

III.2 Cape Verde: the Creation of a Creole Literature

Taberna à beira-mar

Uma luzinha distante
E um farol cuspidor luz
Na cara negra da noite

Tudo é salgado e saudoso

Ventos com ondas às costas
Fazem tremer a taberna
Que é um navio ancorado.

Amor intenso e brutal
Entre navalhas abertas
E o desleixo
De uma rameira entre os braços.

Andam no ar desesperos
Em densos rolos de fumo.

Garrafas, copos, garrafas...
-Ai! A sede do marinheiro...

Tatuagens picando a pele
Gritam a dor e a bravura
Das aventuras nos portos.

Gente de todas as raças,
Gente sem pátria e sem nome
- Apenas gente do mar
Com voz de sal e de vento
E barcos nos olhos líquidos.

Entram o Tédio e a Saudade
Mordendo velhos cachimbos...
Entram e saem depois
Levando, aos tombos, um bêbedo.

Baralhos, mesas e bancos,
Garrafas, copos, garrafas
E a cara do taberneiro
Instigam a velhas revoltas.

E tudo cheio de vícios,
E tudo cheio de sono
E tudo cheio de mar!

Aguinaldo Fonseca³⁶¹

“Taberna”³⁶⁰ by the sea

A little, far away light
And a lighthouse spitting light
In the black face of the night

Everything is salty and melancholic

Winds carry waves on their backs
And shake the “taberna”
Which is an anchored ship.

Intense and brutal love
Among waiting blades
And the carelessness
Of a whore in your arms.

Despair spirals in the air
In dense coils of smoke.

Bottles, glasses, bottles...
-Ah! The thirst of a sailor...

Tattoos sting skins
Screaming the pain and bravado
Of adventures in harbours.

People from all the races,
People without motherland or name
-Only people from the sea
With a voice of salt and wind
And ships in their liquid eyes.

Boredom and Nostalgia come in
Biting into old pipes...
Come in and go out afterwards
Carrying away, a stumbling drunkard.

Playing-cards, tables and stools,
Bottles, glasses, bottles
And the face of the barman
Instigate old rebellions.

And everything is full of vice,
And everything is sleepy
And everything is full of sea!

(my translation)

³⁶⁰ “Taberna”, in Portuguese, means “seedy, shabby bar”.

³⁶¹ *Op. cit.* Antologia da Poesia Negra de Expressão Portuguesa, Andrade, 1958.

When Portuguese and Italian settlers, with their slaves, started the colonisation (actually, peopling) of the ten islands of Cape Verde, both Europeans and Africans were de-territorialised from their cultures of origin. They were together, on a harsh landscape, materially isolated from immediate contact with other cultures and influences: both Europe and Africa were ever-present references, but discontinuous, fragmented and contaminated (by the proximity and mingling of African ways with the life-style of European sailors and settlers). Because of these circumstances, Cape Verde is the product of a clear case of cultural hybridity. On the contrary, in the continental cases (like Angola and Mozambique), strong African cultures co-existed with a minority European presence, keeping its continuity and partial integrity, in spite of contamination.

According to Isabel Caldeira³⁶², since Cape Verde was not an attractive destiny to invest in agriculture, and it did not have significant natural, mineral wealth to prey upon - though coral, salt, indigo, cotton and “urzela” became significant exportation products - it was partially left to itself, and the few white settlers and their slaves who moved to the archipelago developed their own local hybrid culture without too much control or opposition from metropolitan power. In this way, did Manjacos, Mandingas, Balantas, Papeis, Fulas and Portuguese settlers live, mix and miscegenate. Obviously, not all the islands have the same history, nor do they share the same ratio of white and black settlement and ascendancy, even if the whole of the archipelago is the product of *mestiçagem* and Creolisation (90% of the people have mixed ascendancy). For more extensive (geographical and historical) background information on the archipelago see the short summary provided as appendix II.

The first published works by Cape Verdean writers were poems that appeared in the *Almanach de Lembranças*³⁶³ (1854-1932), the available outlet for whoever had literary inclinations in the Lusophone colonies. Although the social references embedded in these poems are not Cape Verdean but rather copied from (European) romantic literature, the fact is that the local Creole of Cape Verde was thus granted “literary” status. Women poets of Cape Verde like Antónia Gertrudes Pusich, Gertrudes Ferreira Lima, Maria Luísa de Sena Barcelos and Maria Cristina Rocha were among the most faithful feminine collaborators of the *Almanach*.

The press is equally important in this first stage of the emergence of a Creole literature. The newspaper *A Voz de Cabo Verde* (1911-1919) was particularly assertive of the rights of the archipelago, pushing for a greater modernisation, better organisation and improved facilities, though all these demands are still presented within the logic of a colonial frame³⁶⁴. The “modernisation drive” as a factor to develop postcolonial awareness in Cape Verde has to be understood in the context of the rivalry between the seminar and the high school (liceu) the two local poles of higher education in the archipelago, at the turn of the century. The Catholic seminar in S. Nicolau provided a classical formation, presenting Europe as the “original” source of civilisation, via a Greco-Latin tradition. The high school

³⁶² Isabel Caldeira, “Identidade Étnica e Identidade Nacional” in *Portugal: Um Retrato Singular*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (ed.), Edições Afrontamento, Centro de Estudos Sociais, Porto, 1993.

³⁶³ The “almanaques” were a sort of popular magazine, which included relevant practical information like agricultural technical advice, schedules of trains and ships, weather forecast and new laws and rules issued by the king, with more entertaining elements like games, charades, poems and short stories. The simple *Almanach de Lembranças Luso-Brasileiro* was probably the most widely read periodical across the Portuguese speaking world of the nineteenth century. Most texts were in Portuguese but the Almanach accepted texts in Creole for publication. *Almanach de Lembranças*, anthology co-ordinated by Gerald M. Moser, Editora ALAC, Lisboa, 1993 (1854-1932).

³⁶⁴ Carlos Lopes Pereira, “A Voz de Cabo Verde”, in *África*, n^o 14, II^a série, ano 9, Lisboa, Agosto/ Setembro, 1986.

at S.Vicente was more oriented towards sciences, and it was placed in the town that was most exposed to international influences, next to the busiest harbour (the city of Mindelo). While the aesthetic perspective of those writers trained within the tradition of the seminar was classic and romantic, those that studied under the more open, and science oriented high school developed a more realist, and critical perspective. It is through the influence of this latter institution that literary modernity reached younger generations, whose works contributed to the making of a Creole literature in Cape Verde.

From a chronological perspective, the first stage in the literature of Cape Verde started at the time when printing facilities were built (1842) and it lasted until the moment *Claridade* appeared (1936). The few isolated poets that were active before³⁶⁵ the first issue of this foundational magazine are colonial poets, in the sense that they replicated the patterns of Portuguese literary fashion, without contributing to the assertion of a local Creole culture as something else, independent and different from Portugal. For example, most of the African elements are suppressed from representation in these first colonial poems, revealing a longing for a European/Lusophile identity. This alienation from the reality of one's archipelago served colonial interests, for no dangerous nationalism would emerge from such a complacent and uncritical attitude, which was also the current attitude in other colonies, in the first decades of the XXth century. At the time *Claridade* appeared (1936) it had to face censorship and the feared secret police (PIDE) and this fact explains its careful social criticism. Many other magazines that appeared after *Claridade*, like *Certeza* (1944, two issues) were not so tactful in exposing their postcolonial awareness, and the result was that number three of *Certeza* was censored and the movement was over. *Claridade* survived.

Later generations, especially the most irreverent one of the 1960s (publishing in *Seló*) was very critical of the apparent lack of anti-colonial resistance from the group of 1936. Similarly, the group of writers gathered around *Certeza*, a more openly ideologically committed magazine, voiced this same accusation against their predecessors. These accusations are undeserved. Just as a matter of awareness, mind the group of writers around *Certeza* was in its early twenties, full of energy, creativity, political ideas and...immaturity. *Claridade* was a less obvious project, with long lasting effects (as a source of literary influences), which ended up being the serious beginning of Cape Verdean literature, outliving all these other magazines.

The factor that distinguishes the work of the group of writers around *Claridade* from colonial literature is that only the former broke with the previous tendency to copy European literary traditions, inaugurating a recognisable Cape Verdean literature. The writers who started *Claridade* (Jorge Barbosa, Manuel Lopes and Baltasar Lopes) were aware of the: “*situação desastrosa, principalmente no domínio político-económico, em que o nosso arquipélago estagnava*”³⁶⁶ (“despairing situation, especially in political and economical terms, which was paralysing the archipelago”) and they translated their commitment to Cape Verde by grounding the subject matter of their writing in the archipelago. By representing the living conditions of its people and asserting its life style and habits, this team of editors expressed a self-assertive intention, in that it reveals a concern with praising and promoting local culture, distinguishing the culture of Cape Verde from Portuguese identity. This may seem a little step, but, as Baltasar Lopes points out, at the time, under censorship, things were not easy. The word “starvation”, for instance, was forbidden in print, in an archipelago that knew it only too well³⁶⁷. It is because of this context, that in the introductory note to the

³⁶⁵ These poets would be the contributors to the local press (like *A Voz de Cabo Verde*), to the few publications organised by students, at the end of high school, and the *Almanach*.

³⁶⁶ Manuel Ferreira (ed.), *Claridade*, second edition, ALAC, Lisboa, 1986: xiii.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 1986: xiv.

special edition of *Claridade*, to commemorate fifty years of its birth³⁶⁸, Baltasar Lopes rejects several accusations of complicity with the colonial regime. It is very easy to say what should have been done, twenty-five years later.

Claridade was in tune with modernist fashion, promoting a realist trend in literature, what amounts to say that, for the first time, writers were looking at Cape Verdean people and their life-style as source of inspiration for their texts. This process has been described, informally but effectively, through the expression: “*fincar os pés na terra*”³⁶⁹ (literally “bury your feet on the ground and hold on to it” meaning “stick to the land”), emphasising the new bond between the reality of Cape Verde and the critical eye of the writer, traditionally alienated from social analysis and exclusively attuned to the lyrical mode. The commitment of *Claridade* to the reality of Cape Verde influenced other literary projects and magazines, and some of the main themes addressed in the pages of this pioneer publication became a sort of “school” for younger writers. For example, you repeatedly encounter in the literature of Cape Verde references to “insularity”, the anxiety of isolation from the “big world”, the harshness of the barren land and the constant fear of droughts (with the corresponding obsession for rain). All of these themes were firstly established by the writers of *Claridade*, and they were so characteristic of the life of the islands, that current writers still go back to these themes, as the main traits in the identity of the archipelago. “*Fincar os pés na terra*” was both a thematic guideline and an aesthetic project, re-discovering the beauty and the harmony of the Creole culture of the islands. Previous colonial writers always tried to suppress the African influences, projecting a replica of Portuguese culture on to the reality of Cape Verde.

