
Travel, Anti-Travel, and Subjectivity in the Poetry of Waly Salomão

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In this paper, I want to bring together several things: the poetry of the Syrian-Brazilian poet Waly Salomão (1943–2003), especially those parts that reflect on travel versus fixity; certain tendencies in Brazilian modernism tied to the country’s authoritarian history that precede, or even anticipate, Salomão’s poetry; and a casting of these alongside theories about the formation of poetic subjectivity extrapolated from the work of linguist Émile Benveniste.¹ These comparisons are worthwhile because Salomão—an extraordinary poetic voice who remains understudied—has created unique syntheses on self-placement and movement at the axis of several encounters (East/West, North/South) that force us to reread established notions about the poetic “I” in modern poetry. This rereading can have implications that go further than the scope of this paper. For one, while Salomão’s poetry is not explicitly political in content, it certainly confronts both the isolating nature of the dictatorship he lived through as well as the aggressively optimistic discourse of post-dictatorship modernization.² Rather than simplifying the rich discursive nature of Salomão’s poetry to his dual-heritage biography and his personal experience of authoritarianism, I want to offer them as side notes to the larger concern of laying out a poetic consciousness on the page.

Before elaborating further on Salomão’s work in the context of poetic subjectivity, I want to give a brief historical framework in which his work emerges: the *Tropicália* movement and its sustained dialogism with different strands of artistic and cultural currents in Brazil in the late 1960s. *Tropicália*, the literary and cultural movement that blossomed despite years of brutal dictatorship under successive military governments (1964–1985), was a critical and commercial success.³ While Salomão played an integral role in this socio-artistic process, it was in its aftermath that his work matured, simultaneous with a torrential influx of mass media, corporations, and

proliferation of means of travel that altered the nature of both industrial and artistic production in Brazil in ways unseen since the nineteenth century.

The dialogic reality of *Tropicália* provided for the use of multiple viewpoints in text or song, whereby the contrapuntal interaction (or contradiction) is crucial to the text's interpretation. While the movement emblemizes a crucial opposition to the state by nature of its dialogicity, *Tropicália* is considered by some to have eventually faded into commercial and governmental interests. Salomão emerged from the context of this movement but challenged it. He was especially interested in the clinical, touristic, and militarized landscape of modern space and spectacle. The interpolation of migration and mass media before, during, and after *Tropicália* in Brazil expanded the discourses of cosmopolitanism, internationalism and the creation of the subject *vis-à-vis* European (and American) counterparts. The approach of this poet to both the nationalist project of modernization as well as to concurrent aesthetic production was subversive, confrontational, and humorous, with an acute perception of his speaking position as both insider and outsider with regard to Brazilian lyric.

As Christopher Dunn has asserted, the “group of young singer-songwriters and their interlocutors in film, theater, visual arts, and literature responded to long-standing polemics over modernity and nationality, as well as to specific dilemmas of cultural production under military rule [...], an evolving ‘modern tradition’ in Brazil” (4). Dunn is right to point to a “modern” tradition, but it would be more accurate to pose the *Tropiclists* as interlocutors with *modernismo*, or the Brazilian modernist movement. Although the traditional, more conservative strand of modernism took hold in the United States, in Brazil it was what Charles A. Perrone has called the “radical and antinomian” strand of modernism that was popularized.

Tropicália revived and supervened upon an assemblage of debates around popular culture and formations of national identity that had not been in such heavy circulation since the mid-1900s, at the end of the reign of Dom Pedro II. Brazil's second and last emperor ruled for forty-nine years under the slogan “União e Indústria” [Unity and Industry]. The emperor—who also considered himself a lover and patron of the arts—reigned during the early stages of industrialization, in which Brazil introduced its first paved roads, steam-engine railway, submarine telegraph cables, and the telephone.

