

THE SOCIAL
AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND
OF PORTUGUESE NEGRO POETRY

If we are to understand the contradictory character of negro poetry in the Portuguese language, we have to be acquainted with the social conditions under which it was written. We are thus led to examine the origin of the creole societies of Cape Verde, Saint Thomas and Prince Island on the one hand, and of the negro societies of Angola and Mozambique on the other, whose evolution was entirely different. On Cape Verde, we can still find a system of agriculture based on small properties. On Saint Thomas and Prince Island, agriculture still predominates, but is based on large properties and shows many features of the capitalistic system. In Angola and Mozambique on the other hand, we encounter many different social and economic forms, ranging from tribal organization to urban concentration and agricultural exploitation of the capitalistic type.

The creole islands have produced cultural forms of very mixed origin. They even have their own language derived from

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the archaic Portuguese of the fifteenth century (*Crioulo* in the case of Cape Verde, and *Forro* in the case of Saint Thomas and Prince Island). In Angola and Mozambique on the other hand, the appearance of languages or dialects derived from the Portuguese is a much less frequent phenomenon. We hardly encounter linguistic forms resulting from the contact of the Portuguese language with native languages or dialects, except in small pockets located in urban areas.

If we want to gain a deeper insight into the social and economic factors that determine the culture of the creole islands, we must begin with Cape Verde. In view of the physical type of the population, we may be inclined to think that African influences must be more numerous than they in fact are. The kind of agriculture that is practiced, the tools that are used, the manner of habitation and the wide distribution of land, still testify to a way of life which is similar to the Mediterranean way, and which, after centuries of practice, is now accepted as the only way. The small size of the property has even given rise to a proverb, current on Fogo Island, which says that every pauper shall have his bite. The poetry of the islands is a direct echo of this truth, for the poets speak of humble things and modest means, things which everyone knows only too well. Cape Verde is thus related, by its way of life, to the Atlantic islands (Madeira and the Azores), and has a great many features in common with them.

The recurrent themes of the poetry of Cape Verde are due to the geographical and sociological features of the islands. These themes are unrest (caused by the instability of the economic life which is at the mercy of the rains), drought, famine, escape, the hour of departure (*bai*) and return (to which may be added a complementary theme, the impossibility of departure, for this depends also on the financial means of the aspiring emigrant). The poet of Cape Verde is a paradigm of insularity. But his place in time is not for that reason fixed. Instead, he occupies a series of places in time, each with its own set of values which may well be incompatible with the rest. For in the creole islands, screaming modernisms exist side by side with archaicisms difficult to eradicate. The local poet fights against his spatial isolation and makes the sea the vehicle of a hope that is only rarely ful-

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filled. Like other natives, the poet is a restless creature, always torn by the desire, the hope, of departure. His is a vain hope, but one he cannot abandon. Given the economic conditions of life on the islands, man is a hungry animal. Local poetry is dominated by the feeling of oppression that arises at the sight of the arid soil, ravaged by periods of long and intense drought, the bringer of famine. Thus at the top of the social pyramid, the poet becomes the mouthpiece of a people protesting against their geographical and economic conditions which no technical intervention, no matter how appropriate or efficient, seems to be able to improve. This is why a great many local poems enact the drama of a people faced with drought, of the men dying with the beasts, or setting out in search of water or pasture which they know they cannot find. By contrast, other poems express the hope for rain, and others still, the exultation of a people after the rain, when the whole island foresees a year of plenty which will banish the spectre of famine for a long time to come. The hour of departure stands, in the psychological makeup of the natives of Cape Verde, for a collective feeling, the feeling that emigration is the only effective solution to their economic problems. In addition, the hour of departure naturally evokes the restlessness of a man about to leave his native land. The rhythm of the sea does not, at this moment, supersede the rhythm of the land to which the native is bound by tradition. Both rhythms can in fact be discerned in the poetry of Cape Verde, where they serve to polarize the forces of collective life. There is on the one hand the rhythm of the land, of life tied to the soil, to the cultivation of tiny fields; and on the other, the rhythm of the sea, of eternal departure and eternal return. Roger Bastide has drawn attention to the call of the sea which can be heard in these poems. But the call of the sea issues directly from the difficult economic situation of the islands; the native listens to it only as a temporary and inevitable solution to his problems. After leaving the islands, he tries to settle in a place where his labor will be well enough rewarded to allow him to return to his native land after a short interval. As a result, we witness the perpetual reenactment of the same tragedy: the exodus of great masses of natives, either to the United States (a destination they choose less and less frequently, because of economic and other

difficulties they encounter there) or to Saint Thomas and Prince Island, or else to Dakar or Portuguese Guinea. Emigration to Saint Thomas and Prince Island is a truly dramatic event: The emigrant goes to work as a laborer on a cocoa or coffee plantation for a period of no less than two years. The work there is extremely hard, and since he is little prepared for the humid tropical climate, he is often ill and out of work. This experience has given birth to an anthology, known as the *cancioneiro* of Saint Thomas, whose most distinguished contributors are Oswaldo Alcântara, Gabriel Mariano, Onésimo Silveira and Ovídio Martins. In the poems of Onésimo Silveira, one of these emigrants who went to work on the cocoa and coffee plantations, and especially in his poem *Regresso* (Return), we find the most complete and authentic awareness of the problem. His language is not only alive with resentment against the cruel fate which condemns the native of Cape Verde to emigrate; it describes in great detail the daily calvary of the laborer, whether from Angola, Mozambique or Cape Verde, on the plantations of Saint Thomas. To the man from Cape Verde, work on the plantations is a case of flagrant injustice, which could be corrected by technical and economic improvements in his own country. Gabriel Mariano demands a thorough inquiry into the reasons why the natives of Cape Verde have to leave their native soil, to be subjected to a system of semi-slavery. He is seconded by Ovídio Martins, who goes on to protest against the capitalistic system of the plantation, with its systematic destruction of human beings. It seems then that the *cancioneiro* of Saint Thomas is above all a violent protest against the fate of the laborer and at the same time a condemnation of the methods used to force the natives of Cape Verde to submit to this kind of emigration.

