

SOUTH ATLANTIC ENCOUNTERS: THE LUSOTROPICAL MODERNISM OF ERNESTO LARA FILHO'S CRÔNICAS

REGINA CASTRO MCGOWAN

CITY COLLEGE/CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract: For most of the twentieth century—particularly before the independence of the Portuguese-speaking African nations—literature produced in these regions remained closely attuned to the new aesthetic currents emerging across the South Atlantic. Modernism, defined by its rupture from the former Portuguese metropolis, was the first major twentieth-century literary movement originating in Brazil to inspire generations of Portuguese-language writers in Africa. One prose form in particular, the *crônica*, which had evolved into a distinctive discursive genre under the anthropophagic influence of Brazilian Modernism, proved especially influential. This essay examines how the *crônicas* of Angolan writer Ernesto Lara Filho, written in the 1950s and 1960s, construct a South Atlantic dialogue that engages both the aesthetic legacy of Brazilian Modernism and the *crônica* as a reconfigured Brazilian genre. At the same time, Lara Filho's work reinscribes the form within the ideological framework of Gilberto Freyre's lusotropicalism, articulating a complexly ambivalent negotiation of identity and *lusofonia*.

Keywords: Brazilian modernism, *crônica*, Angolan literature, South Atlantic, lusotropicalism, *lusofonia*

Resumo: Durante a maior parte do século XX—particularmente antes da independência das nações africanas de língua portuguesa—a literatura produzida nessas regiões manteve-se intimamente ligada às novas correntes estéticas emergentes no Atlântico Sul. O Modernismo, definido por sua ruptura com a antiga metrópole portuguesa, foi o primeiro grande movimento literário do século XX originário do Brasil a inspirar gerações de escritores de língua portuguesa na África. Uma forma de prosa em particular, a *crônica*, que evoluiu para um gênero discursivo singular sob a influência antropofágica do Modernismo Brasileiro, mostrou-se especialmente influente. Este ensaio examina como as *crônicas* do escritor angolano Ernesto Lara Filho, escritas nas décadas de 1950 e 1960, constroem um diálogo sul-atlântico que engaja tanto o legado estético do Modernismo brasileiro quanto a *crônica* como um gênero brasileiro

reconfigurado. Ao mesmo tempo, a obra de Lara Filho reinscreve a forma no quadro ideológico do lusotropicalismo de Gilberto Freyre, articulando uma negociação complexa e ambivalente de identidade e lusofonia.

Palavras-chave: Modernismo brasileiro, crônica, literatura angolana, Atlântico Sul, lusotropicalismo, lusofonia

Brazil's 1922 Semana de Arte Moderna reverberated widely, crossing decades and an ocean. In Portuguese-speaking Africa, numerous examples attest to the impact of Brazilian Modernism on literature—both poetry and prose—produced during the colonial period. While it could be argued that none of the five Portuguese-speaking African countries developed an autochthonous Modernism *per se*, their individual and collective engagements with modernist tendencies may be understood, comparatively, as a Lusophone African form of anthropophagy—an absorption and transformation of the new aesthetic forms and the socio-linguistic nationalism characteristic of Brazilian Modernism. As early as the 1930s, intellectuals in Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe recognized and celebrated the new literature emerging from Brazil for its cultural rupture with the Portuguese metropolis. Historical and sociological affinities between Portuguese Africa and Brazil operated as powerful forces shaping literary production in territories that remained under Portuguese colonial rule.

Brazilian poetry, regionalist novels, and *crônicas* from the first half of the twentieth century played a significant role in shaping and contributing to the emergence of national literatures in Portuguese-speaking Africa, both before and after independence. The avant-garde literary journal *Claridade* in 1930s Cape Verde—and its counterparts *Mensagem* in Angola and *Msaho* in Mozambique during the 1950s—served as experimental spaces for literary expression where, much as in Brazil's *Semana de Arte Moderna*, the idea of cultivating authentic cultures rooted in local realities and aspirations for freedom could fully flourish.

In Angola, the intellectual trajectories, stylistic choices, and thematic preoccupations shared with Brazil demonstrate that this exchange was dialogic and intertextual, and marked by a “convergência de ideias”—a movement of ideas that functioned not as mere transmission, but as a productive reworking (Madruga 23). Angolan literatures re-elaborated Brazil's modernist legacy within their own colonial, multilingual, and African realities rather than simply replicating

the Brazilian model. Thus, the propositions of the Brazilian modernists, such as linguistic experimentation, identity formation, and the valorization of the autochthonous elements—resonated within Angolan literary circles and significantly contributed to the process of severing ties with the Portuguese metropolis, a process that gained momentum with the “Vamos descobrir Angola” movement launched in 1948 (34–35).

In mid-twentieth-century Portuguese-speaking Africa, the *crônica* [chronicle]—a modernist, semi-amorphous discursive genre positioned between journalism and literature—also blossomed. Published regularly in periodicals throughout the Portuguese African territories, *crônicas* became a vehicle for social commentary, as writers and intellectuals increasingly discontent with colonial rule turned to the form to articulate critique and reflection. Contextually, the late 1950s marked a period of profound cultural decolonization in Angola, particularly among intellectuals and writers seeking to find—or indeed to found—a sense of national identity, and eager to present their work as authentically Angolan.¹

