

***The Fiction of Fernanda Dias and Senna Fernandes:  
Revisiting Colonial Macau through the lens of Ethnicity, Gender and Patriarchy***

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**Abstract**

Macau, the last colonial settlement of the Portuguese empire, inspired several Lusophone writers, though few have captured the intricacies of the Portuguese and Chinese cultural presence. Senna Fernandes and Fernanda Dias are such outstanding voices and the selected authors for the current analysis.

Being a Macanese, a term locally reserved for Eurasian people of Chinese, Portuguese and other descent born in Macau, Senna Fernandes chronicles his own community, picturing the processes of the construction of identity and otherness along multiple lines of class, ethnicity, and gender. He captures the fused historical experiences of the Macanese community at the borderline between the Portuguese colonizers and the majority Chinese population. His novel *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé*, depicting the strains and conviviality between those of Lusophone descent and the Chinese population, reflects a very conservative social milieu where protagonists remain trapped inside customs whose roots stretch back through the centuries.

The contemporary Portuguese poet and novelist Fernanda Dias presents a self-conscious gaze into a romantic encounter in Macau, perceived as generating a new identity. Featuring a relationship between a Portuguese woman and a Chinese man, she delves into the power strains intrinsic to love, uncovering the subtle games of political implications and allusions to colonial history. A gendered identity is built upon the overlapping of erotic love and aesthetical options.

The two authors reveal the various thin lines of invisible but resilient markers and multiple crisscrossing strategies of either closure and refusal or binding with and accepting various others.

Keywords: Fernanda Dias; Senna Fernandes; literatura colonial; Macau

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Fernanda Dias and Senna Fernandes's writings are distinct from one another in countless aspects. This made the project of analysing their narratives side by side appear unreasonable at first. How can one compare and contrast two writers that have such different standpoints? Setting aside the biographical disparities to solely focus on literary appreciations, Senna Fernandes's fictional works are defined by their external events in a very traditional way, whereas the key to Fernanda Dias's fictional writings is internal and subjective. In the former, the narrative revolves around the plot and the writer shows the significance of the story by just asking the reader to follow the protagonists' actions. However, in the latter, priority goes to central images and epiphanies, around which the lyrical meaning is revealed to the reader. One offers the reader what Roland Barthes calls a "readerly text", the other asks the reader to fill in the plot gaps – what Barthes calls a "writerly text".

The purpose of this essay, however, is not to examine the literary structure and style of Senna Fernandes and Fernanda Dias's fictions, but to analyse the fictional writings of these two authors so as to understand twentieth century colonial Macau and its multi-layered convolutions. Henrique de Senna Fernandes is a prime voice in Macau Portuguese literature. Born in Macau in 1923, Fernandes spent most of his life in the Portuguese colonial city. After a few years sojourn in Portugal where he studied law, he returned to Macau and set up a law office. Besides practicing as a lawyer, he was also a school principal and a journalist. His fiction takes place in a conservative social milieu - the Macau Lusophone community during the 1930s and 1940s. He wrote two collection of short stories, *Nam-Van*, and *Mong-Há*, published respectively in 1978 and 1998, and two novels, *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé* (1986) and *A Trança Feiticeira* (1992)<sup>1</sup>, both of which were adapted for the cinema. One of his novels, *Os Dores*<sup>2</sup>, was posthumously published in 2012, and another one, *A Noite Caiu em Dezembro*<sup>3</sup> is expected to be published in 2014.

The complex relationship between the three main communities in Macau, the Macanese, the European Portuguese and the majority Chinese population is uniquely reflected in the fictional works of Senna Fernandes. This association is illustrated in numerous instances through the idiom of language, religion, gastronomy, music, architecture, and other cultural lexis coming from the West and the East, and generating hybrid cultural expressions in the city.

The vulnerability of Portugal, a country occupying a tiny corner of the international chess board of politics and itself colonized by "Grand Empires" (Santos, 2002), and the nearby silent but impressive China, alert and equipped with a roaring voice when required, made the Macanese defenceless and disquiet as an ethnic minority made of many historical mixtures and re-mixtures. The city was divided in two territorial areas, the Christian and the Chinese, with limited cross-interface between them. The novel *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé* depicts the insecurity of the Macanese with regard to their position in Macau. In the novel (2012, p.50), a playful young Macanese man warned his friends not to tease a Chinese group of street performers in the *cidade chinesa* (Chinese city) because it was dangerous to do so. The district occupied by the *cidade cristã* (Christian city) is regarded as the Macanese social realm, whereas the

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<sup>1</sup> The bewitching Braid.