The native of Cape Verde never really leaves his islands, for even as an exile far from his country, he remains close to it. While the ocean forms an integral part of his set of values, it rarely suggests to him a voyage of no return; on the contrary, it is on the ocean that the parallel lines of departure and return meet. He is certainly attracted by the distant land which promises to satisfy, not (as is sometimes said) his thirst for adventure, but the economic needs for which his native land cannot provide. But news from home easily outweighs all foreign attractions.

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Many poems, especially those of the *cancioneiro* of Saint Thomas, show that the exile keeps up a kind of correspondence with his native land. The *mornas*, poems written in the Creole language, take up this theme, and never fail to point out the need for close ties among a people dispersed, by economic necessity, throughout the Atlantic Ocean. Sometimes the sea is spoken of as a prison which keeps the islander from attaining the distant marvels he longs for. The liberating sea has thus another, sinister, aspect. But in spite of this, it is the sea which causes the great lyrical outbursts; which contains all hope when the islands are devastated by drought, their only scourge. It is also the sea which brings the vessels carrying the bread that may save them from starvation, and which allows them to set out for more promising lands, or at least more promising in appearance.

Rain is another recurrent theme in the poetry of Cape Verde. In their dreams, the poets envisage a future in which the water flows freely and merrily through an irrigation system feeding the wild and arid soil of the islands. Such a vision is to be found in almost every poet; but it is fully developed only in António Nunes who conceives it as the poet's task to live for this future paradise which, all indications to the contrary, may yet be realized with the help of the machine. This dream of total fertilization, achieved by means of the machine, points up another facet of life on the islands. For life there appears to be steeped in the past, remote from civilization, except for the occasional ship or plane. Under the strain of their bitter lot, the islanders dream of the machine which will transform their sterile soil into fertile plains bursting with grain and fruit. In the same way, the bitter poetry of the islands becomes a song of hope, without, however, losing its contact with reality, which continues to be the point of departure, and without giving up its revolutionary fervor, which would transform the social structure. (See *Capitão Ambrósio* by Gabriel Mariano.)

While the actual world in which the poet lives, and which determines his way of life, may give the impression of great calm, it cannot conceal the unrest which is implicit in every one of his words. Although he reflects the life of his times and describes it in its most particular aspects, this does not prevent him from searching for general truths valid for all times, such

as injustice in the distribution of wealth. In trying to see his society objectively, he is forced to define his position *vis-à-vis* the forces that shape its objective reality. His subjective attitude invariably reflects the various coordinates that define the collective life of the people. He could not fulfil his mission if he did not take up the main themes that run through the life of this earthbound, and at the same time seagoing, people perpetually ravaged by famine. Prior to 1928, poetry usually expressed a passive attitude: Men were waiting for a miracle, whether the miracle of emigration or that of the clouds on the horizon. Only rarely was this passive attitude translated into action. There was little awareness that man could do something to help to solve his problems. This attitude was expressed in lamentations on the fate of the islanders, abandoned to starvation and ignored by the Red Cross, Caritas and the international press (Jorge Barbosa), in poems which contrast the lives of those who left the islands with the better lives of those who stayed to live in a world of dreams (Manuel Lopes), and in bitterly nostalgic poems written by poets living in exile (Aguinaldo Fonseca, Terêncio Anahory). The latter sometimes contrast life in a big city abroad with life in a small village at home, and are shocked by the difference between the intimate life of the village, where everybody comments on everybody else's affairs, and the anonymous life of the city, where lack of interest in others appears to be the rule. To the creole poet in exile, city life seems totally dehumanized, devoid of any human content. This contrast defines the structures of the two societies: the small intimate society, where the number of individuals permits inter-subjective communication, and the city of more than a million inhabitants, where this is impossible. The poet in the city is thus doubly isolated. But rejected by the big city and exiled from home, he is also doubly united with his village. It seems that the native of Cape Verde can never be completely at home in the big city. His insularity stands in the way, and only his return, whether real or imaginary, allows him to find what he has always been looking for. If he becomes aware of his difficult position, his only hope of adaptation or harmony in his new surroundings is to evoke one of the ten islands of Cape Verde, the one in which his heart resides.

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While we may conclude that the poetry of Cape Verde is characterized by deep emotion and bitter melancholy (located somewhere between anguish and fear), we should add that the more recent poets also express racial feelings, and in particular, an awareness of their ties to Africa. While earlier poets had not despised these ties, they had often ignored them. The evocation of "slave ancestors" (Aguinaldo da Fonseca) is not just a literary device, but represents a return to African ways of feeling, hidden beneath European ways of thought. Thus a kind of visceral connection with ancestral Africa appears in the poems of Gabriel Mariano, Ovídio Martins, Terêncio Anahory, Onésimo Silveira (and, to some extent, Oswaldo Alcântara). At the same time, this connection reappears in society as a whole. (See Gabriel Mariano, Teixeira de Sousa, Baltazar Lopes and Félix Monteiro). The creole, the mulatto of Cape Verde, thus goes back to his negro origins and reclaims the original wisdom of the Negro, which enables him to see social problems in a new light.

