

# **The Last Empire**

**Thirty Years of Portuguese Decolonization**

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## ***5: Portugal and the CPLP: heightened expectations, unfounded disillusion***

Luís António Santos

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‘The CPLP is a disaster, and for that I blame the Portuguese government.’

*Mário Soares, Universidade do Minho, Braga, 28 June 2000*

‘The CPLP appears not only to have been born of a ‘caesarean section’ but it also suffers from a very considerable ‘ideal deficit’. In fact, it undoubtedly seems to have started out with the wrong ideal.’

*Michel Cahen, ‘Des caravelles pour le futur?’, Lusotopie, 1997*

Portugal’s relation with the *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa* (CPLP) has been uneasy from the start. Although proposals for the creation of a new institutionalised relation with its former African colonies and Brazil had been put forward at least since 1983, several different factors concurred to prevent any serious undertaking until the end of the 1980s: first and foremost, pre-1989 international involvement in Angola and – to a lesser extent – in Mozambique, greatly reduced both Portugal’s diplomatic leeway and the new countries’ interest in a new entity. Secondly, Portugal’s own internal political life was going through a time-consuming state of instability until 1987, leaving governments very little scope for dealing with less than immediate concerns. Finally, less than 15 years after decolonization, Lisbon’s position regarding its former African colonies was still very much determined by a fear of neo-colonialism accusations. By the same token, relevant sectors of the African single party regimes’ were weary of any political or diplomatic option that might even hint at any Portuguese prominence.

Portugal’s role in the Angolan peace process, and its insistence on maintaining some degree of intervention in the Mozambican peace discussions appeared to be

instrumental in changing its own perception of what the new relationship could amount to, and also in gradually securing a level of mutual trust especially with these two countries.<sup>1</sup> The political wrangling which followed the debacle of the Angolan peace process, and particularly the length and the periodic susceptibilities of the ensuing process of creation of the CPLP would nevertheless come to prove that doubt, suspicion, and resentment remained an integral part of the relation, and were thus inevitably both integrated in the genetic code of the new organization and conditioning Portugal's role.

Four years after the formal institutionalization of the CPLP, Portugal maintains a cautious position, based on the same structuring premise – the necessity to shy away from almost every 'leading role' opportunity for fear of neo-colonial accusation – and on more down to earth reasons like the limited availability of funds.

Should we thus infer that the empty shell like existence of the CPLP derives from such a Portuguese attitude? Should we alternatively argue that the demise of the Community is linked to its 'Lusotropical emanation' beginnings?

We would submit that even if both these queries did get favourable answers, another dimension should be added to the debate – a discussion on the level of expectations. Indeed, both those who defend that Portugal should have had a more prominent role in the organization from the start, and those who instead argue that a new relationship framework should be in place before the CPLP could work, seem to share the notion that a great deal more could be attained.

In this paper we would like to propose that such readings seem to compare their own (sometimes very elaborate) specific notions on what the CPLP should be like with actual plans and achievements, invariably drawing negative conclusions on the organization/community's performance.

### **An ambiguous start**

The idea of a Community anchored on a shared linguistic background has been hovering over Portuguese politics at least since the mid-1950s. The first enunciators of such proposals were undoubtedly influenced by the writings of Gilberto Freyre on the singularity of a Lusotropical culture.<sup>2</sup> Agostinho da Silva would write in 1956 that Portugal or Brazil should take it upon themselves the task of creating a linguistically based association in order to develop the 'common cultural affection' (quoted in Domingues 1999: 4). Nearly a decade latter, one of the staunchest defenders of Portugal's strategic turning to the Atlantic, Adriano Moreira, would organise the First Portuguese Culture Community Congress in Lisbon. A second gathering, in Mozambique, would follow it and two organizations would emerge as a result: the Union of Portuguese Culture Communities, and the Portuguese Culture International Academy.

Not being our purpose to analyse in detail these organizations and initiatives, two remarks should be nevertheless be made; firstly, they were somewhat contradictory in purpose, by taking on board Freyre's notions on the added value of cultural interplay, yet at the same time clearly stating their metropolitan-centred nature;

secondly, their creation – ostensibly parting from the reality of an ongoing war – should be interpreted more as an indication that they were part of the proposed alternative path on colonial matters for a very particular group within the regime than as an objective and, especially, viable proposition (Graham 1973: 32–3). Their importance as creators of a particular framework that would demarcate the debate henceforth should not however be in any way diminished by the previous comments. Indeed, the longevity of some basic notions – the pivotal role of the Portuguese language and the proposed cultural prominence – advises against any hasty dismissals, and the existence of ambiguities in the past if anything reinforces the link with the foundation and initial wavering of the CPLP itself.