It was during the years of “Union and Industry” that the work of Romantic poets assigned themselves the task of envisioning the modern Brazilian subject, no longer at the receiving end of a long and arduous colonial dependency. They celebrated Brazil's tropical landscape as a symbol of distinctiveness and opposition in relation to Europe. Antônio Gonçalves Dias' “Canção do Exílio” [“Exile Song”] in *Primeiros Cantos* [*First Songs*], an

1843 poem by a youthful, miserable law student longing for the Brazilian homeland from his perch in Lisbon, is the most influential and parodied distillation of these sentiments. The poem, which takes on the recurring symbol of the *sabiá* bird, native to Brazil, is ripe with the use of *saudade* through a characteristically Brazilian natural environment and rural geography, as well as the idealization of a real or imaginary past.⁴ *Primeiros Cantos* was prodigiously praised by Alexandre Herculano, Portugal's most important contemporary critic, in the first and only gesture of acknowledgment of a Brazilian writer up to that time:

Quiséramos que ocupassem maior espaço. Nos poetas transatlânticos há por via de regras demasiadas reminiscências da Europa. Esse Nove Mundo que deu tanta poesia a Saint-Pierre e a Chateaubriand é assaz rico para inspirar e nutrir os poetas que crescerem à sombra das suas selvas primitivas. (Ed. Bandeira 55)

[We wanted them to occupy more space. There are as a rule too many likenesses of Europe in the transatlantic poets. This New World that gave so much poetry to Saint-Pierre and Chateaubriand is more than rich enough to inspire and nourish the poets that grow under the shadow of its primitive jungles.]⁵

Herculano's nativism intimates that the New World that up to then provided sufficient imaginary space for European observers might now drink from the nectar of its own trees. It is no wonder that his orientaling of the colonies and its subjects came at the heels of rapid industrial transformation in Europe, as well as ferocious reterritorializations of the Second Empire not witnessed in Brazil's history since the inception of slavery.

This is where my use of the term modernism finds itself, in the first stirrings of change, and of the "dual impetus of *modernismo*—formal liberty and the search for Brazilian identity—[with] inherent potential for contradiction, surging from both cosmopolitan and local sources" (Perrone 5). The former interacted with and borrowed heavily from the formal advances of the European avant-gardes, while the latter evolved into a "nationalism of resistance to the foreign and to emphasis on Brazilian originality [. . .] there was no avoiding oscillation between, and sometimes mixture of, these two aesthetic and ideological positions" (Perrone 5). My focus on Salomão's formation of a poetic subjectivity comes from this lush but complicated cultural and literary history, since his ruminations on self-placement, geography, and passage emerge from the context of *Tropicalist*—and by extension, revisited modernist—recombinations, but diverge from

them significantly. One strategy of understanding Salomão's post-*Tropicalist* "moment" (if this term is more helpful than an imagined "movement") can occur through his reshaping of home and homeland, which I would like to explore in light of the first-person narrative quality that accounts for much of his work, and relates to the discussion of Benveniste's notion of temporal subjectivity below.

As a first-generation Brazilian borne of a Syrian father (from Syria's only island, Arwad) and a Brazilian mother from Jequié, and interior city in Bahia (where Salomão was born), his work is marked by a transgressive approach to the idea of the Oriental subject as the other. Especially in his later years, he explores Oriental identification and the nature of search and exile. To get to the source of how the question of identification and self-orientalizing expresses and subverts itself, especially with respect to the idea of travel and mobility, one has to move beyond diaspora, hybridity, and nationalism as particularities. Gonçalves Dias was, like Salomão, only one generation away from being an outsider to a Brazilian homeland, though he generates a subjective viewpoint in decidedly nationalist terms. Salomão ineluctably challenges the desperate nostalgia that characterized Gonçalves Dias' rhetoric of *saudade*.

Salomão's fifth and most critically appraised volume of poetry is titled *Algaravias*, a word with a far-reaching and entangled etymology.⁶ He prefaces the book with the definition provided by Pedro Felipe Monlau's *Diccionario etimológico de la lengua castellana*, and it is worth reproducing here:

ALGARABÍA: Del a. al-garb, el occidente; algarabia, el poniente, gente que vive hacia el poniente. Y como esa lengua de los alárabes era un a. corrompido, poco inteligible para los castellanos, de ahí que traslaticiamente pasase algarabía a significar cosa dicha o escrita de modo que no se entienda [...]. Algarabia es también nombre de planta, y parece que se lo dió por la confusión de sus ramas, aludiendo al significado con que está comunmente recibida la voz algarabía. (17)

[From a. al-garb, the West; algarabia, the West, people who face westward. And as that language of the Arabs was considered a. a corrupted (Arabic), little understood by the Spanish (Castilians), from here it began to be seen figuratively as something written or said in a way that one does not understand. Also a name of a plant, and it appears that it was given that name by the messiness of its branches, alluding to the confusion that the word *algarabía* is commonly taken to mean.]