The racial feelings expressed in Portuguese are also expressed on a more popular level in the poems written in the Creole language and recited to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Thus the famous *mornas* of Eugénio Tavares deal with typically creole themes and are rooted in the deepest layers of the social structure. The *mornas* of B. Leza, one of the most popular poets of the islands, directly express this racial awareness, and some later poets follow his example in an effort to restore the dignity of the creole race (Pedro Cardoso, Porge Pedro, Gabriel Mariano). The sense of social reform is not, however, confined to poetry. It is reflected above all in the consistent use of the Creole language, which distinguishes the creole from the Portuguese, and may well lead to revolutionary social changes, in spite of the appearance of immobility.

Saint Thomas and Prince Island developed along lines entirely different from Cape Verde, even though they had been settled by the Portuguese under identical circumstances. The geophysical features of the islands, their tropical climate, heavy rainfalls and permanent rivers, encouraged the introduction of luxury crops, to the detriment of human values. This led to a differentiation which became more pronounced from century to century. In the middle of the seventeenth century, an economic

crisis, due to a decline in the production of sugar cane, led to profound changes in the social structure. There had been a drop in the price of sugar on the European market, after the North-east of Brazil had been opened up to intensive cultivation of sugar cane. The result, on Saint Thomas and Prince Island, was a profound stagnation of social life, which lasted well into the nineteenth century, and was interrupted only by internecine clan warfare. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, we witness an agrarian revolution, following the introduction of other luxury crops, of coffee in 1800, and cocoa in 1822. The excellent climatic conditions for both these crops led to the arrival of a new kind of Portuguese colonist. The land was systematically occupied, to allow the maximum production of coffee and cocoa. This was the beginning of the large plantations and of capitalistic exploitation on a large scale. The plantations gradually expanded at the expense of the small properties of the creoles (who were the descendants of white settlers and negro slaves from the West Coast of Africa: from the Gabun, Guinea, and Angola).

At this point, the social structure of the islands begins to look like an extremely complex mosaic. There are, first, the so-called "Angolans," Negroes with no admixture of white blood, the descendants of Angolan slaves shipwrecked near the islands. Then there are the "forros," a category which includes individuals of varied descent, like the "sons of the earth," the descendants of white settlers and negro women, and the "Gregorians," the descendants of slaves who were freed under the governorship of Grégório José Ribeiro (1876), and are called after the governor. Individuals in this category are distinguished by the color of their skin, which ranges all the way from bronze to white. The presence of white indicates the extent of the interbreeding between white and colored, and the extent of the class of mulattoes to which it gave rise. But there is no real contact between Angolans and "forros," and a "forro" woman is not allowed to have sexual relations with an Angolan.

There are still other elements in the social structure of the islands, like the "tongas," colored people whose parents were born elsewhere, and the natives of Angola, Mozambique or Cape Verde, employed as laborers on the large plantations. Foreign-

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born whites, while numerically the least important, are socially the dominant class. They occupy places at the top of the social hierarchy which the natives can only hope to attain in exceptional cases, no more than two in a hundred. Unlike Cape Verde, Saint Thomas and Prince Island show all the symptoms of the class struggle, between classes defined primarily in terms of color. The conflict between different social classes is thus heightened by the color problem, and in addition, by no less important economic problems. On Saint Thomas, creoles own in fact no more than 7 percent of the arable land, while they number more than 30,000, whereas 93 percent of the land is owned by 300 whites, most of them absentee landlords. (The large plantations, run according to the capitalistic system, have their head offices and their administrative staffs in Lisbon.) This is why 95 percent of the agricultural product of the islands goes to the Europeans, and the annual per capita income of the natives is between 25 and 30 dollars. These figures illustrate the marginal existence of the native, who lives in the margin, not only of the economy, but also of society; and his social position has been deteriorating in recent years.

On Saint Thomas, as on Cape Verde, poetry is written both in Portuguese and in the vernacular (which is *Forro* in the case of Saint Thomas). The music which accompanies all folk poetry is of very ancient origin, and we know of forms of song which are no longer practiced, like the *lundum* (which originated in a dance called N'bloló N'blalá), the *irmandade* and the *ussua*. The *sòcòpé*, which is related to these forms, is still sung at popular gatherings. Since *Forro* poetry seems to find its main inspiration in proverbs, the "art poetry" of the islands (if it may be called that) which is written in Portuguese can hardly go to the same poetical and musical sources as folk poetry.

Given this complex social system and, especially, the existence of a typically creole society, it is not surprising that the first colored poet writing in Portuguese who showed any awareness of his color should have come from Saint Thomas or Prince Island, and as early as the middle or end of the nineteenth century. It is in fact in the work of Costa Alegre, a medical student, that we find the first expression of racial awareness. His poetry is a powerful indictment of Portuguese society at the end

of the nineteenth century, for its deep prejudice against mixed blood, and for imposing severe limitations on the exercise of his poetic talents. Almada Negreiros, the author of several studies on the economic and ethnological problems of the islands, enacts in a sonnet the drama of a poet unable to overcome the racial prejudice against him, his inspiration destroyed in the attempt. To quote from the sonnet, written on the occasion of Costa Alegre's death and dedicated to him: "As a poet, he loved, passionately / And he loved without being loved / For there is no woman in the world who would bear / The caresses of a negro. the shameful ecstasies / Of a man less than a pariah, a convict!" One of the recurrent themes in Costa Alegre's poems is the malediction which hangs over the colored race, though this does not prevent the poet from invoking the common origin of white and black. If the white race appears to him "full of grace" whereas he himself is a "horrible pit," a different attitude comes out in a different poem, and he begins to discover the virtues of the Negress: It is of her "lovely tender carbon" that diamonds are made. Finding in her a companion in misery, he extols her peculiar virtues without, however, clearly defining them: Like the stars that sparkle more brightly on a dark night, the white teeth of the Negress stand out more clearly from her dark skin. But the poet accepts the inferior status of his race, as a judgment rendered before birth, and from which there is no appeal, and he continues to adore the white woman whom he knows he cannot possess. His feelings of inferiority do not allow him to think of himself simply as a human being, or to find a new freedom and dignity in the acceptance of his race. Instead, he accepts and suffers his fate.