Currently, most postcolonial critics, in and outside of Cape Verde agree that *Claridade* took a clear attitude of resistance against colonisation. Publishing texts in Creole, was a linguistic manifestation of this same assertion of the otherness of the islands in relation to Portugal. The problem, to the eyes of later liberation activists is that there is not “enough nativism” in all these literary gestures. The harshest critics are the writers from the 1960s, Gabriel Mariano, Ovídio Martins or Onésimo Silveira, who were influenced by Pan-African and Négritude ideas. In their opinion, the previous generation of *Claridosos* was complacent. The irony in this case is that what Silveira considers nativist “genuine” literature was the kind of literature that would turn to African values and black culture for inspiration. Given the hybrid nature of the Creole culture of the archipelago, this gesture of recovering “pure” African roots would be as unbalanced and biased as the simple copy of European models.

Mind that during its irregular life, *Claridade* covered different periods and stages in the swelling of the postcolonial self-awareness of Cape Verde, and different issues of the magazine certainly contributed with different perspectives. In the nineties, nobody denies that *Claridade* is the foundation stone for a national Cape Verdean literature, becoming the first literary movement in the whole of the Portuguese colonies. Curiously, the other archipelago (S. Tomé e Príncipe) was the home of the first Lusophone poet, Caetano da Costa Alegre, and from this other archipelago came the most active group of college students in Lisboa (who founded the newspaper *O Negro*, and later on the famous *A Voz de África*). Geographical isolation seems to have encouraged creativity.

Several things strike you when going through old issues of *Claridade*. The sure lack of means in the Cape Verde of the 1930s, the sheer energy to do it in such a place as

³⁶⁸ *Claridade*: first three issues in 1936/1937, issues number four and five in 1947, number six in 1948, number seven in 1949, number eight 1958 and number nine 1960.

³⁶⁹ Expression used by Baltasar Lopes, one of the editors of *Claridade*, in the preface to the commemorative edition of the 50th anniversary of the first issue.

Mindelo (so remote, the only cultural centre in the small archipelago), the impact it had, and the quality of the texts, the whole contradictory and surprising picture falls short of a miracle. It is remarkable that this magazine included texts in Creole (usually poems, followed by the Portuguese translation in smaller characters) already in the 1930s, while during the postcolonial 1980s the choice of literary language still was an issue under discussion in relation to the self-assertion of local culture versus the “rival” alternative of appropriating former European influences, as it was the case with the usage of Portuguese.

After independence (1975)³⁷⁰, the government of the first republic tried to promote literary creation by organising contests and awards. However, most postcolonial literary production has been published in local newspapers and magazines, which constitute the great majority of the literary life of the islands. Committed writers keep underlining the necessity of a more systematic investment in publishing and culture³⁷¹ but the archipelago has other, more basic, priorities to attend. Still, it has got the lowest rate of illiteracy (26.5%) in the five Lusophone African countries³⁷².

In the 1980s, a significant group of writers gathered around Germano de Almeida (the most internationally acknowledged name in contemporary literature of Cape Verde) and the magazine he founded, *Ponto & Vírgula* (Mindelo, 1983 - 1987), which published 17 numbers (plus a special edition). This magazine had higher intellectual standards than the most of other Cape Verdean publications. Vera Duarte, one of the main woman poets of Cape Verde was a frequent collaborator.

Finally, another magazine that has been the meeting point of a younger generation of writers, the “second generation” after independence is *Fragmentos - Revista de Letras e Cultura* (Praia, 1987 -) and it has an open, eclectic attitude towards ideology and allegiances. Among their collaborators are Vera Duarte and Dina Salústio, the latter one of the women writers addressed further in this research. The division between these generations is not rigid and many of the older writers are still active and collaborate with younger talents.

Orlanda Amarílis is one the most frequently mentioned women authors around 1975. She is a writer with multiple facets, and, because of that feature, her work can be related to different time frames in the evolution of the literature of Cape Verde. She wrote a tale in an anthology of Portuguese women writers devoted to the fantastic³⁷³, but her three published

³⁷⁰ 1975 is the year of independence. Since 1991, Cape Verde is a multi-party democracy. It was the first of the Lusophone countries of Africa to hold multi-party elections on the 17th February 1991.

³⁷¹ Statistics from 1999, revealed a 26.5 % illiterate population for a total population of 412. 000 inhabitants. This is, by far, the lowest illiteracy rate in the whole of the five Lusophone countries of Africa. There are 54 active writers in the archipelago, six publishing houses and four bookshops. Cape Verde also has one national library, ten public libraries, three university libraries, reading centers and mobile libraries. (Corsino Tolentino, “Para um Estudo da Situação das Indústrias de Conteúdo Cultural nos Palop”, *Anais*, vol. 2, nº 2, Agosto 2000, pp: 63/ 83.)

³⁷² The first literacy campaigns in the archipelago were promoted by the church, in its attempt to spread Catholicism among non-Catholic settlers and slaves. However, according to Elisa Silva Andrade (1996), the people of Cape Verde had access to primary education around the second half of the XIXth century, when there were state primary schools, private primary schools and municipal primary schools. There were schools for boys and girls, although the number of boys attending school was higher than the number of girls. The church started the first seminar in the island of São Nicolau, in 1886. Seventy years later, Santiago (Praia) and São Vicente (Mindelo) were the two chosen islands to build state high schools, but only in 1962 and 1952, respectively. The one in Mindelo is the most active in cultural terms. There was no university in the archipelago until independence. (See, Elisa Silva Andrade, *Les Îles du Cape-Verde: de la Découverte à l'Indépendance National 1460-1975*, Éditions L' Harmattan, Paris.

³⁷³ In Clara Pinto Correia (ed.), *Fantástico no Feminino*, Lisboa, Rolim, 1985.

anthologies of short stories³⁷⁴ are more linked to Cape Verde than to Portugal, and she is dutifully acclaimed first and foremost as a writer from Cape Verde.

In the next sections of this chapter, a selected piece from the works of Orlanda Amarílis and Dina Salústio is approached through a double frame, combining a feminist and a postcolonial perspective.

Orlanda Amarílis

III.2.1 Atlantic Selves and Sea Tides...

Orlanda Amarílis has lived in Portugal (Lisboa) for several years but she was born in Santa Catarina, in the island of Santiago, Cape Verde. She grew up in the archipelago and she attended high school in the island of S. Vicente. She also lived in Angola and in India, where she finished her studies to become a school teacher. Later, she graduated in Pedagogic Sciences at the Faculty of Letters in Lisbon. During her well-travelled life, she collaborated with several magazines like *Certeza* (in Cape Verde), *África* (Lisboa), and the newspaper *O Heraldo* (in Goa, India). She got married at twenty-one, to the Portuguese writer and critic Manuel Ferreira, then in the military service in Cape Verde during the Second World war. Their first child was born in Cape Verde, but the second one was already born in Goa, India. All these journeys and moves never cut Orlanda Amarílis from her strong umbilical bond to Cape Verde, the clear base of her identity.

A reference is due to Orlanda Amarílis' husband, one of the most respected professors at the Faculty of Letters of Lisbon, celebrated writer and active editor. He published several anthologies³⁷⁵ of Lusophone poets, promoting critical discussion among the writers working in different parts of the world of literatures in Portuguese. Thus, Orlanda Amarílis always lived in contact with the "milieu" that, in Portugal, tried to promote the study of the literature of Cape Verde.

One of the basic references to understand her writing is that her displaced position in Portugal created a sort of ambivalence, marking her texts in contradictory ways, as an intimate, "insider" of Cape Verde, and at the same time, as a critical, estranged "outsider". As a Cape Verdean writer in diaspora, Orlanda Amarílis has a double perspective on the evolution of this postcolonial literature being as she is, both inspired by the local realities of the archipelago, and at the same time, as a displaced emigrant, looking back on Cape Verde from abroad, reflecting on the condition of other less privileged fellow emigrants.

Orlanda Amarílis was committed to the fight against colonialism and she was a member of the Portuguese Movement against Apartheid (MPCA). This detail is important to frame her ideological position in relation to the anti-colonial struggle and the relation between different races.

It is interesting to note that though it was written after independence, the anthology of short stories that I am going to analyse here, *Ilhéu dos Pássaros* (1983) still looks back on memories of resistance and oppression during the colonial period, but revisited from a postcolonial point of view. In terms of literary quality, one of the best features of *Ilhéu dos Pássaros* is precisely this ability to represent multiple layers of recent history, hinting at the atmosphere and issues affecting Cape Verdean society at different moments in time, seen from the angles of different social classes and with different degrees of innocence or perception, according to the changing/changed age of characters (many of the stories are re-

³⁷⁴ *Cais do Sodré té Salamansa*, (Centelha, Coimbra, 1974), *Ilhéu dos Pássaros* (Plátano, Lisboa, 1982), *A Casa dos Mastros* (ALAC, Linda-a-Velha, 1989).

³⁷⁵ See several references of the critical anthologies organised by Manuel Ferreira in the bibliography of this dissertation.

interpreted memories, when you look back with more mature eyes). The chameleon-like point of view of Orlanda Amarílis is the main factor justifying my choice for this writer, because even though she was active around 1975³⁷⁶, that is to say, at the time that a first generation of postcolonial writers published nationalist texts, she was able to keep in touch with changes in the local atmosphere, which makes it difficult to pin her down to a single literary moment. A certain distance from the regime of the first republic and its Marxist commitment was an attitude shared by many other writers who did not accept political constraints in the creation of their texts.

Atlantic Selves and Sea Tides...

The sense of identity of Cape Verde, so deeply shaped by emigration across the sea³⁷⁷, reproduces a constant wave-like flow of movement between country of origin and host country, as it fits a nation, half the population of which lives in diaspora. For those who stay in the archipelago, usually women and children, physical permanence in land is balanced by the emotional bond to people at sea (sailors, fishermen), or living across the sea (as emigrants).