Salomão's reclaiming of this word signifies a major diachronic shift away from the way Gonçalves Dias conceived it. For an epigraph to "Exile Song" Gonçalves Dias borrowed Goethe's famous first lines of "Mignon's Song": "Kennst du das Land, wo die Citronen blühn?" ["Do you know the land where the lemons bloom?"] (11). Goethe was alluding to Italy, still considered part of the Orient by Anglo-Europeans. Gonçalves Dias adopts the line "where the lemons bloom" as a nostalgic refrain toward the Brazilian homeland. Unlike the unselfconscious Orientalist rhetoric of the Romantic period, Salomão's adopts that poetic discourse with a keen perception of his role as a double insider: both as the son of the Orient, "where the lemons bloom," and the son of the native land of the *sabiá* bird. In "Câmara de ecos" ("Echo Chamber") he writes:

Cresci sob um teto sossegado,
 Meu sonho era um pequenino sonho meu.
 Na ciência dos cuidados fui treinado.
 Agora, entre meu ser e o ser alheio,
 A linha de fronteira se rompeu. (*Algaravias* 21)

[I grew up under a quiet lair,
 My dream was a just a little dream of mine.
 I was trained in the science of care.
 Now, between my being and that of the other,
 The borderline has ruptured.]

The first-person "I" of the narrative voice in this passage embodies the role of the double insider in delicate ways. The author never explicitly characterizes the difference in the nature of his own being and that of the other—say, one Eastern, the other Western—instead alluding to the dissipating frontier between them. Salomão pronounces his own presence in the allusion to an echo chamber, where the emission of a singular voice not only multiplies in the "quiet lair" but transforms it. He transgresses the "cackle" of the *algaravias*, heard as a "messy" echo by detractors. The submersion into a doubly conscious, doubly present, first-person authoring makes Salomão able to subtly recast disparate voices.

Octavio Paz contends that Romanticism coexisted with the condition of modernity, merging with it concomitantly in order to transgress it. In his poem "Velha Cartomante Setentona" ["The Old Septuagenarian Fortune-Teller"] Salomão premises that "o modernismo brasileiro foi genuinamente um MOMENTO DE RUTURA" ["Brazilian modernism was genuinely a moment of rupture"] (*Armarinho de Mindezas* [Miscellaneous Drawer] 55). For

the *Tropicalists*, the “moment of rupture” entailed a cannibalistic engorgement of cultural and social artifacts: the artist moved through society as a bulimic, “eating,” processing, and digesting everything in sight. For Salomão, the act of searching and finding in order to suture change requires that an artist be still. In the poem “Líbano” [“Lebanons”] from the collection *Tarifa de embarque* [*Airport Tax*], this stillness as a necessary “move” repeats as a refrain:

Busco.
Tudo passa como se eu fosse
Um pássaro imóvel.
Busco. (58)

[I search.
Everything passes by as if I were
An unmoving bird.
I search.]

If modernism, especially Latin American *modernismo* concurrent with industrialization and the nationalism of the Romantic period, has been centrally concerned with the principle of change, Paz reveals that the poetry of the present age is concerned with the art of convergence, in contrast to the tradition of rupture. The poetic subject of the modern age sought the principles of change; the poets of the present seek the “unalterable principle” that is the root of change. Whereas we once measured the aesthetics of historical change between *The Odyssey* and *À la recherche du temps perdu*, we now ask if there is a point “at which the principle of change will be fused with that of permanence”:

The poetry that begins with this century’s end neither begins nor returns to its starting point: it is a perpetual re-beginning and a continual return. The poetry beginning now, without beginning, is seeking the intersection of times, the point of convergence. It asserts that between the cluttered past and the uninhabited future, poetry is the present. (Paz 76)

There is much to be explored (and even contested) in Paz’ notion of the continual return in contemporary poetry, but they allow us to open up a systemic set of contentions about subjectivity in language. Paz postulates that the poetry of the contemporary (distinct from the genre of contemporary poetry) to be at “the intersection of times,” or between seemingly equidistant points. His image of a “cluttered” past and an “uninhabited” future conjures

two opposing cities, one congested, the other desolate. The image also brings to mind the biography of experience: in one, the crowded panoply of personal memory, and in the other, the deserted unknown of a distant future. This is how I am concerned with the “intersection” of the change in poetry and understandings of subjectivity, which leads me to ask: How does Paz’ notion of convergence merge (at least metaphorically) with the bifurcated “I” at the center of Benveniste’s examination?