This attitude was not to be abandoned for another fifty years. In 1942, Francisco José Tenreiro, a young mulatto of Saint Thomas, published his *Ilha de nome Santo* (Island of the Saintly Name), an exposition, in the form of a poem, of social injustice on Saint Thomas (and, by extension, on Prince Island). In this poem, color becomes a positive attribute. White superiority, hitherto accepted without question by all negro poets in the Portuguese language, is here challenged for the first time. But it should be noted that Tenreiro's mixed blood has had some influence on his work, and did not allow him to produce true

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negro poetry of the kind we shall find in Angola. Nevertheless, Tenreiro goes beyond Alegre's poetic vision. Color is no longer regarded as a punishment inflicted by a powerful and inexorable god, but as a motive for action on the part of the Negro. Instead of being a proof of divine judgment, as some white racists would have it, it is regarded as a rallying-cry for the colored, a cry which the White can neither ignore nor make light of. Tenreiro rejects the social inferiority of the colored (for economic discrimination no longer exists in Europe itself, where he lives), and by endowing color with a positive value, forces the White to reflect on the status of the mulatto in a multi-racial society. If there are times when Tenreiro seems to subscribe to the classic doctrine of "luso-tropicalism," there are many others where he clearly rejects this idyllic picture of a multi-racial society living in harmony. Being a mulatto, he is aware that the typical Portuguese colonist aims at the exploitation of the colored population. And in his *Romance de seu Silva Costa* (Ballad of one Silva Costa), a biography of a typical white settler, he shows how the White manages to enrich himself at the expense of the colored.

Tenreiro's mixed blood shows up most clearly in a passage in which he claims to accept both racial elements in his nature: to be a negro when he loves a negress, and white when he loves a white woman. This ambivalent attitude, which he later extends to other spheres of life, shows conclusively that he has not achieved full racial awareness. He has, nevertheless, asserted the autonomy of his race. The colored man no longer looks upon himself as the eternal outsider, as he is looked upon in a colonial society. In this spirit, Tenreiro sings of an Africa integrated with the rest of the world, and recognized by the world for its distinctive achievements. The negro boxer who knocks out his white opponent in a North American ring symbolizes this new Africa. The way to improve the lot of the colored people is not to revolt against the civilization of the White, but to seek integration in it, by accepting its values and by claiming one's dues. Tenreiro's poetry occupies a unique position in the development of negro poetry in the Portuguese language. It marks the point where the poet is fully aware of the color problem, but unable to solve it.

The foregoing suggests the same conclusion that Jean-Paul Sartre drew from an examination of negro poetry in the French language: Only poetry is capable of expressing the feelings, values and aspirations of the Negro; only poetry can grasp the infinite complexity of the problem. The concept of white superiority, which Alegre regarded as unquestionable, begins to be challenged in Tenreiro's work, though Tenreiro does not take the only natural and legitimate road, which leads to revolt. He does not so much demand equality as accept the equality that is offered to him, and after overcoming the initial obstacles, settles down to a conservative attitude. Having challenged the discriminatory practices, insofar as they affect the mulatto, he accepts these very practices, insofar as they affect the Negro and, by encouraging a differential treatment of negro and mulatto, lead to the acceptance of the mulatto on a position of equality with the White. It should be noted here that in Angola and Mozambique, mulattoes still suffer the same fate as negroes. Tenreiro's apparent lack of concern is explained by the fact that his poetry was written in Lisbon. Having been brought up in Europe, he lacked an intimate knowledge of African conditions. Tenreiro is in his own words a "more dark-skinned European," whose sympathy for the cause of colored peoples under Portuguese domination is more intellectual than emotional.

The new poets of Saint Thomas and Prince Island show a much sharper awareness of the issue. Alda do Espírito Santo describes daily life only to probe beneath its surface. Her little poems like *Lavadeiras do Água Grande* (The Washerwomen of Água Grande) are really subtle allegories describing the ostracism of the Negro under the capitalistic "occupation" of the islands. Thus her washerwomen stand for all colored women, and her moral that the *whiter* the laundry, the *blacker* the skin of the washerwoman, may be taken to mean that the greater the awareness of race, the sharper the conflict between the two racial groups. Her poetry is no longer concerned with the special problems of the mulatto, as Tenreiro's poetry had been. The color problem is seen as a whole, and people of all shades are shown to have a common cause. There are signs of revolt and indications of the final solution. Another poem by Alda do Espírito Santo provides the key to this period of transition. Her

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Onde estão os homens caçados neste vento de loucura (Where are the men swept by this wind of folly) was directly inspired by the massacre of the creoles committed by the Portuguese army with the help of the white settlers in February 1953. The poet speaks here of the "spilled blood" and the "bleeding wounds" which, though suffered in vain, impose a sacred obligation on all men of colored blood to rise in revolt and attain their freedom.

