But there was no "inside" since the house in question was still unfinished. Just some bricks piled up to about the height of windows. No roof, and with a floor of only red earth. Inside the unfinished structure it was already divided into rooms. We chose what was to become a bathroom. It must have seemed appropriate to us, given the physiology of our proposed game. It was a small space and and it looked out towards the back of the future house. It's relevant that we should have chosen the smallest space, that is, the one most enclosing upon us, the most intimate, because neither of us really knew what we were doing, what this "fucking" was. But we intuited it. It was simple, really. We took off all of our clothes, I lay down on the ground, exactly how I had been taught to sleep, with my legs and arms completely straight, and Luisinho lay naked on top of me, also just like he had been taught to sleep, and there we both lay for several minutes, balancing in that precarious position, talking to each other and "fucking". I was underneath and so could see the hole where windows would be placed. And, in the blink of an eye, I see the figure of my father, oh my God, my father...to this day I can still see him there, peering into that hole, with his forearms leaning on the brick, looking down, observing the scene, realizing what's going on, and

quickly disappearing. I understood everything. In that fraction of a second I got up, throwing Luisinho to the side, and grabbed all of my clothes. By the time my father had made his way around the outside of the house, came in through the door, and grabbed me by the arm, Luisinho was still stark naked and I was already half dressed. Seconds before I got spanked, I was absolutely certain that fucking was seriously forbidden.

For a long time I felt the violent smacks of my father burning my face. And the blows that he had spread across my body; my face, arms, buttocks, back, legs, wherever they may have landed. It was violent. Afterwards he clasped my arms with his powerful mitts and yanked me into our yard, where he let me go and I could flee towards my room, sobbing, burning, humiliated, thinking that my life had ended. But worse than the pain of the beating was the humiliation of his having seen me fucking, to have caught me in the middle of committing the worst of all sins. I thought that I would never be able to look him in the eye again, nor he me. That I'd never be able to even leave my room. Later I heard him telling my mother, but I don't remember her response. For the rest of my childhood neither of them ever spoke to me about what had happened. It was something that never *had* happened.

On that long-ago day in 1970 I lost my innocence, discovered sex, and began daydreaming about fucking the singer Gianni Morandi while he crooned sweet songs to me in Italian.

6.

He liked to live. He wasn't afraid of anything. With him, everything was possible.

He had a white Bedford pickup, in which he would transport his electrical gear: cables, tubes, machinery. At the time, only people who lived in the bush had jeeps.

When he would decide that it was time for us to go out for a joyride - and he decided this often, since it was the thing he most liked to do - my mother would shiver. It was well known our little trip would inevitably end up with us getting lost or broken down in the middle of nowhere, whence we'd have to go on foot looking for some cantina or hut to ask for help. We would get stuck in the sand or the engine would stall while crossing some stream or it would hit a rock or a deep hole and the axle would break or the gas would run out...My mother and I would tell him, "It's not gonna make it!" And he'd say, "You'll see!" And we *would* see! From that particular spot we would see hours worth of landscape! My father would head into the deep bush and rustle somebody up from a hut to come push, to help out the branco for a tip. I would always thank God for these forced recruits, who in my eyes would emerge from the middle of the forest as if they had come from heaven.

Leaving the city, places would quickly turn wild and uninhabited for kilometers upon kilometers. My mother and I were afraid of the night, and we thought of nothing but how to escape the trouble that my father had gotten us into while trying to discover a street that "without a doubt should get us somewhere". Not only would we seldom arrive at said "somewhere", but we'd also be high-strung and traumatized, which of course prevented us from enjoying the scenery as much as otherwise would have been desired.

It was Africa, burningly Africa, sensual and free. You could feel it growing beneath your feet. It was red. It smelled of wet earth, scrambled earth, burnt earth. It always smelled.

It's not that I didn't appreciate my father's trips, but children don't understand the spirit of adventure. I was afraid. I would have liked it if my father had lived long enough for us to be able to repeat such things in my adulthood, but I don't know if he could have returned to Africa,

despite it being the only land that he ever loved. In the days leading up to his death he still dreamt that he was doing more installations in the buildings of the Sommershield district.

The trails of my dreams are also of red, rugged earth.

7.

The mangoes weighed down the trees, dangling on green stems. They were big and hefty, pinkish, taking their branches all the way down to the ground. At the point where the mango and its stem met flowed viscous drops of transparent resin.

The pretas would sell mangoes on the ground, all in a row, at the bazaar in Lourenço Marques. Pretas always sold everything on the ground, anywhere you went; they threw down an old *capulana* and made small piles of tomatoes, roots, mangoes, peanuts.

Everything that the pretas sold had come out of the earth that they tilled - although that earth didn't belong to them - and everything was good to eat. The pretas sold their goods in order to eat and to feed their children and the men, who never belonged to anyone.

A branco and a preto weren't just of different races. The distance between brancos and pretos was equivalent to the difference between species. They were pretos, animals. We were brancos, people, rational beings. They worked for the present, for today's moonshine; we worked to be able to afford the best urns and the best ceremonies on the day of our funerals.

A branca would never sell mangoes unless it was wholesale, for other white people to distribute. A branca would never sell mangoes on the ground, at her door. But I was a little black colona; I just happened to be the daughter of brancos. A little black blonde girl. And the little black colona that I was would sell little piles of mangoes outside of our farm gate. Three mangoes, with an extra one on top. Four mangoes: fifty cents. I knew that that was cheap, but it needed to be so to win over the negros that would pass by on foot after work, stopping in their

tracks at the sight of the little colona seated Indian-style on the ground, busy with her little mango operation displayed on top of an upside-down crate. It was necessary for the price to be very attractive so that they might have the nerve to approach the white-black girl. "How much?" they would ask from afar. "Fifty," I would respond. And so they would come, hesitant and surprised, but smiling. I remember the big smiles of the negros. And they would make their purchases. They were the best mangoes from my tree, with fat flesh and full of juice, rose- and salmon-colored. Only fifty cents for four.

Selling mangoes in front of the gate, hidden from my mother, was the disobedience that I most preferred to practice.

8.

The preto was named Manjacaze. I don't know where he lived, whether he had a wife or kids, but I imagine that he did, that he lived in a hut about two or three hours away from Lourenço Marques. I imagine that in order to get to work at seven, he had to leave his hut at five. And that he walked the whole way breathing in the low-lying, milky mist of the early morning, after the rising of the angry sun but while it was still cool.

Manjacaze was the servant at the Lobato Apartments.

He brought down all the trash from seven floors, in large barrels that had previously been full of gasoline. I have no idea where he took them. We didn't want to know about such things. We were brancos, we had no interest in knowing about what pretos did with our trash as long as they got rid of it.

Manjacaze was beloved by the building's tenants. My parents always gave him scraps of bread from the previous day, leftover food, worn-out and torn clothing that we didn't have any more use for. Once in awhile, because we were good Catholics - Easter, Christmas, Fat Tuesday

- a bottle of wine or moonshine, or some fried snacks from my mother. Food, drink, objects that were given with altruism to the good preto, to the preto who would always bow upon seeing us. He was simply good. A good preto. *Um bom preto.*

I distinctly see Manjacaze; his dry, calloused hands in front of his legs, with his fingers intertwined, as he thanked us - "*Muito obrigado, patrão. Muito obrigado, senhora. Muito obrigado, menina.*" Thank you boss, madam, miss. And then he would bow.

Manjacaze was good. Manjacaze's eyes, slightly yellowish, were kind. He never spoke loudly, never altered his tone, smiled always. I see him taking the barrels of trash out of the service elevator. I can describe how he rolled them out on their bottoms' edges, leading them up to the street. Always from the service elevator, the only one that he could go up and down in, although he was the one who fixed all the building's elevators, the one who would fix all the problems on the seven floors of Lobato Apartments.

Manjacaze, come up here, we have some things for you. Thank you, madam. Always a kind word. Manjacaze helped me to believe in the human species, in those that, despite being humiliated within the hierarchy, held onto their dignity over everything else, and cherished it as a sacred, invisible possession.

At that time I still believed in everything and couldn't have imagined I would ever be forced to be dispossessed of everything, to fail, overall to fail others - *me*, the picture of normalcy - and furthermore to fail year after year, as if I had been born covered in invisible stains.

Manjacaze had a grandfatherly way about him. If I could have sat on his lap and heard preto stories, as if that were possible in this world! Because a negro never touched a branca, not

even as a grandfather. It was taboo. So we would just smile at each other. We never said anything.

9.

People worked on Saturdays and my father would pay out for the week at the end of the afternoon. On Saturdays there was trouble, what we called *milando*.

We lived on the top floor in a building on 24 de Julho Street. The cement rectangle that constituted the elevator shaft rose up exposed from the ground, like a kind of watchtower. We climbed six rather high steps to get to the gate of that scary-looking edifice.

On Saturdays, at the end of the afternoon, my father would arrive at our place with all the pretos - the clever ones, the idlers, and the so-sos. They sat on the steps to the elevator shaft, making up an amphitheater of wage-earners. They spoke their own language among themselves. Rarely Portuguese. They would chat me up sometimes, sometimes not. They'd ask for me to ask my father this or that. They'd ask me for cups of water. Sometimes my mother would give them sandwiches or cookies. If it was the eve of an important day, my father was likely to call for cups of wine to be handed out, or beers with meat sandwiches. Those were good times.

My father would sit at the head of the living room table with his books and notepads where he kept track of each one's work, plus the bills and coins to be paid. There were, sometimes, talks between my father and mother over the amounts, she being the one to attempt to calm him of his moods; she'd tell him, "don't do that", "that's wrong", "you're just going to start problems".

I remember those afternoons' ends as golden, bathed in an animated serenity. The weather would start to cool down. Bodies would free themselves from the slavery of work as if shedding old skin. The next day would be Sunday and on Sundays nobody ever spoke of work.

You could go out, eat, drink, hang out in the shade, listen to the radio. But, in my house, on those Saturday afternoons, and despite everything else, the air trembled with fear and uncertainty.

I liked seeing my father's pretos there. There seemed to be a great many of them when they were all together. They relaxed a little. They were men different from one another. Some were younger, some old, with their kinky hair turning white. Some quiet and serious. Others smiling. Some scared. Others, talking their heads off. I made my rounds through them and observed them while my father settled up the books. I would go inside to see if he was in the same spot, grouchy, cursing, and then I'd go back to the amphitheater of negros who were getting tired of waiting around; the books took a while. I would go back inside, You're taking a long time, my father all tense, They gotta wait. So I would run back to the amphitheater and tell them, You gotta wait. The golden afternoons' ends would shred the nerves of all of us.

At some point, my father would start to call them, I don't know in what order. It could be the order in which he picked them up on Monday mornings at the pumps at Xipamanine, or it might be at random. The procedure was simple. The negros would go to the living room and my father would give them their money. Sometimes they would count it and then complain. My father would yell that this week they had busted a cable or showed up late or lazed on the job or had had a surly look on their faces or just because he felt like punishing them for whatever reason that had popped into his head. I don't know, anything was possible. Despite his hot temper in these matters, he had his favorites and to them he would always pay the established amount without any cuts. Then there would be the younger ones, the rookies, or those whom my father didn't trust. And with these guys there were often problems, *milando*. They didn't understand the rules yet, of which there were two: take the money and shut up. It wasn't necessary to say thank you. But if you did say thank you, you would start to rise in the ranks of

the favorites. The only way to avoid *milando* was to stick the money received in the pocket of your torn pants and leave, head down. If you complained, there would be trouble. And it wasn't uncommon that you would leave the office with your chin punched, a real good one too.

Sometimes the *milando* would be really something. They would threaten my father, which irritated him even more. They were expelled. My mother and I would tremble. Among the negros that were still waiting to get paid, there arose a tense silence. Afterwards, everything would go much more hurriedly. My father would call the rest of their names, pay up, and send them on their way. Then he would be sick for the rest of the night.

My father had the power to transform those golden Saturday afternoons' ends into a dark well of fear and rage.

10.

Then there was the son of our black neighbor, the one who bought the house next door, in Matola, the one with a *manfurreira* tree on the back corner, which abutted the roof of our garage.

I climbed up the old lemon tree to get away from my mother, to talk to myself, to play with the cats, and to imagine new worlds, some other world.