The French linguist Émile Benveniste (1902–1976), born in Aleppo, Syria, supercedes the Saussurean referential system by asking the question: “What makes linguistic communication possible?”⁷ He offers, “The man who is speaking and within in the condition of intersubjectivity” (“Subjectivity in Language” 230). Language necessitates subjectivity; subjectivity, in turn, is defined by language. For Benveniste, the bifurcated distinction occurs not between *langue/parole* but between the subject of the *énoncé* and the subject of the *énonciation*.⁸ His theory of subjectivity and consciousness are first revealed in a short outline called the “Nature of Pronouns,” in which he singles out the first person singular “I” and second person singular “you” as necessarily implicit in all languages everywhere and behaving distinctly unlike any other pronouns:

La conscience de soi n’est possible que si elle s’éprouve par contraste. Je n’emploie *je* qu’en m’adressant à quelqu’un, qui sera dans mon allocution un *tu*. C’est cette condition de dialogue qui est constitutive de la *personne*, car elle implique en réciprocité que je deviens *tu* dans l’allocution de celui que à son tour se désigne par *je*. (“Subjectivity in Language” 260)

[Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*.] (Trans. in Meek 224-25)

For Benveniste, the basis of subjectivity, with language as a model, “would not be those aspects that constitute either its lexical content (meaning) or its formal and grammatical rules, but it would only be discoverable in the *exercise* of language” (Phillips). The subject of the statement that requires I/you (*énoncé*) appears fixed in time, an ephemeral instance that begins to fade at the moment of enunciation. Benveniste makes an important temporal distinction that between the subject speaking (enunciation) and the subject

represented in speech (statement), what is implied is a single pronoun *I*, and at least two subjects: the subject speaking and the subject represented in speech.

For Benveniste, man is self-conscious not *when* he says *I* but *that* he says *I*. There is no “object” definable for him and “each *I* has its own reference and corresponds each time to a unique being who is set up as such” (“The Nature of Pronouns” 218). He contradicts the notion of language as an instrument of communication: “The pick, the arrow, and the wheel are not in nature. They are fabrications. Language is in the nature of man, and he did not fabricate it.” Yet he goes further, displacing the idea of a reductive subject that is brought forth into consciousness through his opposition to the existence of another: “It is a speaking man whom we find in the world, a man speaking to another man, and language provides the very definition of man” (“Subjectivity in Language” 224-25). In other words, the “old antinomies” of “*I*” (the individual) and “the other” (society) fall away; to posit the question of subjectivity as a duality or a reduction of it to a “single primordial term” is, for Benveniste, illegitimate. It is only in a “*dialectic reality* that will incorporate the two terms and define them by mutual relationship that the linguistic basis of subjectivity is discovered” (“Subjectivity in Language” 225).⁹

In writing about the relationship between temporality and subjectivity, Benveniste defines the “present” by the *Dictionnaire générale* as “le temps du verbe qui exprime le temps où l’on est” [the tense of the verb that expresses the time at which one is]. But, he cautions, “there is no other criterion and no other expression by which to indicate ‘the time at which one *is*’ except to take it as ‘the time at which one is *speaking*’ (original emphasis). Therefore, all linguistic time, including poetic time, is *self-referential*, and human temporality “with all its linguistic apparatus” reveals nothing more and nothing less than the “subjectivity inherent in the very using of language” (“Subjectivity in Language” 227).

For Benveniste the subject is the *function* of the speech act, there can be no subjectivity without linguistic apparatus, and the issue of tense is firmly situated there. If there is a substantial subject it is unstable and de-centered. Modernity as a condition of being is interesting here as a conventional category of “co-temporary” time because the poet is both co-present with this subjective temporality as well as a present-future onlooker, hyper-aware of the solitude and erosion inherent in the conception and day-to-day life of a “modern.”