The massacre of 1953 has inspired more than one poet. Tomaz Medeiros, in writing about the event, refuses to believe that the future of the creoles can be held in check by restrictive measures on the part of the "occupation," his term for the Portuguese, and reaffirms his faith in human equality. In his poetry, which seethes with racial feelings, he recognizes the need for violence, but also the need to define the freedom which ought to result from the violence. Clearly aware of the economic conditions, he depicts the creole as dispossessed, busy growing food for his own meager consumption. The task of fomenting a revolution for the sake of freedom for all, falls to the intellectual, who must beware of all bourgeois temptations. Revolution becomes a moral obligation; any move to postpone it, if it does not amount to treason, is a tactical retreat in the face of overwhelming social pressure. The creole, more than any other native of the islands, suffers under the prohibitions imposed on him for the sake of keeping him "in his place." In assuming the responsibility for the class struggle, the poet has only a single aim: freedom. Medeiros does not hesitate to compare the mountains of Saint Thomas with the Sierra Madre of Cuba, and he calls his compatriots to arms, in the hope that armed conflict will lead to land reform, the only solution he can see to the problems of the dispossessed. For injustice in the distribution of land reigns supreme on both islands of the archipelago: Not only does all the arable land belong to 300 whites; only the smaller plantations, from 10 to 50 hectares, are completely under cultivation, whereas the larger ones, above 50 hectares (which are in the majority) have less than half of their land under cultivation, because of a shortage of cheap labor. These problems are also reflected in the poetry of Maria Manuela Margarido. While she sometimes harkens back to the world of childhood, it is the world of racial conflict which predominates. Thus she

makes us listen to two laborers from the South (Angola and Mozambique), reminiscing about their countries and their homes, and deploring the cruel fate that tore them away and forced them to work on the plantations of Saint Thomas and Prince Island. For owing to the inhuman conditions, work on the plantations is regarded as a punishment, not only by the natives of Cape Verde, but also by those of Angola and, to a lesser extent, of Mozambique.

Thus the poets of Saint Thomas and Prince Island, though few in number, express some of the most significant themes of negro poetry in the Portuguese language. They take up the cause of freedom, not only within their own narrow boundaries, but everywhere. Their poetry reflects the changing attitudes of the colored populations, in spite of all the changes which the medium itself has undergone. From the passive attitude of acceptance and submission we pass, though only fifty years later, to a rehabilitation of the race, which brings us to the last phase, the view that revolution is the only way to freedom.

Angola and Mozambique have sometimes been compared with Brazil. But only Cape Verde, Saint Thomas and Prince Island lend themselves to this comparison. Social evolution on these islands was in fact similar to social evolution in Brazil, and had its origins in a similar economy: agriculture and the large plantation. But in Angola and Mozambique, the point of departure was entirely different. For ever since the Portuguese arrived in these parts, the economy was oriented towards trade and slavery. This explains why groups so similarly constituted developed in such dissimilar ways. A mobile society cannot adopt fixed values. Thus we find, in Angola, a so-called "luso-congolese" cultural cycle, marked by the adoption of Portuguese expressions, which lasted from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, had its ups and downs, and declined towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the first few years of the twentieth. During the same period, we find the Portuguese forming a number of small groups, in comparative isolation from the natives, which led to the formation of several pockets of European culture whose influence varied from time to time and place to place. The end of the nineteenth century saw the appearance of a flourishing press, supported by a society in which the "sons of the earth" (to use

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a euphemism of the period) had accepted the dominant culture. During the same period, the colonial élite was taking an active part in this development, and the masses of the natives were being culturally assimilated. Some newspapers printed sections in native languages. Thus at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, we find Quimbundo, a Bantu dialect spoken in Northern Angola, appearing in print in Luanda.

Among the ancestors of contemporary poetry in Angola, the only outstanding figure is Joaquim Dias Cordeiro da Matta, who tried to write typically Angolan poetry as far back as the last decades of the nineteenth century. But the movement he started lacked continuity, and in Angola, as on Saint Thomas and Prince Island, we have to wait another fifty years before we meet another attempt of this kind.

The first organized literary movement in Angola did not appear till 1950. In that year, a group, who came to be known as the "Movement of the Young Intellectuals of Angola," formed around the periodical *Mensagem* (Message), organ of the Association of the Natives of Angola. Only three numbers appeared, for the periodical was promptly suppressed by the Governor General of Angola. But the seed had been sown: The slogan coined by the group, "Discover Angola," was taken up by others, in the sense in which it was meant: Discover your human dignity. The movement was obviously not created out of nothing, but was a reaction to very specific social and economic conditions: Since the end of the war (1945), there had been a great influx of Portuguese settlers, attracted by the rapid increase in the value of Angolan exports. In a very short time, the white population reached the 100,000 mark and took possession of the most fertile regions of the country, often by force. The coffee-producing regions of the Congo district were suddenly put under intensive cultivation, which called for a massive recruitment of native labor. The inhuman conditions of the laborer found their echo in the poems of António Jacinto: "On this large plantation, the rain does not fall / It is the sweat from my brow which waters the plantation / On this large plantation of ripe coffee berries / Those cherry-colored spots / Are drops of my blood."

All Angolan poets without exception speak of the native laborer, the *contratado*, who is recruited by force, removed from

his native surroundings, and made to work under inhuman conditions. The recruitment of native labor has been largely responsible for the general impoverishment of the natives, as well as for the dissolution of the tribal organization. It has led to the virtual extinction of all the traditional social forms which, after a slow process requiring centuries, had finally adapted themselves to a culture and a technology very different from theirs. The natives who are made to work against their will and inclination are beginning to realize that revolt is their only hope. At the same time, some white intellectuals have begun to protest against the treatment of the natives. The poems of António Jacinto sum up the situation of the native who is both victim and rebel, and who reclaims his right to being treated as a subject while he is in fact being treated as an object. Jacinto refuses to adopt a "fatalistic" attitude. In his poem *Já quer e já sabe* (You Ask a Question and You Know the Answer) he writes: "My poem is my white self / Mounted on my black self / Riding through life." Since he professes to find in himself the difference on which the differential treatment of white and black is founded, he cannot accept the one as the master and the other as the slave. He therefore joins the ranks of those who reject the laws which would condemn them to slavery and manual labor, and who revolt against the systematic denial of their human rights.