I almost got pregnant by that son of our black neighbor. I was ten years old and the fear of it left me bedridden. It was a close call; God protected me. The little black boy saw me on the garage roof, climbed up his *manfurreira* to talk to me while hidden from my mother. He was the only black person that I ever had any kind of deep relationship with. We got to touching our hands together, when he handed over the cats that had wandered over to his houses' yard. He had hands the same as mine, pink-yellow-beige on the palms, but black. We talked about school. About games. About animals, specifically about snakes, because there were innumerable quantities of them in the scrub of his backyard, and he liked to scare me with this. And he would

show me their carcasses. I remember the day when I told him, “My mother won’t let me talk to you.” I also remember telling him, “I have to go, she’s calling me.” And she would call me, furiously, really angry, for not being able to get up to the roof herself and for not being able to spank me with her slipper. She was afraid of my chats with the negro. I was afraid of the mulatto baby that was certainly growing in my belly. The boy made me happy, and I had understood that when a man and a woman liked each other, a child would be born. If I had gotten pregnant by him, though, my father might kill me, if he wanted to. He could beat me senseless, within an inch of my life. He could kick me out of the house and I would never again be a woman accepted by anyone. I would be the pretos’ woman. I was afraid of my father. Of my father’s power.

11.

I didn’t like rings. The pretos had no use for rings. They wore heavy jewelry on their ears, that tore their lobes towards the ground. They wore chains with red seeds on their necks, colored ribbons on their wrists, on their ankles, on their arms.

I was made to wear a golden ring set with a ruby. It was ugly and too tight on my finger. The negros never used anything that would constrain them, unless it was the work of brancos. Serving the brancos was constraint enough. That’s why, on Sundays, the negros drank cashew-fruit wine that they had left to ferment all week.

Their wine was a cloudy white. It was dirty wine; bits of fruit fibers and rinds floated in it. It was fermented in big *Laurentina* beer bottles, or *2M*, also big ones; big, bad bazooka bottles.

Cashew fruit looks like a mop when twisted open and gives an acidic, sweet, and milky juice, a juice that made the negros happy. Yes, on Sunday afternoons they were happy with their cashew wine. On Sunday afternoons, they weren’t negros, they weren’t anything; they were like the white bosses, happy, and they could laugh and fuck, sing, fall all over the place, and sleep.

On Sunday afternoons the negros were almost brancos, among themselves. And then everything ended on Monday, before sunrise.

On Sunday afternoons, appropriately enough, the radio played Nelson Ned singing “*Domingo à Tarde*”. On Sunday afternoons we would go to the movies. The theater in Machava played double features, with an intermission of a half hour between each movie; the Mufanas, wearing shoes for the occasion, would come to sell ice cream *Quibons* to the brancos, or pyramid lollipops to their kids. The gigantic theater in Machava was divided into three well-defined zones: benches made of wood in the front: third class; individual stuffed seats, all the way until the back of the theater: second class; perched a meter and a half above the last line of the second class seats were the “cabins”, the balcony, with seats draped with red velvet, luxury of all luxuries, only occupied when the movie was really popular and they were called for by the presence of high-class people. Movies like *O Fado*, *A Maluquinha de Arroios*. Cantinflas, Jerry Lewis, and Trinitá also filled these cabins.

Some blacks would go to the movies. They would put on patched-up European clothes and shoes. They would sit in the third class benches and, eventually, on slow days, in the seats of the first row of second class.

It wasn't written anywhere that the negros couldn't sit in second class or in the balcony, but I rarely ever saw them sitting there. There was a tacit understanding, not an agreement: the negros knew that they were to sit in the front on the wooden benches. And the brancos expected that the *pretalhada* would all sit together in the front, speaking that language of theirs, looking back to covet the brancos' wives, but otherwise duly seated in the benches where they belonged.

To the brancos, a preto, there in the third class, would never turn and look back for any good reason. He would either be flashing his ghastly yellow-tinted eyes at the brancas, or was

looking for someone to rob, or otherwise just spreading malice. In general, in the cinema or out, a look from a negro was never, to the *colonos*, absent of blame: to look at a branco straight-on was a direct provocation; to lower his eyes was an admission of guilt. If a negro ran, he had just robbed somebody; if he walked slow, he was on the lookout for someone to rob.

On Sunday afternoons we would go to the movies. I wore a ring. I didn't like rings.

The seats in the second class of the Cine Machava were bolted on an incline. Anything that might fall there would roll up to the third class, but nobody would go after it; that was the pretos' place. It wasn't worth it.

I was seven years old. I wore that ring. And I hated it.

I thought about being free from that horrible piece of jewelry, and suddenly an infallible idea popped into my head, one that I would set in motion at the first opportunity: In the theater, in the dark, in the middle of the film, at the moment of highest commotion, highest suspense, I would take off the ring from my finger and throw it with quite a bit of force underneath the seats in front of me so that it would roll, unnoticed, up to the third class and disappear forever into the hands of the negros, who would, of course, be happy to get it.

On one Sunday, I did it, and breathed deep in relief. So long, ring. So long, torture. Goodbye forever. I would have to say that I had lost it, that it was loose and had gotten away from me, that it had slipped off my finger without me noticing. And then, nothing could be done. A ring was expensive. Really expensive. But, what can you do? I was so scatter-brained like that!

On that Sunday I ate a *Quibom* during the intermission. I was happy. Nobody saw that I didn't have my ring anymore, even when I forgot to hide my hand.

The intermission had already ended when a truly unusual scene caught the attention of all the whites in the second class: a negro had left his place in the front, walked down the left aisle,

asking something, row by row. What could this guy want? He must be going around asking for money, no doubt. And, when he got to our row, nobody would be giving him money, that's for certain. Why doesn't he get a job? We don't give money to blacks. Unless they work for it, of course. And, if that, it wouldn't be too much, since that would give them the wrong idea. When he got to our row, we could see that he had a tiny golden ring set with a red rock between his right index finger and thumb. He asked, "Did this ring come from here?"

My mother still has that ring, at home, in her jewelry box.

12.

We had a few *mainatos* that would carry our groceries from Lousã's store in cardboard boxes. They would cross Lourenço Marques on foot, if necessary, with the boxes either on their heads or on their backs...it wasn't up to us to really pay that much attention. It was their problem. They had already walked all the way from home, which had to be some anonymous hut somewhere we didn't care about whatsoever...as long as they didn't bring any fleas or lice or those bugs that burrow in your skin.

If we didn't have a *mainato*, Lousã had his own. We never needed plastic bags.

But it seems that this was only happening in my family, those bastards, because according to what I've come to understand many years later, the other whites that were also there never practiced colon...colonili...colonialism, or whatever it was. They were all really buddy-buddy with the pretos, paying them well, treating them better, and they are really missed.

13.

Ernesto hadn't worked in three days. He was a preto and the pretos were lazy, only wanting to pass the day stretched out on a mat drinking beer and cashew wine, while the pretas worked the

land, planting peanuts in the sun, sweating with their children on their backs, at their breasts, with the hoe going up and then back down to the ground. Pretos were bad eggs. They lived off the pretas. They never thought about their lives, the future, their children. They just thought about lounging, snoozing, dancing, singing, drinking, eating, living the good life.

It was absolutely necessary to teach the pretos to work, for their own good. So that they would evolve through the recognition of the value of work. Working, they could earn money, and with money they could prosper, as far as pretos could prosper, that is. They could get out of their huts and build a cement house with a zinc roof. They could wear shoes and send their kids to school so that they'd learn how to be useful to the brancos. There was a lot to be done for the black man, whose animal nature had to be annulled for his own good.

So thus it was that sometimes my father had to go out to the village on Saturday afternoons to look for Ernesto.

The shantytown was out by Xipamanine, or maybe near the airport, or, anyway, far, far away. The village was like the Minotaur's labyrinth, my father being the Minotaur, entering and leaving as he pleased in order to dispense his justice.

The place was cut through with narrow paths indented with the entrances to clusters of huts, where the women would be together talking, children would be crying or playing, mangy dogs would be sleeping, goats would be munching grass, pestles would be grinding corn; loud voices, cans of food smoking over charcoal; basically, life. The shanties were all made of old sugarcane, now grey, or if new, coffee-colored with a touch of light milk.

My father took me by the hand and I felt portable like a light backpack; I was almost floating. The earth was red and there was pink dust on everything. A few times my father stopped and asked, Where's Ernesto So-and-So's house? Ah, it was further ahead, near a big tree,

an old cantina, a crossroads where there was a new hut, and then he'd keep going and would find it. My father went on asking around - I was behind him - flying over the red soil, peeking into the gaps in the shanty walls, behind which the lives of the negros lay hidden, those lives that were of my land but could never be like mine. They were pretos. That was the crime. Being black. My father soon after found the place, Is this where Ernesto lives? Where is that slacker? The woman pointed out the hut. My father let go of my hand and entered while I stayed outside, hugging myself, in the middle of the chickens and Ernesto's barefoot children, plus all the other pretos in the neighborhood who had seen the branco and came to look.

My father yelled inside, and with a shove brought Ernesto outside, both of them looking stunned. On Monday, you are going to work, you hear? On Monday, you'll be at the pumps at seven. You're going to work for your woman and for your children, you lazy dog. What do you want out of life? Shove. Punch. And Ernesto's woman and all their kids and the whole neighborhood and I, we were there, immobile, paralyzed with fear of the branco.

And then the branco sticks a bill in the negra's hand and tells her, Feed your kids. And then he grabs my hand and I go flying behind him, captured by his grip, while he yells at the negro, Monday, at the pumps, or you're toast.

And we both fly away from the village. From all around us the onlookers, dogs, chickens, and frightened goats flee and scatter. There is a nervous vibe in the air. The branco went in there, roughed up Ernesto, now he's leaving. The branco brought his little girl, she's his daughter.

And then the white man - who has me by the hand as we fly - crosses the village, quickly finds the Bedford parked outside, sits down, puts the keys in the ignition, starts it up, looks at me, So, you're tired, huh. Do you want a Coca-Cola? Do you want me to let you take a sip of my *penalti*? I look at him and don't respond. This white man is not my father.

14.

I had never hit anyone before. Nevertheless, I slapped her. Because she had bugged me, because she didn't agree with me, because I knew it all and I was in charge and I was right, because she had lied, because she had stolen my eraser...I don't know why I slapped her, damn it!

But I did, in the Special School, during the morning break, up against the back of the grade 4 classroom. It was a white wall. She was Marília.

It was premeditated. I had thought beforehand, If she bugs me again, I'm going to hit her. I could by all rights get away with hitting her. She was a mulatta. And the girl took it and stayed standing, without a fuss, with her hand on her face, saying nothing, glaring at me with a strange, injured look, without any indication that she would strike back. I told her, See what you get? And then I went out to the back of the yard, completely conscious of the outrage that I had just committed, such a flaunting of power that I didn't even understand, and with which I didn't even agree. Not because it was a slap, but because it had been against Marília. Marília was a weak target. She could do nothing against me. If she had complained, then what? I was white. Which one of us had already won?

I felt really bad. Afterwards. The experience left me feeling sour. Beating up on someone meeker than myself was unchristianlike. Jesus would never do such a thing.

I never forgot beautiful Marília's slender face and her beautiful kinky hair. She was a *mulata* and couldn't hit me. I don't remember if I ever got around to apologizing to her. I don't think I did.

15.

Just outside the kitchen door of our house in Matola, my mother had planted a grove of *piripiri* pepper trees that came up to my forehead, their spicy fruit in season all year long, with which I would test my courage and tolerance. I would pull off the peppers, tearing off the stems, choosing the reddest and most swollen ones, and I would eat them raw, chewing them, the first few times suffering the fire of the earth. But later I would seek out patterns of spiciness based on the color and shape of the peppers.

I wanted to make myself strong. First a pepper without making a face, two, three, getting to four, and then to infinity, until I could win the Olympic gold medal in the pepper-eating competitions, which, by the way, took place regularly and spontaneously among the kids in the neighborhood, in the F block of the Bairro Doutor Salazar, Matola Nova.

Who could take it the longest? Who could bear it without choking or making tortured faces? I had to beat the boys in the neighborhood on the basis of all possible aspects of evaluation, but above all, I had to outdo myself, to beat my past record. To be strong like my father. To be strong like my father wished that I was. And like the pretos, who would eat *piripiris* without batting an eye. Or like Helen Keller, who didn't eat any peppers whatsoever. That's why I would doubly train myself each time I left the kitchen. Starting in the grove, I would begin, each one tasting spicier than the last. Then I would run around the house, because I had to have stamina, around and around, and when I had done six laps without stopping, the seventh would be even faster, then the eighth, onto the heights of athleticism. To be strong. I had to be able to fight off anything, never quitting. I had to be like Helen Keller. Like my father. Like the pretos. Life would never catch me off-guard. I had to live through it all to live better and well. I wouldn't be an earthworm, a jellyfish, an amoeba. I wouldn't have to be a stooge like the

other women. I wouldn't bend over backwards like them. I had to be like Hellen Keller. Or my father. In that sense, not like the pretos.

I remember: It was necessary to vanquish fire and pain.

16.

My father's shirts were always white.

It was Saturday afternoon. My mother had been enslaved with work in the yard, what with the rabbits catching scabies and the turnips needing to be planted into divots that she herself had dug, like a negra.

