

But I am only a woman! Modesty as Subterfuge in Fernanda de Castro's Memoir

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Abstract: Despite her long and prolific career and her status as a renowned author, Fernanda de Castro infused her memoir, *Ao fim da memória*, as well as her statements to the press about its success with a great amount of modesty. This article argues that by seemingly complying with traditional expectations of gender and modesty, De Castro crafts an autobiographical project that resorts to the performance of modesty to belie both the masculinist Portuguese national and imperial narrative by shifting the focus onto women and their imprint.

Keywords: Life writing – memoirs – nation – modesty - performance

In an interview with Portuguese newspaper *A Mulher*, writer and intellectual Fernanda de Castro (Lisbon, Portugal, 1900-1994) expressed her surprise in regard to the success her memoir, *Ao fim da memória* (1986), garnered upon publication: “O meu livro foi um espanto muito grande para mim. Não esperava que um livro de memórias tivesse o impacto que teve. Foi para mim completamente inesperado” (De Sousa 30). On the one hand, De Castro's humble words put her in the illustrious company of a long list of women intellectuals from different locales and time periods—Christine de Pizan (France), Santa Teresa de Ávila (Spain), Anne Bradstreet (U.S.), or Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Mexico), come first to mind—who, until approximately the late 19th century, had to both engage and comply with a demand for modesty in order to display their knowledge as well as intellectual prowess. In other words, to be considered as worthy of inhabiting a place in the public discourse, they first had to publicly proclaim their intellectual inferiority.¹ On the other

¹ As Patricia Lender argues, critics have traditionally read this display of modesty as an acquiesce to patriarchal demands instead of as a performance—and therefore a subterfuge as I argue in this article—required of women in order to inhabit the public discourse (4). Also breaking with more conservative interpretations of modesty in women's writing, Tamara Harvey examines modesty both as a *sine-qua-non* requirement to appease the powers that be for women intellectuals wanting a seat at the table. Harvey also rightly notes the double standard that revolved around it: when applied to women, modesty appealed to their sense of cautiousness, even shame, towards knowledge; when applied to men, modesty appealed to their sense of measurement and reason (15). The message was clear: women's relationship to

hand, her comment speaks to both the awareness of a literary hierarchy that deems autobiographical writing as a minor genre as well as to the fact that women's lives did not seem to merit much attention in Portugal at the end of the 20th century.

And she was not completely wrong, a case in point is Pablo Morais. In his article "António Ferro—O Traje e a Moda," Morais refers to Fernanda De Castro's memoir as the "lindíssimas memórias da sua mulher" (398). While not derogatory per se, the adjective chosen by the author—"lindíssimas"—to allude to the work of an established writer suggests a lack of appreciation for the genre. Morais' statement paints *Ao fim da memória* as unimportant, as an afterthought of De Castro's impressive literary body of work unworthy of scholarly consideration. Moreover, what also transpires from Morais' words, in addition to his dismissive attitude toward the memoir genre, is his labeling one of Portugal's greatest intellectuals as "someone's wife," thereby denying her any autonomy at best, or worth at worst, intellectual or otherwise. Ultimately, Morais' comment subordinates De Castro's intellectual acumen, literary talent, and achievements to those of her husband's, thus minimizing her own legitimacy probably as an author in her own right. If someone not familiar with Portuguese literature were to read Morais' article, he or she would never guess that António Ferro was married to an equal in intellectual and literary matters.²

Nonetheless, her choice of words in conveying her surprise—"O meu livro foi um espanto muito grande para mim"—seems somewhat exaggerated despite the circumstances. Although memoirs might not have been in vogue in 1986, De Castro had been a prolific and renowned author for decades: she published eleven books of poetry, five novels, seven plays (five of which were put on stage), seven children's books, and two volumes of memoirs. She was also an avid translator who made writers such as Katherine Mansfield (Great Britain), Rainer-Maria Rilke (Germany), Luigi Pirandello (Italy) or Carmen Laforet (Spain) accessible to a Portuguese readership. Her work had been recognized with several literary awards. In addition to her cultural capital, she was married to António Ferro—also a writer and intellectual—who rubbed elbows with literary figures such as Fernando Pessoa and who was an advisor to Portuguese dictator António Salazar as well as an active promoter of his *Estado Novo*

knowledge was seen as unnatural and borderline sinful; instead, men's was socially acceptable, even encouraged, so long as it were balanced. Hence, as Harvey explains, the imposition of feminine modesty paved the way for women's concealment of knowledge based on societal expectations of the time period (16).

² The lack of critical studies on *Ao fim da memória* further supports De Castro's veiled statement. While the Portuguese readership did seem to give the memoir a warm reception, literary critics did not follow suit. In fact, literary critic Paulo de Medeiros states that as early as 1997, literary criticism articles on life writing continued to neglect women's work (228). One might attribute this lack of critical attention to the combination of genre and gender: life writing had garnered an ill repute among literary critics, especially so if composed by a woman. For an illuminating discussion on the vexed relationship between women's life writing and literary criticism, see the introduction to *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (1998).