According to a review by Isabel Maria Baptista Ramos to *Ilhéu dos Pássaros*³⁷⁸, the circularity of movement between leaving and returning to the archipelago of Cape Verde is one of the key themes of this anthology, a fact that links the contribution of Orlanda Amarílis to older writers of the generation of *Claridade*. Nevertheless, this thematic similarity should not be interpreted as a lack of imagination or creativity on the part of the younger writer. The right way to comprehend this repeated discussion around insularity and emigration is to recognise that these themes are basic constitutive features in the identity of Cape Verde, since half of its citizens are emigrants, and the poor, claustrophobic archipelago does not provide enough rewarding opportunities for its population³⁷⁹, let alone harbour the dreams of its youth and their natural curiosity for other horizons and ways of life.

In the introduction to this research, I said I am not dealing with the diasporic dimension of postcolonial literatures. Instead, I am looking at social critique, self-assertion and resistance to globalisation, as strategies to consolidate and heal postcolonial societies, still struggling against poverty, home colonialism and the schizophrenic search for means to find a functional “glocalisation” (i.e. combining local culture and tradition with technology and the ideological impact of Western modernity and postmodernity). However, a Creole culture, with such high rates of emigration as those of Cape Verde, has been living with the awareness of diaspora from the very beginning of its existence. Cape Verde was one of the ports of call of the “Black Atlantic” (the exodus of millions of black slaves to Americas), and its main production for the Portuguese empire was, precisely, people: from Cape Verde were picked the educated mulatto clerks to use in the rest of the empire, making up for demographic shortage of the Portuguese empire. From Cape Verde also came the labour force for the plantations of S. Tomé and Príncipe.

Amarílis writes of this nomadic coming and going, like the sea tides, in a mode that undoes the contradiction between “being away” and the permanence of ways of life and

³⁷⁶ Actually, Orlanda Amarílis was among the young collaborators of the magazine *Certeza*, in 1944.

³⁷⁷ See Manuel Duarte, *Caboverdianidade, Africanidade, e Outros Textos*, Spleen Edições, Cabo verde, 1999. See also, Manuel Veiga (ed.) *Cabo Verde, Insularidade e Literatura*, Éditions Karthala, Paris, 1998.

³⁷⁸ Isabel Maria Baptista Ramos, “Ilhéu dos Pássaros”, *Africa*, nº 13, IIª Série, ano 9, Lisboa, Agosto/Setembro 1986.

³⁷⁹ The community of Cape Verdean emigrants living in Portugal is the biggest among those from the five Lusophone countries in Africa: 43.797 individuals, in 1999 (information provided by INE, the Portuguese National Institute of Statistics).

habits in the islands. On the contrary, because of its continuity, the life-style of the islands never makes the returning emigrant feel foreign. The emigrant is rapidly integrated in the close community again, so that one's island as "home" is a real territory, and not a projection of the imagination that makes up for the segregation that emigrants feel in the big Western cities. Because of this generalised experience of being away or having relatives away, Cape Verdean sense of self (either individual or collective) is nomadic, and diaspora is a way of life. The archipelago, sure *pied-à-terre* as "place of origin" and re-visited affective community is a shelter, a known harbour, a place to heal and rest, between journeys.

The way Orlanda Amarílis writes about this flow of movement, keeping a strong feeling of "belonging to Cape Verde" among the displaced travellers, creates a coherent and stable image of a society where the high rate of mobility does not have the disruptive, fragmentary effects one would expect. In this way, Amarílis contributes to consolidate a sense of national identity in the archipelago.

The title of the collection signals this same intention. *Ilhéu dos Pássaros*, is the name of a little islet, repeated in the different sentences that make the epigraphs to each of the seven short stories gathered in this collection. The epigraph is a sentence picked from the body of the short story and it refers to a moment in which one of the characters remembers or talks about the "ilhéu dos pássaros" ("little island of the birds"). The "Ilhéu dos Pássaros" is a big rock, on the right side of the elegant bay of Mindelo, which you pass when leaving the harbour of S. Vicente. It is a sort of sentinel, the last bit of land before the open sea. It is also a beautiful element in the horizon of the city, being a sharp, vertical shape against the misty horizontal mass of the chain of mountains in the island of Santo Antão, just across S. Vicente. Thus, "the sentinel" is also a cherished and familiar view for the people of the city. When any of the characters in the short stories, often in a distant setting away from Cape Verde, remembers with nostalgia this rock, what is being evoked is a sense of roots, whose referent is the little islet, synecdoche of "motherland". Consequently, the impression one gets from these texts is that being away does not de-territorialise a sense of "home", nor is one's identity threatened or in conflict with movement.

From a postcolonial angle, the anthology presents a set of arguments that invite a critical discussion committed to issues of identity, self-assertion, self-consolidation and anti-colonial resistance. The chosen themes, the development of the plots and the construction of characters also suggest reflection on the on-going massive emigration move from south to north, from ex-colonies to ex-metropolitan centre. As her stories follow the movements of emigrants, Orlanda Amarílis maps the impact of historical continuities of dispossession in the awakening of forms of self-awareness and critical perception, which go from a fall from innocence to the making of survivors (scarred, scared ones).

Before addressing the short stories, a couple of remarks on language and *genre* seem necessary. Orlanda Amarílis includes words of Creole in her text in Portuguese. No glossary is provided but it is not necessary either. The same words from Creole are repeatedly used, so, after several occurrences, the context of different sentences makes the approximate (guessed) meaning of the word more precise, encouraging the reader "to master" this bit of Creole. It is a clever strategy that totally reverses the position of Portuguese as the normative language. For native speakers from Cape Verde, it increases bilingual bridges, while for other readers of Portuguese, it promotes Creole among the Portuguese speaking community.

The fact that Orlanda Amarílis writes short stories, a different *genre* than the novels that I analyse in the rest of this study, did not reduce the ability of the collection to illustrate the atmosphere, the factors of consolidation and the most relevant problems in the concerned postcolonial location. The striking amount of insights provided by the anthology is due to the fact that most of the tales fall back on the same deliberate stereotypes of Cape Verdean society. The lack of narrative room to develop a geologically complex account of the socio-

cultural landscape of Cape Verde is compensated by partial repetition, with a different *nuance*. By contrast, the sketch of other places where Cape Verdeans travel to and from, is more simplified, intensely focused on a reduced set of elements that compose the climax of the condensed plot, as it is the standard procedure in the technique of the short story³⁸⁰.

The first short story of the anthology, “Thonon-les-Bains”, constructs an opposition between the dreams that make emigrants leave Cape Verde for France and the reality of second-class citizenship in Europe. However, there are more facets to this contrast than the simple binary opposition. Second class citizenship in the big city also means bigger salaries and the pleasure of showing off, back home (at the island of origin), “worldly knowledge” and urban ways. As for the letters written from abroad to the family, they feed the dreams of those that remain in the archipelago. Orlanda Amarílis completes the picture with the moving innocence of old nh’Ana, mystified by Gabriel’s letters: for her, France must be so perfect and so developed that “*todos os meninhos falavam francês desde pequeninos*”³⁸¹. It never occurs to nh’Ana that this “bigger” world may be neither welcoming nor fair.

Nh’Ana is struggling to bring up her four children, alone, without welfare, without a profession. She lives off the meagre rents paid by her miserable tenants in the little pieces of land she owns. Gabriel, emigrated stepson, the product of an extramarital affair of her deceased husband is her second source of income and most esteemed and blessed support. His advice is trusted and his opinion respected. Hence, when he sends a letter saying that he found a job for Piedade, his half sister, nh’Ana does not hesitate in sending her eldest daughter to France, already making plans to start a small business with the money sent home by Piedade. Piedade works in a ski factory and she also has a job as a cleaning lady in a hotel.

Emigration to Europe is an inversion of the direction of colonial expansion, but this change in the orientation of the massive dislocation of people is not accompanied by a similar shift in terms of racial relations or access to better opportunities. The life of Gabriel and Piedade in France takes the tragic turn predicted by a colonial tradition of abuse. Piedade starts a relationship with an older French boyfriend (Jean), who intends to marry her, but, as time goes by, Piedade gets bored with this serious, quiet man. Her reckless, carefree character rejects him, while the patriarchal references according to which she was brought up push the young girl to search for security and comfort through a man who can offer her that. During a party with other young people from Cape Verde, Jean realises he does not like the food, he cannot dance the music and he is not the man Piedade desires. His sense of exclusion, hurt pride and rejection make him push Piedade to the bathroom, lock the door and cut her throat with a knife, escaping through the window. This scene, almost a stereotype of tabloid stories, would be the dramatic climax of a passionate affair if it were not marked by traces of collective mentalities, which reconstruct a murderous heritage opposing white coloniser to black, female slave. Piedade is punished for destroying his nostalgic dream of displaced colonisation. Her black, young body, dancing the rhythm of her different culture, unreachable to him apart from his passive (desiring) gaze spells out a history of independence and rejection Jean cannot accept. While narrating this insane crime, Orlanda Amarílis evokes other historical crimes and encounters, where sexism and racism would have combined to make sure Piedade would not have any opportunity to escape appropriation. Her culture, marked by food, music and dance, materialises an “otherness” which survived (and consequently eluded) the colonial encounter, defeating it. That

³⁸⁰ See Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story a Critical Introduction*, Longman, London and New York, 1983. See also Tzvetan, Todorov, *Les Genres du Discours*, Éditions do Seuil, Paris, 1978.

³⁸¹ “All the little children knew French, since they were babies”. *Op. cit.* Amarílis, 1982: 20.

unbearable knowledge is the reason why Piedade has to be suppressed and not simply abandoned.

I see this tale as a despondent metaphor for the permanence of racist codes, even though the enslaved/colonised subject has become an emigrant who moves to the West of his own free will. Gabriel, a coloured emigrant in Europe, has to write nh'Ana telling her of the sad news, face the police, keep quiet when he is mistreated, accept being evicted by his landlord and quit his job when he is told by the police (illegally? Abusively?) to leave the region. Gabriel endures everything for the fear of losing his precious licence to work in France. He never accuses Jean. Later on, while on holidays in Cape Verde, Gabriel explains to nh'Ana that he does not believe the French police would ever prosecute a French citizen to protect the rights of an emigrant. Worse, as the story ends, Gabriel prepares his search for Jean, intent on personal revenge. The reader is led to consider that it is Gabriel's isolation from the legal system, his lack of confidence in the police and the totally uncivilised way he has been treated in Europe that press him into crime. The shameful representation of French institutions as indifferent or oppressive could be extended to other European countries, like Portugal, which has been treating emigrants in a similar way.