The *crônica* as a Portuguese-language genre

The *crônica*, as a literary genre, has existed in Portuguese since medieval times. The earlier *crônicas* not only followed historical events; they were often dozens of pages long and offered a courtly narrative on the lives of kings or on the deeds of the kingdom.² In Brazil, a number of pre-modernist writers—among them Machado de Assis, Coelho Neto, Olavo Bilac, João do Rio, and Lima Barreto—employed the *crônica* as a hybrid form that intertwined journalistic reportage with literary reflection, thereby offering nuanced portrayals of the social landscape of their time. The modernist *cronista*, however, distinguished itself through a markedly different aesthetic orientation: a deliberate rupture with academicism, the incorporation of colloquial language rooted in everyday speech, and the valorization of Brazilian popular culture—all while sustaining a critical engagement with the quotidian realities of national life. Notable early examples include those by Manuel Bandeira, Oswald de Andrade, Mário de Andrade, and Carlos Drummond de Andrade. The subsequent generation of Brazilian *cronistas*—undeniably indebted to

¹ Agostinho Neto, António Jacinto, Mário Pinto de Andrade, and Mário António are among the writers and intellectuals who contributed to the formation of Angolan literature in the 1950s and 1960s. Many were associated with *Mensagem* and the pioneering literary journal *Imbondeiro*. For further analysis, see Dorothée Boulanger 11–37.

² A *Primeira Crónica Portuguesa* is the oldest narrative in prose written in the Portuguese language. The manuscript is considered the origin of the *IV Crónica Breve de Santa Cruz de Coimbra*, believed to have been written circa 1340. See Mattoso 9.

Modernism—came to include, among others, Rubem Braga, Ferreira Gullar, Fernando Sabino, Clarice Lispector, and Rachel de Queiroz. Among these, Rubem Braga remains the foremost exponent of the mid-twentieth-century Brazilian *crônica*. Although Antonio Cândido asserts that “a *crônica* não é um gênero maior,” he also recognizes its impact—and its ephemerality—as products of the machine age, making it synonymous with modernity. He further observes that, in many respects, the *crônica* has become a Brazilian genre (14).

The modernist aesthetics and cultural functions of the *crônica* found resonance beyond Brazil, particularly in the Portuguese-speaking African world. Among the many *cronistas* writing in Portuguese in Africa,³ this article focuses on Ernesto Lara Filho, whose work most clearly embodies the aesthetic dynamics discussed above. A third-generation white settler and brother of the poet Alda Lara, Lara Filho was born on November 2, 1932, in Benguela, Angola. One of the founders of the *União de Escritores Angolanos*, he wrote both poetry and prose—the latter primarily in the form of *crônicas*, published in various newspapers in Luanda during the 1950s and 1960s.

Writing in the late colonial period, Lara Filho’s *crônicas* exemplify the transatlantic circulation of the genre and its aesthetic possibilities. Inocência Mata characterizes his writing as “performative,” noting that his engagement with Brazilian literary traditions predates Modernism. Describing him as an “escritor maldito” of the Geração da Cultura (1957–1961), she shows how his work echoes the indigenist and *negritude* impulses of Brazilian Romanticism, particularly in Gonçalves Dias and Castro Alves (Ernesto Lara Filho 207–210). As this study will show, Lara Filho merges nonconformity and subjectivity with an idealized vision of the autochthonous figure, revealing his affinity with Brazilian models. Expanding on this performative ambivalence, Lara Filho’s nativism operates at the intersection of colonial subjectivity and emergent national consciousness, revealing the tensions between identification with Brazilian models and the specific sociopolitical realities of Portuguese Africa. These contradictions become evident in his poetry, where gestures toward resistance coexist with exoticized representations of the colonized subject.

In two of his collections of poetry,⁴ *O Canto do Martrindinde e outros Poemas Feitos no Puto* (1963) and *Seripipi na Gaiola* (1970), Lara Filho appears to push back against colonial power in Africa—most explicitly when he includes an epigraph from Frantz Fanon’s seminal anti-colonial

³ See A. Bobella Mota, Luís Fontoura, Charulla de Azevedo, for example, among others.

⁴ Ernesto Lara Filho’s first book (not included in this analysis) is titled *Angola Picada de Marimbondo: Poemas*.

text *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). This association with protest was provocative enough that his first collection was withdrawn by the colonial authorities. Yet, while Lara Filho invokes revolutionary ideas and gestures toward social awareness, his engagement remains ambivalent. Rather than articulating sustained political activism, he often fetishizes Blackness—confessing that he “gostava de ser negro” and romanticizes poverty, detaching it from the colonial structures that produced it. As Russell Hamilton observes, “Lara’s poetic flirtation with the idea of a black proletarian social awareness is tempered with exoticism, and he remains on the periphery of a ‘fighting phase,’” using Fanon’s term for the third and final stage of the colonized writer’s evolution (“A Literatura” 111–12). Unlike authors such as José Luandino Vieira,⁵ whose *Luanda* (1963) foreground the multiplicity of colonized perspectives and exemplify Homi Bhabha’s notion of in-betweenness,⁶ Lara Filho’s writing lacks this dialogical negotiation with subaltern consciousness. Hamilton, in his discussion of the poem “Sinceridade”, even describes Lara Filho’s discourse as a form of “flamboyant exoticism” (*Voices from an Empire* 83). His positionality is thus complex: his idealization of the land and of Blackness is not devoid of colonial subjectivity. Although Lara Filho cites Fanon, his poetics ultimately fall short of enacting a fully dialogical engagement with the subaltern perspectives of colonized communities in Angola—or in Africa more broadly.