It was Saturday afternoon, after a lunch that she too had whipped up.

It was after she had cleaned and dressed me up, and then done the same for my father.

Like every day.

A shoulder-kissing sunny Saturday afternoon, a light sea-breeze blowing through our hair. Thirty-some degrees Celsius. Our chests rose and fell slowly. Nostrils opened and closed, slowly. Because it was the south. Breathe in, breathe out.

Driving with my father in the white Bedford on the road in Matola, on the way to Lourenço Marques, a ripe tangerine opened its buds inside my brain.

A revelation, a miracle: in an instant, inexplicably, I read out loud, and all at once, the advertisements painted on the sides of the buildings, "*Singer, your sewing machine; drink Coca-Cola; Tudor batteries; there's always room for one for Lux; 2M beer, everything people want*".

All juicy, the open tangerine, a flower in my brain...it was sweet; and I said to my father, "I can read". He smiled at me, "You're my treasure". He didn't say it, but he thought, "You're everything to me".

My father was wearing a fine cotton shirt, very white. Immaculately clean and zealously ironed by my mother, it was too tight at the button over his belly, about to rip open. His bronzed skin radiated with health. And his eyes shone and sparkled. My father's smile could smile all by itself. With nothing left hidden. At night he would come home with his shirt black with stains because he had handled and let himself be exposed to dust, coal, oranges, me. But at this moment, he was impeccable. On his shirt pocket I could see the remains of a stain from a cracked pen. It was hardly anything. Just a millimeter. Otherwise impeccable.

That afternoon was happy: we would go for an outing at *Zambi*, he would take me to eat yogurt downtown, or perhaps we would go snack on chicken gizzards at *Sabié*. He would let me take sips from his cup of beer. Or of a *penalti* or a similar thing called a *tricofaite*. He would let go of my hand and I could run, could breathe free without fences, just a bit. I could reathe deep, breathe in the bittersweet air of *catanga* - the smell of black sweat - and of pollen and peanut. Because at my father's side no preto would ever dream of robbing or bothering me, and if they did I'd also be to blame because my smile was much too pure. But my father was there, and his hands were like bear claws. He would tell me stories about when he was young, in Portugal; about the cloud that suddenly and violently poured down on him, on the road from *Óbidos* to *Caldas*, and from which he fled, running at its same speed and in its same direction, ending up, after all, underneath it; of which he only became aware when he stopped, lungs bursting, and the cloud overcame him. That memory of his. Rather, of mine. His ridiculous stories, so that I might laugh, and involuntarily learn that it's lovely to fool around, to be a ridiculous person, to be a rock, a just-baked loaf of bread. To be nobly ridiculous.

I told him, "Dad, I can read now", and I leaned my head back, lying it on the headrest, with my eyes closed, while I took in the ocean spray coming in from the right, from the marshes

next to *Sonefe*. My muscles, always tense, eased up. There was no longer a war inside of me, and I could rest; the laws of reading made sense at first glance, all because the stubborn tangerine had decided to entirely open itself up inside my brain. There, inside the car, on the way to Lourenço Marques, close to the *Sonefe*, like having my first period.

I knew how to read. It had been hard. But now, what a miracle. So quickly. I knew how to read. I opened my eyes again to make sure, and read, as if I hadn't done anything else in my whole life, "long size LM cigarettes: modern life for the modern man". I didn't understand how it had happened, but I could read.

This miracle of reading, such fast magic in my brain, as if someone moved a wand from afar or recited mysterious words, breaking the spell of my previous illiteracy.

As of that Saturday afternoon, even though my physical prison remained intact and the walls and iron bars continued to loom high everywhere around me, I became more free.

Sentences could steal me away to some other place, carry me into other people's minds so I could listen to what they thought and didn't say; into the minds of good people, bad people, so-so people, the last of which being the majority; to find myself aboard lost ships, hovering over volcanoes and sleeping in gardens full of roses and soft purple shadows.

It was when, slowly, I began to become my father's worst enemy. The enemy deep inside, silent. The one that sees and listens and never asked for permission. It was when I began to become a spy. A mole.

Only many, many, many years later did I understand how knowing how to read - the access to the key to decodifying secrets - had transformed me, against all odds, into the mole that would gnaw upon others' roots, one at a time, until only dust remained.

My father had his white shirt and I, his treasure, his life, soiled it with dirt forever.

17.

Under Marcelo Caetano's administration, from 1968 to 1974, the ships would dock every week full of people. The *colonos* would show up, along with the Portuguese troops, and there they would carry about their business: renting out a house; moving in; sending the kids off to high school, trade school, industrial school; getting a well-recommended *mainato* - or otherwise taking the risk of getting one who showed up at their door. A small number of them would buy a cantina, whether near or far, five or six hundred kilometers from the capital, where they would sell coal, gas, flour, dry fish, and beer to the pretos who came out of the bush and didn't speak Portuguese. These vendors would learn all the native dialects so were middlemen in business - they did well for themselves. Otherwise, most of the colonos stayed near the cities.

The troops would head north and, through the radio shows, would arrange "*madrinhas de guerra*" - lady pen pals - with whom they would exchange letters via on-air messages. I wished I could be a *madrinha de guerra*. If only I were 15...The *madrinhas de guerra* were just postal girlfriends, so no kissing on the mouth. I liked to hear the radio shows on which the messages were sent: "Maria Albertina Santos, *madrinha* of Quartermaster Diamantino Russo, stationed at Nova Viseu in Company 3470, sends him her best wishes and those of her family, and hopes that he returns soon and in good health."

We knew as much about what the troops were doing as we did about the country's politics. We knew nothing.

I am not describing a land ignorant of the war that was going on inside of it. There was indeed a war, but it wasn't visible in southern Mozambique; we didn't know how it had started, or what it was for, exactly. At least no such things were discussed in my presence, until April 25th. It didn't even come up.

There was war because there were *turras* - gooks; terrs. There were *turras* because human nature was spiteful and unsatisfied. Evil existed everywhere and it was up to us to fight against it.

The war was in the North, but we never grasped its seriousness. Our soldiers were never mentioned as having possibly been killed. Even words to explain such things - like those we know well now - were unknown to us, like “ambush”, “guerrilla”, or this or that kind of mine. We thought that they were all up there in their barracks or doing drills, doing their part to spread the good word of civilization. Roughing up any negros who might not be behaving themselves, which was normal. Or maybe really taking them down if they were stubborn or out of line, which was less likely. That’s what my cousin must have been doing up in the North; correcting the negros.

The North was really far. It was way up there in the land of the Makua and the Makonde. The *turras*, all of them thieves, wanted to steal the land from the Portuguese. They came from Tanzania with their dark black, malevolent skin. It was necessary to defend our land, and that’s why the soldiers had come from Portugal. There were also black soldiers. They were made commandos so that they could go to the front and die first; this way we could spare some of the brancos. It wasn’t as bad for a preto to die in the war. It was between them.

18.

My cousin was born in Lourenço Marques and he never once pronounced the three difficult syllables of the word “Maputo”. Ma-pu-to. The five syllables of Lourenço Marques came out nice and smooth. Smooth and white.

Maputo was a black name. A preto, a wild place, or a river could be called Maputo, Incomati, Limpopo, Zambezi. A black town could be called Marracuene, Inhaca, Infulene, Xipamanine. A white city, no. It had to be Lourenço Marques, Beira, Mocímboa da Praia.

Xai-Xai was the pretos'. Ponta do Ouro was the brancos'. No branco who left Lourenço Marques ever got used to calling it...any other name whatsoever. Like *geleira* - "icebox". A Mozambican white to this day thinks *geleira* and then corrects himself, in a split second, to *frigorífico* - "refrigerator". He's at the dinner table and thinks *galinha* - "hen" - and corrects it to *frango* - "chicken". He thinks Lourenço Marques and says, with delight, with spite, as if keeping a name meant keeping its meaning, Lourenço Marques. He says all the syllables, spreading them out long and with relish. *Lou-ren-ço-Mar-ques*.

Life in Lourenço Marques was peaceful, soft, rhythmic, and very smooth, like its name.

On the tarmac at the airport, when my cousin managed to leave Maputo in safety, he looked back and said, "I'll never come back to Lourenço Marques." And he never did.

19.

Afterwards we buried his field knife, his revolver, and his uniform. He had been in Niassa Province with license to kill pretos, so all of his things smelled like blood, and did so for many years hence, even after being buried in the fertile, uncertain soil of Matola, even up to moment he put a bullet in his brain there in Xabregas, back in Lisbon, after spiking his veins, after holding up jewelry stores on the Avenida Almirante Reis, and shooting random blacks in the back in Damaia.

Besides that, he was my first cousin.

In the ex-colonies it was easy to die. One minute you were alive, the next you were dead. There were hunting accidents, bush accidents, work accidents, highway accidents, accidents.

Fingers got sliced and then they would heal, washed with cold water. Flesh would grow where it had been cut. If the wounds didn't heal, the arm would be amputated or its owner would die from sepsis. It was easy.

The life of a preto was worth as much as his usefulness. The life of a branco was worth more, much more, not that it was worth much either. The life of a South African "beef", as we called them, one of those that showed up in a Mexican sombrero to catch rays at the Polana Hotel, yeah, that was the life. These guys, yep, they knew how to deal with the pretos, how to keep the reins nice and tight on them.

To kill a preto, under Premier Caetano, had started to become a nuisance; the police, if they found out, would come and ask questions. "So there, Rebelo, you didn't see the bugger, and then you killed him?"

"That's right, Officer Pacheco, I didn't see him. It was night and there weren't any lights around those parts, and the guy was drunk. He threw himself in front of my truck. What what you have had me do?!"

"I would have had you stop, man. I would have had you help the preto!"

"I thought that I just gave him a little bump, that the guy would wake up there in a few hours with the booze out of his system...then he'd go home to his hut and never remember it. You know how the *pretalhada* is. They drink till they fall over and then they bug the hell out of us."

"I'm going to look the other way this time, but see to it that this doesn't happen again, Rebelo. We have orders from the *Metrópole* to follow through on these things these days..."

Killing a preto, as of a certain time, started to become a real drag.

20.

In Maputo, after independence, and even before it, certain military men that were decommissioned from the Portuguese army and didn't go back to Portugal, and who considered themselves Mozambicans, black or white, were hunted down and murdered. It was said among the brancos that it was FRELIMO who did it, in revenge for the war. There were neighborhood committees; commissions were formed. They'd go door to door. People got frisked. Anything was possible during those lawless years.

Dying was always easy in that land, before or after.

My cousin had been brought up exposed to the deepest disdain for blacks. When he turned 19, and they sent him to Niassa Province, he left happy. He was going to fight for the Portuguese California.

He would go down to Lourenço Marques every nine months, but he was no longer the same. He let his beard grow. It was wartime and my cousin never spoke of the war. Nobody spoke of the war. I suppose that nobody ever talks about war.

“So, are they tough, the guys up North?” He'd smile and not respond. “But you boys are giving 'em hell, right? They'll see who owns this place.” My cousin spoke little and avoided social situations. He'd lock himself in his room and smoke, never making a peep. Even if he might have said something or other after that, “yeah, no, maybe, I don't know,” but he never spoke again. He was ashamed, my cousin. He would look at me with wild eyes and I could see that he was embarrassed around me.

He was dark and handsome. I was 10 going on 18 and I loved him in secret and, despite not knowing what sex was, I dreamt of having intense erotic adventures with him. I'd spy on him in his room, which he always kept dim, where he would hide out, chain-smoking. He didn't

know what to say to me. He was embarrassed around me. I would close my eyes and fantasize that I would open them upon us hugging each other, being thrown into a flaming pool, and that the intensity of what was being consummated, this violence, would burn us with pleasure. My cousin awoke my first strange desires. And a few years later, he killed himself.

21.

My father would converse with other men in the street. I'd twirl around him, like always, listening to the distant sound of the discussions.

It was the day of my first period. I was wearing a white poplin dress, short, smooth, girdled, with lace stockings in low, varnished shoes. Everything was white, because they always dressed me in white, like a sacrificial lamb.

My shoes were wide, especially in the toe, and I tripped on some stairs, exposing my blood-stained panties beneath. I knew that they must be soaked through, since I hadn't used any kind of pad, and I died a slow, shameful death, certain that all those men had seen my blood. Among them was my young cousin, very handsome, about whom I secretly dreamt; and he had seen my panties, stained with blood.

Thanks to that mortifying memory I can put a date to my first period.