<sup>2</sup> The Dores.

<sup>3</sup> The Night Fell Down in December.

*cidade chinesa* appears as only a place to go in search of entertainment or to fulfil less honourable and usually secretive purposes. Although co-habiting the same city and being able to communicate with each other, the conviviality between the two communities is thus confined to particular purposes and provides that certain codes of action are met. This is, however, open to variation if categories of class, belonging or gender relations are added to the equation. The social divide can be reduced or expanded under certain circumstances, irrespective of the ethnic origin of the agents. The construct of ethnicity might not be as productive as others such as social strata, gender or patriarchy, when analysing the dynamics of Portuguese colonialism. In fact, the latter concepts, when merged with the colonizer/colonized equation are easily eclipsed.

Within the Macanese community, both social and gender lines display a multitude of subtle though insurmountable divides, evidencing a highly structured and extremely conservative society. In *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé*, the protagonist Chico Frontaria, a hedonistic son of a traditional Macanese family descendant from Portuguese seafarers, falls down the social ladder from privileged to penniless, and ends up dishonoured and snubbed by his own family and community. He is eventually redeemed by another displaced member of the community, the “spinster” Victorina Vidal. There are heroic deeds in Victorina’s ancestry, though her father was disowned for marrying her mother, a daughter of a Filipino with a shameful occupation - he earned his living treating sexually transmitted diseases. The social secluded Victorina, an independent woman no longer in the marriage pipeline due to her age and physical appearance, would never have been noticed by any male member of the community, including Chico Frontaria. For years, whilst immersed in a carefree and happy-go-lucky lifestyle, Chico Frontaria and his friends indeed had made fun of Victorina. However, the tremendous physical and moral degradation of the latter and the loneliness of the former had put them side by side down on the same road. In this sense Fernandes’ novel is a romantic tale with Victorina coming to rescue the ruined Frontaria, while realistically confirming the social and unbeatable boundaries of the social ladder.

The patriarchal gaze into women as objects of pleasure and decorative display which allow the males to consolidate their position in the social rank, is apparent throughout the novel. The female characters are usually portrayed and evaluated by their external qualities, as in the depiction of Chico Frontaria’s aunt: “[Ela] não tinha atractivos, nunca rapaz algum cirandou à volta dela...”<sup>4</sup> (p. 23).

Yet the patriarchal gaze does not only target the females - it extends its tentacles to ensure that ambiguous masculinity is not to be tolerated. Victorina’s father is the object of gossip and is belittled by his family for reacting to differences and quarrels in a gentle and quiet manner, thereby attracting the contempt of his own daughter, who states: “[Ela] Preferia um pai bruto como o avô àquela coisa amorfa e abúlica, empurrada eternamente pelos outros”<sup>5</sup> (p. 217).

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<sup>4</sup> ([She] was chubby, easy going, predestined to the celibacy since infancy. She was no eye-catching, no one else ever wanted to date her...).

<sup>5</sup> [I] would prefer a father as rude as the grandfather rather than that amorphous and apathetic thing, always pushed by the others.

Another social divide regulates the relationships between the Macanese community and the metropolitan Portuguese temporarily settled in the city, who fulfill administrative, military, or commercial roles. To the Macanese community the mythical homeland gathers unconditional loyalty and its representatives are objects of respect and devotion, as in the passage depicting the encounter between a Portuguese physician and Titi Bitá, the aunt of Chico Frontaria: “O clínico veio, com todo o seu prestígio de português de Portugal. A Titá respondeu-lhe timidamente às perguntas, misturando o vernáculo com frases do mais retinto patuá”<sup>6</sup> (p. 40).

Too far from and forgotten by Lisbon, the Macanese community experienced a longing that was also ambivalent and contradictory. While the high level metropolitan representatives were accepted and cherished, the local community looked upon the Portuguese soldiers settled by the colonial administration with disdain. What attracted Chico Frontaria to Ermelinda Soeiro, a Macanese woman married to an older man and known within the community for her infidelity, was not her beauty or her sexuality, but revenge - she had shown preference for Portuguese soldiers rather than the *filhos da terra*: “Apontavam-se-lhe os amantes, todos sargentos metropolitanos da Guarnição e da Guarda Cívica. ... Mas, para os filhos da terra, aquela preferência pela gente de fora era uma constante provocação. Todas as tentativas para a seduzir e tirar proveito dos magníficos pomos que pareciam querer sempre saltar do peito, e doutras redondezas opulentas dum corpo extremamente favorecido, baqueavam inúteis. Ela repelia-as com desdém, achava por bem não se comprometer com a ‘sua própria gente’”<sup>7</sup> (p. 53).