While Lara Filho’s poetry remains marked by ambivalence, his *crônicas*—written during the late colonial period—reveal a more intricate negotiation between aesthetic form and ideological position. The *crônica*, with its hybrid nature and capacity for immediacy, enabled Ernesto Lara Filho to explore everyday life, memory, and belonging while engaging with broader transatlantic dialogues that linked Angola to Brazil. His *crônicas*, published between 1956 and 1961, rehabilitated the genre in Angola—one that, as Carlos Teixeira de Sousa observes in the preface to his edition of the texts, had long lacked literary vitality and had been confined to the minor journalistic sphere of social reportage (20–21). Through this reworking, Lara Filho drew upon Brazilian modernist aesthetics to craft an intertextual and transatlantic mosaic of Angola—assembled gradually, one *azulejo* at a time (Antunes Gomes 105). Lara Filho’s *crônicas* also foreground his ambivalent positionality within the colonial field. His identification with Brazil, African American cultural expression,⁷ and *negritude*, is filtered through his social locus and

⁵ See Chabal for a deeper analysis of Vieira’s literary work and political position.

⁶ See Homi Bhabha for a discussion of in-betweenness.

⁷ See James Jongh’s analysis of how Lara Filho evokes Harlem in the poem “Sinceridade” (125).

through a belief in the racial and cultural exceptionalism that underpinned the Portuguese imperial imaginary. This ideological framework—rooted in Gilberto Freyre's mid-twentieth-century theory of lusotropicalism—constructed Portuguese colonialism as a uniquely benevolent and racially harmonious enterprise, masking its structural inequalities beneath a discourse of hybridity and tolerance.

Between the late 1930s and 1950, Freyre visited Portugal on several occasions, lecturing in Coimbra, Lisbon, and Porto, where he articulated the foundations of his lusotropical theory, later published as *O mundo que o português criou* (1940). As Cláudia Castelo observes, the theory resonated by projecting “uma imagem mítica da identidade cultural portuguesa, concedendo-lhe a autoridade ‘científica’ de que até aí não dispunha” (14).

During the first half of the twentieth century, Portuguese-speaking intellectuals and writers in Africa were likely aware of Freyre's theory of lusotropicalism (Cosme 89–90). For Freyre, the intellectual architect of the term—conceived as a model of Euro-tropical interaction—Portuguese colonialism produced a distinctive form of cultural hybridity through the purportedly “harmonious” interaction between colonizers and colonized peoples. In this framework, the Portuguese were imagined as particularly adaptable to the tropics and naturally predisposed to miscegenation and cultural fusion, a claim that framed the colonial encounter as benign and mutually transformative. The geographical referents of this theory—Brazil, Africa, and Asia—thus became symbolic spaces through which Freyre projected an exceptionalist narrative of Portuguese colonialism. Within this ideological structure, Freyre's *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (1933) functioned as the foundational text sustaining the myth of Brazil as a ‘racial democracy.’ By theorizing intimate relations between white colonizers and enslaved peoples as generative of a mixed and ostensibly egalitarian society, Freyre provided a cultural logic that obscured the structural violence inherent in colonialism and slavery.

Lusotropicalism and the colonial discourse:

Lara Filho's engagement with Brazilian cultural and intellectual production can be read through the lens of lusotropical modernism, a term I use to describe his literary approach. His writings not only reflect the transatlantic circulation of ideas but also reproduce the broader lusotropical discourse that sought to frame and regulate the narrative of colonial dominance across the Portuguese-speaking world.

In a *crônica* published in *Notícia* on April 30, 1960, Ernesto Lara Filho expresses admiration for Gilberto Freyre and establishes a dialogue with Brazil through what he calls an “azulejo modesto”. This Angolan *azulejo*, metaphorically “tingido do sangue comum” evokes the shared violence of colonization and the transatlantic slave trade. Lara Filho transforms his “humble tile” into a counter-monument—one that celebrates not Portugal’s glory, but a transnational and interracial community forged through suffering, resistance, and art. By invoking figures such as Heitor Villa-Lobos, Manuel Bandeira, Jorge Amado, Cândido Portinari, Oscar Niemeyer, and Freyre himself, he situates his homage within a broader field of Brazilian cultural production. At the same time, he affirms Angola’s role in shaping Brazil’s ethnic identity—“todos nós ajudámos o Brasil a crescer” (Lara Filho 62)—reframing the colonial relationship as one of historical co-creation rather than unilateral influence. Within this framework of colonial subjectivity, Lara Filho’s writings resonate with the concept of *lusotropicalismo* advanced by Freyre.

In contrast to Ernesto Lara Filho’s apparent assimilation of Freyre’s ideas, other Angolan writers, notably Mário Pinto de Andrade, followed a markedly different path. His 1955 essay, “Qu’est-ce que le ‘lusotropicalismo?’” [O que é o “lusotropicalismo”], published under the pseudonym Buanga Fele, challenges the premises put forth by Gilberto Freyre, arguing that “Le luso tropicalism n’étant pas valable pour expliquer la formation du Brésil, est entièrement faux pour les circonstances coloniales de l’Afrique” [Luso-tropicalism, not valid for explaining the formation of Brazil, is entirely false for the colonial circumstances in Africa] (Pinto de Andrade 29). His contention that lusotropicalism “nunca significou uma harmonização de valores europeus (lusos) com os africanos ou orientais” would later find resonance in the work of Amílcar Cabral (Cazetta et al. 12–13). Evidently, the inherent contradictions within the lusotropical discourse—aimed at defining and controlling the colonized—produced opposing effects, creating spaces for resistance, negotiation, and cultural hybridity.

