DONA BERTA'S GARDEN: REACHING ACROSS THE COLONIAL BOUNDARY [1]

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This is a paper about continuity in change; about inertia and unconscious resistance. Situations of rapid political change, such as independence from colonial domination, lead to a total reconstruction of the political discourse. Whatever the specific status of these ideological projects, they will always have to confront the resistance of the lived world and its immense inertia and complexity. In the middle of post-Independence Maputo, Dona Berta's Park is a symbolic reminder of the indivisibility of Mozambican history and of the inescapability of a historically constructed world that functions as a referent for communication.

This is a paper about continuity in change; about inertia and unconscious resistance. Political phenomena are marked by ideological formulations that can change overnight and often do. But the same cannot be said of the lived world, a world that constitutes the third node of any act of communication. I am here inspired by Donald Davidson's concept of *triangulation* – his notion that all acts of communication demand not only a high level of similarity between the agents to the communicative act but also include a context in which similarity is enacted and achieved (Davidson 2001).

Situations of rapid political change (such as independence from colonial domination) lead to a total reconstruction of the political discourse and often also appear to lead to a total re-composition of the ruling elite. Frequently, it is also hoped that rapid political change will lead to a re-composition of the relations between social classes, ethnic groups and even genders. Whatever the specific status of these ideological projects, they will always have to confront the resistance of the lived world and its immense inertia and complexity.

Faced with the inertia resulting from this shared world, change may be denied, fought, resisted, co-opted, adopted, etc. In particular when we are dealing with public spaces, new political contexts give rise to new formulations and to new interests and conflicts. But the existence of the continuity affects the new narratives used to experience the shared world. They dialogue retrospectively with the old narratives. Linguistic and narrative means are required to deal with the strong evidence of continuity in the face of political change. These are more often formulated in a metaphoric mode than in explicit fashion.

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The example that I am about to describe is one such case. I hope it will help us to clarify a number of misundertandings that often plague the debates about post-colonialism in particular, and sudden political change, in general.[2]

The historical context

Mozambique was a Portuguese colony until 1975. Ever since the sixteenth century the Portuguese State had a claim to certain portions of the Mozambican coast and on trading in this vast territory. Portuguese administrative presence was, however, limited to small commercial towns in strategic places. In the central area of the country, the Zambezi River valley, Portuguese presence was increasingly felt from the eighteenth century onwards. Nevertheless, it was only at the end of the nineteenth century, and largely due to the pressure exerted by British colonial interests, that a systematic territorial administration of Mozambique was undertaken.

The military campaigns that paved the way to effective colonial administration in the 1890s (cf. Alexandre 1998: 182-193) were directed mostly against a group of Nguni warriors under the paramount chieftainship of Gungunhana, a descendant of Shoshangane, one of the generals that escaped from the grip of Shaka Zulu in the 1820s (cf. Wilson 1969, I: 346). As was the case in other areas of southern and eastern Africa, these Zulu warriors came to constitute the core of a military leadership that ruled over local populations. They received allegiance from a vast number of Tsonga and Ndau subjects and revolutionized completely the political map of the region that stretches northward from contemporary Maputo to the Save River.

After these wars, the locus of Portuguese interest in the territory shifted from the northern coast (Mozambique Island and Quelimane) where it had been since the sixteenth century, to the south. The two main modern towns were Beira and Lourenço Marques. The former, lying in swampy ground between the Save and the Zambezi, was a newly founded sea gate to British dominated Southern Rhodesia. Lourenço Marques, the new capital city (today Maputo), played a similar role for the British mining interests that controlled the central plateau of Transvaal in South Africa.

Mostly fuelled by agrarian protest, a war of liberation was started in the north of the country in 1964. Actual independence, however, resulted from a brusque change in Portuguese colonial policy. In April 1974, seeing that no political solution had been prepared to end an increasingly wearisome African war, the Portuguese military overthrew the dictatorship, leading to the

[2] Since writing this version I have come accross further interesting facts about the case, but the demands of publication oblige me to present the text in this yet unfinished form.

granting of independence to the African colonies and to the institution of a democratic regime in Portugal.

Whilst the first acts of armed rebellion against colonial rule in Mozambique were primarily carried out by people from the north, Frelimo, the political party that ultimately saw the war through to its end and established a new independent country in 1975, was mostly staffed by southerners, many of whom had strong links to the pre-colonial Nguni elite.