Considering the importance of emigration for the society of Cape Verde, it makes sense that a tale on this subject should be included in the anthology, and granted the first place, as a sort of introduction to the rest of the collection since most tales deal with characters that are travelling or have been moving between places. Nevertheless, this mobility does not weaken the strong ties to Cape Verde: it is as if the sense of collective identity in the archipelago is conceived of, at the same time, as being at "home and away".

For those that stay at home, the Creole society represents a joyful and easy-going environment, though its tight closeness may be heavy at times, as far as it creates the circumstances that foster too much interference and low-key rivalries. That is the double flavour of the peaceful and amiable life in the islands, which the reader encounters while following nh'Ana's life in Cape Verde. Actually, the sting of "small town atmosphere" becomes one of its comic elements. It is totally impossible to keep any privacy in relation to neighbours and friends. Everything is known, by everybody, no matter how secretive one is.

These two features of the represented society, friendly and supportive bonds versus too much interference, will be re-encountered later on in other short stories, composing, gradually, a well-defined image. Parallel to this illustration of patterns of social interaction in the archipelago, the denunciation of the grinding living conditions waiting the poor emigrant in Western cities handles another fundamental element in the split identity of Cape Verdeans: the wish for departing and "make it" in the big world tempered with the constant longing for the cosy, warm atmosphere of the islands.

Another distinctive trace of life in the archipelago is a strong and widespread belief in witchcraft and divination. Several characters refer to it, and the thoughts of nh'Ana reveal her fear of the evil eye of envious evil wishes. Furthermore, her neighbour tells of a divination session for the future of Piedade, which eventually proves to be right.

The reference to witchcraft and divination is an anti-colonial self-assertive move in so far as the belief in these practices diminishes the impact of Catholicism, and its implied European/colonial influence. To deny the first is to resist the second, upholding the bonds to the African continent and its systems of knowledge, the influence of which shaped the identity of the archipelago from the beginning of its history. On the other hand, in the context of postcolonial self-assertion, to reclaim the African half of the hybrid identity of Cape Verde is a way of creating distance from Lusophilia and its corresponding alienation from a suppressed black self.

The second tale in the anthology, “Luísa Filha de Nica”, goes back to the belief system of the archipelago. It is a tale of possession, expanding the relevance of the point I just made above concerning the assertion of the presence of non-Western values in the culture of the archipelago. In this way, Orlanda Amarílis is distinguishing Cape Verdean local culture from mainstream Western references, underlining how much of the reality of the archipelago escapes the limits of “Africanist” interpretations of “the other”. The interest for supernatural subjects is an expression of resistance to Enlightenment/rational epistemes, wrongly presented (by colonial discourses) as the only legitimate source of knowledge, and, obviously, an exclusive domain of the colonial West. On the other hand, it should be said that the anti-logocentric perspective that makes this writer go back to these issues is an expression of a personal interest for the fantastic that would keep reappearing later on, at different stages of her writing. The difference between later writings and the anthology that concerns this study is that one thing is to tell exceptional events as a deviation from everyday patterns of normality, and another is to represent the supernatural as part of the everyday life of a community in the context of a postcolonial society that endured a coherent and continuous history of suppression of these manifestations, under colonialism. In this context, to assert and explore the supernatural is an anti-colonial gesture of cultural self-assertion.

The third short story, “Luna Cohen”, adds something to the postcolonial arguments discussed above. It takes place sometime after 1975 because the fall of the Portuguese regime is mentioned and Cape Verdean independence has been achieved. The time frame of the short story must be soon after that period. This time reference matters, and still I understand why a concrete date should be omitted: Orlanda Amarílis is not writing about the particular events of one of those years but rather of the spirit of the time and the ideas that were in the air. This short story celebrates the new attitude of young activists that witnessed independence and grew up expecting to see improvements in their own countries once they became POSTcolonial. Still, when looking around, these young, highly politicised people already start noticing some neo-colonial continuity in the postcolonial picture, together with the changes:

Luna Cohen, young Ph.D researcher from Cape Verde lands at the airport of Lagos, Nigeria, arriving from Rome, Italy. In contrast with the previous story entitled “Thonon-les-Bains”, where the writer exposed a bit of the harsh conditions working class emigrants have to face, this piece inscribes in the picture another class of emigrants. Equally important, the story makes one aware of the active circulation and co-operation between people from two postcolonial nations (south/south), independently from the Eurocentric (and unrealistic) representation of north/south movements as the exclusive model of international relations. As I said above, Orlanda Amarílis writes a multilayered anthology that partially confirms (but also escapes) the most common binaries taken as the references to understand a postcolonial location.

Another telling instance of the willingness of the writer to expand one’s perception of the complexities framing a postcolonial context, is the ironic point on Visa bureaucracy: Luna, Cape Verdean citizen is in Nigeria with the Visa she got at the British embassy in Portugal. Both postcolonial (Cape Verdean) citizen and borders (of Nigeria) still are legally manipulated in a distant office that should be settling matters between Portugal and the United Kingdom. How come that in a post-independence context this small legal affair still ended up being arranged through the two former colonial powers?

On the other hand, Luna Cohen stands for a cosmopolitan, educated, urban elite of Africa that is erased from a nativist representation of “black culture”, obsessed with purity, roots and the self-contained space of a re-imagined “mother Africa”. These nativist ideas are

dangerously alienating, and they are out of touch with a more complex, neo-colonial reality, as the narrator subtly leads you to notice: the businessmen at the bar of the airport still are British citizens. And then, there are other binary oppositions that criss-cross with the colonial/postcolonial point of view on the changing realities around Luna: she is Jewish, like her PhD supervisor, Professor Khan, who keeps talking about Israel and the necessity of returning to “his roots”. Luna thinks her roots are her family, friends and the islands of Cape Verde. She does not understand that obsession, and finds it disturbing. The subject is temporarily settled by her friend Da Silva’s caustic irony: “Eles marturbam-se com esse tema, está a perceber?”³⁸². In spite of the joke, something keeps depressing young Luna though she is unable to put her finger on the cause.

Most of the subject matter of this story turns around life in the university campus, the parties and the easy contact among international members of staff, until, due to a serious fever that confines Luna to her bed for weeks, Professor Khan suggests that she should stop working until the next term. A skinny Luna decides to go back to Cape Verde for a while, to heal and think things through. As she packs and prepares for the trip, gradually, Luna realises that the endless discussion about Israel is an excuse to avoid talking about other problems, closer at home. She looks back on the last months at the university campus and she takes in how much they had made her open her eyes to postcolonial realities:

“Dr. Odgi levou-a ao hotel para jantar e passar a noite. Parecia já estar na Europa. Até eles chegava a som de uma orquestra num dos salões. Era uma festa privada, uma festa de multinacionais, possivelmente um encontro de magnates de petróleo. A Europa e o imperialismo ficavam para além daquela porta. Deste lado era a exploração.”³⁸³

(1983: 62)

Luna falls asleep thinking of the contrast between the neighbourhoods of beautiful villas, a couple of sky scrappers, and the wide sea of miserable squatter settlements around them, with naked children playing in open sewers.

This short story embodies one of the motives why I picked Orlanda Amarílis as an object of study for this research. She keeps jumping across generations in the postcolonial literature of Cape Verde, writing of subjects that keep their relevance in the postcolonial life of the archipelago and quick to sense the disappointment in the post-euphoria decades that were going to follow the euphoria of the independence moment.

Life under Colonialism

Ilhéu dos Pássaros is a rich anthology addressing several angles of the history and identity of the archipelago. Thus, the collection also includes three tales that go back to the colonial period. The first of them, “Canal Gelado” (“Frozen Channel”), is written around a set of childhood memories. As a privileged, rich, nine year-old girl, the narrator liked to walk through the miserable neighbourhood built for the workers of the British coal warehouse in Mindelo, so cold and uncomfortable that it was called “Frozen Channel”. These were one-room houses with an earth floor that had to be wet before one could sweep it. It is also the neighbourhood where tuberculosis claims more lives and people walk

³⁸² “They masturbate on that subject, you know?”. *Ibid*, 1982: 57.

³⁸³ “Dr. Odgi took her to the hotel to have dinner and spend the night. It seemed she was already in Europe. The sound of an orchestra playing in one of the reception rooms reached them. It was a private party, a party of multinational companies, probably a meeting of oil tycoons. Europe and imperialism started behind that door. On this side, it was exploitation.” (my translation), *Ibid*, 1982: 62.

barefooted. As a child, the narrator is too innocent to connect these poor living conditions to the pain and suffering they imply. To the eyes of the truant rich child, these people are only exotic, the subject of successful boasting at school, telling of her adventure trips to a forbidden area. Naturally, her mother is dismayed to find out that her child walks these streets where she can get diseases, or worse, bad manners. The little coin earned for speaking Portuguese instead of Creole completes this snapshot of social differences and class prejudice. In the postcolonial present, this neighbourhood no longer exists, but the narrator is mature enough to re-interpret what she saw then and understand its social and ethical implications.

This is a frontal anti-colonial piece, moreover because of the pathetic representation of class/racial prejudice. Contrary to the innocent child, the adults around her know what circumstances the people of the poor neighbourhood have to face, and yet, they decline any responsibility in improving those, shutting their remorse off in their phobias and fears. This is a very good example of colonial prejudice, demonstrating the importance of racism (or class prejudice) as an ally to ease the awareness of the suffering inflicted on others. Though narrated in a very subtle, apparently apolitical way, there is a lot of self-assertive and anti-colonial energy in these short stories. Yet, the delicate handling of these ideological issues might escape a less attentive eye. Probably the experienced practice of writing in an oblique way to go around censorship remained with Orlanda Amarílis in the postcolonial period, as the memory of less peaceful encounters during her formative years, when she collaborated with the magazine *Certeza*.

As for “Xanda”, the second tale set in colonial times, it tells of the recruitment of a young Cape Verdean girl to the Portuguese secret police (PIDE), that grim presence, sharply feared by the Creole population. The anti-colonial message of the story comes from the fact that the narrative is focalised from the angle of Xanda’s family life, revealing her as an unbalanced, unreliable character that brings exasperation to everybody around her. Later on, in Lisbon, among the student milieu, Xanda is despised for being an informer, which amounts to (though it is not said) being a national traitor. The fact that this disagreeable character could be accepted as a member of the secret police, and on top of that, through an affair with the head of the department in Cape Verde, puts in jeopardy any claim to respectability, rationality or self-awareness from this same organisation. By corroding the credibility of both agent and institution, Orlanda Amarílis hits a double blow on any positive representation of the colonial system.