It would take nearly two decades for the theme to resurface in Portuguese politics. The so-called ‘spirit of Bissau’<sup>3</sup> had formally initiated a period of more open contacts between Portugal and its former African colonies, and Jaime Gama (Foreign Affairs minister in 1983) would venture the possibility of institutionalising this strengthening of ties. The aim was to ‘bring consistency and decentralization’ to the Portuguese Language tri-continental dialogue, *via* a biannual summit of Heads of State and government, annual meetings at ministerial level, and frequent consultations between Foreign Affairs Ministry representatives. A permanent secretariat (‘ideally located in Cape Verde’) would secure the management of this ‘new dynamic’ (Gama 1983).

The carefully selected wording of the project, and its ostensive focus on mutually beneficial diplomatic actions would not however be sufficient to promote its materialization. It could generally be argued that Portugal’s post-colonial relations with the African Portuguese speaking countries had not yet reached ‘the state of friendliness which such a move required’ (Venâncio and Chan 1996: 47), although some very particular but intertwined factors could be presented as major contributors to such a scenario: Portugal’s political instability, the emergence of distinct approaches to the question of relations with the former colonies, the limitations still imposed by an international bipolar division, and also the new African countries’ continued (if somewhat dimmed) suspicion of Portuguese intentions (Reis 1994: 74–89).

In a period of no more than a decade, democratic Portugal had had very distinct approaches to the relationship with its former colonies, and relevantly, they very seldom reflected a ‘national’ strategy, agreed upon by government, Presidency, political parties, and military. President Eanes – who sought for himself an intervening role in this particular area of external relations – believed in a pragmatic (though personalised) approach, hoping to enhance Portugal’s economic and political presence in Africa. In essence, this strategy was shared by the Social Democrats, led by Sá Carneiro, although they believed these matters should not be in the hands of the President. The Socialists, led by Mário Soares, were more permeable to both American intentions and the pressures of interest groups and African anti-governmental organizations. The alternation of Social Democrats and Socialists in power had clear reflections on political attitudes towards Africa, and also on the African posture towards Portugal. The fact that Jaime Gama’s proposals were not followed by any concrete measures hence tells us very little about their specific validity. If rea-

sons are to be sought, they rather lay in the demise of the Socialist lead Central Bloc government, in the expression of Angola and Mozambique's by now chronic misgivings towards Soares' inspired initiatives (Venâncio and McMillan 1993: 101-4), and also in the ostensive non-involvement of Brazil in any type of discussions on the matter.

By 1989 conditions had considerably changed. In Portugal, Cavaco Silva's majority Social-Democrat government assumed that relations with Portuguese speaking African countries were strategically important, and that concrete confidence building and cooperation measures were needed.<sup>4</sup> A strategic plan, elaborated by diplomats and officials at the Foreign Affairs ministry in March 1988, foresaw Portugal's active involvement in the search for peace both in Angola and Mozambique, following a process which entailed the promotion of state to state relations, and the cessation of contacts and imposition of circulation restrictions to Angolan and Mozambican rebel movements (Interview with A. Monteiro, 19 July 2000). At the economic level, Portugal's proposal on the existence of assistance programmes for countries without geographical continuity was accepted during the Lome IV discussions, thus allowing the five Portuguese speaking African countries to be treated as a 'regional group'. Much in the manner previously envisaged by Eanes and especially Sá Carneiro, this *rapprochement* was linked to the perception that Portugal's role within Europe would be enhanced.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, Constitutional revisions had by now clearly established governmental prominence over the conduct of foreign affairs, reducing the risks of Presidential 'interference', and promoting an external image of greater unity on these matters.

A specific set of conditions led Angola to interpret Portugal's commitment with less suspicion than in the past. Indeed, Soviet effective retreat from Africa under Gorbachev, a severe economic crisis, a desire to further relations with the EC, and significantly an intention to establish a new relation with the United States, secured Luanda's adhesion to a mutually beneficial political and diplomatic convergence, nudged forward by 'confidence building' measures, like the curtailment of UNITA's activities in Lisbon and the symbolic refusal of an entry visa to its leader, the late Jonas Savimbi.

Ravaged by a succession of natural catastrophes and by a paralysing civil war, Mozambique was also receptive to Portugal's renewed attentions. The intensification of economic and, especially, military cooperation was enshrined in a series of agreements signed in 1988, and the political emphasis was given by Cavaco Silva's official visit to Maputo in 1989. Having initiated a delicate process of peace negotiations with Renamo, the Mozambican government also sought to secure Portugal's help in convincing the Portuguese Community in South Africa to both terminate their support for Renamo, and initiate an investment oriented return to the country.