Mozambique's independence, however, had a bitter taste as, soon after the institution of a communist regime, a civil war erupted that economically bled the country dry and killed a substantial portion of the population (cf. Geffray 1990). After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the factions in the struggle finally managed to achieve a durable peace. Since the elections of 1994, the country has been governed by outwardly democratic governments, which have favoured private enterprise and civil freedom. Frelimo, however, remained the ruling party.

Dona Berta's Garden[3]

This paper is based on an occurence that took place on the first day of my arrival in Maputo, in March 2000.

The porter of the building where I lived was showing me the way to the nearest telephone exchange. We crossed a small park that contrasted pleasantly with the generally unkempt atmosphere of the city. I commented that the park was particularly well looked after. He agreed and responded that the reason was because it was "Dona Berta's garden", to which I asked "who is Dona Berta?". He replied that she was a woman who lived somewhere on the other side of the park and that was her park and she looked after it, not allowing anyone to damage it. For this reason the place was so well kept. "It's because it is private," he said, "if it were public it would have been a disaster, just like everything else."

A seemingly improbable tale, the story of Dona Berta's garden continued to rankle in my mind. I asked my colleagues about it and was told that some years earlier the Municipal Council of Maputo attempted to contract out the upkeep of its public parks, as the council found itself incapable of looking after them with public funds. The contractors would be allowed to use the park for the production of flowers for sale in the markets and to charge a fee on group photographs taken there on the condition that they maintain

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[3] I am grateful to Rui Ramos for sharing with me his knowledge concerning Marshall and Mrs. Craveiro Lopes and calling to my attention the passages quoted below; and to Maria da Luz Prata Dias for her help in tracing the records of the Park.

FIGURE 1 – A view of Dona Berta's Park (August 2001).

the park and its grounds. They wondered whether this was the case with Dona Berta's garden.

I was, therefore, particularly surprised when, a few days later, as I again crossed the park, my attention was drawn to a discrete but elegant grey

FIGURE 2 – A joint venture in the city's main avenue (August 2001).

marble plaque that said simply "To Dona Berta Craveiro Lopes". So that was Dona Berta, after all – the wife of Marshall Francisco de Craveiro Lopes, the President of the Portuguese Republic between 1951 and 1958!

FIGURE 3 – Dona Berta at the time of the 1956 Presidential visit (Notícias, 1958).

As it turns out, the Marshall was very familiar with Mozambique, having distinguished himself there as a young officer during the bitter struggle against German invasion in the course of the First World War. He lived there again from 1918 to 1920 and visited many times during his career. He was there with Dona Berta in 1956 at the head of an official state visit. He probably met her in Mozambique, during his lengthy stays in the 1910s, as she was born to a local Quelimane family with military connections. According to Marcelo Caetano, Dona Berta was "sweet and fragile" and "a lady of most distinguished bearing" (1977).

Being deeply concerned with colonial matters, Craveiro Lopes started to show signs of independence from the dictator[4] during the course of his tenure as President. As a result, in 1958, the dictator substituted him in the Presidency in a rather vexatious manner. Dona Berta died shortly before her husband abandoned the post. According to the uncorroborated reports of people whom I met in Mozambique, whose parents were part of Craveiro Lopes' entourage at the time, strong pressure was placed on the President to leave his post without undue scandal. Salazar carried this out by threatening to imprison and demote his eldest son (a lieutenant-colonel who was at

[4] Salazar always refused to assume personally the Presidency.

the time the President's aide-de-camp). Craveiro Lopes always attributed his wife's death[5] to the terror caused by Salazar's threats to stop short their son's promising career levied through the infamous Minister of War, General Santos Costa (cf. Homem de Melo 1983: 47).

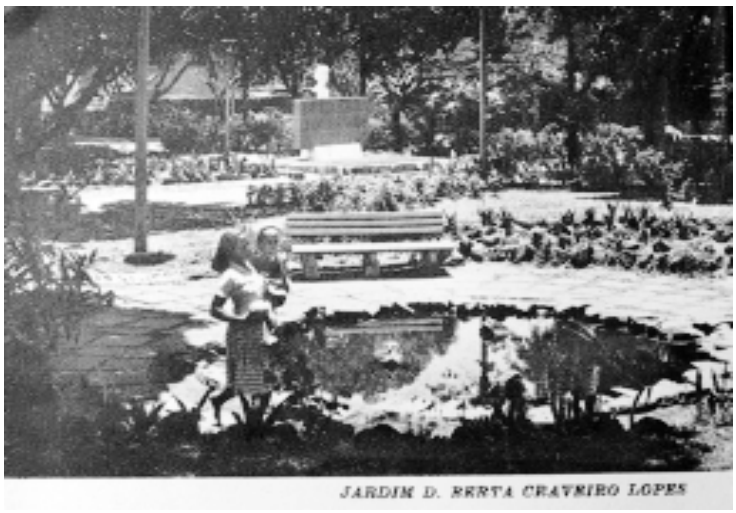

FIGURE 4 – The park in the early 1960s.