Freyre’s theory of racial harmony, though deeply idealized, found echoes among Angolan writers such as Mário António (Fernandes de Oliveira). Considered Freyre’s “main Angolan disciple,” Mário António is credited with introducing the concept of *crioulidade* into Angola’s literary and social studies (Kajibanga 142–144). Published by the official colonial agency, Agência Geral do Ultramar, his *Luanda Ilha’ Crioula* (1968) cites Freyre’s lusotropicalism and portrays Luanda’s elite as both tolerant of African customs and adept at interracial relations (Mário António 48). Within this framework, *crioulidade* is presented as the product of Portugal’s

purportedly ‘benevolent’ colonization: “duas culturas que não se opõem uma à outra, antes que se interpenetram, daí resultando, ao longo do tempo, e com vários destinos, formas -síntese que constituem o melhor de uma floração a que, adequadamente só se poderá chamar crioula” (52).

Like Ernesto Lara Filho’s notion of mixed identities, which emerge as a cultural consciousness mediating between African and Portuguese inheritances, Mário António’s notion of a “creole” identity in Luanda carries the risk of essentializing or romanticizing mixing, obscuring power relations, or presenting a homogenized identity that masks divisions of class, race, gender, and political authority. In this sense, “creolization” could serve to smooth over social conflicts or support a rhetoric of “racial democracy,” suggesting that race was inconsequential and that *crioulos* could advance socially regardless of skin color. In reality, colonial Angola was marked by persistent correlations between color, race, and access to power, privilege, and resources (Marzano 34–35).

The writer as *cronista*:

Ernesto Lara Filho’s first *crônica* for *Roda Gigante* appeared on August 5, 1956. Writing in the first person and often in epistolary form, Lara Filho establishes a dialogic relationship with the reader, whom he addresses as Luís Fontoura—whether a real individual or a fictional construct—through a metaliterary discourse. It is significant that, in contrast to instances where he objectifies the colonial subject, here the reader (another colonist) is granted both a name and a sense of subjectivity. Additionally, the newspaper itself functions as a symbolic subject, a living and moving entity: “O jornal está pronto. Vai seguir, apanhando comboios, aviões, caminhonétes, carros, a pé, por fim, por todos os meios de transporte, para os quatro cantos de Angola” (Lara Filho 24–25). In this text, the newspaper is endowed with human and physical agency: it “follows,” “travels,” and “moves” autonomously, almost like a messenger crossing the country. The verb *vai seguir* personifies the newspaper, framing it as an active participant undertaking a journey rather than a passive printed object being distributed. This travel imagery transforms the newspaper into a living intermediary between writer and reader.

In a piece published in *Roda Gigante* on June 2, 1957, Lara Filho once again anthropomorphizes the *jornal*—in this instance, the newspaper *Brado Africano*. He attributes human qualities, emotions, and agency to the newspaper, transforming it into both a living entity and an extension of the writer’s self. Lara Filho casts the *Brado Africano* as a cultural ambassador for Mozambique, promoting it alongside other, more established periodicals, including the

Brazilian *Estado de S. Paulo*. Notably, he depicts all these newspapers (which he observes arriving each morning) as part of a familial network, “Habituei-me a vê-lo chegar aqui à redacção, pequeno, envergonhado, humilde, no meio de todos os outros” (Lara Filho 27).

Employing humor as a rhetorical strategy, Lara Filho inscribes the nation as a discursive cultural space and foregrounds cultural commentary, both of which are defining features of his *crônicas*. The irreverent spirit of Brazilian Modernism—which Madruga primarily associates with Mário de Andrade and Oswald de Andrade⁸ in the first phase of Brazilian Modernism (177)—can be seen in Lara Filho’s *crônicas*. In his June 9, 1957, piece for the *Roda Gigante* column, the *cronista* pretends to admire the debtors, praising debt as if it were a virtue. This false admiration is the core of mockery. Through exaggeration and irony, the text subverts moral and social values: “Confesso sinceramente que tenho uma admiração imensa pelos indivíduos que devem” (Lara Filho 28). The word “sincerely” already sounds ironic—the reader perceives the tone as mocking, as the discourse praises something that would be morally reprehensible. The *cronista* transforms vice (debt) into a virtue, and honesty into a flaw: “Não há dúvida que uma pessoa que não deve, é na verdade uma criatura fora do nosso tempo, indigna da minha simpatia” (28). By pretending to celebrate the debtor, the narrator exposes the normalization of unethical behavior, exposing the ridiculousness of a society where “Todos nós devemos” (28).

In his February 24, 1958, *crônica*, Lara Filho articulates his philosophy of (un)work. The *Roda Gigante* piece opens with a rhetorical question, signaling this critical and ironic stance. As Russell Hamilton observes, “Lara himself adopted a *musseque* lifestyle, which, though it may represent vicariousness and social marginality for some, possibly reflects a more extreme psychological reaction by a white *filho da terra* to the precariousness of Angola’s cultural reality” (*Voices from an Empire* 84). The irony emerges, as before, from the contrast between the narrator’s declarations and the text’s implied meaning. Lara Filho openly states: “Não sei porque, nasci sem vocação para o trabalho” (Lara Filho 29). Yet, to the reader, this is not a confession of laziness but a satirical commentary. The narrator, employing humor and exaggeration, critiques the hypocrisy and alienation of the modern working world. The text subverts traditional moral assumptions that valorize labor—the industrious individual is presented as almost absurd, “ainda há, infelizmente, quem goste de trabalhar. O que reputo de grave. Lamentável” (29).

⁸ See Mário de Andrade’s “Prefácio Interessantíssimo” and Oswald de Andrade’s manifestos “Antropófago” and “Pau-Brasil” for examples of humor as a rhetorical device. Further instances appear in Mário de Andrade’s *crônicas*, such as “Ode ao Burguês,” in his novel *Macunaíma*, and in Oswald de Andrade and Patrícia Galvão’s column *O Homem do Povo*, a selection that is illustrative rather than exhaustive.