Ermelinda belongs to the lower and most vulnerable strata of Macanese community. Her choices, including preference for a particular type of sexual partner, are ruled by factors other than ethnicity. Her exchange of sexual favors with soldiers rather than Macanese men, although attracting the contempt of the latter, rewards her by increasing her chance of social mobility.

To the Macanese at the highest ranks of the social ladder, the myth of a sacred land infused with aristocratic manners, bravery and pride, is not compatible with the vulgar and illiterate soldiers disembarking in the city from the rural areas of Portugal. Moreover, their behaviour reveals the community’s unspeakable roots: it is not the ethnic divide that puts them apart but the social chasm between poverty and wealth, rudeness and elegance, reality and myth.

Senna Fernandes uncovers the fabricated lineages of the “cream of the city”, a social fabrication laboriously developed over time. His narrative goes back to the founding father of the Frontaria family, a soldier who landed in Macau in the late eighteenth century, and the subsequent trajectory of his descendants: “Para marcar a sua

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<sup>6</sup> The physician came, with all his prestige of Portuguese from Portugal. Aunt Bitá timidly answered to his questions, mixing up the vernacular Portuguese with the totally indecipherable patuá.

<sup>7</sup> The populace listed the names of her lovers, all metropolitan sergeants from the military and the Civil Guard. ...However, to the *filhos da terra*, her preference for the outsiders was a continuous provocation. All the plans to seduce her and take advantage of her superb breasts that constantly seem to pop up out of the blouse, were fruitless. She scorned them, choosing not to intermingle with her own people.

importância no burgo e para fazer esquecer a origem plebeíssima do ex-grumete, construíram um palácio assobradado à Praia do Manduco, que foi o pasmo da época”<sup>8</sup> (2012, 20).

Architecture is a territorial status marker that gives the imagined community its second nature. By building a grand home they averted the dangers of exposing a faceless ancestry-line and cemented their solid presence and status in the community. References to people and places, on the other hand, convey the idea of an honourable intangible heritage: “Para justificar a sua empáfia, iam buscar vagas ramificações com alguns nomes mais ilustres da heráldica de Portugal, ocultando ciosamente que entre os seus maiores havia cavadores de enxada escarvando a terra rija de sol a sol.” (2012, 139).<sup>9</sup>

If the mythical homeland serves as the glue to maintain and enhance the community’s standing, the dialect, which developed mainly within the private space of domesticity and spoken within the family meetings and community events, is possibly the strongest line separating the Macanese from the Other. The community absorbed, changed and reinvented the Portuguese language by developing patuá, which strengthened the identity of the group, epitomizing their sense of belonging. Due to its simplicity, the dialect was the preferred language among women in the inner gendered spaces, and the ideal language to communicate feelings and emotions. When a woman chose to speak Portuguese instead of patuá it meant that she wished to be viewed as an educated person, whose education was not confined to the kitchen walls and domestic soliloquies. It might also have meant her desire for social mobility or that she wished not to be associated with the community that speaks patuá, as in the case of Ermelinda, the unfaithful wife (2012, 55): “com o convívio terno dos sargentos, fingia não compreender o dialecto da terra”<sup>10</sup>. However, the Portuguese language retained its power and prestige. The educated Macanese men and women from traditional elite families were required to speak Portuguese. Even when life’s trajectories took them away from Macau, they had to return to study their mother language: “Nascido em Macau, filho de um alto funcionário do Consulado de Portugal em Xangai, que se deixara depois ficar na grande metrópole comercial da costa da China, regressara aos doze anos para estudar no Colégio do Seminário de São José, para aprender português como ele devia ser aprendido”<sup>11</sup> (2012, 161).

The community meets after Sunday mass, a ritual that reinforced the ties and sense of belonging through its enclosed circles of chatty talk and gossiping. Macanese families of high social status are regular attendants, with many engaging in charitable causes

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<sup>8</sup> To establish his prominence in town and to brush off the modest roots of the ex-soldier, they built an extravagant palace at Manduco beach, which mesmerized the populace.

<sup>9</sup> They used to assume a few famous names from Portuguese heraldry, concealing the fact that among their ancestors were diggers working with a hoe from sunrise to sunset.