C’est à partir de la I^e personne que le processus a dû commencer, là était l’axe de la subjectivité. [...] Pour un locuteur parlant de lui-même, le temps fondamental es le ‘présent’; tout ce qu’il prend à son

compte comme accompli en l'énonçant à la I^{re} personne du parfait se trouve rejeté inmanquablement dans le passé. (*Problems* 248)

[It is with the first person that the development must have begun; the axis of subjectivity was there. ... For a speaker speaking of himself, the fundamental tense is the 'present'; everything accomplished for which he assumes responsibility by stating it in the first person of the perfect is cast without fail back into the past.] (Trans. in Meek 214)

Benveniste goes beyond linear time in explicating the speaker/subject in the co-temporal present. Salomão's strategy is analogous to Benveniste in approximating subjectivity and temporality. I want to explain how this is so by again returning to the Romantic period: with its peak in the poetry of Gonçalves Dias, this period was characterized by a superimposition of the personal, singular, subjective "I" of the lyric form onto the multi-voiced, pluralist, collective "we." Though the sentiment at the heart of the poem is a personal and private *saudade* for the bemoaned homeland (and Gonçalves Dias writes in the Prologue that it is his private form of *saudade* that instantiated the poems), it is the shared, collective value of the land and its natural elements that are extended to an entire people, in opposition to the European metropole. Salomão, in contrast, makes consistent, near-total use of the subject "I" in his work, but frequently displaces it by employing an uncannily impersonal "I" that insinuates a plural form.

In "Carta Aberta a John Ashbery" ["Open Letter to John Ashbery"] Salomão's narrator takes on multiple personae, speaking in an impersonal I/we:

A memória é uma ilha de edição—um qualquer
passante diz, em um estilo nonchalant,
e imediatamente apaga a tecla e também
o sentido do que queria dizer.

Esgotado o eu, resta o espanto do mundo não ser
levado junto de roldão.
Onde e como armazenar a cor de cada instante?
Que traço reter da translúcida aurora?
Incinerar o lenho seco das amizades esturricadas?
O perfume, acaso, daquela rosa desbotada? (43)
[Memory is an editing dock—a nameless
passerby says, in a nonchalant manner,

and immediately hits delete as well as
the meaning of what he wanted to say.

The self spent, what is left is the wonder of the world
without being swept along in the rush of things.
Where and how to store the color of each instant?
What stroke to retain from the translucent dawn?
To set ablaze the dry wood of shriveled friendships?
The scent, perhaps, of that faded rose?]

The speaking subject here looks on at the “espanto” or astonishing horror of the world, but from a distance. The observer does not allow himself to be swept along into this confusion.¹⁰ The messiness of that world, or the “roldão,” is an adverbial locution; the enjambment “não ser / levado junto” underscores the sense of caution and halting, lest the poet-observer too be carried away recklessly.

Salomão’s poetic subject looks at the “I” of himself as a displaced insider (the “spent” or expended self), not unlike the allusion to the searching but “unmoving” bird. In “A Praia da Tropicália” [“Tropicália Beach”], he writes that the poets and musicians of *Tropicália*, including himself, should not be credited with having invented the movement’s aesthetics, but as having functioned “como sismógrafos, como antenas de gafanhotos captando abalo sísmico iminente” [as seismographs, as grasshopper antennas capturing the imminent earth tremor]. Rather than an all-encompassing, all-knowing, all-controlling poetic subject, Salomão envisions a hyper-tuned, reflexive, and conscious “I” that waits for and registers movement (“the imminent earth tremor”) rather than chasing after it. He imagines the poetic subject as one with heightened powers, but one who like ordinary linguistic subjects continuously generates and abandons ideations and cognitions of the world, never alone but in solidarity with other subjects.

Algaravias is marked with an epilogue poem extracted from Edgar Allen Poe, in which the poet asks and answers his own question as a reflexive echo: “What is poetry? –Poetry! that Proteus-like idea [...]” (81-82). It seems as if the very premise of *Algaravias* hinges on the double meaning of this word: poetry as Proteus, a sea god who overlooking his prophetic powers morphs into different shapes in order to avoid stability or consistency or having to predict the future. The poetic subject is formed through a process of simultaneous domestication, or negotiation of normal constraints, and an unleashing of an outlawed license to transgress the boundaries of socially accepted linguistic norms.