Possibly due to the lack of post-colonial internal conflicts, lesser international involvement, and the exiguity of self-sufficiency resources, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Guinea-Bissau all opted from a non-confrontational relation with Portugal since 1974. The fact that Portugal was now an EC member if

anything increased their interest in strengthening that link.

Finally, a democratic yet economically debilitated Brazil, also started to recognise the advantages of closer contacts with Portugal and the Portuguese speaking African countries. The historic affinity and the existence of a 700,000 strong Portuguese community in Brazil had never managed to ignite a substantive relation between the two countries. Caricature images of each other were, until the late 1980's, the reflection of such a steady aloofness. Portugal's adhesion to the EC was instrumental in the inversion of that trend; Portugal sought to strengthen its image as a worthy interlocutor not only in Africa but also in Latin America, and Brazil was keen on reinforcing its relation with the European Community. From Africa, Brazil expected an expansion of its cultural products market, but also – particularly in the case of Angola – a spill over effect into other areas.

More than ever before, conditions were hence appropriate to the establishment of a new type of relationship between Portugal, Brazil, and the new African states. The first summit of Portuguese speaking Heads of State – which took place in São Luis do Maranhão (Brazil), on November 1989 – nevertheless resulted in no more than the formal creation of the Portuguese Language International Institute (PLII). Under pressure from distinct internal conditions, and in the absence of clear leadership, the 'seven' were only able to vaguely agree on the defence and promotion of a common linguistic heritage.

Whilst the Portuguese President, Mário Soares, seemed to share with his Brazilian counterpart, José Sarney, and with the Brazilian Culture minister, José Aparecido de Oliveira, an enthusiasm over the evolution towards a more encompassing entity (Avillez 1996: 53), Angola's failed peace process, and delays in achieving a settlement in Mozambique advised the Portuguese government against any hasty protagonism (Briosa e Gala, Interview, 19 February 1997). In the name of 'a long term national interest policy', but also as an indirect acknowledgement of its own limitations, the Portuguese government opted for the safety of an incremental approach, through an engagement in concrete sectorial '5+1' meetings.<sup>6</sup>

The arrival of Itamar Franco at the Presidency, would definitely thrust Brazil into a leading role. Its ambassador in Lisbon, Aparecido de Oliveira, would in March 1993 (some three months after the EC had become the European Union) present a concrete proposal for the creation of the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa. Confirming the support of all seven Heads of State, a meeting of Foreign Affairs ministers – held in February 1994, in Brasília – would state the 'spontaneous' nature of a project that was based on the 'special relationships' forged by a common language.

Two failed dates for the formalization of the CPLP – 28 June 1994, and 29 November 1994 – would however expose the political frailties of such a special relationship, and hint at the continued stress between different objectives, and importantly, possible oscillations in member states' interest for the project. Itamar Franco's last minute unavailability for the proposed June meeting was<sup>7</sup> – despite Portuguese diplomatic efforts<sup>8</sup> – interpreted by the African countries as a political snub. Hence their immediate (and joint) decision to stay away from the planned



event. Despite numerous reassurances to the contrary (Bernardes 1994; *Jornal de Letras* 23 November 1994), the second attempt would also run into problems when Angola's President decided to announce his absence, as a result of the perceived interference of his Portuguese counterpart in Luanda's 'internal matters'.<sup>9</sup> A total collapse was avoided by intense diplomatic activity, which would nevertheless only produce results more than a year later. What Mozambican President, Joaquim Chissano, would (rather euphemistically) describe as a 'natural maturation process' (Domingues 1999: 7) finally resulted in the July 1996 Heads of State summit, not without a last reminder of how fragile the whole construct was – Angola's insistence on appointing a former prime-minister as the CPLP's first Executive Secretary,<sup>10</sup> revealed that susceptibilities were still very high, and that not all countries had the same posture towards the new organization. Indeed, if Angola can be – on this particular occasion – singled out for taking advantage of a tense situation, it should be noted that Brazil's acceptance of such a demand was decisive. In fact, Brazil's new President, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and (especially) his Foreign Affairs minister, Luis Filipe Lampreia, were not entirely in accordance with Aparecido de Oliveira's ideas on the nature and purpose of the organization, and Angola's demand was an opportunity to solve a potentially damaging internal problem. Not proposing Aparecido de Oliveira, could hence be presented as a goodwill measure, with the purpose of cementing trust among all member states.

Besides the solemnity of the occasion, the Lisbon summit produced a series of generic undertakings, on the defence of the common language, on the progressive affirmation of a Portuguese Language block in the international *fora*, and on mutual solidarity and cooperation (CPLP 1996b). As the final communiqué so clearly shows, the new organization was however very much an empty shell, awaiting its 'mechanisms and instruments', 'a list of priorities and projects', and 'strategic guidelines' (CPLP 1996c).