In Angola, Viriato da Cruz is at the head of the literary movement which reflects and articulates the various currents within negro society. One of the aims of the movement is to create a genuine Angolan culture, rooted in native traditions and better adapted to the social and economic conditions of Angola than the culture of metropolitan Portugal. This movement has been gathering momentum ever since *Mensagem* published a poem calling on all Angolan poets to create an "Angolan language." There is a growing awareness of the native heritage, and Angolan culture is beginning to assert itself within a well-defined social and human setting. In his satirical poems, like *Sô Santo* (Holy Seigneur), Viriato da Cruz points out the gap between the *raison* of the new generation (of men born around 1928, like Mário Pinto de Andrade and Viriato da Cruz himself, or a little earlier, like António Jacinto, 1924, and Agostinho

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Neto, 1922) and the *unreason* of earlier generations. The new awareness of the motives behind the exclusion of the Negro from colonial society leads directly to a new freedom. While this freedom is at first only internal, it is bound to be externalized eventually, by means of revolt against the established order. The revolutionary import of Viriato da Cruz's poetry, obvious to a careful reader, is disguised by his subtle irony. Without appearing to explain the reason of his generation, he succeeds nevertheless in calling for the overthrow of the established order: The Negro must no longer suffer his fate in silence, but must become aware of his suffering, as the first step on his road to freedom. The differences between white and black, which had been emphasized by the White in his attempt to justify the exploitation of the Negro, must instead be used to make the Negro aware of himself and to bring out the inhuman condition of the victim and the slavery in which he is kept. Viriato da Cruz thus introduces a new element into Angolan thought, by holding out the hope of freedom through revolt, where there had only been despair and resignation.

Before leaving the subject, let us note that there is a great variety of poetic forms in Angola, though underneath this variety there is a common national and racial awareness. Thus mixed forms, which are modelled on the Portuguese, but borrow native themes and expressions exist side by side with purer forms, which are more deeply rooted in tribal traditions. (The poems of Viriato da Cruz and, more clearly, Mário António are of the mixed type.) These two forms have given rise to another, intermediate, form which is at home in the *musseque*, the native quarter, of the cities, and especially in Luanda. This type of poetry reflects in realistic terms the clash between tribal customs and urban conditions, and expresses, in Quimundo, the same revolutionary outlook and the same themes as current negro poetry in the Portuguese language. It never fails to contrast the low standard of life of the Negro with the high standard of the White or even of the mulatto. Whereas the income of the White allows him to live in comfort or even luxury, to equip his home with all the latest inventions, and to drive a car, the Negro is given the lowest and least rewarding jobs: domestic servant, messenger boy, laundryman, cook, construction worker. The

mulattoes and the few Negroes who live in bourgeois comfort come in for their share of the blame, for ignoring the problems of the masses, and for their slavish imitation of their white masters. They are accused of betraying the cause of their race and of abandoning the long and arduous fight for freedom. While the poetry of the *musseque* shows the influence of negro poetry in the Portuguese language, it is often a direct echo of traditional Quimbundo poetry (as for example in the case of Mário Pinto de Andrade and Agostinho Neto).

The changes in traditional ways of life, which have shaped this poetry, go even deeper. Urban life has always had a strong attraction for the native. Thus in addition to the 70,000 white inhabitants of Luanda, the capital of Angola, there are now 200,000 natives, of various ethnic origins, who live in the "shanty towns" which make up the *musseque*, the native quarter of the city. Few of the natives settle permanently in the city; most of them move back and forth between the city and their native village, thus alternating between two conflicting ways of life: agriculture and industry. Whereas the Negro, or rather, the negro peasant, lives in a universe where time is measured by the sun, the White lives in an artificial universe where time is measured by precision instruments, and thought of in mechanical terms. This is not to say that the Negro is that mythical creature, the natural man; for he has had to rationalize his relations to his social and natural environment. But he does not yet possess a mechanical instrument for measuring time which would allow him to carry rationalization to its logical conclusion; and while he is not at one with nature, he remains at least close to it. The confrontation of this attitude with modern technology has serious repercussions in the economic sphere: A subsistence economy, based on agriculture, is incompatible with a capitalistic economy which is necessarily accompanied by the appearance of an industrial proletariat. Because of the color problem, the negro proletariat is even more exposed to exploitation, and therefore more inclined to revolt when it becomes both class-conscious and race-conscious. Rejecting the appellation of "big children," by which the colonists seek to justify their continued exploitation, they unite in open revolt. Since 1952, this proletariat has in fact been following the example of the Mau-Mau, as the only way

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to expel the colonists from such a vast region by the force of only primitive arms.

The Angolan poetry of revolt is almost entirely the work of city-dwellers. This does not mean that the large masses of plantation workers, cut loose from their tribes, have remained silent. Some poets, like Costa Andrade and António Jacinto, have become their spokesmen, by volunteering for work on the plantations, farms, and wherever white exploits black, in order to experience the depth of servitude and the distance between free man and slave. In this way, the disaffection of the poet has been multiplied by the disaffection of the slave, resulting in a total rejection of the law of the oppressor. Conscious of his position, the poet must choose between two alternatives: He may treat his case as unique and, by arguing that a colored poet is hardly colored, seek equal opportunity for himself and his special gifts; or else he may make common cause with others, inciting them to a common revolt. If the poetry of revolt began with such special pleadings, it soon passed into the stage of revolt; and if this revolt was at first envisaged in poetic terms addressed to a small élite, it was soon envisaged in broader terms addressed to the colored masses, inciting them to shake off the white yoke. As Marx had taught, revolt does not aim at integration in the world, but at the transformation of existing conditions. It is therefore not a matter of improving these conditions, but of their total destruction. The poetry of António Cardoso, José Graça, Costa Andrade, Manuel Lima and Arnaldo Santos urges the Negro to wipe out every trace of discrimination. The battle, fought initially on the level of poetry, soon shifts to the field of action. The oppressed do not only demand their freedom, but even refuse to tolerate the presence of their oppressors, whose legal apparatus is responsible for their condition. The colonists must therefore be eliminated if every trace of slavery is to be wiped out.