After his wife's death, in December of the same year, Craveiro Lopes again visited Mozambique, but now as a private citizen. His second son, an architect, lived there for many years. In his correspondence, the Marshall claims to have received a particularly warm welcome, and indeed the newspapers of the time back up this claim. A public subscription was organized to give the newly appointed Marshall his gold baton, which was supported by people from all over Mozambique and rose to a considerable amount.[6] Increasingly angered by Salazar's African policies, he writes from Lourenço Marques: "I am not at all satisfied with what I have seen and heard here. The Province is going through a serious economic and social crisis that demands an urgent and wise response, so that it can prepare itself to meet the difficulties that threaten all the African territories South of the Sahara" (quoted by

[5] The newspapers at the time attributed her death to *congestão cerebral* (some type of cerebral vascular disease – *Notícias* 06/07/58).

[6] The initiative for this public subscription was the newspapers' and had no specific official support, even though it was also not opposed by the dictatorship. It went up to what was then a very large amount – 86 770$00 (*Notícias* 21/01/59). The baton was publicly exhibited in a shop downtown and was visited by a large amount of people. The ceremony of delivery was grandly organised by the Municipality, but the attempts to dampen the impact the general was having on the colonial elite were already underway.

Homem de Melo 1983: 27). Later, his opposition to Salazar became so strong that he accepted a role in the ultimately failed coup led by Botelho Moniz in April 1961 (cf. Ramos 1999: 79).

FIGURE 5 – Drinking fountain, dated shortly after Dona Berta's death.

In all likelihood it was in 1958, after her death, that the park received the name of Dona Berta. I was told by people who were then living in the city that the ceremony for naming the park[7] was a rather subdued event. There is a modest drinking fountain in the park that carries the date 24th July 1958. This was the city's feast day, celebrating the decision of French President Mac-Mahon to grant the Maputo strip to the Portuguese rather than to the British in 1875. Although the newspapers of 1958 comment extensively on the grand commemorations that were held that year on the 24th of July, not one single reference appears – on that date or any other during the 1950s[8] – about the park and how it came to be dedicated to this highly placed oppositionist. In fact, educated opinion in the colony was deeply dissatisfied with the tone of the events. A month later, João Craveirinha – who later became famous as a politically inspired poet – wrote a bitter article against the "low level" (*mau nível*) of the celebrations (*Notícias* 27/07/58).

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[7] The park had always been contemplated as part of the new city's admirably successful quadrangular plan.

[8] I carried out an extensive search in the city's papers of the 1950s at the Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique. The silence around the park and its dedication to Dona Berta was absolute, even though there were constant remarks to the public celebrations of the Marshall's presence. I take the opportunity to thank the Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique for their generosity on this occasion.

Craveiro Lopes' frustration with Salazar's unwillingness to reform colonial policy had many sympathisers among the colonial elite in the 1950s and 1960s. Could this be the reason that Dona Berta's plaque escaped the fate of other such public memorials during the destructive euphoria in the aftermath of the colonial era? Her bust, it must be noted, was taken away from its place on top of the plaque (cf. Figure 4 and Figure 6) and no one knows its present whereabouts. As it turns out, members of Dona Berta's illustrious family continue to play important roles in postcolonial Mozambique – even though, as I found out, they do not care to share openly in her former glory (first, as wife of a distinguished general; then, as wife of the President of the Municipality of Sintra, a rather prestigious position at the time; and, finally, as First Lady). Or might the reason for the survival of the monument be simply its discreteness, due to the fact that Salazar would not have condoned anything grander?