In essence, the CPLP had an Executive Secretary imposed by one Member State, no head office, no staff, no clear orientation, and – despite Brazil's last minute offer of US\$4m – an insufficient and erratic supply of financial means. Its members all admitted an interest in the organization, although their purposes were not coincidental. If Portugal's caution advised it against going much further than to hope for a 'means to project the language', and for the development of a genuine new understanding: 'We thus actualise a secular familiarity, punctuated by light and shadow, but now assumed in its entirety and without complexes... Our heritage belongs to us all, and we must all enrich it. The rules are quite clear: equality, solidarity, and mutual respect. Not forgetting that this community is marked by our own reading of universalism' (Sampaio 1996: 2, 6–7). Brazil was much more straightforward in the expression of its political and economic goals: 'we will be presenting some concrete cooperation projects that we would like to see prosper. They are realistic projects, simple but goal oriented initiatives' (Cardoso 1996: 2). Brazil's strenuous appeal for a 'sense of realism' was seconded by the African member states, even if relating to different purposes. As Angolan President, José Eduardo dos Santos, put it, the new States were seeking 'new ways to fight exclusion' in the

international arena, thus hoping for less ‘grandiloquence, and sentimental rhetoric’, and more ‘effective solidarity’ (economic, political, technical, but also in sensible areas like migratory policy) (Santos, J. E. 1996: 1).

Less than six months later, Brazil’s Foreign Affairs minister, Luis Filipe Lampreia, would make no effort to hide his personal lack of confidence in a structure like the CPLP, by stating that his country’s first interest was to strengthen ties with the European Union (presumably with Portugal’s help), and that Brazil could very well be in Africa without the CPLP (Sousa 1996: 8). The natural follow up to such statements would be the early 1997 internal devaluation of the CPLP, in terms of Brazilian Foreign Affairs priorities.<sup>11</sup> On the first anniversary of the organization, the Executive under secretary, Rafael Branco, admitted its chronic shortcomings: the oscillations in member states’ commitment,<sup>12</sup> the lack of a concrete progression strategy,<sup>13</sup> and the exiguity of funds (Silva 1997: 5).<sup>14</sup> In 1998, he would add that the organization still lived ‘in a sea of ambiguity’, and that it had not yet managed to become ‘a relevant consideration in each member state’s decision-making process on foreign policy’ (Abecassis 1998: 18).

Some three years (and two Heads of State summits) latter, the CPLP has not yet been able to assert its existence in full, and – significantly – it has not managed to escape the immobility trap. Tentative efforts in the diplomatic arena (as was the case during the 1998 coup in Guinea-Bissau), or the sponsoring of cultural and scientific events and meetings do not seem to be enough to justify the existence of the organization itself. Lack of political autonomy and financial resources have rendered it powerless in the face of catastrophes (as was the case during the 1999 Mozambican floods), and silent in the face of human rights violations (particularly in matters relating to Angola).

The Heads of State 2000 summit, held in Maputo, has apparently attempted to kick-start a new, more cultural oriented organization. The choice of an academic for the position of Executive Secretary could be interpreted as an attempt to isolate the CPLP from political interference, thus creating some (until now non-existent) room for manoeuvre. Still, if compared with the initial proposals on greater political, diplomatic, and economic harmonization, this change cannot but be interpreted as a downgrading of member states individual and collective hopes. It could be argued that conditions are finally in place for the affirmation of a flexible language Community but it could as much be said that a dimming of members’ interest signals the demise of the organization.

### **Interpretations and their weight**

Such a troubled and historically attached past, and such problems in its initial years have had profound effects on the CPLP’s image. Indeed, criticism of the organization itself and of particular member states (for their perceived ‘responsibilities’) has been constant, with the added peculiarity of uniting politicians from distinct (and sometimes opposing) persuasions, writers, diplomats, and academics.

Notwithstanding the fact that specific positions have distinct nuances (which are

often seen as relevant differences by their holders), it could be argued that criticism has revolved along two broad arguments. The first one departs from the notion that Portugal is historically responsible, and therefore should play a more active role in all matters concerning the CPLP. Portugal having hence failed to fulfil its duties, the CPLP could not but be an incomplete (at best) or failed (at worst) project.<sup>15</sup> The second argumentative line, departs from the notion that a Lusophone Community should develop from open and egalitarian exchanges between member states. The CPLP's undoubted Lusotropical origins imposed ideological, and even structural constraints, which have definitely contributed to some member states' mistrust, and concomitant deflation of the project.