(Barreto, 1-2). As critic Paula Morão rightly notes, the biographical information that Fernanda de Castro pours into her memoir provides us with enough material to craft an accurate portrait of life in Portugal during her time (102); hence, if anything else, De Castro's memoir stands as a first-person historical account of 20th-century Portugal by one of the country's most accomplished intellectuals—a detail that I am sure did not escape the author. This fact alone should account for its success upon publication.

De Castro's memoir unassumingly brings to the fore an inner history of the Portuguese nation both at home and abroad, which in turn sometimes belies and sometimes fills the gaps of the country's official story by simply shifting the focus to women's lives. While at face value De Castro plays along with societal expectations of traditional patriarchal roles such as daughter, wife, and mother, and depicts other women in a similar fashion, she rewrites Portugal's national script by bringing to light the invisible, yet irreplaceable work with which women such as herself contribute(d). In what should be read along the lines of what Josefina Ludmer labels as "tricks of the weak," that is, as a strategy built on modesty that consists of "saying one does not know, not knowing how to say it, not saying one knows or knowing what not to say," De Castro, perhaps in an attempt both to not alienate readers and keep her conservative credentials intact, crafts a memoir underpinned by a performance of modesty that allows her to rewrite the national script in a non-threatening manner (my translation; Ludmer 48). Examined through the prism of modesty, and reading modesty as a performance, *Ao fim da memória* unfolds as a text infused with subtle contradictions and subtexts that both expose and question a national narrative that neglects women's contributions and experiences.

1. What's in a genre?

De Castro's performance of modesty starts early on in the text in the form of metaliterary commentaries that ponder on the nature of her autobiographical project. On a couple of occasions, the author discusses the difficulty of placing her text under the umbrella of one autobiographical subgenre or another by claiming that it does not belong to any. For instance, De Castro recounts an episode in which a friend asked her about her on-going project: "É verdade que andas a escrever um Diário?" (13), which De Castro promptly denies by replying: "(n)ão e bem isso, ando a juntar recordações, a tentar fixar no papel certos momentos que não quero esquecer" (13). Although she denies writing a diary, she does admit to being in the midst of a creative process with a purpose: to remember and, perhaps tacitly, to be remembered. In the words of Nancy K. Miller, in reading a memoir, in this case De Castro's memoir, "we might be witnessing a kind of unconscious fear of erasure" (14). Writing down her memories is thus an act of defiance, an attempt to control the narrative as well as the memory of her life to ensure that she is remembered and, most importantly, that she is remembered on

her own terms. The very title of the memoir, *Ao fim da memória*, invites the reader to (re)think De Castro as an agent of history, rather than as an addendum or as a footnote.

Nevertheless, there is another important reason to which she never alludes, but which can be safely assumed to play a role in her response: up to the 19th century, diaries had traditionally been associated with women; they were regarded as venues where women could safely and privately pour their emotions, never to be shared, read, let alone published. The following words of Spanish writer Laura Freixas shed further light on the way diaries have traditionally been deemed: "I suppose the reason I had rejected the diary at first was that I wanted to be a real, published writer, not a private, childish scribbler of secret papers" (Freixas 76). Paulo de Medeiros asserts that diaries have traditionally been perceived as documents or "at best as a para-literary genre" (227). Therefore, it is not surprising that he notes the lack of critical attention paid to diaries, and to women's diaries in particular. Although there is no attempt on his part to ascertain the reasons behind this lacuna, the verdict seems clear: diaries, especially diaries written by women, do not constitute serious literature, just anecdotal documents. Thus, by refusing to categorize her work as a diary, De Castro, much like Freixas, retains control of her work while challenging societal gender norms: a woman's life has value, is worth-writing down, and is worth-publishing. This argument becomes even more compelling when we learn that De Castro ended the relationship with her first suitor when she overheard a conversation between her own father and her mother-in-law-to-be, in which they labeled her devotion for reading and writing as harmless pastimes that would end once married (153).