<sup>10</sup> With the tender conviviality of sergeants, she pretended not to understand the local dialect.

<sup>11</sup> Being a son of a high-ranking official working in the Portuguese Consulate located in Shanghai, he was sent to Macau at the age of 12 to study proper Portuguese at the Seminary of Saint Joseph, to learn Portuguese as it should be.

as a means to assert their inherited Catholic values and their position in the social rank. However, it acts also as a space where collective control is exerted over individuals, as in the case of the fallen hero of *Amor e dedinhos de pé*. If we consider Senna Fernandes's fiction as a narrative about customs and social mores, the front of the church on Sunday mornings plays the symbolic central stage in it.

Born in Alentejo, Portugal, Fernanda Dias arrived in Macau in her late thirties, earning her living as a visual arts teacher, and lived there for more than 20 years. She published poetry and two volumes of short stories, and she is recognized as a visual artist. Her passion for the Silk Road civilization was like love at first sight, as reflected in her works evidence.

Contrary to S. Fernandes's stories, Fernanda Dias is not interested in portraying mainstream Macau. Her literary universe is the private and intimate sphere of human relationships filled with tensions of a political and gendered dimension. The protagonists of her short stories are revealed to the reader via their emotions and their senses – they are the “unknowable other”. In some tales of *Days of Prosperity* and in her poetry, the interplay between East and West takes place through a love affair between a female Portuguese settler and her indigenous Chinese lover, the latter personifying the dispossessed lord of the land. Both in the narrative and in the poems, the meta-function of the inter-ethnic romantic encounter disrupts the colonial establishment, illustrating political strains, as well as gender and power imbalances. Fernanda Dias's writings challenge the colonial and conservative Macau by focusing on the intimate game of love. Yet by their practices, dialogues and soliloquies, they keep unsettling several forms of social hierarchies.

In *Horas de Papel*, the amorous woman extends her devotion to the Chinese man and from the man to the Chinese land, not regarded as possession. In so doing she ignores her ascribed role in the colonial order: “Eras tu que partias./ E é só tua a terra que deixavas./ Mas era eu, desfeita, que me despedia/ com os olhos febris sorvidos pelas coisas/ que tão cedo não tornarás a ver” (1992, 42)<sup>12</sup>. Her lover remains inaccessible with the mystery (and the appeal) of belonging to a different race and a different world. Driven by love, the urge to reach the Other is stronger than the pressure to follow the order of things. It is not power any longer that governs the course of her actions, but the consciousness of a primordial harmony encapsulated in time and waiting to be revealed: “Sentado na minha frente, paraste o tempo,/ e o teu rosto de súbito revela/ que em ti arde a memória de milénios. // Quem me sorri na tua face séria?” (1992, 34)<sup>13</sup>

The writer reveals the loneliness of the enamoured woman, for her lover either has not yet arrived, or he's leaving, or when he stays he still escapes her by being absent minded. She reverses the colonial order while reproducing the gendered hierarchies,

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<sup>12</sup> “It was you who went away/And the land you left was yours alone. / But it was me, wrecked, who said goodbye / with feverish eyes absorbed by the things / that you will not see soon again”. This and the following paraphrases in English of Dias' quotes are just that, not a literary translation.

<sup>13</sup> “Sitting in front of me, you stopped time, / and your face suddenly reveals / that within you the memory of millennia is burning. // Who is smiling to me in your solemn face?”

in which the power apparently remains with the male. The patriarchal system seemingly remains intact, granting the overarching role to the Chinese lover, while the colonial imperative is clearly dislocated within the romantic tale. Because one loves, or has loved, one is suffering. In “Orgulho” it states: “Doem-me os braços de há tanto tempo/ os trazer estendidos ao longo do corpo/ (...) Dói-me a alma de ouvir falar/ a tua língua que não entendo/ e as mãos por nunca as ter pousado/ na máscara serena do teu rosto//(...) Mas nenhuma lágrima assoma/ e nenhum grito me trai// Uso a dor límpida orgulhosamente por dentro// Como um broche de ouro/ num vestido rasgado.” (1992, 54).<sup>14</sup>