The first position's most recognisable proponent is former Portuguese President, Mário Soares. Whilst recently stating that the CPLP is 'a disaster', he blamed the Portuguese government for not being able to go beyond what he considered a 'poor formulation' (Lima 2000: 11). Committed from the start to a Brazilian led,<sup>16</sup> eminently cultural, and politically autonomous project – that personified by Aparecido de Oliveira – Soares no doubt shares Almeida Santos' (his long term friend and political ally) notion that Portugal has always 'played defensively' for fear of 'public opinion's reactions which never occur' (1993: 20). In essence, Soares seems to regret that an over-cautious Portuguese attitude (which has been constant in the last decade, irrespective of the party in power) transformed a 'people's project' into no more than a political instrument. This notion is complemented by the former Foreign Affairs minister and European Commissioner, João de Deus Pinheiro: 'while the CPLP is seen as a "governments' thing" ...it will be able to do very little... To have nominated a former Angolan prime minister for the top job was, I believe, an enormous political mistake... "civilian" was needed, capable of making the organization as "civilian" as possible' (Nóbrega 2000: 25).

Notwithstanding the obvious fuel provided to these positions by a tense relation with some African leaders (namely in the Angolan government), the fact is that they are supported by a series of assumptions on what the Portuguese foreign affairs attitude towards both the CPLP and its members should be: political assertiveness, commitment to the upholding of human rights and civil liberties, and concrete economic investment. Ranging from the prudent: 'The Portugal that has come out of 25 April is not neo-colonialist, and should thus not squat, always begging forgiveness for the help it provides' (Vasconcelos 1998: 32) – to the hyperbolic: 'Portugal should assume the right of interference' (Tavares 1999: 13) – supporting comments all embody the notion that opportunities are being lost, either due to unnecessary complexes or overzealous *real politik*.

The second position's scepticism derives from one main premise – the CPLP's ideological origins are embedded in a time resistant Lusotropical discourse, and it embodies the fanciful self-esteem constructions of a predominantly white Brazilian community whilst providing an 'imagined' sustenance to Portugal's national identity. This 'adaptation of paternalism to modernity', as Michel Cahen calls it (1997: 431), could not but create suspicion among the African countries, thus preparing the ground for an uneven commitment and, ultimately, for a growing disinterest in

the organization. The fact that the organization is sometimes referred to as ‘lusophone’ hints at the existence of an invisible centre/periphery construct, which can seldom be either flattering or beneficial to members other than Portugal.

Even if positions might slightly diverge on what Portugal does get from this fundamentally discursive insistence on the ‘community of affections’ – the Angolan historian, Carlos Pacheco, would stress a straightforward economic interest (‘Questions related to Africa are still dealt with in the backyard. Always in the hope some quick profit might be made. Just profit. As it was in the past’ (1996: 15)),<sup>17</sup> whilst Mozambican writer, Filimone Meigos, would rather focus on the self-perceptive value of institutionalising the global projection of a language that defines the Portuguese nation: ‘A country like Portugal, periphery of the periphery, now wants a leading role in a process already closed by History’ (Cahen 1997: 410) – the shared understanding is that the CPLP proves Lisbon’s still problematic relation with its colonial past.

Disinterest in the reality of African affairs is – again according to Pacheco – ‘soaked up by ignorance and disguised with folkloric propaganda,’ hence leading some politicians to ‘mingle knowledge of Africa with personal friendships and political complicities forged in PIDE’s gaols, the Students of the Empire’s House, and the exile in Algeria, with Africans which belonged to a very specific socio-cultural universe – the urban one’ (1996: 15). The CPLP is, thus, no more than part of that folklore, serving the dual purpose of guaranteeing some singularity to a country that feels increasingly diluted in Europe and ‘invaded’ by Spain, whilst attempting to cement old self-assurance notions, like the ‘unique ability to interplay with other cultures’, or the ‘non-racist character’ of the Portuguese people.

### **Heightened expectations**

Apparently opposing, as they may seem, these two broad argumentative lines share the assumption that the CPLP could have been much different from what it is at the present. If the first position envisaged an active cultural community, under clear leadership, jointly strengthening its ties on the basis of a mutual linguistic heritage, the second one expected a much looser entity, without any centre, acting as a partial cooperation tool between an heterogeneous but mutually respectful group of states. Irrespective of their intrinsic value, these proposals should not, however, be used in isolation when evaluating the concrete actions and purpose of the four year old organization. Departing from a high level of expectations, they do bluntly expose some of the most obvious problems of the CPLP, yet precisely that departure point hampers fairness in comment, leaving very little room for a discussion on the expected fluid nature of an organization like the CPLP.

The first position is in fact the inheritor of more than 40 years of mostly Lusophone centred discussions on the creation of a Community. Its weight has been felt especially during the pre-institutionalization phase, although it becomes very difficult to read this fact as a somewhat premeditated initiative to ‘re-subjugate’ the former African colonies.