Later in the book, De Castro revisits the issue of genre only to reject yet again the idea of conforming to one, in this case the memoir. However, this time she does it of her own accord, as if she wanted to establish a one-on-one conversation with readers to come clean before those who have trusted her by picking up a copy of her book. By the same token, she flaunts her cultural capital, while admitting that her work is a healthy mix of mundane and intellectual matters. Contrary to the modesty put forth by her rhetorical question, we can assume her work would get the attention of those interested in issues pertaining to the daily life of a renowned author, if only for voyeuristic purposes, as well as of those more invested in issues pertaining to high culture in Portugal as well as in the rest of the world:

A isto não se pode de modo algum chamar *Memórias*. Princípio por qualquer pequeno acontecimento do dia, por qualquer pequeno facto que me provocou esta ou aquela reação, mas não sei como—pensamento puxa pensamento—acabo por escrever páginas que nada têm que ver com o primitivo assunto. Ainda há dias a propósito de uma banalíssima insónia fui parar a Valdemosa e a Chopin, a Montana e ao pequeno jardim de Katherine Mansfield e a missa cantada em latim em

Castelo Novo, pequena aldeia da Beira Baixa. Terá tudo isto interesse para alguém a não ser para mim? (44)

While it is true that *Ao fim da memória* is non-chronological and lacks formal divisions in the way of chapters, sections, and even a thematic structure, I argue that this seeming lack of structure and purpose is part and parcel of the overarching performance of modesty and should be read as anything but casual. The lack of planning or purpose, which could certainly be read as amateurism unbecoming of a seasoned writer such as De Castro, provides the author with a great amount of creative freedom from literary conventions largely set by men. Her rejection of labels signals the way in which De Castro resorts to modesty as a vehicle to pursue creative freedom and free herself and her work of literary constraints, stylistic and otherwise. As Helen Buss reminds us, claiming to work within the parameters of a specific genre creates a series of expectations on readers, who are then predisposed before embarking on the reading (4). Hence, I read De Castro's metaliterary comments as a dialogue with her readers, a means to invite them to enter a territory free of literary conventions and of expectations and to read her life on her terms.³

2. Writing While Woman

The disregard to abide by the rules that De Castro intimates with the form, she further reinforces with the content. While her memoir lacks any blatant criticism of issues such as the institution of the patriarchal family and women's place in society or Portugal's imperialism in Africa, readers can nevertheless perceive a great deal of social commentary that consistently signals a desire to change the script by incorporating women's experiences and contributions. Undoubtedly, De Castro's discussion of women's writing and its place within the Portuguese nation as well as empire come across as the most compelling sections, especially so when they are interwoven with depictions of patriarchal family dynamics, their connection to the Portuguese national narrative, and the preservation of the Portuguese empire.⁴

³ There is one occasion, however, when De Castro refers to her text as a memoir. Although this could be read as an oversight, it happens two thirds into the book, on page 227, when she has thoroughly established her authority and gained the readers' trust.

⁴ Although the Portuguese empire had already dissolved by the time De Castro wrote and published the memoir, it was certainly a reality during the time the events depicted therein took place. In an interview with Antónia de Sousa, De Castro shares her unequivocal opinion on the Portuguese empire and its demise. She laments its loss and declares her relentless loyalty to it: "Para mim o Quinto Império é uma realidade. Sou sebastianista por nascimento e vocação e, sobretudo, por vontade... há muita gente que se sente ferida e magoada—e eu também—pela perda do Império" (De Sousa 31). These strong did obviously did an imprint in the memoir, in as much as there is hardly any criticism of it even after it was no longer a reality.

As an intellectually inclined woman, De Castro depicts her pursuit of learning in 20th-century Portugal as a struggle in a country where the belief that the only acceptable role for a woman in society was as the angle of the home, as devoted wife and mother, which constituted the norm (Ferreira, *Nationalisms*, 135-36). Contrary to what one might think, the fact that De Castro made a name for herself in the Portuguese literary scene does not imply that she her path to success was free of hurdles. Female intellectual acumen was greatly undervalued, if recognized at all, a fact that deems her success even more of an achievement. Perhaps the episode that illustrates best the hostile climate in which De Castro developed as a writer and intellectual is one that happened in her childhood; a friend of the family gave her and her siblings presents for their respective birthdays: her sister got a doll, she got a toy kitchen set and, her brother, in her words, got “uma autêntica maravilha” (27)—a box of writing utensils, crayons, and more. She elaborates by explaining how unjust she thought the situation was; even at her early age, she was able to grasp the unfairness of the situation and what it meant on a social level: “Então eu que sabia ler e até escrever (muito mal, é certo), eu que contava até cem e já começava a fazer contas de somar com vai um e tudo!” (28). Early in her life, De Castro was made aware of the iniquitous place she occupied in society because of her gender—she was meant to serve others—and the distance said position placed between her and anything that required serious intellectual engagement. Despite her displeasure with the situation, it is how she chooses to respond to it that merits further examination: instead of throwing a tantrum and getting scolded by her parents and thus earning their disapproval, she opted for showing her brother—whom she describes as a glutton—the positives of her kitchen set and making him want it so much that he would willingly exchange gifts (28). Not only does this anecdote educate readers on the reality of the operating hierarchy between men’s and women’s intellectual acumen as perceived by Portuguese society, but perhaps, most importantly, it also illustrates De Castro’s strategy throughout her memoir: seemingly acquiescing to the tacit gender status quo while unassumingly questioning it and flipping it on its head.⁵