The beloved is metonymically named through the objects and materials that symbolically represent the civilization to which he belongs: The poet will sing the “opulento jade do teu peito” (1999, 29).<sup>15</sup> Jade, alabaster, silk, lotus and the erhu are thus all names of the beloved, reflecting a strong attachment with the lover’s culture to an extent that one may question if the lover’s ontological being would survive if taken from his cultural and aesthetical context. “... o seu corpo novo e puro parecia incorruptível. E era por isso, para isso, que eu ali estava. Para fazer dele o cerne de um sonho. (...) O seu rosto, que eu não me atrevia a fitar longamente senão em temerários momentos ou quando ele dormia, revelava-me o mistério dos antigos Budas, aqueles cujo corpo é da natureza vegetal dos Lótus e cujo sorriso é o último raio vermelho do Sol a cair no Mar.” (1998, 81) <sup>16</sup> Through this mediation between the lover and his environment the poet also creates a protective distance with respect to the male beauty. “Dormes, com as flores negras do teu cabelo/ esparsas na esteira lisa./ E a límpida carne adormecida/ revela o anjo torpe prisioneiro” (1992, 32).<sup>17</sup>

At the root of Fernanda Dias’s poetic inspiration one also finds one’s longing for the homeland. In this case Alentejo - the land, the scents, the names, which she carries along as fond memories, and that will be summoned in a strange place: “Estou aqui, encolhida num canto/ trago os olhos cheios de estevas e besouros/ que vieram para te ver” (1992, 13)<sup>18</sup>. The magical parallels through which Baudelaire theorized in his poetry live in synaesthesia to the places captured in the poetic vision: “Ah, aldeia de Coloane! / Por entre lágrimas, / vejo-te, num ápice, alentejana / roda-pés azuis, alteias cor-de-malva / e púrpura aflorando os beirais! (...) E ao som das pedras do mah-jong/

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<sup>14</sup> “My arms hurt for so long / bringing them stretched along the body / ...It hurts my soul to hear / that language of yours which I don’t understand / and my hands for never having touched/ the serene mask of your face/ / ...But no tears looms / and no crying betrays me / / I use proudly the clear pain inside / / As a golden ornament / on a torn dress”.

<sup>15</sup> “The opulent jade of your bare chest”.

<sup>16</sup> “I did not dare stare at length to his face but in reckless moments or when he slept, it showed me the mystery of the ancient Buddhas, those whose body is of the same nature of the lotus plant, whose smile is the last ray of the red Sun falling in the Sea”.

<sup>17</sup> “You sleep with the black flowers of your/ hair scattered on the smooth mat./ And the pale flesh asleep / reveals the vile Angel imprisoned”.

<sup>18</sup> “I’m here, huddled in a corner / I bring my eyes full of cysts and beetles/ who came just to see you”.

vejo os velhos cabisbaixos/ sentados de lado em cadeiras de bunho/ apascentando aéreos, zumbidores/ ténues rebanhos de asas – vespas e besouros.” (1992, 58)<sup>19</sup>

In the unfamiliar landscape, one recognizes colours, sounds, and scents (1992, 14): “Ninguém sabe o meu nome em Macau/ não tenho amigos na cidade/ Mas no Jardim Lou lim Ieoc/ o plúmbago azul/ é tão azul como naquela praceta/ no outro lado do Mundo.// Não posso dizer que estou sozinha.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, through this recognition the poetry muddles the boundaries between one’s own space and the space of the Other in a way that the two become indistinguishable. Fernanda Dias’s earlier poems seem as various occasions of discovering new areas in the “cidade estranha” (1992, 13)<sup>21</sup>. In fact, they are the result of a mutual presentation - the city is presented to the visitor in the scenes described, the subject presents herself to it, loaded with a past and a knowledge that coincides with the founding space of childhood, Alentejo, a memory of scents and colours, and playing with what the foreign city is offering. Baudelaire’s programmatic synaesthetic associations are the focus of a recognition that eliminates the notion of radical dissimilarity and anticipates the proclamation of an universal equivalence - of feelings, representations and realities that will structure later works such as *O Sol, a Lua e a Via do Fio de Seda* (2011) and *Contos da Água e do Vento* (2013). Fernanda Dias manages to recreate a particular cosmology, geographically identifiable with the Chinese civilization, while at the same time postulating an openly universal epistemology.

In “Sai-kuá”, F. Dias chronicles an idyll in China, addressing ironically the dilemma of a woman who questions her lover’s refusal to carry a watermelon purchased by both of them. She drags the watermelon behind him, lost in her musings: “Como peças de um jogo desconhecido perguntas sucessivas surgem na minha mente. Que secreto tabu o impede de atravessar o mercado carregando uma melancia? Ou antes, que orgulhoso preconceito o impede de caminhar ao lado de uma mulher ocidental, carregando fruta num saco de plástico? Ou então, que norma antiquada o proíbe de atravessar o mercado carregando as compras, seguido de uma mulher? O talvez, que lição quer ele dar-me, obrigando-me a segui-lo, penosamente carregada (...)?”