“Requiem” is the last short story of the anthology and it is set in a transition period when the plotting for the liberation struggle is already consolidating. Young college students, artists and scholars mix in a certain atmosphere that is evocative of the CEI (Home of the Students from the Empire) when underground activism for national liberation, love affairs, alcohol, youth irresponsibility and serious political commitment co-existed in a chaotic way. Some characters seem very sure of what they are planning (although secrecy demands the elaboration of a speech in innuendoes that leave both reader and “non-insiders” unsure of what conspiracy is going on) while others are still in the middle of a process of self-discovery. This is exactly the case of Bina, the main character, who is trying to write a text (novel? short story?) about this activist urban world. She is experiencing a writer’s block.

Meaningfully, the creative block ends when, at home, with a hangover, Bina suddenly remembers the “little island of the birds”, that proud rock in front of the marginal of S. Vicente. Her spirit drifts to Cape Verde for a few moments. Back to reality, Bina looks at the attempted urban, Lisbon based story and throws it to the dustbin. A relieved exclamation (“Requiem!”) marks the ritual of parting with the wrong writing material and the wrong direction to look for inspiration.

On the whole, the anthology of short stories addressed here, offers a representation of a changing Creole universe that has developed its own ways to cope with necessity and harshness, consolidating a relaxed, “small town” atmosphere. This representation of Cape Verde is very different from the postcolonial literature being written in the Caribbean, another postcolonial Creole universe. The first striking difference was the much lighter stream of racism. There are a couple of references to this kind of behaviour, criticised and confronted by the writer (a militant of the Portuguese Movement against Apartheid, anyway), but the expression of racism in the narrated pages of the anthology, usually overlap race with class in a confusing way. For example, rich Creole families, though not white, are treated with deference. Besides, the society of the islands is mostly mixed, anyway. The atmosphere might be different in the two islands that had a plantation system (Fogo and Santiago), but the tales considered here were certainly inspired by the society of the island of S. Vicente, where the writer studied. A telling detail in this positive picture is that girls covet straight hair, a mark of whiteness equated with beauty. In terms of class, social barriers are more serious, especially because poverty affects quite a significant part of the population of the islands. Still, when I read the analysis of Caribbean writers like Michelle Cliff, Ananda Devi and Marise Condé, following an amazing piece of critical work by Françoise Lionnet³⁸⁴, I was astonished with the contrast between the tense bilingual culture and the problematic identities expressed by Caribbean writers in comparison to the cosy integrated hybridity of amiable Cape Verde from the pages written by Orlanda Amarílis. This positive image of Cape Verde is reproduced by other writers like Germano de Almeida. A couple of explanations may be relevant to understand this difference of tone between the postcolonial literatures of the two Creole locations. To begin with, issues of “authenticity” seem to be a past crusade for the Lusophone writers, quite open to the new influences that may come from (a remote) Europe. As for the assertion of their African identity, geography seems to have handled the matter (the archipelago is 500 km off the coast of Senegal). Secondly, the high rates of emigration and mobility probably upset clear dichotomies between foreign and local, since people are constantly crossing these borders. Finally, the proximity to Africa and the distance from a threatening colonising influence (like America) may be one of the reasons for the absence of a challenging “whiteness” in the atmosphere of Cape Verde.

III.2.2 Respectable Ladies and Adventure Sails in Sailors’ Eyes:

Frequently, sexism and racism or Eurocentrism are dimensions of segregation and oppression that combine and overlap. That is why a combined feminist and postcolonial approach is proving productive to read texts written by writers who are aware of their own postcolonial condition, articulating this awareness through their gendered selves. The analysis of the short story “Thonon-les-Bains” (see above section III. 2.1) proves this point quite clearly, as the suppression of Piedade is both a colonial and sexist act. Still, there are aspects of this anthology that are worth considering from a strict feminist angle, more sharply involved with gender issues.

The first point that becomes noticeable, looking at the collection from this changed angle, is the absence of father figures in all of the represented families. This absence is represented as a matter-of-fact, general issue, not commented upon. Five of the short stories are about families encompassing two generations of women. In this case, there are references to masculine characters, but they are neither the heads of the family nor powerful figures.

³⁸⁴ Françoise Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations. Women, Literature, Identity*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995.

Instead, they are usually young, and under the authority of the main mother figure. The other two short stories that break with this pattern are about a single young woman studying in college, abroad. From this sketch, it is easy to conclude that the Creole universe that is going to be discussed here is not as dependent on a patriarchal/masculine presence as, say, the Indian women represented in the three Indo-English novels analysed in part II. This does not mean there are no problems, only, according to the context of this other location, the social position of women and the priorities for change are different.

The society of Cape Verde is divided in classes. The available resources are scarce and unemployment is high. As I said above, emigration is a fundamental factor shaping contemporary postcolonial society. Most men between 20 and 45 years of age move to other harbours or other countries where they may find work, leaving their partners and their children in the islands. Many families have moved definitively to the European country where they are integrated in a minority diaspora community. However, for those that live in the archipelago, the standard situation is to have a husband, son or partner abroad, who sends money back to the family (the savings of emigrants amount to a very significant part of the economy of the archipelago). Women are deeply integrated in wage earning activities in the two bigger cities, active in several sectors of society and for them, any relevant social reform will be deeply dependent on an improvement of the economy of the country, and not so much on a reaction to tradition or on the struggle to leave a domestic life.

Strong pressure to conform to patriarchal codes is linked to the power and presence of father figures and these seem very volatile in the social world evoked in *Ilhéu dos Pássaros*, a fact that is confirmed by the socio-economic conditions in the archipelago, so adequately exposed in these literary pieces. From a feminist angle, the first thing to understand about Cape Verde is that out of necessity it functions, in practice, on a sort of matriarchal basis. Alone, women raise families that, on average, include a rate of five children. In urban areas, the number of such families (only one parent, the mother, and children) is 37%, while in rural areas it reaches a bit higher: 39%³⁸⁵. But practical arrangements and dominant mentalities are not directly dependent on each other. Below, I will analyse the dynamics of a family of five women in relation to the pseudo-“absence” of a father figure, because although the head of the family is not a man, the social system remains patriarchal.

The Creole society represented in these short stories by Orlanda Amarílis is branded by a strong institutional basis (the Catholic Church) to promote patriarchal power along cultural patterns that strongly resemble traditional Portuguese life style. This bond between repressive patriarchy and the religion of the coloniser suggests that the critique against patriarchy is a reaction against colonial echoes as well. Moreover, because Catholicism co-exists with strong African influences and a highly respected and feared system of witchcraft, in a way that makes Cape Verde similar to other Creole contexts like the Caribbean. However, for women, the castrating impact of Catholicism is much clearer than that of African influences, feared by high class families precisely because of its “lack of manners” and (sexual) misbehaviour.

The hold of Catholicism is doubly framed as colonial, on the grounds of a certain Lusophilia. In Cape Verde, money grants social mobility, but prestige still is linked, in some sectors of society, to old families. For women, a means to claim one’s position in the aspired highest social class is to marry into it. The accompanying side effect of this interest in social mobility is a disposition to assimilate and imitate the conservative ideology of the highest class, usually represented as deeply Catholic and Lusophile. Still, a liberating energy exudes

³⁸⁵ Georgina de Mello, “Sobre a Mulher e o Desenvolvimento nos Palop”, in *Que Estados, Que Nações em Construção nos Cinco?*, Fundação Amílcar Cabral, Praia 1998.

from these short stories as these families are repeatedly portrayed as decadent, cruel, obsolete and consequently, a totally wrong model to assimilate or desire.

Apart from the conservative impact of some decadent families, gossip is a powerful means of social control. In the insular, small town universe of the archipelago, younger women live in fear of becoming the object of gossip while older women watch them fearfully, to keep their respectability (read “marriage ability”) unquestionable. Nevertheless, after certain age, and if there is a project or opportunity, young women are quite independent to leave the archipelago, either to study or to work. Tough gossip is feared, the social atmosphere of the tales is very welcoming and warm, reflecting the continuity of its appeal for many returning emigrants.

To make this general discussion more concrete, I will analyse closely one particular short story called “Prima Bibinha” (Cousin Bibinha). This piece did not seem very relevant if a postcolonial critical frame was applied to it. By contrast, it shines as one of the best stories if properly addressed through a critical frame sensitive to feminist issues. The results in the change of critical perspective raise a relevant theoretical point. The adequacy between text and reading approach is fundamental, otherwise a text may be under-evaluated. Naturally, there is a slight difference in the way I handle this anthology, because it is not a novel as the rest of the case studies. This difference in form allowed me to select which short stories should fall under each pole of the bisected analysis.

Thematically, “Prima Bibinha” is devoted to feminine solidarity and women’s problematic complicity with dominant patriarchal mentalities. The plot of this piece turns around a family of five women, three older ones and two younger girls, one of them still single. The three older women are cousin Bibinha, a syphilitic, abandoned wife, barren step-mother of three children from her contagious husband; aunt Marinha, virgin spinster and Mam Bia, grandmother. The younger ones are Lola and Biluca, the main character.

The worth of the tale as an ethical lesson in human solidarity comes from the bond between Cousin Bibinha, on her way to Lisbon to receive treatment, and the unwavering generosity of aunt Marinha, encouraging her to face illness, organising the trip, lending her all the best clothes (suitcase included) and taking care of her cousin’s home (reforming, fixing, cleaning, painting) while she is away. The impeccable house will be a welcome surprise for the sick relative. The representation of this taken-for-granted, trusted support from relatives paints a warm Creole society where a helping hand is sure to be found in the community.

While aunt Marinha is so busy with cousin Marinha, old Mam Bia is very shocked to find the youngest of her grand-daughters, teenage Biluca, with a boyfriend. Through Mam Bia’s fears, the reader gets a glimpse of the importance of virginity/ respectability to guarantee eligibility for marriage. Mam Bia is pleased that her oldest grand-daughter, Lola, is properly settled with Custódio, an agreeable and esteemed member of the family. Now it is time to be vigilant until the responsibility for Biluca’s future is no longer on the shoulders of the old woman (it is taken for granted that in a couple of years, with qualifications and more maturity, the girl will be able to make choices, on her own, hopefully, with a nice, respectable husband by her side). But teenage Biluca dreams her own dreams of romantic adventure, eager to find out about sex and love.