For Salomão, as recorded in biographical sketches and interviews, this process of ideation is never given or foreseen, often arising out of stressful and even debilitating conditions. What is striking about his work, especially in the later years, is the theme of discovery and liberation not in physical wandering and nomadism, but in looming exile and isolation. As articulated in “Líbanos,” stillness and fixity are once again a necessary “move” in the self-fashioning of the author’s voice. In 1970, during the height of the dictatorship, Salomão was imprisoned for possessing a small amount of marijuana in São Paulo, and was forced to serve his sentence in the notorious Carandiru prison. In 1996, he spoke about the extreme circumstances of his detention and the subsequent publishing of his first book, *Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço* [*Hold Me Down Cuz I’m Gonna Have a Fi!*]: “Paradoxalmente, a casa de detenção foi o momento de libertação da minha capacidade de escrever... Não me senti vitimizado, de ver o sol nascer quadrado. Para mim, foi uma libertação da escritura” [“Paradoxically, the detention center was the liberating moment of my capacity to write...I didn’t consider myself victimized, from seeing the sun rise in a quadrant. For me, it was the liberation of writing”]. He relinquishes discovery and liberation to exile and isolation in place of physical wandering and abandon; here the protean, amorphous nature of poetry and the poetic subject pronounce themselves, in which the process of ideation is accessed by a non-domesticated, unexpected means.

Do confinement and fixity—the bottom depths of where the self is “spent”—allow the release of that stored “color of each instant,” where the present past is negotiated by the poet? My intention is by no means to romanticize or soften the forced deprivation and internment of a crushing dictatorship. Rather, what Salomão’s experience suggests is an untying of the nooses of fear, conformity and mediocrity that the dictatorship demanded in the “free” world. The prison emblemizes his confinement, and poetry liberates him from the rut of sameness: “sob o signo de PROTEU vencerás / Por cima do cotidiano estéril / de horrível fixidez” [“under the sign of PROTEUS you will rise / above the sterile everyday / of horrible fixity”] (*Me Segura* 29). Despite the usually awkward conditions surrounding the birth of any poem by any poet anywhere, the poet can seek a poetic truth that does not exploit his or her poetic license; the poem “speaks” about its transformation without actually making that transformation its subject. Salomão is exemplary of a body of work that is generative and creative in its approach to the modern subject (outside the state discourse of modernity) without falling into the despair or depression that the modern aesthetic implies for many observers, writers, and critics.

As an aggregate of modernization and Brazil’s perceived destiny to “become modern,” travel and movement posed a conundrum for the state

and the artist. The state inflects travel as positive since it can (1) regulate the terms of that movement, including the imprisonment of some artists and the exiling of others; and (2) encourage consumption and tourism in interchangeable “modern” cityscapes, where “duty-free” or zero-tariff shopping zones demand a political vacuum. Salomão was not exiled in the manner that Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil were in 1969. He defied the forced fixity imposed by a dehumanizing internment. However, he arrives at “anti-travel” thinking through play and irony. In “Anti-Viagem” [“Anti-Travel”], he expresses disinterest with the fatigue and weariness of travel, all the while underscoring a traveler’s ability to regenerate change and make contact with the unknown:

Toda viagem é inútil,
medito à beira do poço vedado [...]

Quem viaja arrisca
uma taxa elevada de lassitudes.

Meu aconchego é o perto,
o conhecido e reconhecido. (*Algaravias* 50)

[All travel is useless,
I brood at the edge of the enclosed well. [...]

Whoever travels runs the risk of
a raised tax on weariness.

What is cozy to me is what is near,
the known and recognizable.]

The poem offers a stern but tongue-in-cheek response to an increasingly alienating consumerist culture in Latin America (“raised tax on weariness”). More seriously, the poet resists the homogenizing and conformist tendencies of contemporary culture, or the modern state’s definition of “progress,” as defined by the movement of goods, people, commodities, etc., embodied in the industrialization impetus.

Nenhum habeus corpus
é reconhecido no Tribunal de Júri do Cosmos.
O ir e vir livremente

não consta de nenhum Bill of Rights cósmico.
Ao contrário, a espada de Dâmocles
para sempre paira sobre a esfera do mapa-múndi.
O Atlas é um compasso de ferro
demarcando longitudes e latitudes. (49)

[No habeas corpus
is recognized in the Jury Tribunal of the Cosmos.
Coming and going as one pleases
doesn't consist of any cosmic Bill of Rights.
Just the opposite, the sword of Damocles
forever hovers above the sphere of the *mappa mundi*.
The atlas is an iron compass
demarcating longitudes and latitudes.]