E que estranho pudor me impede de o interrogar? E que desconhecido atavismo me compele a renunciar ao impulso de largar o saco na berma do caminho?”(1998, 30)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “Ah, Coloane village / Amid tears, / I see you, at a glance, Alentejo / blue footers, pink mauve hollyhocks / and purple surfacing the eaves! ...And the sound of mah-jong pieces/ I see the old men droopy / sitting sideways on bulrush chairs / steering air, buzzing / faint flocks of wings / Wasps and beetles”.

<sup>20</sup> “No one knows my name in Macau/ I have no friends in town/ But in Lou Lim Ieoc Garden/ the blue plumbago/ is as blue as the one in that little square/ on the other side of the world. / I cannot say I'm alone”.

<sup>21</sup> ... strange city.

<sup>22</sup> “As part of an unknown game successive questions arise in my mind. What secret taboo prevents him from going through the market carrying a watermelon?

Or rather, what old-fashioned proud bias prevents him from walking besides a western woman carrying fruit in a plastic bag? Or else, what antiquated rule prohibits him from crossing the market carrying groceries, followed by a woman? Or, perhaps, what lesson does he intend to give me, forcing me to follow him, painfully loaded...? And

While behaving in accordance with the patriarchal order, the western woman is self-conscious and questions the reasons why she is following such humiliating imperatives, which in the context of her cultural background are considered awkward. Yet her leading goal is to understand the Other's attitude in accepting the patriarchal conventions. The denouement imposes the only possible happy ending: female complacency to the reactions of passers-byes: "Retribuo o sorriso, é como se lhes dissesse: cá por mim, posso muito bem carregar com a porcaria da melancia. (...) Como uma bandeira de submissão, entro no hotel arvorando orgulhosamente uma melancia."<sup>23</sup> Like the watermelon, the woman is now a trophy. They are both spoils of war, a war she wins if he is victorious.

The fact that they belong to different ethnicities and different worlds, only intensifies this unyielding antagonism existing between man and woman. The arrogance, the effrontery, the indifference, and the estrangement are on his side. In "Respirando sem ti": "digo e repito:/ estou aqui e esta é a minha voz./ a terra é tua, a arrogância é tua./ mas o ar que respiramos é de todos nós" (1999, 31).<sup>24</sup> Love gives her everything, but it takes everything away from her as well: "com uma mão te dás, com a outra me tiras/ tudo, até o direito de amar o teu país" (1999, 38).<sup>25</sup>

The narrative is deeply interweaved with colonial Macau and the lovers merely enhance a duality that precedes and overlaps the natural antagonism between man and woman, between the one consenting to love and the one who surrenders to it. The political implications of the moving equilibrium oscillating between colonizer and colonized are never concealed in this script about love: "seis mil anos pesam no meu destino/ é por causa de umas vagas caravelas/ que aqui estamos/ prostrada como uma cativa, sou eu que venço quando a ti me dou" (1999, 43).<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Fernanda Dias and Senna Fernandes have written about slightly different periods, and their perceptions and experiences of the place also reflect this historical gap. Their individual convictions and standpoints seem also vastly different. However, both offer non conventional modalities of gender and interethnic relations, that at some point defy atavisms, stereotypes, social determinism and politically correct outlooks. Both deemed to uncover cross-cutting themes worthy of consideration in the field of Lusophone postcolonial narrative.

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what strange modesty prevents me to question him? And what unknown atavism compels me to forego the urge to drop the bag on the side of the road?"

<sup>23</sup> "I reciprocate the smile, as if saying to them: 'It's fine, I might as well carry this crap. (...) Like a flag of submission, I proudly entered the hotel carrying a watermelon'"

<sup>24</sup> In "Breathing without you": I say and I repeat: I am here and this is my voice/ this earth is yours, like your arrogance/ but the air we breathe belongs to every one of us".

<sup>25</sup> "with one hand you give yourself, with the other you take/ everything from me, even the right to love your country".

<sup>26</sup> "six thousand years weigh upon my destiny / It is because of some vague caravels / that we are here / I am prostrate as a captive, but I am the one who is wining when I give myself to you".

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