Custódio, the only man in the house, has been a good husband for six years, and he is used to the explosive, childish character of his young sister-in-law, taking the “boyfriend affair” quite lightly. Nagged by Mam Bia, Custódio eventually accepts to play the role of father figure, motivating Biluca to write and study instead of going around with boyfriends. The teenager only grows more rebellious. Twice she spells out her paralysing fear of growing into women like cousin Bibinha, aunt Marinha or grandmother Mam Bia. She wants to succeed where they all have failed: in getting her own man. Unaware of the image of self-

denied femininity the older women represent, they constantly underline the importance of being respectable, unable to see that their lonely “respectability” is what the teenager wants to imitate the least.

The protective circle around the young girl gets worse, claustrophobic, until the budding relationship with her boyfriend is broken. Mam Bia congratulates herself for having achieved that, which she translates into a postponement of damaging gossip before it is time for a serious relationship. Things seem poised to return to normality, but the change in Biluca, quiet and pensive, is intriguing. Time goes by until one of the many maids in the house, out of loyalty, tells grandmother that she has not washed menstruation towels from Biluca for the last three months (a period of time that allows no doubts of a pregnancy). When the teenager is bullied into confessing the name of the father of the child she finally screams: “the priest” (“nhô Padre”). Dismay and confusion paralyse virgin aunt and old grandmother. But more bad news reaches this small family. Cousin Bibinha died on board, when returning from Lisbon.

At the funeral, all women friends and neighbours close ranks against the priest, the subject of all whispered talks (establishing the swiftness and depth of the informative network of gossip). Only Mam Bia is not convinced: she remembers the genuine surprise and anger in the face of the priest when she privately confronted him with the accusation. What if Biluca is protecting the young (available for marriage) boyfriend? Again, it is one of the servants that comes out with the truth, only because she likes Lola, the oldest girl, who will soon be hurt unless Biluca is sent away to relatives in another island: Custódio and Biluca are having an affair and they meet at the end of the garden, in one of the warehouses. Ironically, Mam Bia was so effective in cutting Biluca away from any other available man, and she so much pressed Custódio to play an interfering fatherly/patriarchal role, that she nurtured the conditions for this much unhappier turn of events through her prejudice and subservience to social codes, uncritically applied.

One can look at this tale as a demonstration of the consequences of lack of sympathy towards youth, facing the pains of growing up in an over-constraining environment. Too much repression does not do away with desire or curiosity for life. It will only hurt, enrage and confuse young people. From a feminist angle, the tale is more ironical and far reaching. It is the sacred respect for patriarchal authority that turns sour in the uncritical hands of these older women. If they had been less concerned with respectability and strict conformity, they might have found a middle ground to raise Biluca. As it is, their Puritanical views make a victim of the teenager they so much wanted to protect.

The repression of feminine desire and the obsession with respectability are themes which I will come back to in the next section, for Dina Salústio is another woman writer that confronts the society of Cape Verde by questioning the personal price women are made to pay in the name of social mobility, vanity and the assertion of distinctive barriers between social classes. In a way, these subjects echo the ideas and the reflection of the Indo-English women writers, previously analysed in Part II, only in this case we are not talking about reigning castes but rather of a small group of decadent families, isolated from the more flexible and (pragmatically) liberated society around them.

Dina Salústio

III.2.3 Village Fears, Innocent Dreams, City Lights

Dina Salústio has published an anthology of short stories called Mornas Eram as Noites³⁸⁶, but she is most established as a poet, having collaborated with several newspapers and local magazines. She is also included in the anthology Mirabilis de Veias ao Sol³⁸⁷, a critical edition of the poets active in the archipelago, in the 1990s. Dina Salústio is an achieved writer of children's stories, and she is a teacher and a journalist, as well. The novel discussed in this section, A Louca de Serrano³⁸⁸, is her first long narrative. She has written critical essays, and she wrote a chapter of the reader Cabo Verde, Insularidade e Literatura³⁸⁹.

The novel A Louca de Serrano (the madwoman from Serrano) is about an isolated village, "Serrano", a name that comes from "Serra" which means "big mountain". This isolated village, with the mountain, the river and the fountain, is not necessarily in Cape Verde. It is rather, a fantastic landscape, living under a spell.

Like the re-writing of Thousand and One Nights, which I addressed above in the section devoted to the Indian writer Githa Hariharan, the space of the plot of A Louca de Serrano does not have to be linked to any concrete national geography. Again, whatever form of social criticism or ideological reflection carried out in this novel, it will have to be assessed as a sort of allegory, with several levels of meaning. A second similarity linking Hariharan and Dina Salústio is the fact that they develop the plot of their novels from a central dichotomy opposing two places and two classes of people. While the Indo-English writer I analysed above wrote a novel on the relationship between the city (where people live their busy lives) and the palace (where the sultan who rules the city lives), Dina Salústio writes a novel on the opposition between the village, as a representation of the rural, provincial worlds of the XXIst century, and the city or the capital, as a symbol of the cosmopolitan, powerful, urban centres that rule over these satellite or peripheral areas.

This is an interesting topic for a postcolonial study as far as the widening gap between a rural, less sophisticated, powerless world and the urban heart of politics is creating a sort of replica of the colonial polarisation between a more powerful and pseudo-superior region and other territories ruled by it. The similarities to the colonial situation are enhanced by the fact that to rule over rural areas from an urban frame of mind may imply abuse and exploitation on behalf of foreign, or at least distant urban interests, arising resentment among those who are under forms of political authority that decide, on a unilateral basis, over issues that may affect other communities. Nevertheless, contrary to the colonial situation, the rivalry between city and village is an intra-national problem, though it can be read as a metaphor of the relations between diverse centres of power and their less glamorous peripheries.

On another level, in the canon of the literature of Cape Verde, insularity has been one of the most fundamental and repeated themes, and the isolation of the small community of Serrano, unknown and unknowing of the "big world", can be read as an expression of the claustrophobic self-containment of the islands, if they do not open up to the world. If that is

³⁸⁶ Dina Salústio, Mornas Eram as Noites, Instituto Camões, Colecção Lusófona, 1999.

³⁸⁷ Mirabilis de Veias ao Sol, José Luís Hopffer Cordeiro Almada (ed.), Instituto de Promoção Cultural, Praia, 1998. The selection of eight poems by Dina Salústio is on pages 163-171.

³⁸⁸ Dina Salústio, A Louca de Serrano, Spleen Edições, Mindelo, 1998.

³⁸⁹ Manuel Veiga (ed.), Cabo Verde, Insularidade e Literatura, Éditions Karthala, Paris, 1998.

the case, then this novel reverses self-assertive nativist gestures, because instead of considering ways to manage borders that distinguish “self” from “other”, it invites dialogue and exchange of influences. Being that the case, this would be the first example, among the texts considered in this study, of a dissemination of local (national) references, similar to the hybridity that characterises the emergence of emigrant communities in the urban centres of the Western world (see section I. 2. 4), deconstructing the borders that oppose “national” to “foreign”. Reading the novel along these lines, its main argument is an encouragement to open up, and attempt mobility across worlds, rejecting isolation and fossilisation.

As the inverted negative of this cosmopolitan perspective, the village of Serrano, a metaphor for self-centred, isolated worlds and mentalities, is an emotionally and intellectually crippled place, in part due to its geographical isolation, mostly on account of the narrow patterns of living the villagers insist on holding to.

Serrano is also a place without a notion of history or linear time, as a horizon of possible evolution. This conceptual lack prevents the villagers from defining projects for the future, learning new things, looking up solutions: the future will only be a repetition of routines. This life style also shapes their emotional life and their intellectual abilities, forming people that neither think too deeply nor develop sensitivity, seldom expressing intense feelings. Bearing in mind this construction of characters, one would say Dina Salústio does not refrain from adding irony to insult when measuring the achievements within the reach of such a self-centred, isolated community. She certainly makes a strong point concerning the necessity to overcome one’s fears, encouraging mobility across rural borders to crave integration in the city.

The naming ceremony is a key scene to define the position of Serrano in relation to the city and establish the power of the reigning midwife (and her co-helper, the village madwoman). Serrano was never on the map, until, some generations ago, several men arrived with instruments, papers, and “*wearing glasses*” (which was an unusual thing in the primitive village). Their arrogant ways immediately denounce them as “city people”. After taking measures and writing them down in papers (another odd behaviour to the eyes of the villagers), they ask for the name of the place. No villager answers the city men, for nobody had ever thought of naming the place. It is the midwife, witch-daughter, queen and seer, who, after an inspiration telepathically sent by the madwoman, finally answers the city people, saying the village is called “Serrano”. Her individual answer is collectively taken as law, and this moment amounts to the naming ceremony of the village. This episode establishes the isolation of the village, and the power of the interference of the city to make the village self-aware, for it only gave itself a name, first stage in claiming an identity, when it was pressed to do so by the city people. It also confirms the absolute authority of the midwife, and her strong bond to the spiritual leader, the madwoman.

After the naming ceremony a second change occurs in the village as a consequence of this new contact with the city: a man starts arriving regularly to claim recruits for the army, for a period of thirteen months. Jerónimo, one of the main characters, is the only one who stays in the army (and in the city) for four years, because of an unhappy affair with the captain’s daughter. He returns a changed man, who craves a city life as mechanic. Apart from having projects and ambition, there are other features that mark Jerónimo as a different man, with little resemblance to the other villagers. He is very sensitive and correct, he has a strong character, and he is ethically very developed, though naïf and not very educated. Jerónimo lives the typical drama of the Cape Verdean citizen, torn between the desire to leave, and the sense of allegiance to the place where he was born, and where his family lives. Out of solidarity towards his parents he will try to accommodate to the village after his life in the city, but he is an unhappy, divided man. Among the villagers, Jerónimo is the only man who wishes to transgress the boundaries that separate the village from the city.

You can read the represented relation between village and the city as a metaphor of the tension between accepting or rejecting foreign influences, a theme that, considering the isolation of the Cape Verdean archipelago, induces reflection on the exchange of influences between the little Atlantic state and its neighbours, always across the ocean. Secondly, given the high emigration rate, this novel can be read as a necessary piece of encouragement to adapt to a new, usually urban, world. Finally, city and village can also work as a dichotomy that opposes purist, nativist frames of mind (unchangeable and focused on a past age), to modernisation and the adoption of new ideas. In this case, one is not necessarily considering foreign influences, but the dominant mentality of a local culture, which can be more open to innovation or more devoted to the preservation of local ways. In any case, the village of Serrano features as an exemplary projection of a negative “insularity”, lack of mobility or inability to evolve. In these three senses, corresponding to the three interpretative hypothesis, the problem in the behaviour of the villagers is the accommodation to known limits, or the lack of a drive to leave and learn, being as they are afraid of everything that is new.