It was, then, in January. That was the day of my first period. I had turned 11 and we would be returning from someone's house, where I must have listened to adult conversations for hours on end. A racket that did nothing for me. "Yes, I'm listening." Sure, I was listening, I would tell them. Yes, I heard. I thought. I watched. I observed the animals, the knickknacks, the spines of the Basic Encyclopedia books, the *mainatos* that scraped the floor, and afterwards cleaned it with turpentine and then waxed it, bringing out the shine with half of a coconut, and then a wool mop, until it gleamed like a mirror. I was fascinated with these huge men, gleaming

black, bent over the floor, cleaning up what we had dirtied, serving us platters of seafood whose shells perhaps they might get to suck on, and then lick their fingers, while doing dishes. And they were just the same as me. They had a mother, a father, cousins...their eyes were just as clever as mine. They would smile at me. They talked to me when the bosses weren't around.

I liked talking to the *mainatos*. They treated me well, even giving me piggyback rides. My mother was afraid that they would hurt me or kidnap me. Or maybe she mistrusted me, sensing that I had the soul of a preta.

22.

I found out about the 25th of April on the 26th. They told my father, at the end of the afternoon, while we were at the square just off Avenida Latino Coelho, in Lourenço Marques. I know that we were at the square just off Avenida Latino Coelho because I can picture the placement of the buildings, the men in a circle with their blue, grey, and light brown *balalaica* shirts, exchanging opinions; and I, making my way between them and the curb, on which I was balancing just to amuse myself, while I simultaneously eavesdropped on them. For a minute I grabbed my father's hand and spun around him, pulling on his arms. He was getting animated in his conversation with the other men and I listened in, uninterested, on the unbalanced noise of their voices, and the emotions contained therein. I heard them from afar. I didn't hear anything though. Only my father interested me.

I was wearing khaki shorts and rubber flip-flops that laced through my toes, bought at a Chinese shop downtown. It was warm. It was the end of the afternoon and a humid shadow loomed along with the smell of the trees and earth, now tired of the daylight, even though the day hadn't been so hot.

My mother had gone up to make dinner.

But it's strange, because we only went to live on the square just off Avenida Latino Coelho months later, after the massacres of the 7th of September of that year. Maybe we had gone there to visit somebody. Maybe it was to visit my crazy godfather Joaquim, who had built some buildings there, or rather, my crazy godfather Joaquim's *pretos* had built some buildings there, because my godfather knew nothing about construction, only how to give orders, to yell that he wanted everything ready by the following day, and that the plumber and the electrician would be coming...so he must have known how to give orders to the plumber and the electrician too. My godfather was essentially a suicidal poet, an exploiter of women, and a liar. He was also a spirit-medium. He heard buzzing in his ears and had strange visions. The man should have been a psychic. A construction foreman, no. That I guarantee.

I recall another conversation about the 25th of April, also at the end of the afternoon, downtown, on the outside of the left flank of the building that housed the municipal market. I, as always, was the only girl amidst a group of men, simply because I was always with my father. I would thus take part as an irrelevant witness in all his public acts. I was the electrician's daughter. She's all grown up, your daughter. What grade are you in? And little else. I would listen in.

The conversation at the square just off Avenida Latino Coelho took place at sundown, but it wasn't that late. The light was whiter. It had fallen more carefully, more orange. It was the orange light of the Indian Ocean, the same color as the earth at Zumbi, at Costa do Sol, at Ponta Vermelha, which isn't really red like its name suggests, but a strong orange like dark saffron.

Which of the scenarios is the real one? Did the conversation about the 25th of April take place up there, in Alto-Maé, or downtown? Was it the same conversation? Were they different conversations about the same topic? I prefer the latter scenario. Perhaps both of them took place.

Temporal coherence, at a great distance, is fleeting. “That’s how it was”, “I’ve got an idea here.” One thing is certain: It happened.

A revolution had occurred in the *Metrópole*. The previous day there had been a great commotion: Marcelo Caetano had fled to Brazil, the country was without a government, the troops were in the streets; it was a banana republic, so how would it be in the colonies? Yes, there had been a commotion, now what?! The government had changed hands, and just as well, since the one from before had robbed us on a daily basis. The ones behind the switch were military men. Would that be good for us?! Were they going to grant independence to the colonies? Ah, finally, Africa would be ours! Finally, we would be able to stop paying taxes to the bastards in Portugal! Now we could prosper and make our land into another California. California, but like in South Africa. With the pretos under our thumbs, controlled, otherwise they wouldn’t do any work. The 25th of April would deliver Africa to the brancos, and then we would be happy.

23.

The heads of whites that had been rolled upon the football pitch started to lose their faces, their skin, their ears, their brains, and what remained of their wrinkled flesh and broken jaws.

The *negralhada* would mend these new kinds of balls with rags stiffened by dried blood and torn off of corpses, and thus the balls kept their shape, though they would start to unravel with each punt, until the only thing left was a handful of soft, pulverized bone, which would then be kicked into the bush behind the shantytown. And then another rotting head would appear, until it too fell apart. It was dusk. Night fell quickly.

They gave me the message on the way to the airport after we got off the road made of loose dirt that had come from the bowels of Matola, on which were doing 90 km/h until we reached the paved road. They kept repeating it: “Don’t forget to tell our story.”

As the pickup truck sped by, to the side and behind us, for those who would be coming still, a fierce cloud of dust was forming, working its way into the textures of our bodies and clothes. It dried the throat, the nostrils, the eyes.

“...so then, they’re real buddy-buddy with the pretos, but you’re going to explain to them that it’s not what they think. They defend them, but nobody talks about what the blackies do to us... You tell them all about the massacres in September. You tell them everything that happened to us. And to Candinha...”

On September 7th my father had arrived in a state of euphoria. Things were going to go back to how they had been. “This is going to be ours again; everyone is at the Radio Club, which our boys are occupying. The negros are screwed! The jig is up. We’re still going to win this thing.”

I smiled. What could “win this thing” mean?

I let myself go. I let myself go all the way. It didn’t matter at that moment. The days were so long and nice...If we were to win, *who* would win, exactly? What did it mean to win? My father was happy. I was happy.

I was smiling because I was his. I knew who he was. I knew a part of it. I was smiling because, even knowing already who he was, I was his. Still.

He lifted me up off the ground and took me to the Radio Club on his back.

There was a white crowd in front of the building. Men, mostly. Also a few wives. I barely glimpsed the building from one of the corners, from the right corner. I know that it was from the right because I can picture that narrow space, I know that I’m leaning forward far enough to be able to reach it.

Just a building, the same Radio Club as always, where the various programs that we listened to at night were produced.

But for my father and all of those brancos, at that moment, the building of the Radio Club was a symbol of hope, and everyone there was anxiously milling about, as if they were worshipping an idol at a pagan temple. It was an invisible hope, but strong, like hope is, made there into solid rock and, thus, palpable. Something concrete.

One could hear a nervous noise.

The late afternoon air boiled with male energy, with desire, with fear. A commotion in vain, shots of off-key voices, but in the background, in everyone's hearts, there was an enormous silence that trembled, that devoured, a punished hunger that wouldn't survive the strike of a match.

Everything that I know about September 7th, 1974 is this: The brancos were beating the pretos; perhaps there might not be the kind of independence that had been spoken about, the one that the brancos had been so worried about. Nothing else.

24.

We go downtown, the two of us hand in hand, to have a snack somewhere, always talking. Maybe chicken gizzards, *miudos de galinha*, clams. A steak sandwich. For my father, an alcoholic drink cut with a soft drink; for me, a soft drink cut with my father's cut drink.

He was way too easy for me. Very easy for me. Without teaching me, my father was initiating me into the pleasures I had already become aware of through my godfather and his strange, intense energy. I enjoyed his presence, my father's. I enjoyed strolling with him, wherever it may have been, hands held. He never spoke to me about responsibility, never combed my hair or straightened out the collar on my dress, like my mother, but rather dealt with

me like an adult. We would talk about what the day had brought and carried with it. And he was free with me, his little pal, a part of him, equal to him.

He was very large and very powerful like a giant-king, and his presence protected me from all irrational fears. I don't think that I was ever so happy as in those moments when he would take me by the hand and walk with me through the streets of Lourenço Marques, up to Scala, then beyond it, as we'd see storefronts, people, smelling scents coming at us from all sides, into the late afternoon, as the lights of the avenues and of the neon signs would start to come to life. And he would explain to me, "Now, these lights are being powered by the substation at..." All my senses would be alert on those afternoons' ends.

I felt like a person. I felt like a woman. His twin-soul.

There has never been another man capable of rescuing me like he was, of breaking me, of giving me life by simply existing. Just by being there, smiling at me, validating me. He gave me his hand. He picked me up. Listened to me. The father that I have betrayed.

Going downtown, on that day, he asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. A typist, maybe, I answered. I liked typewriters. My father explained to me that that wouldn't guarantee a living. That I could be an agricultural engineer. That those jobs made good money; Mozambique was a fertile land where anything you planted would grow, and it would be necessary to have agricultural engineers in the future.

What was an agricultural engineer?

To my father, the most important thing was my autonomy. I had to think about how I would guarantee my independence. How to have a means to a living without depending on a man.

That conversation remains very clear to me. We had it near the Vasco da Gama Garden. "You have to have a profession that will let you live your life, with your children, or not, without

depending on any man! Without being kept by anyone. You have to be the master of your own life. You have to be free. Do you understand?”

“I understand.”

“To do that, you have to study, you have to go to university.”

“OK. I’ll go.”

25.

After the 25th of April, people started talking openly about the war. This was because the *turras*, the terrorists, had entered the city and it was necessary to explain where they had come from and who they were, these powerful invaders.

I understood that the *colonos* wanted independence, but under white rule. Eventually, they would share administrative functions with this or that educated mulatto, malleable enough. FRELIMO was unwanted. This land, the colonos said, wouldn’t be for the negros nor for Portugal, but but for the whites living here. It would be a white independence; the intention was to erect a Portuguese South African California.

To this day I see the ex-colonos engaging in the same kind of nostalgia. “Independence was poorly done, and the ones to blame are Mário Soares and Almeida Santos, who sold us out and delivered everything to the blacks.” I’ll translate: “That which was turned over to the negros should have been turned over to us. We would have taken care of the negros.” When they blubber, tearful and sincere, “I left my heart in Africa,” I translate: “I left everything there, and I had such a good life.”

My father, on the eve of his death, dreamt that he was still doing installations in Sommersfield, and that I was with him in the pickup; afterwards we went to snack on beef

sandwiches at Sabié; Coca-Cola for me; a *tricotfaite* for him. I can see him smiling. “Do you like it?” I smile. “Yup.”

We need time to understand. To kill. To be able to look at them again in the eyes, with the same love. To forgive.

26.

In that other, faraway life I had a cat named Bolinhas. Periodically he would would escape out the kitchen window and he would disappear for weeks. He would come back skinny, dirty, bloodied, missing an ear or toenails, with his tail cut, scorched and squinty-eyed. He’d meow at the window he had left from, we’d open it for him, and he would come in, slow and dying, as we looked on in amazement. He would take a while to get better. When he’d leave again, we wouldn’t acknowledge it, nor did we know if he’d ever come back again. We never knew, and that was over the course of years.

There was also Gimbrinhas, the cat that my father brought from the bush one day, saying, careful, this one’s wild. Gimbrinhas was huge, striped like a tiger, and never ran away. He would stretch out along my father’s desk, on top of all his paperwork. My father never shooed him off; at the most he would tell him, with male pride to another male, go over there, and Gimbrinhas would go, keeping with his duty as the noble mascot of our house. Was Gimbrinhas a wild animal? He was a bit. He scratched my face up just because I tried to kiss him on the nose. He wasn’t about to put up with children. He was a very noble cat, very lordly. I had respect for him and I preferred to manhandle sweet Bolinhas, who was neither striped like a tiger nor wild like one nor had he come from the bush, nor could we see in him any kind of pedigree.

After that came the war. Or rather, FRELIMO, and the cats were left behind in Lourenço Marques. I never understood how they could have left Bolinhas and Gimbrinhas behind. I wasn’t

satisfied with the excuse that they had dropped them off at someone's house, from where they had later escaped. That they couldn't take cats with them. That cats had to stay. I don't believe that the cats made it out. They say that the pretos ate them. The cats and dogs that the brancos left behind - not the crates full of ebony furniture, the high-top, rosewood ashtrays, or ivory teeth - were all eaten by the pretos, the Chinese, and the *Monhés*, which is what we called Indians.

In those days nobody made it out alive from anywhere. There was an illusion of life in Portugal, of starting everything anew, of escaping the chaos and the slaughter. The illusioned quickly became disillusioned, marked by their uprooting.

Of all the slaughters of those days, the one that affected me the most was that of the pets, the only innocents in such a complex game of power.

27.

They said that I was now a woman.

In the middle, in the Bedford, between both of them. The car was going fast. We were late.

Then they didn't talk any more.