Dona Berta's second visitation

The fact is that the park and the plaque survived the iconoclastic crises of the Independence period, when most of the parks lost their decorative appearance and most of the monuments and celebratory plaques were removed or erased. The name of this park too was changed – it is now officially called *Jardim Nangade*, after a Frelimo guerrilla camp during the war years – but this new name did not stick. In and of itself this is an interesting fact, since, with very few exceptions, place name changes were effective in the post-Independence period. In the late colonial period, this area was occupied mostly by white middle-class families. During the years after Independence, however, the city was re-occupied by black residents. So the park and its plaque came to be re-interpreted by the new inhabitants in light of political events that, in 1958, were totally unpredictable and by people who did not reside there at the time.

Later still, during the recent post-socialist period, new ways of running parks have arisen. The city dwellers that attribute the good upkeep of the park to Dona Berta (in her visitation as a bellicose entrepreneur), insist that the only reason she can do it is because "it is private". This is a bitter comment both on the perceived inefficiency and corruption of the now defunct "People's Republic" and on the predatory nature of the country's present bureaucratic elite.

The discrete anger against Salazar's policies, which the friends of Marshall Craveiro Lopes expressed by honoring his late wife, has vanished. But the monument has been reinterpreted in order to manifest a similarly discrete anger against a postcolonial state elite that, having led the country

into total misery through ill-conceived socialist policies, is now trying to transform itself into a democratic/capitalist elite.

FIGURE 6 – Plaque commemorating Dona Berta Craveiro Lopes (August 2001).

The Dona Berta who supposedly contracts the park from the Municipal Council and, through private initiative succeeds in giving the present black residents a basic amenity within an urban existence, is symbolically conjoined with the Dona Berta the white colonial middle-class saw as a martyr to their repressed pleas for colonial reform.

As I wrote the passage above, a suspicion dawned on me that there was more about this story than I knew. I asked a friend in Mozambique to enquire about it.[9] Immediately the plot thickened. People around the park told him that, indeed, there was a Dona Berta, but that she had recently died. Later on, when I went back to Maputo, I personally interviewed the photographers that hang around Dona Berta's plaque during the daytime, charging 20.000 *meticais* for each photograph. The business is not great, they complain. Nevertheless one suspects that it must be worthwhile, as it seems to support each of three photographers and their fancy equipment on a daily basis. The photographers confirmed that they knew Dona Berta personally – she had

[9] I am grateful to Agostinho Manganhela, of the Department of Anthropology of the University E. Mondlane, Maputo, for having pursued these queries.

disappeared only one or two years before. Apparently she did not die but disappeared, as "her relatives came to take her away".

She lived in the lower part of the park, near to where the gardener's lodge is today, behind the plaque. They told me: "Around here was like a home to her." (*Isso aí é como se fosse a casa dela.)* I asked whether she had been mentally ill, but the photographers denied it. She was slightly deranged, they said, but not mad. Only, they replied, "It is the hard things of life, that make one… a little weird. Many evil things happen that a person finds hard to take" (*São as coisas duras da vida, a pessoa fica assim… pronto, esquisita. Acontecem muitas coisas más que a pessoa depois até não aguenta*). They said that, when she was left alone and homeless at the time of Independence, she took to living in the park, looking after it and preventing the park from being occupied by squatters or dumpers of rubbish, making sure that the trees where not cut for firewood or otherwise destroyed.

Only then another resident came past and heard our conversation. Yes, he claimed, Dona Berta often slept here, but she had a house just round the corner. She used to come here daily to do her knitting. She used to say the park was hers because she was a relative of the lady in the commemorative plaque. She wanted to prevent people from harming her park. "In the end," he said (perhaps fantasizing), "her children from South Africa took her away".

My colleague had been told she was *mestiça* – an Afro-European – but the photographers I interviewed could not unanimously agree that this was the case. The ladies in the fruit stall nearby, however, claimed with alacrity that she had been *branca* (a white woman) whose relatives had left her behind at the time of Independence. In fact, they immediately got excited with the notion that I might be her son, come back too late to look for her. I had to explain what I was doing in Maputo before they gave up their romantic confabulation. But then, it must be understood that the category of *branco* (white) in today's Maputo is less a phenotypic category than an elastic referent of otherness – crossing phenotype, class and ethnicity. Thus, the two categorizations need not be contradictory, as I have come to learn from daily experience. In fact, later still, the person living in what had once been her house, explained to me that she had indeed been "a little dark – she probably had some Indian blood in her".