By ostensibly lamenting the existence of diligent workers, Lara Filho critiques a society in which labor has lost its human meaning, reduced to mere survival. The reader again encounters a confessional tone, with the expression “Confesso sinceramente” functioning as a marker of irony—a performative honesty that is intentionally exaggerated (Lara Filho 29). The humor escalates with the absurdity of the *cronista*’s excuses: “constipo-me amiúde, a minha avó já morreu duas vezes este ano...” (29). Beneath this playful tone lies a serious critique: in the modern world, work is experienced as an imposed necessity rather than a source of personal fulfillment, as emphasized in the line “Trabalho, porque preciso de trabalhar para ganhar a vida. O pão” (29). The repetition and staccato rhythm of this phrase accentuate the writer’s disenchantment—life reduced to biological subsistence (“pão”), devoid of vocation or pleasure. In this way, irony becomes a tool to expose the alienation and absurdity inherent in the modern work routine.

***Lusofonia* in performance:**

In the *crônica* published by *Jornal de Angola* on October 31, 1959, Lara Filho reports to his Angolan readers on *Orfeu Negro*, the award-winning 1959 film directed by Marcel Camus. Although the film received mixed reviews in Brazil⁹—many arguing that it romanticized poverty and life in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas—*Orfeu Negro* achieved considerable international acclaim after winning the Palme d’Or at the 1959 Cannes Film Festival). While residing in Portugal, Lara Filho attended a screening and later wrote a *crônica* for *Roda Gigante*. His reception of the film is decidedly enthusiastic, as he perceives it as a mirror reflecting aspects of Angolan life. Notably, the *cronista* dedicates the *crônica*’s introduction—referred to as a poem, though in fact a recipe for *quimbombo*—to Gilberto Freyre: “para seus apontamentos de sociologia aplicada ao luso-tropicalismo” (Lara Filho 39). At the conclusion of the “poem,” Lara Filho specifies that the *quimbombo* should be prepared “por cozinheiro velho de Guerra ou mulata bonita do bairro Benfica” (40). Discursively ethnocentric, Lara Filho’s positionality simultaneously expresses a sense of *lusofonia*. While the term can foster a notion of shared cultural identity: “A história é nossa. De todos nós” (41)—encompassing the connections between Portuguese-speaking nations, it also carries the complex and controversial legacy of colonialism.

⁹ See Juliana Mendes et al. 101-22.

Lara Filho's romanticization of the Brazilian favela possibly reflects his own detached perspective of the Angolan *musseques*. While the *cronista* focuses primarily on the ethnic element and the depiction of racial harmony in the film, he reproduces the ambivalent colonial discourse that underlies the concept of *lusofonia*. While on a cultural level, *lusofonia* can become a site of encounter where South–South dialogues can emerge (the exchanges between Brazilian Modernism and Angolan *crônica* exemplify a lusophone circulation that exceeds metropolitan control), it can also function less as a neutral linguistic category than as a rearticulation of lusotropicalist ideology. These cultural articulations redefine the term not as a fixed territory, but as a network of spaces across the Atlantic and beyond. To theorize it critically, then, is to recognize that it carries the residues of empire and the desires of post-colonial identity, oscillating between inclusivity and hierarchy. *Lusofonia* functions then as a “floating signifier”—a term first used by Stuart Hall in 1997 to refer to race as a discursive construct¹⁰—its meanings shifting depending on who invokes it and in what geopolitical or cultural context (Madureira 66–81).

The *mussegue* as a cultural space would reappear in a *crônica* dated December 17, 1960, published in *Notícia* under the title “Leteiros de Luanda, letreiros de Muceque.” In this piece, Lara Filho establishes a dialogue with the reader, urging them to find their African *Pasárgada* in the streets of the capital—in its markets and communal spaces—by following the murals and their inscriptions. Through this intertextual evocation of Manuel Bandeira’s poem “Vou-me embora pra Pasárgada,” Lara Filho constructs an idealized vision of the *mussegue* as a locus of renewal and poetic escape. Despite this aesthetic and intertextual sophistication, and the evident affinities with Brazilian modernist writing, the *crônica* simultaneously reveals the objectification of the colonial subject. The implied reader, in this instance, is another Portuguese settler, whom the writer encourages to visit the poorer neighborhoods: “Vai dar uma volta pelos Musseques, segue o roteiro dos letreiros” (Teixeira de Sousa *Appendix*). The informal, squatter settlements known as *musseques*—whose inhabitants remain voiceless within the text—are thus exoticized and reduced to elements of the landscape, constructed as the “other.”

Hybridity and *crioulidade*:

In a *crônica* dated December 25, 1959, Ernesto Lara Filho presents himself as “that writer who doesn’t publish books” (Teixeira de Sousa *Appendix*). He then addresses his *patrícios* about

¹⁰ See Stuart Hall 359–373.