We went through well-known places, and I knew that it would be for the last time. I looked with indifference at the big, colorful trees and their shadows, at the ammoniac light of the afternoon, at the dirty corners, at the dingy shantytown on both sides of the road leading up to the airport. It was not worth it to lock in onto an image. Everything would be wiped out quickly. I would never return to this place, which, although my native land, didn't belong to me.

Afterwards, my native land never came to be a precise meter of earth - a plot where I could say "I belong here." Or, "See that window on the fourth floor? It was there," or "Where that building is now, that's where my mother..."

My land would have to be a history, a language, miscegenated from some cultural and historical things, not belonging to anything or anyone for very long, and at the same time capable of everything, and belonging to everyone, if they'd have me, so I would be worthy of being loved; how much did love cost?

My body turned slowly into my land. I materialized into it. Every day I would return at night to it, and leave from it in the morning.

When we got to the airport, the message I was to carry out had been repeated to me countless times.

The message was important: the blacks in those days were killing at random; they were making arrests and humiliating people as they pleased. We felt as if life were being taken from us; nobody talked about power anymore. We were scared. And that was the truth. The truth of the end.

The life of a branco in Lourenço Marques had been changed into a game of luck of the draw.

I played that game, without great losses, some weeks before my departure, while I waited for a ride from my father, on one of the corners of Avenida 24 de Julho, the one in front of the Special School. It was a shady, breezy place, that corner.

I was wearing brown lycra pants, purchased in South Africa.

A black youth made his way quickly in my direction, without any clear intention. When he got close, he hugged me with his left arm, slamming my body up against his, fingering my crotch with his right hand, grasping it tightly, like he was squeezing the juice out of a cashew fruit. He looked me in the eyes, very close, without flinching, without guilt. He let me go without a word and continued on his way without looking back.

I stayed in the same spot, paralyzed, mute, with my eyes wide open. Tiny bright dots popped around me. I didn't look for anyone. I didn't see anyone. I don't know if anyone saw me. I don't know if there was anyone in the street.

I don't know if my father showed up right then, or if he took a while. When he arrived, I silently got into the pickup and he took me wherever he needed to take me. I never told him about it, nor my mother. I had to spare them. To avoid a fuss. It might have set them off. With my father you never knew. It was necessary to avoid getting him into trouble in those days.

The Age of the Brancos had come to an end.

An event like the one I've just described, in broad daylight, in the middle of the city, never would have happened during the Age of the Brancos. If it had, that kid would have been guaranteed a summary lynching within hours. They would have found him. He would have died, or another who looked like him. Either way, somebody would have died.

And he knew it. Now, nothing could touch him. Since he knew that, he dared to do it, all the while staring me in the eyes, victorious. Anything was possible in those days. But, overall, his time had come, coinciding with the end of my own. I was a symbol of the land and the spoils to be looted.

“The negros killed Conceição's husband and children with katanas, in Infulene. Remember that, that they dismembered him. His parts were spread out over their cornfield...it was your father who found all the bits...

You're a woman now, you have to tell what they did to Candinha do Joaquim, with a stick...that they all used her and afterwards ran her through from below until it came out her throat, until she died like Christ.”

But in Portugal nobody knew what a katana was. I would have to describe the features and potential of that weapon. Only then could I tell them the rest.

Usually wide like butcher knives at their greatest width, but longer, with wide blades, slightly curved, or not, depending on their manufacture; heavy and sharp, they could cut granite. They opened the bush, castrated, gutted, slashed, carved.

Katanas were docile in the hands of the negros. And cold. They cleaned them carefully with spit, licking them, and they wiped them off on their dirty shirts. A katana was worth its weight in gold and had its own life. Its own spirit. There was a spirit within each blade.

A katana could transform any living body into a random and shapeless mass of organs. In seconds. It was an instrument of death and power like no other. I wasn't afraid of firearms, because death was hidden inside of them. But a katana had its insides in the open. It shone, with stains that never came off. A katana was an ugly, demented clown's face of death with red-painted lips.

In the days after September 7th the *negralhada* ran amok. In Machava, Infulene, Matola, Malhangalene, all over, they blindly slaughtered anything white: farmers and their families, cats, dogs, chickens, parakeets, white cows, leaving them in agony on the ground, oozing blood. The native fowl with bald necks were spared. And the black cats.

“When you saw them playing football with heads, on the road to the zoo...Tell them everything, everything they robbed, looted, broke, burned, took over. The cars, the houses. The farms, the cattle. Everything now rotting on the ground. You're going to tell them. That they provoke us every day, and we can't even do anything about it or they take us before the party committee. That they insult us at the checkpoints, they humiliate us, they spit on us. That they

don't let us go to church; that they arrested the priest and the adventist preacher for refusing to stop their services.

That we never know if we'll make it back home. That it's up to them whether we do. They think they're the kings of the land, that it's theirs, that they're in charge. As if they had built this city, everything here that you see. Everything that is ours.

Tell them that they arrest, torture, and kill without caring who; that there's no food, that everything that comes from international aid goes to the big shots of FRELIMO, that it never gets to the shops. Tell them how many hours you stand in the breadline just to end up with an empty bag.

Tell them that everything that they hear there in the news is a lie, that Almeida Santos and Mário Soares are dogs who are selling us up the river for a pittance. They have to put Spínola in power, he's got a good grasp on things. He's tough. Bring back Spínola.

Tell them that we cannot get visas for South Africa or for Rhodesia. That we've tried everything. That we have to go back to Portugal; we have to get space on a ship where we can stick our furniture, and for that one needs connections.

Tell your grandmother...some big boxes, by mail...to see if they don't arrive with everything broken. The ebony, that'll be worth money there. And the silver coins, they'll be worth their weight. She should squirrel away those things wherever there's space. Your Anita books. The big fan. The lamp from your father's desk. The typewriter. Raul da Bernarda's porcelain vases that I brought with my trousseau. The tea service. The top of the sewing machine. Papers, pictures, your first communion diploma. The Chinese tea set."

28.

On September 7th, Domingos was spared death by katana by the black skin of his teeth and fled with his wife and daughter to the city.

Domingos raised pigs and chickens in Infulene Valley. Rather, Domingos' pretos raised the pigs and chickens for him, while he fornicated with the widow on the other side of the street.

His farm should still be there, on the edge of the old road of Infulene, flanked by shanties on both sides, to the right of those coming from Maputo on the way to Matola, at the intersection with the sandy road that headed out to Cândido's lands.

Domingos never had electricity because he hadn't been raised with it in Portugal. So he didn't need it. Thus, at night his house was filled with the dim light of oil lamps, which flickered through the mosquito nets in the wide-open windows. At night, in Infulene, you couldn't breathe because the mosquitos would cover the walls of your windpipe and larynx.

The walls of Domingos' house, I remember well, were painted top to bottom with the red from mosquitos splattered there a long time ago. As if it were some kind of arabesque wallpaper. That kind of wall-painting had been going on for years. This was normal, in the houses of the colonos, especially outside of the city. And Infulene was a swamp.

There was nothing to do at night in Infulene. I liked to stay there and have sleepovers with Domingos' daughter, who was my best friend. We listened to contests on the radio, or music on the turntable. We read Sarah Beirão. That's not true. She would read me the story, except for the ending, and afterwards, yes, she would lend me Sarah Beirão. We talked about boys. She talked. And we laughed.

She, Domingas, was older than me. We took baths together. I thought she was very grown up, and pretty, because she had breasts and pubic hair, but the truth was she was just more grown up than me.

Domingas was the first person to masturbate me. Early in the morning, in the tub full of lukewarm water, she stuck her leg between mine and searched, with her foot, for the opening of my vulva, and then rubbed it slowly, staring me down with a goofy look and laughing. She knew what she was doing. And I looked right back at her and laughed too, letting myself keep looking at her while equal-parts laughing and getting off.

I wish I could have taken baths with Domingas for the rest of my life, but afterwards came September 7th and the rebels broke the tub and we had to deny ourselves such hygienic and sneaky pleasures.

On September 7th, Domingos saved his wife and his daughter and nothing else. The house in Infulene was broken into, looted, burned, and the cattle either stolen or killed. Domingos' negros were tired of carrying sacks of wheat and corn and bran that were never for them. Domingos was lucky, because Cândido, the one from the farm at the end of the dirt road, who, like him, also raised pigs and chickens, was murdered by katana, as well as his children, plus everything that was white and moved: dogs, cats, and parakeets. Their bodies were cut up and spread out throughout the farm grounds, heads left far away from their corresponding legs¹⁴. Cândido's wife, who on that night had stayed in the city, returned to find what remained. Since nothing remained, besides rotting white stumps, she asked the men of FRELIMO to dig her a hole in the ground for a communal grave for the man, children, and animals, all unrecognizable. It didn't matter who was whom. Life had to go on, and it did.

¹⁴ Professor Simas-Almeida has informed me that this practice was based on an indigenous belief that unless its parts were spread far away from each other, a dead body would be capable of coming back to life.

A few months later, the party committee announced that the looted and vacated houses would be taken over by the hut dwellers if their previous occupants did not return. For the brancos, there was nothing to return to anyway. All the apartments to be rented out in Maputo already had been taken. They didn't want to lose their property - at least at that time they still thought they could keep them - but they were afraid to return. Thus, Domingos justified keeping his house by negotiating with the committee, offering literacy classes for the people, to be given by his daughter, who was then a high school student. His daughter nominated me as her helper and so on Wednesdays and Saturdays we would teach the ABC's to the children of those who had murdered Cândido, in his burnt house. There was no furniture, only cement floor and walls licked by flames. The little black kids would arrive at three in the afternoon, sit without any order whatsoever, either in the middle of the room or up against the walls. They came barefoot and tattered, as they always had; they came with their legs and arms all white and red from the dusty earth, snot-nosed and with rheumy eyes. And Domingas and I, very white, very clean, very well shod, very well-raised, would write out the alphabet with chalk on the burnt wall, which afterwards we would clean and dry quickly to use again. We would bring pencils and notebooks, in which we would draw the lines of *is* and *us* and *pês* and *rês*, to be copied by the children. They didn't speak Portuguese whatsoever, but they understood everything that we explained to them. And, at the end of the afternoon, when the mosquitos would start up, the children of those that had killed Cândido would go away happy for having learned many letters. That's how, for twelve months, Domingas and I, with the authorization of the committee, taught the little black kids of Infulene how to read and write.

After that, they sent me back to Portugal, to be a woman. And Domingas continued, by herself, to ensure her father's legacy, which never was really his.

As for the two of us, the war robbed us of our pleasure. It always does.

When we grow up, and life corrupts us, it becomes impossible to return to those first letters, to those ABC's that have no knowledge, naturally, of any corruption.

But that was all a lifetime ago.

29.

1975. November. Flights on TAP had been sold out for months, to anywhere.

On the days before, there had been a big fuss. The suitcases. False bottoms. Lettuce green and canary yellow *La Finesse* pants, for the Portuguese winter, so grey and brown and dark blue.

Socks. Underwear. Bras. Modess-brand feminine hygiene pads. Long-sleeve sweaters. A heavy wool jacket, out of style, packed in a hurry.

Lourenço Marques had been draining of brancos, rich and poor, long before independence.

We had stayed until the end. My father still believed in another coup, in a White Africa in which the blacks would have to assimilate, wear shoes, go to school, and work.

The negros would smile at us, as always, and thank us for what we had done for their land, or rather, our land. They would serve us, obviously, because they were negros and we were brancos, and this was the natural order of things. Is it not normal to train a dog to wear a leash and a collar, or to slaughter a kid-goat and then roast it? Well yeah, that was the way of the world.

My father believed in a white movement, in another white movement, after September 7th. One that would really win, that would be financed by South Africa and Rhodesia. We would expel the black power from the city and chase it back to the bush, where it had come from, where it belonged, and to domesticate it or to wipe it out. One or the other, according to whatever would be deserved and necessary. A White Africa, yes, a White Africa, we repeated.

Because you see, ladies and gentlemen, that land was my father's. My father represented the entire Mozambican people. He was empowered and enraged and he frothed until the final day, refusing to lower his voice before negros, to show them his documents, his travel itinerary, to call them *você* instead of *tu*, to extend his hand in signal of his acceptance of their authority.

With or without independence, a preto was a preto and my father was a colono to the death.

On the eve of his death, when he could no longer eat nor drink, he dreamt that the pretos had stuck the cables into the walls all wrong, and he yelled at them. He was really wrapped up in it. He was suffering. I asked him, "Do you still remember Sommershield?"

He remembered. He knew the names of all the streets by heart, the locations of the buildings, the names of the stores on every corner, and the full names of the builders of each project. He remembered every one of his favorite pretos: Samuel, Ninhanbaka...

"We would have made the United States out of that land...if those guys...and these..." and he would shake his head, letting out a croak and closing his eyes, shrugging his shoulders up to his neck. His body shook as if he wanted to release thoughts: *pretos do caneco*. Those black bastards.