Salomão directs our attention to a “habeas corpus” and a “Bill of Rights,” avatars not of authoritarian dictatorship but liberal democracy. The instinct of “coming and going as one pleases,” he infers, cannot be contained by the laws of society, though travel may carry its own irreducible perils (“the sword of Damocles”).

“Poema Jet-Lagged” lingers over the contradiction at the heart of travel/anti-travel sensibility:

Viajar, para que e para onde,
se a gente se torna mais infeliz
quando retorna? Infeliz
e vazio, situações e lugares
desaparecidos no ralo,
ruas e rios confundidos, muralhas, capelas,
panólias, paisagens, quadros,
duties free e shoppings [...]

Mas ficar, para que e para onde,
se não há remédio, xarope ou elixir [...]
se viajar é a única forma de ser feliz
e pleno?

Escrever é se vingar da perda.
Embora o material tenha se derretido todo,
igual queijo fundido. (*Algaravias* 29-33)

[To travel, what for and for whom,
if one becomes more unhappy
upon return? Unhappy
and empty, situations and locations
disappeared down the drain,
jumbled up streets and rivers, murals, chapels,
panoplies, passageways, squares,
duty-frees and shopping malls [...]

But to remain, what for and for whom,
if there is no remedy, syrup or elixir [...]
if travel is the only way of being happy
and full?

To write is to take revenge on loss,
Though the material has all melted away,
just like melted cheese.]

The poem dwells on the interchangeability of speed-through spaces, especially zones like “duty-frees and shopping malls.” Like much of Salomão’s work, the poem is marked by a weariness and fatigue with the velocity and conformity of modern living but a simultaneous refusal to fall into despair and psychological misery. His is a testament that the poem can simulate “revenge” on the real, small tragedies of everyday life even when the source material for its discourse has dissipated. I want to refer back to Benveniste in the context of the poem’s last lines. Despite the ephemeral and “melted” nature of its origin, the poet’s language cannot be distilled into its “material,” textual, empirical, or otherwise. Benveniste’s intervention on the study of intersubjectivity, especially in the first person, was a belief that language cannot be distilled into mere parts or tools or instruments. Salomão’s “spent” self is kindred to Benveniste’s divided subject, pointing the way to an understanding of selfhood that still retains the residue of life in both the traveler and the writer, even when fleeting images and places have dissipated.

NOTES

1. I wish to thank Professor Mariano Siskind (Harvard University) for engaging with this work from its inception. A version of this paper was presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association, in the panel “Arabs and the New World”—my thanks

to panel chair Professor Wail Hassan and fellow panelists for their remarks. My gratitude also extends to the editorial review board of *Brijula*, the anonymous readers they consulted, as well as Professor Steve Caton, Darryl Li and Sarah Waheed, for their commentary.

2. I use modernization in this context to denote state discourses on progress, which cast travel, migration and movement as overwhelmingly positive, even transfiguring. The “poetic subject” that the poet produces views the ephemerality and instantaneity of modern living with deep (and often satirical) skepticism.

3. The movement took its name from an eponymous composition by Caetano Veloso, who had in turn borrowed it from an installation by the visual artist Hélio Oiticica. The term was “rich in connotations since it played on images of Brazil as a ‘tropical paradise’ that date back to the letter written by Pero Vaz Caminha in 1500 to the king of Portugal relating the ‘discovery’ of Brazil” (Dunn 72).

4. This word is usually interpreted as a complex sensibility involving unrequited yearning, longing, or nostalgia for a person or out-of-reach place (“homesickness” carries a similar connotation). However, the aesthetic history of the expression expands from the writings of King Dom Duarte to the *Saudosismo* movement following World War II (i.e., nearly the entire span of the modern Portuguese language).

5. All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

6. The book won the Prêmio Jebuti in 1995.

7. Ferdinand de Saussure differentiated between *langue* as “l’oeuvre de l’intelligence collective” [the work of collective intelligence] and *parole* as the work of individual statements and utterances. He asserted that the study of *langue* should focus on language in general use—universal conditions of possibility that apply to all languages everywhere—and the study of *parole* would rely entirely on actual, individual statements.

8. As I discuss below, the *énoncé* points to the enounced, or the meaningful set of words; the *énonciation* is interpreted as the articulation, pointing to the subject speaking.

9. Emphasis added.

10. My thanks to Professor Luis Girón-Negrón for articulating the distancing effect in this line.

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