their relationship with the Portuguese language: “Vocês, patrícios, que escrevem, não observam que têm vocês uma língua nova, em paisagens novas, de cenários novos de país novo?” (*Appendix*). Lara Filho’s advocacy for this “língua nova,” however, does not exhibit the same destabilizing force as José Luandino Vieira’s hybridized linguistic practice, which through literature becomes emblematic of Angolan identity. Vieira’s linguistic innovation contests colonial authority precisely through its decolonial consciousness. By elevating *mussequê* speech to a literary register, Vieira—himself influenced by Guimarães Rosa—provides a platform for marginalized communities, asserting their agency and cultural legitimacy through the combination of oral expression, Kimbundu words, idiomatic expressions, syntax, and neologisms of the *mussequês* (Arenas 163). In his *crônica*, Lara Filho similarly situates himself within a local cultural framework, yet his positionality differs markedly from Vieira’s: whereas Vieira grew up in the poor neighborhoods of Luanda’s periphery¹¹ and adopts a phenomenological approach, writing from lived experience, Lara Filho was an outsider, observing *mussequê* life from the margins. Vieira’s engagement with everyday life informs both his decolonial writing and his aesthetic vision, a perspective that Lara Filho, as an outsider, does not share. Despite this distance, Lara Filho remains attentive to local expression, declaring, “Tenho usado a língua como artista usa barro. Tenho procurado dar-lhe cor, a minha cor, as cores da minha terra” (Teixeira de Sousa *Appendix*). The recurrent use of the first-person possessive adjective in “minha terra” emphasizes the *cronista*’s conception of Angola as a space of *crioulidade*. Lara Filho also reminds his fellow readers in this *crônica* that they—including himself—have contributed to the creation of a linguistically and culturally innovative idiom, invoking Rachel de Queiroz as a reference point: “Quando digo gíria, nativismo, pretendo significar mulato, híbrido, nosso, típico. ... Socorri-me da Raquel de Queiroz para exprimir o que vem atrás. Suponho que me terão entendido” (*Appendix*).

Much of Lara Filho’s nativism in this *crônica* is constructed in deliberate contraposition to Portugal, as when he critiques the uncritical transplantation of Portuguese cultural praxis to Angola, advocating instead for local adaptations to the Christmas menu, “aí em Angola sua-se nesse tempo com o calor, e sabe-se melhor o sumo da manga, do que o pinhão e as passas de uva, os figos e as ameixas” (*Appendix*). By foregrounding Benguela’s regional particularities, Lara Filho critiques the artificial replication of metropolitan cultural and linguistic norms. He likens

¹¹ See Darlene J. Sadlier’s discussion of Luandino Vieira’s 1961 book *A Cidade e a Infância* (160).

Portuguese to historical archaisms: “essa cópia desastrada do figurino tradicional de âmbito restrito em Angola – o figurino luso, o das caravelas e dos Diogos Cães” (*Appendix*). Such linguistic subversion aligns with the “dessacralização da língua portuguesa,” a conscious political and aesthetic project undertaken by Brazilian modernists that finds resonance in Angola (Madruga 40–41).

While this linguistic desacralization signals a subtle challenge to metropolitan authority, its subversive potential remains limited. Whereas Ernesto Lara Filho’s conceptualizations of hybridity, *lusofonia*, and *crioulidade* are clear, they are insufficient to destabilize or directly challenge the political apparatus of Portuguese colonial authority. Instead, the cultural hybridity defended by the *cronista* constitutes an articulation of *lusotropicalismo*. Like Mário António would do years later, and by adopting a favorable stance toward colonial structures, Lara Filho seeks to address the cultural hybridity of Angola’s elite, framing Benguela as a cultural enclave of *crioulidade*. Lara Filho and Mário António both conceive *creole* identity as bridging African and Portuguese heritages; Lara Filho emphasizes its lived, syncretic expression, while Mário António frames it conceptually—yet both risk idealizing hybridity and masking social hierarchies.

The poetics of longing and belonging:

In a *crônica* published in the *Roda Gigante* column and later transcribed in *Notícia* on August 31, 1959, Ernesto Lara Filho recalls his Sundays in Angola. Writing from exile in Lisbon, he reconstructs these memories with a tone that combines nativism and communal belonging: “Domingo de preto. Domingo de todos, domingo de missa, de padre, domingo” (35). Yet this nostalgic recollection also exposes the cultural privileges embedded in the *cronista’s* perspective, as his depiction of leisure depends on a colonial hierarchy that sustains his routine. His Sundays begin at the beach and end with a siesta—“Começa na praia e acaba na sesta”—after a *moamba* prepared by his (colonized) staff: “O molho será apurado pelo velho cozinheiro, que foi mestre dos pais, dos filhos e dos filhos dos filhos” (35). This scene exemplifies Alfredo Margarido’s notion of “thingification,” the colonizer’s tendency to objectify the “semicivilized” African subject (qtd. in Hamilton, *Voices from an Empire* 39). From this vantage, Lara Filho appears as a cultural consumer who observes the colonial world through a memorialist lens peopled by depersonalized figures such as “Rosa lavadeira” and “amo-seco Canivete” (Lara Filho 36).

The memorialist tone that pervades many of Lara Filho’s *crônicas* may be understood in light of the political moment, in which recollections of home fulfill a longing for independence

(Tindó Secco 159). Writing from exile in Lisbon for a piece that would appear in the *Roda Gigante* column dated September 30, 1959, he transcribes an article by a local reporter—whom he calls the “pardal lisboeta” (Lara Filho 39). The *cronista* ultimately concedes his inability to experience Lisbon as he does Angola: “A nota daquele repórter que não sei quem é, feita com o coração e muita justeza, diz tudo aquilo que eu não conseguia dizer sobre Lisboa. Ou teria dito mal (38–39).