In 1975 there was no more building going on in Lourenço Marques. Everything had stopped. There were no longer any new works to thread through with electric cables. And even if there had been, they would have been handed over to the Soviet, Cuban, or Balkan comrades, not to a hated colono with a bad reputation, a soiled past hung up by a wire.

Bit by bit, my father's negros disappeared back to their villages, because there was no longer any work. None stayed behind. I never saw my father's pretos again.

In school, the French professor was black. *Il était du Sénégal. Noir. Le français au noir!*

History now was that of the rulers before Gungunhana, of his people and the others, which were many. And the wars that they waged. The Bantu, the Shona, the Monomotapa. The Nguni. Then the Zulu.

The whites laughed. That's black history! The pretos thought they had *history*! "The history of the monkeys!"

In Portuguese class we wrote poems about colonialism and the exploitation of man by man, armed conflict, and the end of *lobolo*, which was the dowry system, and of *cadonga*, which was the black market; FRELIMO as a religion, the saviors of the people, Samora Machel, Graça Simbine, Eduardo Mondlane, that one, yeah, he had been "married to a white woman, because he was educated in Europe; he wasn't even really that black, he was more of a mulatto"...with him things would have been tougher, and that's why they had killed him, or supposedly Samora did; and then Chissano, "as false as Judas".

In Visual Education we would produce work in groups: murals about the revolution, posters about the revolution, but all of that wasn't really school. I would need more to make a future for myself. I was white. "I was already a woman. It was dangerous."

On the twenty-something-eth day of some month or another, they closed up my suitcases and bags. I didn't say anything, because a good daughter "is seen but not heard." At the last minute, they threw my luggage into the Bedford, on top of the tubes, cables, male and female plugs, outlets, and other devices for measuring voltage, in those days going unused. My mother brushed my hair until I winced, as always, and said, "Today you're wearing this outfit. You're going to the *Metrópole*."

I got into the pickup with orders not to get dirty; not that they had to say as much though - I knew not to ever get dirty. As if I had ever had any other directive in that matter since birth. That's why I always *did* get dirty - as a matter of principle and priority.

On the twenty-something-eth day of some month or another, the three of us got into the Bedford in silence - I was in the middle, the two of them on either side - and they drove me to the airport, on the dirt road past the limit of Matola Nova: Bairro Salazar. My father called it simply "Bairro Salazar."

The hurried ride left red dirt in our throats. We were late.

I think that it was the last time that I sat between them.

In that silence, I went over my notes.

I was the carrier of a message; I carried with me the truth. Their truth.

My truth as well, but they would never imagine that I could have a truth that was solely mine, outside of their shadows.

And I went over my notes.

30.

My father drove the white Bedford down the unpaved road that crossed all of Matola Nova until we reached the paved one that connected Lourenço Marques to Matola Velha, further down. This time I wasn't wearing white. He was driving way too fast, because we were late for the flight. I was going to Portugal on that day. The flight was at the end of the afternoon, and everyone knew that you needed a few good hours to take care of all of the customs procedures. The showing of documents. The searching of luggage. Going through the metal detector, getting frisked.

I could hear the thudding of the electric wires back in the flatbed, shaken by the holes in the road - back there, back in the place that I was leaving behind, behind. We passed by the

cantina on our right side, where some negros waited for lifts and sold all kind of stuff, from firewood to mounds of coal, chickens, goats, *capulanas*, and roots to be chewed on. It was there that I used to ask to buy bottles of Laurentina or 2M beer or Seven Up, or ice cubes or sulfur or olive oil, or whatever else my mother had forgotten and needed to have, because my father wasn't around. I could take my shoes off in the secrecy of the bush and go stealthily, shoeless, to see if I could get my feet to be like those of the negros, open-toed and hard-soled, roughed up. And I would swagger like a preta, to see what it was like to be one. And the black girls would pass by me and laugh, the guys too. They'd tell me things that I didn't understand, laughing, the branca, the branca, the electrician's little branca. And I would laugh too. They had noticed me. I looked like them. They had laughed. I went barefoot. And I wasn't supposed to.

We were passing that place, halfway to our destination.

As it raced along the pickup brought up a cloud of red dust that fell upon the pretos' kinky hair and their skin, turning them unworldly-looking - into forbidden, intense, and alien beings. So mysterious. I know that I wasn't wearing white, because it was the day of my departure for Portugal and I am sure that I arrived in Lisbon in navy blue terylene pants. And it was next to the cantina, that cantina, where my father had to go back. He had forgotten something that was supposed to go in my luggage. My aunt's emerald ring, that I would have to wear on my middle finger when going through customs; it was really big on me, so they tied some twine around it to make it fit. It was still too big on me, though; it was made of white gold with stones that I considered tacky; I had my own ideas about how an emerald should be. My aunt, when she herself would return to Portugal, wouldn't have enough fingers for her rings, and that's why she was giving them out.

That vexed me. Not the ring. The turning around. Losing twenty minutes. I would wear whatever they told me to, put whatever rings on my fingers that they handed me. I'd even swallow them if they asked me to, or smuggle them under my boobs, as was done with paper money, silver coins, and legitimately precious stones. I just wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible.

I'd been happy to find out that in the final decision about my future, my departure had won. Had there been a decision? It didn't matter. Just that I would be going on the first flight available. Any reason would do: school, security, my virginity...just to get out of there. To go. Quickly. Like a war criminal, I wanted to turn my back on all that schizophrenia that would never let me be who I really was or live the way that they did. I needed an identity. A grammar. What's more, to present these things fearlessly. I am this, OK, I am this, like this, now, look, deal with it.

They would dress me all in white and send me off to walk that damn black and humid earth that sizzled under my feet. Or which was so red that my shoes, varnished or of leather, would become watercolored in light blood. There was no way to save my body from the stains of the earth yet it was forbidden for me to be stained by it. There was no way for me to free myself from the necessity of staying immaculately white. In my memories, I am always dressed in white, worried about not getting dirty. The white dress that I didn't wear on that day is the loudest metaphor for my life as a little colona: a white in white, clinging to her skirt that she couldn't get dirty, looking at her white shoes that she couldn't get dusty. And that's how I see myself, in the cabin of the white Bedford, shrunken under my clothes, worried about the dust coming in through the windows.

On the driver's side, my father: You're going to my homeland. You're going to like it. Ask your grandmother to make you *toucinho entremeado com couve branco* - bacon with white kale. On the other side, my mother: Don't get dirty. Brush your hair. Your hair's always unbrushed. Be careful that nothing arrives broken. Keep an eye on your godmother's ring.

Yeah, I would look after everything. Who did I hand my godmother's ring over to?

It was November and really hot and I was wearing a white crepe dress. I couldn't get dirty. All of that seems certain, but it's a lie. I was dressed in blue.

Hurry now, to the airport. The colonial life was impossible. Either you were a colonizer or were colonized. There was no in-between there, unless you wanted to go insane.

31.

Already late at night, there outside, men riding camels made their way towards the plane to offer technical assistance. I see them passing underneath the wing. Some of them stop.

It's an unusual sight, thus strange. It's night, and a particularly lonely night. The first night that nobody told me to turn off the light. The first night that I start on the path towards being the woman writing these words. The same woman, still a girl, the same hair and light-colored eyes dulled by myopia, the same lined hands, the same legs fat in the thighs that keep tearing pants. The same person. I don't know how to explain it better: the same person.

At night, the slow, light shapes of the camels ridden by turbaned men. All around me, an apocalyptic darkness. No light whatsoever. That was thirty-some years ago.

It's the airport in Dakar. We have just made a stop in Senegal for technical reasons. We don't get off the plane, we cannot stand up or even unbuckle our seatbelts.

I remember that it was Senegal because at the time I thought that that was where margarine came from. There was a really good margarine that came from Senegal and we would

spread it on our bread. I don't remember if we stopped in Johannesburg or in Luanda. We may have. I only remember the margarine from Senegal, and the turbaned men on their camels, surrounded by the deepest darkness.

I tell the stewardess that I need to look for my godmother's emerald ring, the one that I had on this finger, but fell off in a moment of forgetfulness when I didn't notice whatsoever, and it must have rolled either forward or back. She tells me that I cannot get up. I am desperate, It's an emerald ring that doesn't belong to me, I have to bring it to someone, later, I don't know when, it's too big on me, it fell, I need to get up and look for it. She tells me no. Only when we arrive in Lisbon. I have to be patient.

The way that we looked at our hands when we were ten years old, and the way that we look at them now - I'm looking at my hands right now - doesn't change. The same hands. How could they have aged and still be the same? The nails are the same. The knuckles. The same eyes. The same thought, when we look, with the same eyes, at the same hands.

Same goes for how one reacts to events, the expression of feelings, like happiness, but more so fear, which also don't change much over time. As of a certain age, early on in childhood, we already are who we are, the same ones who will forever haunt us.

I don't remember flying over Lourenço Marques. I didn't see the Baía, Delagoa Bay, for the last time. That's not true. I did see something! The vast savannah below, while the plane was taking off. The hot savannah. Nothing else.

When we left, at the very end of the afternoon, Lourenço Marques was left behind the sunset, very sweet, very ripe, but already far when we ascended; it was the place where I would never return - I knew it - now I had to prepare myself to be a woman, to start a new life, to do

things right. I knew that this was hard. That I was marked by a wide, invisible solitude. I didn't know how it had happened nor why.

I now know how and why, today, because I recognize that my thoughts are following the same trajectory, shaped by the same mold. Because I am the same. I remember how I used to think.

Now I am here, although I am still there. The truth is, all of the past, present, and future blended together there, on that trip, and I can only speak of it using borderline words, transitional words, ones stained and dual, that were formed at that time.

In the airport at Lourenço Marques, in the moments leading up to my going through customs, I remember a glass door. Once its threshold was crossed, there was no return.

I could see those that had gone through, now split up into lines. We had arrived late, because my father had forgotten my godmother's ring, the one that I lost on the plane, and it was still necessary to greet all of those brancos who had come to bid farewell to the electrician's daughter, bringing messages for me to carry, letters, little packages that I was to stick in my carry-on baggage, instructions on how I was to tell them everything in the *Metrópole*, the same rigmarole, You tell them about everything that they've done to us, tell them that we've lost everything, that our money isn't worth anything, that there's nothing to eat, that they killed the Monteiros, that Sousa's daughter and her husband are in jail, tell them that we're about to leave. Tell them that they're all killing each other here. That they don't want to work and that they'll soon starve to death. That Africa without white people is doomed. They'll cry and wail so much for us!

But go now, we'll be together again soon there and we'll talk. We'll go after you. Go now, it's late already, go, go, and in that instant in which everything is lost, at that point of no return, as I walk through that glass door, after the formal kisses, a strange feeling that I cannot control, an emptiness, an I'll-never-come-back, something lost, an emptiness, and that love for my father - so hidden, so evident - that hurls me into his arms against my will, like a bullet cutting through him that leaves him bloodless...me, crying uncontrollably, not able to let go of his body, his huge arms, his huge body, his huge hands, his huge flesh which I kiss, for I don't want to let go. And I go back, crying, crying, hugging any part of his sacred body that I can get at, crying, crying out for him, scratching him with love, as if the world were ending, and had already ended...then my mother, who shook me, embarrassed, and I, embarrassed, so many people, Don't cry, honey, look at all these people, don't cry, honey, you've got to go, it's already late, and my father's sweet, acidic, sweaty body, my father's beloved body, his sweet and white shirt, acidic, sweaty, soaked by the tears that I couldn't understand nor could I control. Go now, you've got to go, and he threw me through the glass door, and I turned around to see his sorrowful face, now on the other side, both of his hands palmed against the glass, his smile mixed with tears. His hands, the same as my hands. These, in the flesh, that now write this sentence. The very same.

32.

“There in the *Metrópole* they're now all buddy-buddy with the pretos! But they'll have to see who they really are, and what they gave us in exchange for everything that we buried here, and was ours; this city, our work, their mealticket. And it's through you that they'll know. You have to tell them. Tell everyone.”

When I got out of the pickup, at the airport in Lourenço Marques, and for the last time, I was dressed from head to toe in blood. It was red earth, but the truth is that it was blood that was set loose during my flight, flown at night out of shame, not to allow sleep. In shame, in silence.

“Stick your godmother’s emerald ring on your finger. If they ask, tell them that it’s yours.”

“Say that we’re coming soon, that your father is going to set up an electrician’s workshop...look for cheap places to rent there...tell them that we were left with nothing, that we’re starting from scratch.”

The airport was full: the racket of things and people, the smell of sweat, anxiety, fear, loss. Messages, letters, little objects for somebody. “Don’t forget what you have to tell them. You’re a woman now. You are now a woman. It’s all in your hands.”