Dona Berta's second coming, then, in her postcolonial visitation as an aggressive but endearing bag woman, turned her abandonment into a public gift. She was as gross, miserable and lonely as her former name-sake was grand, beautiful and distinguished. The former had been a victim of her husband's opposition to Salazar's misguided colonial policies; the later fought against the destructive policies of the city's postcolonial rulers. The one was "a lady of most distinguished bearing"; the other was a lowly

mestiça. Both of them, however, were Afro-Europeans and had written in their bodies the ambiguity of their belonging. The Marshall's return to Mozambique to commemorate his wife, who had recently died in his quarters at the Presidential palace, quite as much as the courageous, if somewhat lunatic, struggle of her supposed kinswoman to save this public amenity from destruction, strike me both as symbolic claims to chthonic attachment.

In my latest visit to Mozambique, my fascination with the history of this park yielded further interesting results, particularly concerning the role of the recently deceased head gardener (Rubão Balane). After persistent questioning, I eventually discovered that his authority and stubborn attachment to the park was the principal reason why it remained viable as a park during all the years since Independence. This was why the park did not collapse like practically all others in the city. And, in turn, that is the background against which the stories of the post-Independence Dona Bertas came to make sense.

In all likelihood, and in spite of their collaboration, the second Dona Berta's role in preserving the park was less effective in practical terms (even if it was symbolically more resonant) than Balane's authority over his colleagues, gained in the immediate pre-Independence period. He died in December 2000. Thus, between my first visit to the park and my last in September 2001, the state of the park deteriorated tremendously, in spite of all of the 13 gardeners that claim a miniscule salary from the Municipality stating that they work there!

Conclusion

As I have argued elsewhere, "In our normal view of history, colonialism, postcolonialism and the present capitalist period seem to annul each other in succession, neatly lined as they are in a chain of successive acts of overcoming. But in fact, social time is seldom linear. The past and the present are constantly being re-mixed into conglomerates of experience, where each component element becomes largely indissociable from the others. The past and the present constantly visit each other in experience."

The three Dona Bertas form an ambivalent bridge between the past and the present. In daytime, people visit the park in order to have their photographs taken. They want their loved ones to remember them in a place of beauty. At night, the park's shadows harbour dangers untold. Every new acquaintance I met, on knowing where I was living, reminded me to avoid the park and its impending dangers. For some, it was supposed to be a haunt for criminals; for others it was also a place where the tall trees (and especially the araucarias) gave shelter to witches.

In the middle of the city, Dona Berta's Park is a symbolic reminder of the indivisibility of this society's history and of the inescapability of a historically constructed world that functions as a referent for communication – a context for the similarity that is the basis making intersubjectivity possible. The three Dona Bertas (and any others who may arise from new idiosyncratic versions of the story of the park) are not the same Dona Berta. Rather, they are processually related to each other, in the same way as today's park (relatively unkempt and ageing, occupied by poor blacks, see Figures 1 and 6) relates to the former colonial park (neatly kept and punctiliously gardened, occupied mostly by black nannies and white babies, see Figure 4).

We have been dealing with a public space by relation to which, in different historical and political conjunctures, three different narratives were wrought. I call them "stories" or "narratives" for facility's sake. In fact, each person who tells or pieces together in her head the story of Dona Berta, puts together a different story based on a personally specific set of informations and combined in an idiosyncratic fashion.[10]

However, as far as Dona Berta's Park is concerned, the personalized narratives that came my way group together into three neatly delineated "traditions". These succeed each other in time (the "President's wife" hands over to the "bagwoman" who hands over to the "entrepreneur"). They succeed each other not only in the narrative but also in their lived experience – in the way in which they enacted their roles in their lives (with the exception of the third Dona Berta – the entrepreneur – who probably has not yet been embodied). But, at the same time, the three stories are superimposed in the present. When they meet before the park (in the relation of triangulation cited above), the people who know different stories are obliged to re-frame and adapt them. In this way, they too are changed, for their relation with the city (through the park) is re-aligned.

This was clear to me when I faced people who lived in the city before Independence ("blacks" or "whites"), with the reports concerning the three Dona Bertas. They were bemused and slightly disturbed, quite as much by the last two stories (the bagwoman and the entrepreneur) as by the continuities that they revealed with the first story (the President's wife), which everyone seemed to hope to have vanished.

What is specific about this particular park is the existence of a kind of "harmony" between the three stories – which was not at all a necessity. I mean to stress that the change in the sort of narratives that legitimate this public space might well have been such that the three different narratives did not interrelate. If that had been the case, then, we would have had to conclude

[10] And that is why some informants are so much more helpful to the researcher than others, who are less endowed with the capacities to perform an exegesis of the metaphors we collect.

that it was not one single public space but a topographic continuity of different ones. As we piece together the three narrative traditions, however, we are clearly inclined to believe that they make some sort of sense together, they dialogue mutually, creating a space of metaphoric continuity.