A member of Angola’s creole elite, with all the privileges that status confers, Lara Filho also identifies himself as an honorary Brazilian. “Sou uma espécie de brasileiro” (61), he writes. Published in the Angolan periodical *Notícia* on April 30, 1960, this *crônica* reveals Lara Filho’s affective and ideological investment in Brazil—an identification shaped by Gilberto Freyre’s lusotropicalist ideal of racial harmony through miscegenation. He declares: “Amo Brasil... É uma paixão de branco pela mulata de engenho. É uma paixão de negra pelo branco do roçado” (62). Through this gendered metaphor of desire, Lara Filho reproduces the rhetoric of *mestiçagem* as a figure for cultural mixing within the Lusophone world. At the same time, he underscores the influence of the Brazilian *crônica* in Angola, noting its role in shaping both literary production and readerly taste: “Rubem Braga, o ‘sabiá’ da crônica do Brasil, anda nos nossos recortes literários. Henrique Pongetti é lido por nós, também, Raquel de Queiroz e Nelson Rodrigues, esses tratamo-los por tu. São-nos familiares” (61).

Between censorship and exile:

While living in Europe, Ernesto Lara Filho came under investigation by PIDE—the notorious *Pólicia Internacional de Defesa do Estado*—and was listed by the Salazar regime as a political activist. Notably, the report describes him as “mestiço, natural de Benguela” (Teixeira de Sousa *Appendix*). In Lisbon, where he also served as correspondent for the *Diário ABC de Luanda*, the *cronista* wrote an open letter to the Governor General of Angola. Excerpts from this letter, titled “Carta aberta ao Governador Geral de Angola” were published on March 10, 1960, in the Guinean periodical *Arauto*. In response, PIDE censored the issue and confiscated all available copies, deeming the text “prejudicial por razões de ordem política” (Santos et al 177). Throughout most of the *crônica/carta*, Lara Filho reiterates the alliterative phrase “minha Angola” (Teixeira de Sousa *Appendix*). His insistent use of the possessive *my* operates as a deliberate assertion of belonging—and thus a subtle form of political dissent—against the colonial regime: “Minha Angola no Carnaval dança nas ruas. Minha Angola é a do pequeno funcionário,

destacado para o mato, do chefe do Posto isolado no Dirico ... Minha Angola enche os combóios, as caminhonetas, de sisal, de peixe, de óleos, de sacos de café, de farinhas” (*Appendix*).

It is noteworthy that it is precisely during his time in Portugal, from 1959 to 1960, that Ernesto Lara Filho began a more pronounced political engagement aimed at asserting his Angolan identity. There, he describes himself not merely as a correspondent from Angola, but as the self-proclaimed “seripipi da crónica angolana”—longe de sua terra (Lara Filho 38).

This period of heightened political engagement also situates Lara Filho within a complex space of ambivalence and marginality within the Angolan context. In her reading of his work, Inocência Mata emphasizes what she interprets as his “active comprometimento com a luta anti-colonial” (Ernesto Lara Filho 209). Queiroz, in a posthumous preface to *Crónicas da Roda Gigante*, frames this marginality as both the cause and consequence of his ambiguous position—he is neither fully embraced by the colonial authorities nor entirely trusted by the revolutionary movement. From the outset, Queiroz describes the *cronista* as an individual “que falhou,” yet the precise nature of this failure remains both ambiguous and open to interpretation (Lara Filho 11). The colonial power views him as a “traidor” for joining the MPLA (11). The revolutionary movement views him as *unreliable*, incapable of full commitment to the cause. Those who truly know him “toleram a sua falha,” implying that his very character makes integration impossible (11). This double rejection situates Ernesto in a space of radical marginality—he belongs neither to the colonial order (in terms of political ideology) nor to the revolutionary struggle. It is perhaps Ernesto Lara Filho’s position of marginality that ultimately defines him, “Se era um marginal, passou a ser o expoente máximo dos marginais” (11).

It is this very position of marginality that shapes the political focus of his letters to his cousin Lúcio Lara, a principal organizer of the MPLA alongside Agostinho Neto and Viriato da Cruz. Lara Filho’s letters to Lúcio, written between 1959 and 1963, often included newspaper clippings, many authored by Lara Filho himself (Muraro and Verçosa Neta 18). These letters, often accompanied by his own clippings, reveal Lara Filho’s engagement with Angola’s political realities, a preoccupation that also shapes his approach in the *crónicas*, where he examines authorship, expression, and the subtle workings of censorship.

In a *crónica* published in his *Roda Gigante* column on January 31, 1960, Lara Filho engages in a meta-commentary on authorship and expressive practice. A close reading reveals how violence and censorship operate beneath—or through—the veil of humor. By recounting two seemingly innocuous stories—a schoolchild, Tony, who writes a “*Conto de Natal*,” and another,

João, who composes a one-act play titled “A Rã”—the narrator disguises a critique of the authoritarian state, one in which coercion and censorship permeate everyday institutions such as schools and the press. The simplicity of Tony’s story about a turkey’s death at the hands of a man with a knife, “Um dia tiveram uma luta e o homem ganhou. FIM” mirrors the unreflective and banalized manner in which state violence and quotidian brutality are rendered ordinary (Lara Filho 44). Similarly, the teacher’s act of crossing out the word “não” transforms a child’s straightforward line, “Quer-me parecer que esta semana não vou à escola” into a meaningless affirmation (44). Through this seemingly minor act of erasure, the *crônica* allegorizes the violence of censorship as linguistic mutilation. The *cronista*’s exclamation, “oh, a abominável censura!” dramatizes mock outrage (45). João’s subsequent refusal to write literalizes the death of imagination under surveillance: “Isso decepcionou o jovem dramaturgo que nunca mais escreveu nenhum drama” (45).