“Be brave. Don’t forget to tell the truth!”

And without a word, inert, ignoring them, ignoring their truth, I cried.

I cried because I had reached the end, the moment we sense that we’ll never again return to any purple, to any orange, to the smell and life of those colors...I cried while hugging my father, once more, hugging him, and then...“don’t forget, honey; you’re going to study to become a woman”; and having gone back to my father’s arms, to cry what only he could know I was crying for, I said goodbye to him forever...or until another life.

And at that moment there was a time vacuum in which we weren’t people, we were without sin or pleasure - nothing human; only us - I smelled the scent of his sweaty flesh from afar, acidic and sweet, which was mine too, the smell of his shoulders and face, a hug that we could never break free from; still to this day, and nowhere, because it wasn’t just a hug, but an invisible, mute link, that we’ve kept up and to which I’ve been loyal even though I soon later

betrayed him. All that I care about is being loyal to him and doing justice to that time vacuum in which we weren't human, but just the two of us, each of the other, timeless.

When we were reunited, a decade later, we had already excessively bade farewell to each other. Why go over it all again if our time had really ended?

It was the final hour, the last minute, and he pushed me through the door to the boarding area. I looked back, before entering, crying; I had to go, because I carried the emerald ring, the letters, the packages, the messages about the truth. I had to go.

I picked up my little carry-on bag, my beige *necessaire* - because all women needed a *necessaire*, and I, they said, was now a woman. I turned around, stopped crying, and left.

I'm still looking at them. I'm still turned around. On the other side of the glass, together, waving, they're still there. Far away, there. On the other side, there. My mother in a dark blue dress with white embroidery on the collar. My father in a white shirt stained with dust, his pants underneath his belly as it hangs over them. Unkempt. Colonially tanned. His red-eyed smile. His crying smile. His identical hands to mine stuck to the door's glass.

When the plane reached cruising altitude there was a deep silence inside the cabin as we flew over the Bay of Lourenço Marques and the suburbs, the huts, the farmlands, the savannah that I saw as we ascended.

In silence, but in an even deeper silence, because I was finally a woman, I started to cry again for what I had lost and for how much I'd have to pay. The debt of others that would befall me.

I never delivered the message that I carried.

33.

The lights go out inside the aircraft. There are still hours left before we'll land in Lisbon. We can rest our heavy colonial baggage, that is if we can manage to close our eyes for a few fleeting moments.

I don't know her. She's a dark woman, bronzed, tall, imposing. She wears a white twill tailored suit, very tight-fitting. She wears huge, dark, white-framed glasses.

Lounging on a white loveseat, she lets her bust sag carelessly, half-opening her legs in front of enormous bay windows as a happy breeze of spring blows through. Translucent curtains of fine white cotton flutter like those of a seaside beach house.

Dark hands, with their impeccable white nails. Elbows merely resting on the arms of the loveseat. Like someone offering herself to receive an invisible gift.

I've just come in from far away, from somewhere that I've always been. I enter the immense white room and take in her profile. Children run from one side to the other, all around, noisy, in disarray. I don't know them. The woman, like an turned-off robot, doesn't stir, doesn't startle.

The voice of another woman, who is crossing the room in a hurry, carrying at her waist a bundle of laundry, informs me indifferently, "This is your father's daughter." I hear this and mentally correct her at once, This is your father's *other* daughter. I remember my father's never-confessed infidelities and I add, only to myself, "Maybe!" Activated by the voice that passed through the room, the majestic woman rises, smooths her skirt before standing upright, turns towards me and extends her arm, smiling, looking at me over her glasses. She's so damn beautiful.

She's a huge woman, whole, with long and full hair, long, shapely legs, like a Miss pageant contestant, like Ana Paula Almeida, like Riquita...I feel insignificant before the sensual splendor of this daughter of my father.

As soon as she extends her arm to me, the lapels of her jacket - unbuttoned, but still up against her chest - open up completely and her torso is exposed: I see her naked from the waist up. She extends her arm to me, but I cannot respond with my own, because now I see only that naked spot leading up to her pubis that her skirt - now fallen away - no longer covers. Hers is a sculpted beauty, of marble: her ripe and full breasts, pointed in my direction like arrows, the nipples small and hard, a brown that's almost pink; her washboard abs flexing under her flat belly as she moves; the perfect curve of her hips. And, as if her awareness of such majesty were her license to suddenly turn rather godlike, all of her skin sparkles in bronzed, gilded light. A fine layer of silvery dust covers her neck, breasts, abdomen, belly, hips, every bit of her glorious skin. It paints her. It clothes her nudity. And such nudity is a treasure. She keeps her arm extended in my direction. She keeps smiling, looking at me over her glasses, which she has still not taken off. She wants to be my friend, even though she hasn't said so. She's going to say so now. We haven't exchanged a word. But she's going to talk now.

I am afraid. I am very afraid of my father's daughter.

And then we arrive in Lisbon.

34.

I had been going around robbing pretos. Was I now expecting the brancos to wash my tootsies in rosewater?!

This wasn't Africa!

“Ah, you don’t like this offal and rice? You went around robbing pretos and now you think that we should serve you prawns on a golden platter!”

One doesn’t say anything. One lowers one’s eyes. It’s a lie and it’s the truth, but both require a voice that we cannot provide them. It’s too soon. I was still at the root of the truth. It was still inside me, moist, growing, eating earth, awaiting earth.

Everybody owns an undisputable truth. There’s nothing to be done about that. Imprisoned by our absolute certainty, none of us will admit to a lie that has sheltered us, allowed us to walk without guilt or simply to walk. That has allowed us to sleep, get up, eat, work. To keep going. There are innocent-innocents and guilty-innocents. There are as many victims among the innocent-innocents as there are among the guilty-innocents. There are victim-victims and guilty-victims. Among the victims there are executioners.

A long time goes by before we have a voice, before we have paid -willingly or not -the debt that we believe we owe; before we can spit on our obligations and honor and fidelity, those filthy ropes, so forced upon us. Before we can stop caring that we are mere dogs, outcasts by blood and by breed. Before we can lose faith and courtesy. Everything.

35.

My father had a big, sweaty face, and, depending on the day, one either filled with hate or with love. Though I would have preferred the days filled with love, I had to put up with the ones filled with hate. When we love someone and they degrade us at the same time, and we cannot flee, we confront, face-to-face, love and hate, and we don’t turn away from that face; we feel the spit landing on our lips, our eyes, and we listen until the end, without blinking, without a twitch of a muscle that might be misinterpreted. We cannot flee. That becomes certain. A high-security prison inside of which we know that we have to persevere and survive.

My father was voracious, he vociferated and mangled all of the feelings that he managed to express, and then some, with an expressivity so brutal that it would make you dizzy.

When we're young, we believe in that love or hate because that's the face of whom we love. There's nobody else, since we're delivered to the hands of those who will raise us and say that we're theirs. And we are. But it costs a lot to be somebody's to whom a limitless loyalty is owed.

I took in all of my father's hateful speeches. I listened to them at two centimeters from my face. I felt the spit of his hate, which costs more than the spit of love, and I faced, eye-to-eye, his rage, his frustration, his ever-so-vile ideology. And, hearing this, I never said anything, not even a nod of assent, not the twitch of a muscle, while I, every part of me, said, "No."

I was afraid of my father. That he would beat me with his bear claws, that he would yell at me, that he would tell me, You're not my daughter, because my daughter doesn't like pretos, doesn't go out with pretos, doesn't dream about pretos. There would be such a great rage inside of him, in such friendly consort with the love that he could offer me from one moment to the next.

But he never got a peep out of me. He never heard from my lips, a You're-right, a Yes-indeed, a Sure. At the most, an I-understand, in response to Do you understand? Because he could force me to sit down, shut up and listen, to subject me to both public and private sessions on racist ideology, on breeding, but he could not convince me of the advantages of racism, nor of hate.

My father never succeeded in altering who I was and what I thought; he wasn't capable of molding my thoughts. I got away from him. He had repeated to me so many times his favorite parable, the one about Saint Martin, the one who shares his coat. So I, having absorbed his very

generous message, stood by as he then dispensed his sermon on the topic of the pretos. I could have listened to him ramble and rage at the top of his lungs or through a loudspeaker for twenty-four hours a day like a prisoner at Guantanamo without moving a centimeter. Because what I thought, I thought with an immovable certainty.

It wasn't easy being the daughter of the electrician. Many times I dreamt of the electrician dying in various ways, leaving me free to think, to exist without fear. To respond to him.

And one day he really died, without us having completely made peace, without me being completely grown up and without him having been completely vanquished, and now he's sitting here, two centimeters away from my face, reading me, and I, honestly, really just want to tell him that we lived in a time that was, in all its misfit, unjust confusion, too short for our love. That that's what happened to us: a time, a space, a chessboard misbuilt for love.

And that I betrayed him so that we could lift our heads up.

36.

TAP flight Maputo-Lisbon, via Senegal.

I remember the day that I disembarked, by myself, from the airplane in Lisbon, at six in the morning on a day at the end of November in 1975. It was very cold and I was freezing. But that was not the coldest day of the Winter of 75; if I recall, that season was particularly harsh.

Having made it through customs, bundled up in the lettuce green wool jacket that had belonged to my godmother in the '50s and had been hurriedly tailored to my body, I went down a long, curved corridor that took me to people that I didn't know but were nevertheless waiting for me - my parents' family.

On the following Carnaval, my uncle painted his face like a clown and wore my wool jacket, my yellow *LaFinesse* pants, and went around playing the trumpet, drunk, in the middle of the street. What a merrymaker! He really pulled off the clown look dressed like that!

In Portugal, early on I got used to being the butt of jokes, either because I was a *retornada* or because I dressed in red or purple. But my idea of justice was encased in an Our Father. If he absolved me of sin, I could make it past throngs of accusers unscathed. Nothing could bring me down.

Nevertheless, my heart went filling up on the mockery that I was exposed to, and it opened itself up to it completely.

At some point in my youth, people would tell me that I was out of control. That I was a combat vehicle, a tornado, if you will.

Then came an afternoon when I was obliged to tell the truth: “I lost everything but my number 1 pencil.”

I breathed in deep, so much that my chest hurt.

37.

It was November and I had just arrived.

In the neighborhood of Caldas da Rainha, in 1975, to get to school you had to cross a black street flanked by asphalt on its sides, with no sidewalk: a tunnel of buildings dirtied by the years on either side of the way. It was a dark gray street from start to end.

Every day, at the time I passed through it, it was still foggy or smoky or just mired in cold. The atmosphere was thick and I went through it as if I were a knife. I ran into some workers in a hurry, slouching from the early hour and their sleepiness, exhaustion, and rush.

They walked quickly and with little steps, with their eyes on the ground, wearing jackets and gray, black, or brown checkered farm caps, and dark overalls. I never saw any of their faces.

On the right side of the way, at the start of the street, a wide door opened, displaying the insides of a workshop. It wasn't a door, more like the entrance to a sewer: Inside, it was humid, black-walled, and covered with old grease. When I passed in front of the gate, three short guys with hands and clothes dirty from work, yelled sexual comments at me which forced me to not hear them. I shrugged my neck into my shoulders and covered my ears, closed my eyes, and closed myself up and, even really not wanting to, I heard tits, cunt, ass, words adorned with adverbs or verbs of the worst kind of language. Insults.

I was 12, almost 13, and they insulted me for showing the first stages of tits, cunt, and ass, though I didn't understand why they were degrading me. They insulted me for being a woman. That was enough.

There was no other way to school. It was necessary to go that way every day.

My grandmother was a very white and little old lady who always dressed in black. When I described to her how the guys at the garage acted, she told me that that's how things were, that I shouldn't respond, that women of virtue had deaf ears.

I don't know if that black street still exists. In Portugal, everything takes a long time to change.

38.

The *Metrópole* was dirty, ugly, pale, and frozen. The Portuguese from there were small-minded, stupid, backwards little gossips. Ugly, chap-lipped, and goosebumped, all bent out of shape from the cold and all the lard and kale that they ate. What a sorry lot. They got off on jeering at us, getting in our faces about how hard it must be - and it was - now that we didn't

have *pretos* to wash our feet and asses, that now we had to work, we lazy pieces of shit...said those whose lives were never on the brink, who never knew what it was like to build a life and then lose it. Those sad little resigned people. Because they really knew what the *pretos* were like, right? And what we were and what we had just gone through? Motherfucking bastards. They were insignificant little turds, if I were being honest, if I had the chance to tell the truth. Dim-witted and slow, with their savings accounts at *Montepio*, sick in the eyes from looking at what they saw as people who had come to rob what little they had, those *retornados*, all high and mighty like princes who lost their thrones and now have to reclaim it, they figure, ho ho! Because nothing stirs up desire like losing it all, and lose they have, big time. So ugly, so poor in spirit these Portuguese who never left, these Portuguese of Portugal, giddy on their big-bottled wine. Ugly, gloomy, poor, without light in their eyes or in their hands. Small.