In contrast to the villagers, city people act, plan and decide. The main narrative of the city life turns around Filipa, the other main character, a thirty three year old businesswoman who runs a small, but elegant hotel, with a famous restaurant. As close family, she has a thirteen-year old daughter and a young (twenty-three) stepsister. As the plot unfolds, the reader realises that Filipa is quite non-functional in emotional terms, though she has life-long and reliable friends. Basically, she lives to work, though she is a kind person who tries to be correct towards other people. Filipa’s capacities of introspection and perception, together with her city-like ambition and fighting spirit, are in stark contrast to the villagers’ avoidance of any serious kind of reflection, living as they do, totally dependent on habits and routines.

In spite of the binary opposition between the city and the villagers, Filipa has links to both worlds because she was born in Serrano. Like Jerónimo, her step-father, she is the other character who breaks the barriers between village and city, connecting two contradictory worlds. In order to make the reader understand the circumstances of Filipa’s birth, the narrative goes back in time, to the adolescence of Genoveva, her mother.

Genoveva San Martin was the only daughter of one of the richest and most powerful families of the city. The power of this family is generations old, allying material privilege to class prejudice. Hence, Genoveva’s infatuation with a young friend without “the proper background”, would never be acceptable. A trip to another city, to perform in a cultural festival, gives the young people an opportunity for an escape but the plane crashes into the mountain of Serrano, and no survivors are found. Genoveva, who alone survived the accident, has lost both memory and reason, and ends up caught in a fence of barbed wire, in a field, wounded and almost three months pregnant.

Jerónimo, young and sensitive, dreaming of becoming a mechanic in the city, finds Genoveva (suffering from severe amnesia), and falls in love with the glimpse of the city world he gets through her. Sensitive Jerónimo never touches Genoveva, for she is out of her mind and he does not think it is fair to abuse her state, but, as the wounds heal and Genoveva starts moving around, he realises he no longer can leave her in the small barn in the field as he did for the first month. She may get lost or be found by a less kind heart. Though he is married, Jerónimo brings Genoveva to the village and the obvious signs of her pregnancy immediately make her accepted, for Jerónimo’s wife (Maninha) had been unable to conceive, and that is enough of a motive to justify an affair, which will provide the much sought (by his parents and wife) progeny. The fact that Genoveva is a city girl, as her manners show, is enough of an explication: she has to be promiscuous, according to the

prejudice of the villagers. They do not care to know more about her. Confined to the care of Jerónimo's parents, the mindless girl accepts their protection until she unexpectedly gives birth to a premature daughter (Filipa). Since Genoveva is not in her right mind, Jerónimo's mother takes care of the baby, releasing Genoveva from that responsibility.

Jerónimo alone knows the child is not his, so, in town, he secretly puts the name of the mother in the birth certificate of the baby, in case her right family wants to claim her. Filipa becomes Filipa San Martin (Jerónimo found the name in a gold locket, Genoveva wore around her neck). Soon after birth, Genoveva instinctively enters, unseen, the truck of a travelling salesman, and leaves Serrano to the next city, where somehow she must have felt she belonged. A sequence of coincidences returns Genoveva to her family, treatment is provided and, gradually, Genoveva recovers her functional self, but she will remain prone to depressions, nervous and haunted by memories of a birth scene she cannot place. She marries, has a son and, many years later, divorces a husband that becomes a good friend. In 1994, the present time of the plot, she is forty six (she had Filipa while a fourteen year old teenager). This absent mother (physically, emotionally and in terms of sanity) leaves Filipa with her step-father and the moving relationship between daughter and father, Filipa and Jerónimo, is the main line of the plot in terms of psychological depth. Both are outsiders to the village community, and that is one of the stronger bonds uniting them. Filipa is the child of the crazy city woman and Jerónimo is the villager who craves for wider horizons. She is a "foreigner", he would like to become one.

The only other friend of Filipa is the madwoman, a spirit that appears as a nine year-old child, grows with a generation of villagers until she is thirty-three, disappearing at that age, to return cyclically, again as the child, until she is again thirty-three. This spiritual being becomes the guardian angel of Filipa, companion of every game, confident for every secret.

Jerónimo also has a special bond with the other woman with supernatural gifts in the village: the reigning midwife. He is her first man, and this was very important for the newly appointed midwife who has the double function of initiating every man in the village and assist to every birth. Has her first experiment with her new functions and obligations, Jerónimo is the only man who sees the midwife crying and silently comforts her.

These intimate moments link a group of individual characters that stands apart from the collective representation of the "villagers". All that is positive about them is reversed in the construction of the collective anti-hero, an amorphous whole that hates everything that is foreign and new (actually, that is why Jerónimo hesitated in bringing wounded Genoveva to the village). Their rejection of novelty is a rejection of change, and implicitly, of the possibility to improve their living conditions, of developing their minds:

"Quem andou por lá depois que tudo foi cumprido, deixou perceber que os aldeãos só estavam enquadrados no sistema que regia os outros humanos pelas circunstâncias comuns que os definiam e nunca se aperceberam que os outros viventes se tinham coberto de imaginação e andavam vivos pelas esquinas, conquistando espaços, procurando novas formas de existência, alargando aos poucos as algemas que os prendiam. Mas isso só acontecia fora das fronteiras de Serrano."

(1998: 108)

"Whoever walked around there, after everything that had to be came to pass, hinted that the villagers only related to the references which determine the life of other human beings by the shared circumstances that defined them as such, and they never realised that the other living humans were enveloped by imagination and walked alive through their everyday places, conquering new spheres, searching for new ways of being, gradually letting loose the handcuffs that held them. But that could only happen outside of the borders of Serrano."

(my translation)

This quote not only spells out, beautifully, some of the mental barriers that separate “villagers”, anywhere in the world, from the pulse of life (replacing geographical isolation for a deliberate frozen, solitude), but it also exemplifies, in a clear way, how the writing style of Dina Salústio suggests that truth is hidden, always receding from the grasp of the reader: this comment is a “*hint*”, by “*someone*”, that returned to Serrano after “*everything that had to be came to pass*”. Only at the end of the novel, when all the threads come together does the reader realise why truth was so scaring that it could only be guessed through half words. At this stage, suffice it to say that the madwoman always said that Serrano would end one day, but everybody refused to believe her, as they always did, when they could not handle the truth. Yet, the foretold curse becomes true, through the interference of the city:

The government projects a dam that will submerge the village and the people of Serrano are made to leave forever. Some move to the next towns, initially in tents provided by the army, while others depart to the city, and it is in this way that Jerónimo, and his wife Maninha, find themselves in the city, as he always wanted. The construction of the dam and the displacement of the villagers is further evidence of the disruptive and lethal power of the city, justifying to a certain extent the fear, resentment and rejection the villagers always felt towards it.

The fact that the destiny foretold by the madwoman comes to be, proves that she is not mad. In fact she knows everything and always has all the answers, only people, and readers, do not understand her words the first time they are heard (read). Like a sibyl, she talks in riddles. As one follows the plot of the novel, the madwoman becomes rather a prophet, unrecognised by those she has to guard. Yet, the distance between guardian angel and villagers is completely accepted by the madwoman, who is exasperated and disappointed with those the mountain has put under her charge. Mixed with this superficial contempt, there is real concern, and this mysterious prophet also understands how scared, powerless and ignorant her villagers are. Hence, to make her existence easier on them, she accepts her marginal status, posing as mad.

As the plot develops, you learn to rely on the madwoman to get signs that allow you to guess coming events. In making you (reader) follow her hints, Dina Salústio skilfully makes this character your prophet, as well. For instance, the fact that the madwoman had previously opened the door of the barn where Jerónimo lays Genoveva suggests that this encounter is approved of by the supernatural forces that rule the village, which amounts to say that Filipa, the foster product of this affair, is expected to play some important role.

From the beginning, the novel mixes the level of reality with a parallel, spiritual world that interferes with reality, although it is not clear which are the aims or the logic of this supernatural dimension. The two worlds are connected through the magical water of the fountain of the village, the midwife and the madwoman. The title (*A Louca de Serrano*) marks the madwoman (a louca) as one of the central figures of the novel.

The language of the novel is manipulated to create the same effect of uncertainty and doubt concerning the reality of the village. Pieces of several stories are told several times, revealing a bit more of truth in each new version. Still, the impression conveyed during the whole narrative is that the reader is never totally aware of what is going on. Some explanations concerning this spiritual sphere are never provided, while, by opposition, the pieces related to the lives of the main characters fall into place perfectly, in a spiral of events that relies (too much, in my opinion) on perfect, timely coincidences.

Magical realism is an obvious aesthetic influence in this novel, for it follows the same aesthetic codes as Latin American literatures, combining a realist plot (which respects

an intention of verisimilitude) with the punctual intervention of fantastic or supernatural dimensions, as if there were other worlds, spiritual, magical, waiting for particular moments (of crisis) to interfere with the real world through certain people, objects or places. In the case of this novel, Serrano is one such place. Its water has got magical effects and both the midwife and the madwoman are the active “doors” linking the concrete and the supernatural worlds.

Within the frame of the realist line of the plot, the two conflicts at the centre of the plot are the construction of the dam, which finishes with the village of Serrano, and the separation of Jerónimo and Filipa a trauma that stops her emotional life at seven, when she fell seriously ill and had to go to the city for treatment. Father and daughter lose track of each other because the San Martín family fears blackmail from the poor peasant (in public terms, that pregnancy never happened and Genoveva never dishonoured her family) and that is the reason why they malevolently manage to have the priest contacted by Jerónimo, transferred to another parish, so that the link between Serrano and the city is lost. Filipa is given to a foster-family, who receives a fat monthly allowance to take care of the girl, and the family lawyer is asked to make sure she finishes her studies and is well treated. In the city, Filipa goes through five adoptive families, unable to adapt to any of them. She was never harmed nor offended. She was simply indifferent to them, until, both foster family and lawyer decided it was time to try another family. When she reaches María Helena, her fifth stepmother, Filipa decides it is time to settle, study, and wait until she grows up to search for Jerónimo. When she finally can afford it, Filipa hires a private detective to find her father (although there is a misunderstanding until the very last moment to create suspense) and, in the last scene, Filipa gathers everybody, including Genoveva, at the Christmas party of the Samar hotel in 1994.