Lara Filho continues with his critique of censorship in a *crônica* dated May 31, 1960. The use of humor once again becomes a rhetorical strategy, enabling the *cronista* to reveal the moral and linguistic violence of authoritarianism while ostensibly writing about literature. The *cronista*’s gesture of speaking of Padre António Vieira to speak of himself, “Posso afirmar-te, Mário, que o Padre António Vieira foi um grande repórter, um grande jornalista” functions as a metaliterary strategy of self-protection and coded critique (Teixeira de Sousa *Appendix*). He cannot directly discuss his own censorship, so he uses Vieira as a safe historical alter ego, and compares him to a “*teddy boy*,” a term that is both anachronistic and humorous, as it references Britain’s youth subculture of the 1950s (*Appendix*). By invoking Vieira’s persecution under the Inquisition, “Também teve as suas questões com o Santo Ofício cuja censura o chegou a meter em sarilhos” (*Appendix*), Lara Filho indirectly speaks of his own condition under state censorship, turning literary commentary into a camouflaged form of self-expression.

While Ernesto Lara Filho’s *crônicas*, employing humor as a political and rhetorical device implicitly critique the shortcomings of the colonial system, his personal correspondence reveals a markedly serious tone, in which he acknowledges his fear of the regime and his apprehension regarding the consequences of direct political engagement: “Eis o que penso Lúcio e o que não posso dizer em Portugal. Que tenho que calar porque – honra me seja e eu confesso a cobardia – tenho medo das prisões, da PIDE, do opróbrio sobre o nome, da família, de todos, o raio... (Paris, França, 17 de março de 1960)” (qtd. in Verçosa Neta and Muraro 19).

On September 30, 1960, the editorial of the *Jornal de Angola* announces the return of Ernesto Lara Filho. The reason for his return, in his own words: “Primeiro uma grande insatisfação. Depois uma permanente falta de dinheiro” (Teixeira de Sousa *Appendix*). Back in Angola, Ernesto Lara Filho writes “O mão de vaca,” which he publishes in the *Notícia* on November 11, 1961. In this text, Lara Filho again employs rhetorical strategies such as sarcasm and irony to reflect on the relationship between the writer—and in this case, the physical space on the page: “O ‘Mão-de-vaca’ – personagem irreal desta minha pobre crónica que resolvi inventar de repente, para preencher a meia página...” (*Appendix*). This particular *crónica* recalls Rubem Fonseca’s notion of *literatura de mentira*.¹² It combines elements of mystery and latent violence, evoked through suggestive details such as the anonymous figure, the dark sunglasses, and the shotgun, “Indivíduo alto e magro, de óculos escuros escondendo um olho-de-vidro, com menos de três dedos da mão direita – precisamente um deles o indicador, que é o dedo do gatilho da espingarda” (*Appendix*).

In 1994, as a posthumous homage to Ernesto Lara Filho, the Angolan poet and critic David Mestre organized a two-volume collection of his *crônicas*. Mestre contends that Lara Filho’s style was profoundly shaped by Rubem Braga, Fernando Sabino, and other Brazilian writers, whom he credits with revitalizing the *crônica* genre (92). This influence, however, is not merely formal. Tindó Secco highlights that Lara Filho’s informal, “sem cerimônia” tone creates a direct affinity with Rubem Braga, underscoring a shared approach to narrative intimacy and conversational style (156). While both critics emphasize Braga’s specific impact, Lara Filho himself acknowledged a broader constellation of influences. In a letter to his cousin Lúcio Lara dated March 17, 1960, he wrote: “Eu penso e escrevo muitíssimo influenciado pelos brasileiros, Lúcio” (qtd. in Verçosa Neta and Muraro 18), confirming that his literary style was shaped by multiple Brazilian modernist writers rather than a single author.

Conclusion:

The literary influence of Brazilian Modernism on African writers of Portuguese expression—particularly through the *crônica* genre—illuminates a transatlantic dialogue that reshaped cultural and national identities during the colonial era. Ernesto Lara Filho’s work exemplifies this dynamic exchange, as his writing navigates the complexities of hybridity,

¹² See Roger Franchini, “A Genial Literatura de Mentira de Rubem Fonseca”

resistance, and identity formation. By incorporating personal narrative, the epistolary form, humor as a rhetorical device, and direct engagement with readers, Lara Filho—a pivotal figure in Angolan literary history who died tragically in a car accident on February 7, 1977, roughly two years after Angola gained independence from Portugal—not only redefines the role of the *cronista* but also underscores the aesthetic fluidity of literature within Portuguese-speaking communities across Africa and Brazil.

His positionality, however, is not the in-between space theorized by Homi Bhabha, nor is this interpretation grounded in Lara Filho's whiteness. As this article shows, other Angolan writers engaged dialogically with the epistemologies of the colonized population and with the anti-colonial struggle, both culturally and politically. Lara Filho's writings, however, neither challenge rigid notions of identity nor fully reveal how the colonial subject negotiates their place within a broader cultural and linguistic landscape, which emphasizes the author's ambivalent position. Nonetheless, aspects of Brazilian Modernism—particularly as reflected in his texts—exemplify a form of cultural collaboration and influence that bypasses Portugal in favor of a South–South exchange. In this sense, hybridity and *lusofonia* operate in tandem throughout his *crônicas*. The exchanges with Brazilian Modernism illustrate a circulation of ideas, even as his gaze remains marked by positionality and by the fallacies of *lusotropicalismo*—a theory both contemporaneous with and influential upon Brazilian Modernism itself, whose proponents, due to their social and economic privilege and nationalist rhetoric, occupied a positionality analogous to Lara Filho's. Ultimately, these crossings point to a lusotropical modernism shaped by South Atlantic circulations, where the aesthetic convergences and ideological tensions of colonialism remain inseparable from the very forms that sought to transcend them.

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