The optimism which shines through these poems is tempered with pessimism. The poet knows that there is every reason for hope, but he also knows, as the massacre of Saint Thomas in 1953, and of the Kikuios from 1952 on, has shown, that he must suffer with his people before deliverance becomes a fact. And yet, the only way to efface the ambiguities of color which

poison all social relations is to abolish the difference between colonizer and colonized.

Agostinho Neto is aware that the Negro is still reduced to an object or to a submissive subject: "On the road / The file of Bailundo carriers / Trembles under the weight of their burdens." He also deplors the lack of unity among the various colored groups in Angola. But he feels nevertheless that the saturation point will soon be reached and that the time will soon be ripe for revolt. The voices of Africa are still the "sorrowful voices of Africa" who know that their submission does not justify tyranny, but also that it cannot win them liberty. There are still many natives in many parts of the country who are willing to acknowledge the racial superiority of the White, because of their admiration for his technical achievements, especially in electrical engineering: "The White is superior as an electrical engineer." In this case, their submission is due to the idea of technical inferiority which the colonists have succeeded in putting into their heads. In other cases, it is the idea of anatomical inferiority which is commonly accepted by certain groups in Angola, Cape Verde and even, though to a lesser extent, in Brazil. The White is frequently considered physically superior because of his straight hair, while curly hair is regarded as a mark of inferiority. This prejudice has led to a flourishing trade in hair straighteners, especially in Angola, Mozambique and South Africa. Franklin Frazier has noted a similar phenomenon in the United States. It may well seem that a curse has been placed on the entire race, by the spirits of the ancestors, the gods, or some other unknown and unknowable power. If the individual achieves freedom in his own social groups, his freedom remains relative, restricted by the presence of the white group. In his poem *Quintandeira* (The Gardener), Agostinho Neto illustrates both kinds of freedom: The gardener is free to sell her vegetables, but is forced to pay the tax for her son who, like all natives of Angola and Mozambique, is forced to serve on a road-building gang unless annual tax is paid. By providing such vivid illustrations of life under colonial rule, the poets help to dispel the ignorance which reduces the native to the condition of an object, and to furnish him with the means to revolt. For the colonists regard the native as a *thing* and, to indicate this transformation of subject into

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object, call their employees or servants by the name of "Knife" or "Soap" or "Chair" etc.

The use of native expressions often serves the poet as a temporary escape from the colonial world. It also serves to bring home the fact that Africans possess languages of their own, of great expressive power. Hence the frequent use of idiomatic expressions, taken from Quimbundo or Umbundo, in Angolan poetry, and by almost every Angolan poet: Agostinho Neto, Viriato da Cruz, José Graça, Mário António, Manuel Lima, Alexandre Deskallos, Antero Abreu, Alda Lara, António Jacinto, Costa Andrade, Arnaldo Santos, António Cardoso, João Abel, etc. Although white authors, too, make frequent use of native expressions, their purpose is to enhance the exotic character of their work, which can hardly be what native authors have in mind. Moreover, the logic of oppression requires the suppression of native languages, and the introduction of an "official" language. Since the latter is necessarily corrupted by its contact with "natural" languages, the result is a hybrid language which is closer to Bantu than to Portuguese. (This is not what is called "colonial Portuguese.") For if the master wants to make himself understood, he has to speak the language of the slave. Some native poets who have a perfect command of Portuguese prefer this hybrid language. The poems of Mário António and António Jacinto in particular contain deliberate malformations of Portuguese expressions.

There remains one final point: the fate of the natives forced to work on the plantations of Saint Thomas and Prince Island. In spite of thematic similarities, Angolan poetry differs widely from the poetry of Cape Verde, Saint Thomas and Prince Island, because of differences in social development. Creole society, with its elaborate stratification, has undergone a slow evolution, safe from the destruction entailed by rapid changes in social values. In Angola, on the other hand, many villages are threatened, by economic and social necessities, with sudden extinction. When an emigrant returns from Saint Thomas or Prince Island to his native village, he can rarely hope to find his social group intact. The brutal recruitment of labor may well have broken it up altogether, and the returning emigrant may have to find his way through life in new surroundings. It also happens that an

Angolan, forced to work far from home, returns old, poor and ill to his native land, only to find that his village has vanished without a trace, even from memory. Mário Pinto de Andrade has written on this theme in Quimbundo, and Alexandre Daskalos and Costa Andrade in Portuguese.

The development of poetry in Mozambique follows in outline its development in Angola. The first attempt to create a native culture was made at the end of the nineteenth and in the beginning of the twentieth century. By means of an effective press, the colored middle-classes tried to narrow the gap between the black natives and the white colonists, but found themselves frustrated by the problem entailed by a rapid and intensive exploitation of the country. After their attempt had failed, their journalism, often brilliant, disappeared completely. As in almost all of Portugal's possessions, it took another fifty years before we witness a renaissance, however modest, of the local culture. And it was again the press which pointed in the direction of a reevaluation of native values. The journal *Brado Africano* (The Cry of Africa) of Lourenço Marques became the rallying-point for a number of like-minded negroes, mulattoes and even Indians, and at times, though rarely, even Europeans.