As we tried to show in the first part of this paper, two models of association were debated over for a lengthy period, with oscillations in their relative prominence deriving in essence from the result of internal political disputes, both in Portugal and Brazil. A less ambitious and progressive evolution of the 5+1+1 understanding at different levels, was the preferred option of Portuguese Social-Democrats and also of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's presidency, whilst a more symbolically appealing community, sharing a language and proposing to strengthen cultural, political, and economic ties, was argued for by both José Sarney, Itamar Franco, and their Portuguese counterpart, Mário Soares. It should be added that throughout only the smaller African states showed some genuine interest in either project, with internal problems conditioning both Angola and Mozambique's commitment.

The fact that the CPLP resulted in an ambiguous construct – appearing to democratise some of the ideological trappings of the Lusotropical vision (Cabral 1996), whilst also enshrining structural anti-centralization measures, like the fact that important questions are solely decided by unanimity, at the Heads of State summits—does indicate that a deliberate effort to cater for all sensibilities was very much present. The formalization of a 'minimum common denominator' association (interview with A. Monteiro, 19 July 2000), although appealing to neither the supporters of greater Portuguese intervention nor to those hoping for a cleansed egalitarian association, was the only politically consensual option available. It seems as hard to imagine African concessions to a monolithic 'Portuguese Culture valorization' project, as it does to expect Brazil and Portugal not to have their specific goals and perceptions. In the same manner as a Mozambican finds it difficult to see the relevance of belonging (even if by proxy) to the 'União Latina' (to appropriate one of Michel Cahen's most telling examples), a Portuguese fails to see any problem in the intertwining of Lusophony and the mythology of the CPLP under one single totality, even if each of its components is characterised by a distinct culture. A project of association between such distinct readings could never exist unless some concessions were not made.

What the first position fails to realise is that such a language derived Portuguese centrality 'should not have any other dimension besides the genealogical one' (Lourenço 1999: 179). When appeals are made for greater Portuguese intervention in African state's affairs, or for a more politically assertive CPLP, this position inevitably attracts support from more conservative quarters,<sup>18</sup> with the twofold effect of heightening African apprehensions and giving added value to an ideological discourse which – in fairness – has long been effectively deflated.

The core problem of the second position is precisely the fact that it takes at almost face value such a discourse, by inference assuming that Portugal could only aspire to construct a centralised, and culturally coated preferential trade arrangement such as France and Britain have with their former colonies. We would rather argue that Portugal does (and cannot afford not to) have a political and geostrategic affirmation policy – where the language plays a pivotal role – although there is very little indication that a neo-colonial attitude is implied. Portugal's economic and cultural presence in its former colonies results much less from governmental

guidance than from private initiative, and it could hardly be described as intense (Teixeira 1995; Dias, A. S. 1995). Its official political posture in the last decade tends to privilege the maintenance of state-to-state relations, sometimes at the blunt expense of principles that it so strenuously wants to uphold in other situations.

The fact that Portugal undoubtedly uses the geographic extension of its own language as a self-image booster should not be read as more than just that. To use Moura's expression: 'The end of the Empire was compensated by the transfer of a frustrated imperial vocation to the linguistic level. Not being a very intelligent attitude, it nevertheless is pretty much harmless... It is a formula like any other, useful for some speeches and to proclaim more or less superficial fraternities' (2000: 25).

Another significant frailty of the second position is to assume that the African states have been passive observers of a primarily Brazilian-Portuguese construction. Besides being historically inaccurate, this position denotes a predisposition to consider that, to the exclusion of some elite clusters, Africans tend to consider their colonial heritage – including the language of the coloniser – as a malefice. Even if some particular states (or their leaders) do indeed still appear to be so attached to the colonial past to the point of episodically being so emphatic in their 'exorcism' attempts,<sup>19</sup> the fact is that African input has been at least as relevant as individual states wanted it to be. Besides the fact that for the first four years of its existence two African politicians managed the CPLP, some of its most relevant initiatives (particularly in areas related to professional proficiency) have taken place in African countries. The CPLP was, hence, as much a foreign affairs tool to Angola and Mozambique, as it was for Portugal and Brazil. The obvious existing differences are, surely, much more in terms of degree than substance.

Ideologically conceived as a depurated version of the Lusotropical dream, structurally attached to an ostensibly centre-less framework, financially and politically constrained, an organization like the CPLP could never be the autonomous embodiment of an active cultural community, not could it be the light, informal, egalitarian shared expression of individual identities. Portugal's active formal disengagement, Brazil's ostensive preference (from the start) for little else than a vehicle for preferential trade (especially in cultural products), Angola's wavering allied to an internal absorbing situation, and Mozambique rather more survival related priorities have all contributed to the feeble, pale, dream-like *façade* nature of the organization. In a sense, it could even be argued that by reflecting the general lack of commitment of its founding members, their disparate levels of development (hence their dissimilar needs), and relevantly, their general lack of mutual knowledge which seldom goes past folkloric references, the CPLP has become the only possible association of these seven countries, at this particular moment.