Each of the narratives is relatively self-contained, of course. It is a narrative about particular events and does not come together with an exegesis. I follow here an argument by Donald Davidson who stresses that "What distinguishes metaphor is not meaning but use" (1984: 259). As I spoke to people, I was not being told "metaphors" or "legends". I was being told "facts" about specific women and their relation to a park in the context of different political conjunctures.

In spite of that, however, the metaphoric nature of the narratives signalled itself to me due to their relative exceptionality and doubtful verisimilitude. "Generally it is only when a sentence is taken to be false that we accept it as a metaphor and start to hand out the hidden implication" (Davidson 1984: 258). The metaphoric reading of the stories of Dona Berta imposed itself on me. The stories are not "patently false" – they are presented as reports of lived experience with diverging levels of verisimilitude. But, as I heard them, I was struck by their vague "improbability" or the "surprising" nature of what I was being told. I stress that this experience does not seem to be exclusive to me – who might have been held to be specially prone to doubt as, being a social scientist, I live in a supposedly "disenchanted world". Rather, everyone I spoke to about Dona Berta and her story(ies) seemed to be affected either by curiosity or by a certain sense that it was better to avoid them. Much like Davidson's metaphors, these stories signalled their exceptionality and called the listeners to a kind of symbolic understanding that carried far greater implications than the explicit meaning of what we were being told.

As it happens the stories differ greatly, quite as much as the political worlds within which each one of them develops. The first has to do with planter resistance to Salazar's dictatorship and its disregard for colonial interests; the second refers to the resistance to the process of socialist collectivism and post-Independence racial politics; the third is an appeal to values of citizenship in the face of the lack of respect for the public good that characterises the type of corrupt capitalism that dominates the post-civil war period.

What differs between the three narrative traditions, then, is not only or even especially, the story and its main characters. Rather, it is the referential context of interpretation. Thus, although they differ enormously in their explicit content, the harmony between the three of them points towards an enormous area of continuity. The stories invalidate each other mutually – for Dona Berta could only have been one of the three. However, at the end, these

aspects of incompatibility are nothing but a small part of the whole world that is elicited by each narrative.

Since, as we have seen, each one of them signals its metaphoric nature, each listener (or each person who re-activates the story in her memory) is bound to assume a metaphoric approach to the story's relevance. That means that the "patent falsehood" that results from the conjugation of the three stories does not lead the listener to reject them (or at least two of them). On the contrary, it becomes a factor of enrichment of the three of them. This explains the reaction of people in Maputo to my enquiries. Some manifested a kind of ironic pleasure in discussing and exploring the different narratives. Others, however, manifested embarrassment, understanding in a relatively non-verbal manner the potential for meaning that the conjugation of the stories implied.

The "harmony" between the three stories is identifiable in the figure of the heroines that are (a) women of the land who, in spite of (b) being marked by a level of positive social differentiation, (c) resist the oppressive nature of the political regimes in power in favour of the collective good. The greatest element of harmony, however, is not to be traced in the stories. Rather, it is the park itself – patently a public utility.

The point here, then, is that these stories provide people with insights into their world that depend on what each one of them does with the story (or stories) he or she happens to be told (or piece together). "There is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention and much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character" (Davidson 1984: 263). By exploring these stories, their relation to the park and to the different political contexts, and their relation to each other, I aimed at providing an example of how, in the face of sudden political change, people manipulate the continuities that characterize their lived world.

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O JARDIM DA D. BERTA: PARA ALÉM DAS FRONTEIRAS COLONIAIS

Este ensaio é sobre a continuidade na mudança; sobre inércia e resistência inconsciente. As situações de mudança política súbita, tais como a independência da dominação colonial, obrigam a uma reconstituição total do discurso político. Seja qual for o estatuto específico do novo projecto político, confrontar-se-á sempre com a resistência do mundo vivido e a sua enorme complexidade. Localizado, como está, perto do centro da cidade pós-colonial de Maputo, o "Jardim da D. Berta" constitui um marco simbólico da indivisibilidade da história de Moçambique e de quão inescapável é o mundo historicamente construído que funciona como referente para a comunicação quotidiana.