The narrated process of re-conquering one’s past to feel comfortable with the present combines time adjustment with integration in a new environment, creating a new sense of home. That is why the moment Filipa succeeds in having Jerónimo back in her life she finally feels happy, with her present life, in the city... In this way, both main characters achieve a full transition to new grounds, completing a process of dislocation and re-territorialisation. At the end of the journey, the ever present guardian angel, the madwoman, appears to Filipa one last time “*between shadow and light,*” in the terrace, to say good-bye.

Together with the history of Serrano, and the corresponding critique on insularity and isolation, Dina Salústio wrote a novel that invites reflection on the arrogant and abusive relationship between cities and the village, making defenceless villagers even more suspicious and provincial. Implicitly, Salústio is defending the necessity of a greater concern and dialogue between these two worlds, so as to go around the fears of the villagers, bringing new ideas and changes in such a way that it is not aggressive or destructive to their lives.

Finally, while writing about the urban space, Salústio composes a harsh picture, torn by class divisions that generate the same sort of resentment against the backward poor as the reader was led to feel towards the villagers. This time, in the city, the priest replaces the madwoman, as link between reality and supernatural powers, but his exasperated reaction is the same. He has no patience for the stubbornness, alienation, lack of hygiene and stupidity of the poor, and yet, he sympathises and is moved by them, trying to sheer them up with some passages of the Bible, improvised inspiration for story-telling. In private, the priest has bad-tempered, loud dialogues with God, complaining with Him for being so mean to poor people, always on the side of the rich. It is then, in this small, simple passage, which reproduces the insults the madwoman (and the narrator) addressed to the villagers, that all

the impatient anger of the prophet/angel is deconstructed, to reveal sheer love and sympathy with the limits of the innocent, suffering people over whom she had to watch. Contempt and impatience were the reaction to the unbearable impotence confronting those with wider horizons of comprehension, but unable to interfere and cause change.

III.2.4 Growing Up in a Cursed Village with a Guardian Angel Gone Mad

The fantastic mountain village imagined by Dina Salústio has the exact same number of men and women, composing two rival “teams” divided by sexual differences. In the case of rural Serrano, and contrary to the city world represented in the novel, women seem to have managed a more positive arrangement, as the village is ruled by a dynasty of midwives. When the old midwife dies, the next one will naturally move forward at the moment of the next birth, proving through her ability to deal with that situation, that she is the next “chosen one”. The challenge to cope with the critical situation of seeing another woman through the ordeal of giving birth, and succeed in it, is something “normal” village women will not even attempt to do. Thus, the talent to act as a midwife has to be given by the mysterious forces that rule over that haunted place. Motherhood is also the event that marks the full membership of any village woman among the members of the community. In the context of this matriarchy, men have their exclusive “fishing evenings”, where they exchange confidences and boast of their sexual performances.

At the centre of the village, the door of the house of the midwife, the reigning authority, is the public symbol of this female power:

“(A parteira era) dona da única porta mágica do povoado e arredores que parecia alargar quando as dimensões do corpo que entrava ou saía assim o exigiam, ou quando ela assim o decidia.”

(1998: 14)

“(The midwife was) the only owner of a magical door, either in the village or in the surrounding region, which seemed to dilate whenever the dimensions of the body going in or coming out demanded so, or when she herself decided.”

(my translation)

This huge vagina (the measures of the door are 3, 99 meters height for 71 centimetres width), which “did not get rusty with years of usage” (“*apesar dos anos não apresentava um único vestígio de ferrugem*”³⁹⁰) is the distinctive mark of the power of the midwife, grounding it on sexuality and fertility. Since traditional patriarchies tend to connect military strength and wisdom with the *phallus*, symbolically equating masculinity with aggressiveness, reason and culture, female power had to search for alternative means of self-assertion, assembling a positive identity among the remaining elements. This is the theoretical principle which determines the strategic difference between sexual difference theories and the gender driven “equality approach”: instead of trying to prove you are “as good as” men, simply look for alternative forms of empowerment and self-assertion, improvising with what you have at hand. In the fictional construction designed by Dina Salústio, which I read as a feminist thesis, the midwife, in her proximity to nature, and natural processes (as opposed to “culture”), explores the type of knowledge assigned to her feminine identity by phallogocentric discourses, constructing the very base of her authority in “nature”. Since the survival of the community, materialised in the next generation, quite

³⁹⁰ *Op. cit.* Salústio, 1998: 14.

simply depends on her talents, nature/feminine proves more fundamental and necessary than culture/masculine. This is a point with far reaching implications in the promotion of women's status, value and self-esteem. Within this same line of argument, the companion figure to the midwife is the madwoman, local ghost, ignored prophet and buffoon, whose "madness" celebrates unreasonable forms of intelligence, opposed to phallogocentric reason. Besides, the fact that the madwoman disappears and comes back in cycles of thirty-three years is another instance of the connection between women, madwoman, midwife, pregnancy and nature, since all of them are ruled by cycles. Finally, the huge vagina image publicly exposed as the symbol of Serrano's matriarchy, takes one back to the feminine body and bodily metaphors, encouraging women's self-assertion through their own nature, cycles and alternative wisdom.

And what about the men of the village? In Serrano, children do not look like their parents, and it takes several years until a couple succeeds in getting their first child. But stranger things happen: men are intermittently afflicted by impotence, relying on the witch-doctor (or other) talents of the midwife to function properly again. The knowledge that women do not have these problems, being totally efficient in their sexuality, is deeply resented by the men, who feel diminished by it. Consequently, the importance of conceiving children is related to the necessity of proving to the whole village one's ability to do so.

The power given to women is the necessary arrangement in exchange for their gift of fertility. When there are problems in getting pregnant, the woman is always blamed, shunned and insulted by her husband as "unworthy". The unhappy wife is then expected to go the midwife who, with the help of the city doctors always manages to make a couple succeed. The men do not like anything that comes from abroad, but the visit to the doctor is something accepted out of necessity.

This whole lie is exposed at the end of the novel, when the construction of a dam in the village river leads to an analysis of its water. It is discovered that the water of Serrano has the ability to make men who drink it during childhood sterile, and intermittently impotent. This amounts to say that "going to the doctor" means to sleep with a (any) city man, returning to the village with the conceived child, pretending everything is normal.

The knowledge of the dependency of these men and the continuity of the village on women is what explains the established matriarchy. The "fishing evenings" are the equivalent of a collective session of "group therapy" to make the men cope with their lack of virility by boasting of their sexual performances. At the same time, with hindsight, the narrator blames the simplicity of the isolated world of Serrano, their lack of capacity to change, reflect, improve, diversify and evolve on the fears of these men, who feel so disempowered by their impotent/sterile body that they refuse any other kind of challenge or confrontation. Women comply with this collective lie, relying on the midwife to learn of this truth after they are married, taking advantage of the necessity of this lie to reach for empowerment. The tremendous irony in this arrangement is that Salústio is reducing men to their bodily nature, as well. All the transcendental flair of masculinity, as epitome of reason, spirit and culture is undone, displacing the basis of patriarchal power to bodily, natural grounds, exactly in the same way as phallogocentric discourses construct feminine identities (confined to the body, natural cycles an unable to attain transcendental reason).

The only woman who refused to live by the collective lie ruling Serrano was Gremiana, who dared to scream the truth of their situation to the men of the villager, when she found her husband publicly commiserating for having a barren wife. She did not want to sleep with another man, not even to have a child, and she claimed her right to refuse any man she did not desire. She will not violate her "self" to save the public honour, asserted through virility, of her husband. Gremiana becomes a cursed name in the village as the men, in panic and despair at their loss of a fabricated status, drag the screaming woman to the

river and drown her. Until the moment she died, she repeatedly insulted them. Years later, when Serrano is abandoned because of the construction of the dam, and the water is analysed, truth is not revealed beyond the hidden scientific report (extending the habit of concealing male weakness to the city space). However, the dam is called “Gremiana” by the responsible team, as homage to the one who refused to pretend. “Gremiana” eventually explodes because of a flaw in the construction, drowning some of the men who had taken part in the murder of the other, human, “Gremiana” (a symbolical refusal of late consolation in the name of a preferred revenge).

The only other character who screams the truth of this dependency of men on women is the madwoman, but...she is “mad”, so, she is not taken seriously (like a stereotype of the king’s buffoon, from whom she picks the mark of madness, she can say the truth that is forbidden to others). Being the character whose name gives the title to the novel, I take the madwoman as the main figure/figuration of the novel, reaching for a mythical status. While the midwife allows you to reinterpret feminine identities through the female body, recovering a positive and empowering self-image, the madwoman as another currency, as a revolutionary, unreasonable metaphor. Since the madwoman has the power to know the future and interfere with the life of the villagers, screaming prophetic words and providing for those under her guard, I see it as a sort of female Christ, as is suggested by her cyclical death at thirty-three, and her go-between position between mankind and higher supernatural identities (in this case “the mountain”).

Both midwife (as an image of women’s self help and bonding) and a mad female Christ are powerful figures to condense a certain liberated female subjectivity, standing for empowerment and self-re-creation. In this sense, as striking images that captivate one’s imagination, I would claim these two characters as tentative feminist myths, following sexual difference theories and their focus on positive assertions of women’s self in order to heal the primal narcissist wound inflicted by the continuous confrontation with hegemonic patriarchies.

As I said in the previous section, the novel A Louca de Serrano is structured upon an opposition between life in the village and life in the city. The city, or, urban space, is a world where the law of the father is dominant. The purity of the women exchanged between males is such an issue that family honour depends on it. That is why the San Martin family does not hesitate in sacrificing the child Filipa to live with foster families instead of uniting her with her mother. In the name of public respectability that maternity out of wedlock, never happened. The fact that Genoveva (Filipa’s mother) is traumatised by dreams and unfocused memories of her plane crash, the amnesia and a partially remembered teenage motherhood, all of that emotional stress is deemed equally irrelevant. This strict (actually murderous) connection between the control of women’s sexuality and the assertion of class lineages is another theme that links the work of the two Cape Verdean women writers studied in this section. Both of them write about a repressive social world controlled by patriarchal mechanisms, and I find important to note that Orlanda Amarilis also connected the excessive concern with respectability to high-class families (usually a conservative force in society) and to an older generation of Cape Verdeans, probably more Lusophile and Catholic. Yet, this is an unsuccessful patriarchy because all the women characters rebel, inscribing changing patterns of social reference in the life of the archipelago.