In the history of poetry in Mozambique, the first poet of any stature was Rui de Noronha, of mixed Indian and negro blood. Although he felt drawn to his African heritage, he lacked the courage to become fully conscious of his race. His most characteristic poems evoke rites and ceremonies which, though irrational in character, are typically African. He was thus the first to draw a distinction between native and colonist. But there are only the vaguest hints, in some of his sonnets, that he ever contemplated freedom through revolt. In his isolation, he could envisage nothing but a literary revolt. If his conscience was roused at all, the reason may have been that the white masters of Mozambique showed a profound contempt for the rights of the native, using him as a tool in the exploration of the natural resources of the colony, and exporting him to the neighboring British territories, for a fee which helped to balance the budget of Mozambique. Though initially opposed to emigration, the native soon came to think of it as a step on the road to freedom. The *magaiça*, a native who had worked in the South African gold mines, came

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to enjoy the respect and admiration of his native village. Rui de Noronha himself describes this change without, however, fully understanding its social implications. A few years later, the cry of the *magaiça* was to be taken up. A new generation of poets began to see the native as a victim of fate, went on to compare his lot with that of the colonist, and concluded by preaching revolt against the established order.

The neo-realist movement in Portuguese literature has had a considerable influence on African poetry in the Portuguese language, by providing it with a list of the grievances of the white proletariat, and by showing that the lot of the proletariat can hardly be improved without a radical transformation of society. Starting from certain Marxist notions (or what they took to be such, for these notions were for the most part derived from Taine), the Portuguese neo-realists concluded that revolution was the only way to achieve a classless society. The notion of a proletariat was thus introduced into the poetry of Mozambique, and later extended so as to yield the notion of a "colored proletariat." We can witness this change in the work of José Craveirinha who was to influence all later poets. The first poets to succeed Rui de Noronha (Noémia de Sousa being the most important) had in fact exonerated their race and claimed the right to speak for all of "Mother Africa." In this connection, it might be noted that all mulatto poets of Mozambique invoke this figure, modelled, it seems, after the mythical Universal Mother who protects and nourishes, and thus represents the universe endowed with feminine attributes. The divinization of the mother could also be explained in sociological terms: Rejected by his white father, the mulatto is brought up by his black mother alone, and initiated by her into her world. In any case, the white proletariat served the colored poet as a model which allowed him, for the first time, to study the phenomenon of oppression. But it did not take him long to realize that his situation was not the same, but only analogous, and this led him to examine the differences between the two proletariats. He thus realized that, by oppressing the Negro, white society achieves a kind of unity; for when it comes to dealing with the pretensions of the natives, all internal conflicts of interest are for the moment set aside. To recognize the rights of the Negro would be to

undermine the foundations of colonial rule. The hardening of *apartheid* in South Africa only succeeds in widening the gap between the two groups, and in provoking extremist movements whose cries are heard as far away as the poetry of Mozambique.

The melancholy and despair which pervades the poetry of Mozambique must be attributed to the influence of the English language: Spirituals and blues have had a profound effect on native poetry. Craveirinha and Noémia de Sousa have obviously been influenced by North American negro poetry (which has also left its mark on Francisco Tenreiro of Saint Thomas and Viriato da Cruz of Angola). And Rui Knopfli has gone as far as to adopt its rhythms and, by combining them with South African musical modes, to create a new form of expression: the *kwala*. Diverse elements may thus combine to express a single reality.

If there is, in Mozambique, no judicial apparatus as complex as the South African, it is nevertheless true that the Portuguese colonists are watching the South African experiment. Native poets, too, are looking towards South Africa. Marcelino dos Santos (Kulungano) describes the fate of the victims of colonialism whose only hope is to exchange their role of the persecuted for that of the persecutor. In Kulungano's work, the racial struggle assumes universal proportions, the mulatto being the prototype of the rebel. There are some white and some mulatto poets who denounce injustice, but are guided by humanitarian sentiments and will not, of course, encourage or condone violence. Gouveia Lemos tells us that death is the only reward which the man who works in the gold mines can hope for—even though his job is regarded as a social distinction. Marcelino dos Santos, Noémia de Sousa and Duarte Galvão conclude on a similar note. A divided world and a divided family define the situation of the native; but he waits in vain for a call to arms. In a poem by José Craveirinha, in which the author wants to "be a drum," we can feel the gathering of the forces. And in a poem by Rui Knopfli, "Africa awakes" but finds the author shut up in his house, listening to the beat of the drums, among the confused rumors of the night, calling on the victims to come out of their lethargy and to unite in revolt.

The Negro has begun to reclaim his right to a place in history, rejecting the specious arguments of the colonists and

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especially the injustice which has been his lot. Slavery, which has existed in Africa ever since the Portuguese set foot on her shores, calls for revenge. The natives of Mozambique, though slower to grow up than the natives of other Portuguese possessions, are becoming aware, first of their race, and then of their nation. They are beginning to realize that there is another class, whose sole reason for existence is exploitation of their own class. As the slave discovers that he is a slave, his master begins to doubt the legitimacy of his rule. The poets of the white race, Orlando de Albuquerque, Orlando Mendes, Artur Costa, Fernando Couto and Rui Knopfli, dissociate themselves from the colonial cause, while mulatto poets like Gualter Soares and Carlos Maria rise in defense, not only of their own rights, but of the rights of the Negro as well. The building of the future and the struggle in the present, though different problems, are capable only of a single solution. The poet who discovers and defines the problems deserves to be a future hero to his people.