To fuel a debate based on high and specifically oriented expectations is useful only insofar as it projects different views on the nature and objectives of the CPLP. To assume it in any way as a scale might lead us to hasty and inaccurate conclusions.

## **Conclusion**

Some four years after its official launching, the CPLP is often presented as a still-born. Among those committed to the debate on its nature and role, the only consensual note is precisely on the aura of failure that surrounds the institution. Those who perceive it as an opportunity for Portugal's international projection rise against the evident lack of political commitment, and concomitant lack of strategic goals and funding. Those who instead interpret it as an emanation of Lusotropical ideas – hence retrograde, and irreversibly attached to the authoritarian past – argue that such a departing point runs against the nature of a true community. If we look beyond the emotional charge of the debate – both at the political and academic levels – we should concur that these postures, whilst highlighting obvious failings in members' commitment, and in the running of the organization, all seem to depart from exaggerated levels of expectations, hence inducing partial conclusions on its nature and performance.

It is our contention that both these positions hold some validity if we are to consider them in tandem with some important caveats. Firstly, they should not be taken as mutually exclusive interpretations. Secondly, they should be stripped of some of their most obvious oversimplified assumptions. The high level of expectations of these two positions however seems to indicate that, with or without the CPLP, a broad consensus exists on the idea that a language based community is a viable formula to both strengthen internal ties, and create an anti-globalization barrier.

Irrespective of what might be made of the CPLP, Portugal's interest in such an ostensibly non neo-colonial organization is high. Not discarding the importance for certain sectors of the Portuguese economy of traditionally receptive markets, and by the same token not diminishing the relevance of an effective political alliance in the international fora, this link with the former colonies is still vital for Portugal's self-image. That explains the fact that, as it did for a considerable part of the authoritarian period, the attachment cuts across political barriers, creating odd alliances and unique partnerships. It might also help to explain the emotional charge of the debate. As Lourenço so aptly put it: 'Lusophony is an obscure or voluntarily obscured jungle', marked by the uneasy 'coexistence of readings, and unconfessed or unconfessable intentions, all of which expressing particular contexts, situations, and cultural mythologies, definitely non-homologous and, only at best, analogous. This is the reality of things, and as such we must all assume it' (1999: 179)

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Post-1974 relations with Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe were never haunted by severe disputes, thus allowing for an incremental build up of bilateral trust. However, in questions relating to the formation of the CPLP, these small Portuguese-speaking countries have always tended to follow the lead of Angola and Mozambique. Such a procedure was self-evident when Angola decided to boycott the constitutive summit of the organization, initially arranged for November 1994.

<sup>2</sup> The broad analytical area of Portuguese relations with the Africans has clearly been exposed to political appropriation by both those who argued in defence of some sort of singularity, and those who have strenuously attempted to prove quite the opposite. Gilberto Freyre's theoretical postulations on the existence of a distinct Lusotropical culture, resulting from the specifically characteristic Portuguese interplay with other populations, were (and still are) at the core of these discussions. A predominantly cultural focused construct thus acquired a unexpected prominence and notoriety, which in turn limited the possibilities of non-militant discussions. For an evaluation of the limits still imposed on the debate by the two opposing views on the subject see Neto (1997) and Macedo (1989). For a more balanced reading of *Lusotropicalismo* see Barreto and Mónica (1999: 391-4), and for a tentative analysis of the reasons why it remains such a sensitive topic see José Carlos Venâncio (1996).

<sup>3</sup> As the result of the combination of two movements – President Eanes' intention to promote a national interest geared policy for Africa, and the European Economic Community's indication that Portugal's prospective adhesion might benefit from its historical link with the five new African countries (significantly, all under some degree of non-Western influence) – Portugal initiated a *rapprochement* with Africa soon after decolonization. The most serious problem being the relation with the ruling Angolan party, the MPLA, Eanes sought regional help – namely from Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau – to establish initial contacts. Success resulted in the August 1978 Bissau summit, between Ramalho Eanes and Agostinho Neto, where all the major problems were alleviated. The ensuing new phase in relations between Portugal and its former African colonies would henceforth be attributed to the 'spirit of Bissau' (for more details see Antunes (1990: 110-6) and Venâncio and Chan (1996: 42-3)).

<sup>4</sup> Cavaco Silva would say: 'Before I took office, the climate was still very much one of intense suspicion. African leaders were tired of "political talk" and wanted concrete plans and actions' (Interview 20 April 1998).