39.

My father was to escape from rotting in a FRELIMO prison for having publicly affirmed that Samora Machel was nothing but a bloody nurse's assistant. Knowing my father, I believe that he probably added some other little gems, like "fucking *preto*", or worse.

This happened in '78. I had been in Portugal for three years.

He left prison unrecognizable and silent, after a long and anguished intervention by my mother, who knew somebody who was somebody's friend who had some business with Graça Machel, to whom letters were written asking for clemency. The issue ended up being resolved in no small part because my father was never even tried. But the topic of his imprisonment was taboo in my family. He never spoke to us about what went on in there, and we were embarrassed to ask, imagining the worst. The shadow of the unknown is always vast. My father was an

extroverted braggart but he never bragged about his heroic deeds of that phase, not even a word, so it's likely that there weren't any such deeds. That things there did not go well.

One day in the '90s, after he had been back in Portugal for some time, it came up that I was disgusted by spiders. He bragged about the time that he woke up on the concrete floor of the prison with a giant, nasty bug weighing down on his shoulder, which he plucked out of his naked skin with one of his big, familiar mitts, grabbing the pretend monster and throwing it away. He laughed. He was very courageous like that, which we already knew. We weren't surprised. Then I asked him how the amenities were in there, how they took baths, and he answered that the guards would take them "down to the river", referring to the Zambezi, where they would lather up and wash only meters away from crocodiles. Nothing else. The topic went dead after that.

I remember my father's skin, very smooth and humid. I remember his shoulder, where a nasty bug must have crawled.

Knowing my father, I am sure that he must have called them fucking pretos, all of them, and every day, that he must have taken brutal, merciless beatings, non-stop. Knowing my father, and loving him, despite everything, it pains me to imagine him being punched, humiliated, bent over by those he had bent over before. Sleeping on the concrete floor, thrown in with the common crooks.

For the brancos who decided to stay in the ex-colonies after independence, in solidarity with the liberation movements or for not having any other choice - or not wanting to have another choice - life wasn't easy. The *retornados*, having for the most part returned to Portugal in dire straits and empty-handed, made out much better. The brancos who stayed in Africa became easy targets of revenge. They were suspect. Their movements and words were observed by the institutions,

by the neighborhood committees, by the neighbors. They had to be careful with what they said and did. Any slip-up would be considered an act of colonialism, and for this there would be no mercy; its cost was high. They were constantly denounced.

40.

My body was a war zone that engulfed all other warfare. My body battled against itself, body-to-body, but my father's was big, peaceful, and meaty. My father's body was his and it was worth its weight. His body was made of the same stuff as mine, except his wasn't at war with itself. Round, soft, and well-worn, my father's body was given to laughter, to tickles, and to my own body.

My father had white and pinkish feet, flaky and brittle; he said that it was from the *filária* worms, so I shouldn't try to pull the skin off. My mother wouldn't let me go barefoot because of these worms, which caused great itching, and called for the skin to be burned, but with ice, to the bone. My father had scales on his feet like layers of pastry, which I always wanted to pull off and eat. My father's flesh was sweet. His skin warm and dark.

His feet were shapely and full, their toes finely made, like a Renaissance sculpture, their nails round, transparent, and shiny. During Sunday siestas, while my parents napped and I had nothing to do - other than play with Piloto, whom my aunt poisoned in a village in Estremadura years later, or with our male cats, who stayed behind in Lourenço Marques, or rather, Maputo, whom I would watch as they went after the females and were, for certain, caught, killed, and eaten like rabbits by the starving *pretalhada*, my mother said, adding that the *pretalhada* would pay dearly for what they had done to the brancos - I would play with my father's feet as I stretched out in the bed.

My aunt poisoned my Piloto in April of 1978 and then blamed the neighbors. It was during the Easter holidays. I cradled my dead dog. I had never had a dead body up against mine before. His eyes were open and glassy, his back legs all twisted, almost touching his hard, cold snout. I took him in my arms, held him close, and cried my guilt, pain, loss, impotence, and abandonment over his innocent body. I buried him underneath a walnut tree there at my uncle's farm. Later on, they chopped down the tree. My aunt and uncle always looked at me with the same kind of emotion that they beheld an appliance. What good did a dog do? And who cared about a dog brought back by a *retornada* who had robbed blacks and then been given the privilege of bringing her dog overseas, that is to say, here to Portugal? If there was no room for the *retornados* than there was even less for their dogs.

My father rubbed his feet together, squeezed them tightly, and laughed. I couldn't break them apart as I played around with them. My father's feet smelled like dog fur. It was a dry and sweet smell. Dogs smell like earth and bread. That's right; his feet smelled like bread, earth and bread, and I wanted to tickle them so badly and bite them, and he laughed and said, Let your daddy go, little girl, and then I laughed, and did it even more, and then my mother would say, Let your father go, *rapariga*, but I ignored her, settle down, kid, go to bed, *rapariga*.

My mother's body was geometrical and dry. I wasn't allowed to touch it. The only thing that interested me about my mother's body was her big, soft chest. What a pleasure it would be to be able to manhandle her, to breastfeed, to suck all over the place. To really fondle her. She would shake me, Cut it out. Touching my mother was to do something inappropriate. My father's body, on the other hand, was solid, round, available, and seemed like a hill covered with bushes and

vegetation into which I could venture, and feel, smell, pinch, bite. I pulled on his body hair and his nails.

My father's legs had such a harmonious curve to them, such a full-crested wave. I would pretend to chomp on them and he would play-yell, Oh, oh! Stop it little girl! Such lovely legs he had. White. Not too muscly nor fat, though he was fat. Both long and well-shaped. He looked good in shorts. His legs were almost feminine. He would poke me, smiling, full of the same lack of modesty that I know so well, Wouldn't you like to have legs as nice as mine?! You would, wouldn't you?! Mine are going to be shown to some ladies I know! He said this many times, when he was all dressed up, I'm going show myself to all the ladies. And I thought that he was kidding. My father's legs, what a scream.

My father's belly would droop down when he would lie on his side. What solemnity. What regal demeanor, that belly thus drooped. I had respect for it. He would protect it with his arms, along with his crotch, though the latter never interested me much. When he would lie on his side, while he was wearing wide shorts, it was possible to catch a glimpse of certain striking outlines. I would avert my gaze out of shame and fear and disgust. The intimate parts of my father were a dark and soft stain. What a nasty visual!

I remember him rubbing his stubbly face up against mine, against my lips. Go shave, dad! I already did! You wish you had such soft baby skin, don't you? Don't you?

It was soft indeed. I remember the smell of the sweat on his neck. Man sweat. Thick. From the large mass that was his body, so sturdy, so certain. Sitting next to him, on his lap, piggyback. My father's body was a throne. My father's body was good.

What remains of it is packed into a drawer in the Feijó cemetery. As for what's left of what belonged to him, I couldn't find a place to put it. It didn't fit.

41.

My mother thinks that she's going to die and she doesn't want to leave me alone in the world. That's why she tracked her down. I want to be alone in the world. That way I don't have to deal with any more of the brutal words that I had to listen to my whole life without being able to say anything back, exactly what I fled from when I took control of my own life and became my own woman.

My mother gave her my number. She really wanted to talk to me. She had lost track of me. She missed the lost little girl: me. Within twenty minutes, the past smacked me right square in the face.

People don't change. When we meet them again, many years later, we realize why we had gotten away from them.

"The negros, those bastards, those motherfuckers. I came from there a year ago. I never let them disrespect me. They called me mommy, auntie, and I would tell them, I'm not your mother; I'm not a whore. I'm not your auntie either, you bastard. And don't come after me, because I'm white and a foreigner and I'll call the police on you, you fucking kaffir."

I heard this my whole life. Tell me about the silky-smooth Portuguese brand of colonialism. Tell me that old wives' tale.

People don't change. A white person who lived under colonialism will be a white person that lived under colonialism until the day they die. And all of the truth that I tell here is, to them, a betrayal. These words, a betrayal. An affront to my father's memory, but my father's memory is our problem. Both of us can take care of it.

The butchers were so kind that when they killed a goat they would give the guts to the pretos. The intestines. The skin. They would remunerate their slave labor with beatings plus some flour, eaten out of their hands, those black pigs; and if they made them work seven days a week without a schedule, it was only what was proper treatment, what the lazy bums needed. A favor that the white man did for them. To civilize the monkeys.

And now, in Maputo, there's only a lack of respect. "We're what's missing there. They miss us. Whites are constantly attacked. In the streets. At home. They robbed us of everything, the kaffirs. And they ruined that country. They burned it down."

42.

The young man was in front of me in the checkout line. He had a package of cookies and some chocolates and was dressed up like a naval officer. A black uniform with a white cap, very well put together, very noble. High up on his left jacket sleeve on an embroidered patch rimmed with gold read the word "Moçambique". I immediately locked my attention on him. I had the urge to call him and say, Hey, sorry, I just wanted to tell you that I'm from Mozambique too. But I didn't. It would have been ridiculous. Why would he care about that? That there was a land inside of me from which I've been uprooted. Perhaps him too. And then what?! Next I thought that maybe that was his last name. That the guy was named Tiago Moçambique like some guys are named José Portugal. He went off in the direction of Alfeite and I followed him, admiring his poise.

The displaced, like me, are people who could never return to the place where they were born, who have cut off all legal ties to it, though not sentimental ones. They are unwanted in the countries where they were born, because their presence brings bad memories.

In the land where I was born I would always be the *colono*'s daughter. I would always be tainted. And, more than likely, I would be exposed to acts of retaliation. But the land where I was born exists inside of me like a stain that is impossible to erase. I stalk naval officers with the word "Moçambique" written on their jacket sleeves!

A few decades have passed over the girl who would open the door on little barefoot, shabby, undernourished, half-dozen-year-old black kids asking for work, and she would call her mother. There was no work. I knew that there wasn't any. Nevertheless, I would call her. I always had some hope that all of a sudden there would be some grass to pull, or a coin, some bread. Sometimes my mother would be in a good mood. Sometimes she felt sorry for the kids.

They and I, we didn't speak the same language. Just a few loose words. I would look at them a lot, and them at me. For example, right now I'm looking at them through time, and there's a perplexity in their eyes, an emptiness, a hunger, and in mine, an impotence, an incomprehension that cannot be explained by reason. Mozambique is that frozen image of a little girl in the sun, with her blond locks impeccably brushed, in front of a little black girl covered in dust, almost naked, undernourished, in a silence in which neither of us knows what to say, looking at each other on the same side and on opposing sides of justice, of good and bad, of survival.

A displaced person such as myself is also a statue of guilt. And the guilt, the guilt, the guilt that we let grow and writhe around inside of us like a colorless vine, ties us to silence, to solitude, to insoluble exile.

43.

Night fell upon all things born of the earth, that touch the earth, that are confined by their own limits. You are on the earth. I mean, you make do upon it. You stretched out your body to full length amid the bushes, still, feeling the itch of the insects that you let climb up your arms, breathing in the overwhelming scent of the ground, now inert, the acrid smell of the leaves that the nip of the night has moistened. That's what you wanted. This smell. You sit down. You smile. It's exactly as you imagined it. Multicolored dyes glow between the branches of the trees, illuminating the indistinct figures of the silent birds. Flashes of light pop up and fizzle in the darkness, floating like dragonflies. Slight noises. Wings. A bird hoots. The breeze picks up some leaves. Leaves rustle against each other. The weight of paws breaks branches. Wild dogs spot you. Those that, like you, are not well defined, neither dogs nor wolves. They don't bark at you. The dogs never barked at you. You sniff their genitals. Yes, they're of your breed. Good company. You lick them on their snouts. You can lick. You could sleep snuggled up with the pack if you wanted to. The sweet smell of sleep, of heat. So cozy. You don't care about the earth in your hair or under your nails. You rub yourself upon it. You laugh. You hear your laugh disturb the night. Such silence. Such tenderness. Everything is true and you bite into the earth. Lick it against the roof of your mouth. Of course you remember this taste. You knew that you'd remember this taste. All soil has the exact same aftertaste of clay mixed with ground cow's bone. The earth is sweet. And now you can go back up into trees. The lemon tree in your old backyard in Matola. You feel light. Perhaps you can fly, as you flew before. You had missed it. You confess to yourself that you'd missed that. Freedom.

A long night fell, and the night becomes your day. You'll get used to it. A life has many lives, as you know. It's the first night that you've ever slept in the street. That you've ever not

had a bed. You're euphoric. How's your first night going to be? To what house will you return?
How long will you remain over the hole where your past lies rotting? You shouldn't have
stepped upon your grave. Where are you going? Where are you going now?

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