<sup>5</sup> '...Portugal's ties with its former colonies, Brazil, and other areas of the World are indeed trump cards which increase our relative weight in the Community' (Silva 1988); 'If we are "less important" in Africa, then we will also be worth less in Europe. We cease to have something of our own' (Interview 20 April 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Although less formal meetings between the five African countries and Portugal had occurred previously, the '5+1' format was officially a reality since the November 1990 meeting of Foreign Affairs ministers, held in Bissau. In a period of five years, at least 56 specific high-level sectorial meetings would take place, relating to areas as distinct as Electoral Administration, Social Security, Justice, Customs, Environment, or Finance



(MNE 1995: 130–4).

<sup>7</sup> It has been argued that in the wake of his nephew's sudden death, Itamar Franco was advised by Mário Soares to miss the constitutive summit (Meireles and Guardiola 1994: 22).

<sup>8</sup> Portugal's diplomacy attempted to divert attentions (thus avoiding further damage), by insinuating that bureaucratic communication deficiencies were to blame (Albino 1994: 10).

<sup>9</sup> Symptomatic of an increasing rift with the Portuguese government's official policy towards Angola, President Soares had recently made some comments on the Lusaka negotiations, appealing for national reconciliation, but also criticising the Angolan government for its duplicity – whilst discussing peace, they were also attacking Huambo. Portugal's Foreign Affairs minister at the time, Durão Barroso, has recently revealed that henceforth two (undisclosed) African countries decided they would not participate in any type of organization while President Soares remained in office (Monteiro 2000: 13).

<sup>10</sup> One week before the Foreign Affairs ministers meeting in Maputo, ambassadors from the seven member countries had agreed upon the name of Aparecido de Oliveira for the task. Besides representing the biggest Member State, he was generally acknowledged as the 'father' of the CPLP. Angola put it to the others that – either resulting from a set consensus or from the adoption of a rotational alphabetic order – the first Executive Secretary had to be an Angolan.

<sup>11</sup> Leading Aparecido de Oliveira to write an article that started as follows: 'How goes the CPLP? Very poorly, despite Brazilian rhetoric' (1997: 12).

<sup>12</sup> The above-mentioned Brazilian downgrading of the CPLP in its own external relations' priorities list was perhaps the most relevant. Notwithstanding, by June 1997 a strategic re-orientation was already perceptible. In an extensive interview, Presidente Fernando Henrique Cardoso would admit that 'mistakes' had been made, whilst promising a 'more active involvement' henceforth (Avillez 1997: 46–56).

<sup>13</sup> 'I have lived these eight months under a lot of pressure. I would sometimes think that people were right when they accused us of doing nothing. Our attitude was – for a period – defensive, to the point of doing things just to counter that notion. An organization must know what it wants, where it wants to go, and must stick to that. If, after this first year, we can come up with concrete ideas, it will not be so bad' (Silva 1996: 7).

<sup>14</sup> An estimated first budget prediction of US\$506,000 was partly covered by the fixed member states' contributions of US\$30,000 each. The remainder was dependent on the goodwill of those who could afford a supplementary contribution – Brazil and Portugal provided US\$100,000 each, and Angola gave US\$50,000. Concrete cooperation activities were financed by a separate fund, also dependent on voluntary contributions from member states (Silva 1997: 6). Relevantly, the CPLP only managed to occupy its head office – a building in Lisbon, ceded by the Portuguese Foreign Office – two weeks short of the first anniversary

<sup>15</sup> If we substitute 'Portugal' for 'Brazil' in this argument, we find that a similar position is shared by prominent (if in the minority) Brazilian diplomats, writers, and academics. The most visible face of this informal group, Aparecido de Oliveira, already spoke of the need

to reformat the whole project as early as February 1998 (Oliveira 1998: 20). For the purposes of this specific paper we will devote greater attention to the Portuguese version of the argument.

<sup>16</sup> The suggestion has been made that in fact Soares was behind the whole project from the start, yet he ‘used’ Brazil as a vehicle to present it, as if by procuration (Cahen 1997: 398).

<sup>17</sup> On this matter, another academic would write that fashionable constructions like the numerous triangular variants (Portugal-Brazil-Africa, Portugal-US-Africa, Portugal-EU-Africa) often run into ‘reality’: ‘the problem with these builders of strategic triangles is that they seldom know what those situated at the other extremities really think’ (Soares, A. 1997: 22).

<sup>18</sup> See Dias’s strategic consideration on Portugal’s need to safeguard its own sovereignty through an overseas extension: ‘As it once was, we will not find in Europe a basis for our freedom and prosperity’ (1998: 22).

<sup>19</sup> As was the case in October 1997 when Eduardo dos Santos ostensibly delayed (for half an hour) a meeting with the Portuguese Prime Minister, António Guterres, who was on a scheduled official visit to Luanda (Madrinha 1997: 2).