De Castro is not the only person depicted as a writer in *Ao fim da memória*. At face value, her family picture fits the script of the time: her mother fulfills the traditional role as the hearth of the home, while her father embodies the figure of the quintessential national hero who is away ensuring the continuation of the Portuguese empire in Africa. De Castro remembers her mother as neither sad nor happy, as a devout Catholic, and in poor health. But most importantly, De Castro depicts her mother as a woman consumed by the upkeep of the family home as well as a woman completely devoted to her husband, even during his long absences (De Castro 23; 72). The most intriguing detail she provides about her mother is her role as a chronicler of

⁵ I am not suggesting that the situation described above was unique to Portuguese society at the turn of the 20th century. Nonetheless, extrapolating this statement to all societies at this time period would be an overgeneralization on my part and, even if this were not the case, it would be certainly beyond the scope of this article.

the home, also understood as the nation. De Castro explains that her mother dutifully wrote her husband letters that would keep him in the know about what happened in the family home during his absences: “a sua principal ocupação, porem, era escrever ao marido, contando-lhe tudo o que se ia passando, importante ou não, para que quando chegasse, não sentisse um estranho, um intruso entre os seus” (23). De Castro’s mother resorts to the epistolary genre not so much to keep in touch with her husband and guarantee the wellbeing of their relationship, but to provide him with the coordinates that would ensure him with a smooth reinsertion into the family life upon his return. *Ao fim da memória* shows De Castro’s mother taking the initiative when it comes to letter writing—even if compelled by the circumstances—, a gesture that suggests her awareness of the importance of writing, of documenting.

In her diachronic study on letter-writing, Gabriella del Lungo Camiciotti highlights the nature of the letter as a genre and also as a “localized document influenced by factors such as status, gender and generation” (22). Furthermore, she traces the evolution of letter-writing from a collaborative tool that assisted in governing and administering centralized territories to a private, feminized genre that dealt with private matters and was intended to remain private. In the memoir, letter-writing is depicted as a means to ensure both the present and future well-functioning of the home (also understood as the nation) on more levels than one; these letters also provide her husband with emotional support and reassurance. If examined from said diachronic perspective, De Castro’s mother’s letters capture the ethos of letter-writing at large: while it vouches for her administrative skills, her ability to fend on her own, and her value to the Portuguese empire, it also stands as proof of private correspondence about matters that defy the boundaries between the private and the public realms. In part, the memoir suggests, the success of the imperial enterprise relies on this invisible domestic and intellectual work that produces tangible documents that show support, yet are only intended for private consumption. In this light, *Ao fim da memória* depicts De Castro’s mother as an agent of empire much like her husband and the epistolary genre she cultivates as a means of chronicling Portugal’s history behind the scenes. Her work, despite adhering to the ideal of Portuguese womanhood of the time, facilitates and documents the continuation of both the nation and empire from the home front as well as illustrates how women and their work writ large constituted an invaluable asset to both the nation and the empire.⁶

⁶ For some illuminating discussions on the role of women and the Portuguese empire, see *Women in the Portuguese Colonial Empire: The Theatre of Shadows*, edited by Clara Sarmiento. In the book chapter titled “Female Voices in the Fall of the Empire: *O Esplendor de Portugal* by António Lobo Antunes,” Dalila Silva Lopes discusses the ways in which this novel belies the Portuguese national script on empire and masculinity by narrowing the lens on women’s voices and experiences. Hence, De Castro’s considerations on gender, gender roles, and empire put her in dialogue with a cohort of Portuguese writers that have examined these same issues and brought women and their legacy to the fore.

In addition to bearing witness to and documenting the role of women in the nation, these letters along with *Ao fim da memória* point at a genealogy of female chroniclers—De Castro among them—who tell a gendered and more comprehensive story, one of unsung heroes. The depiction of her family, and in particular of her parents, helps De Castro rewrite a pervasive character in Portuguese literature: that of the Portuguese woman who laments the absence of her husband, who is away fighting imperial wars or, in the case of De Castro's father, ensuring the perpetuation of the empire. De Castro's mother not only does not grieve the absence of her husband, but she becomes the head of the household and makes the management of the home/nation a gesture that is both personal and political. In a stark contrast, it is De Castro's father who falls apart when his wife, De Castro's mother, dies. The figure of the head of the household embodied by him is further discredited based on the signs of weakness he displays. For instance, after a few years of being a widower, he decides to remarry; he communicates the decision to her daughters as follows: "Vou casar. Resolvi casar com a Rosa... Sou um ser sociável que tem horror a solidão...Que dizem? Que faço bem, ou que estou doido? (165). Although this episode might not seem bizarre to a present-day reader, it is important to keep in mind that this conversation takes place at the turn of the 20th century, between a high ranking military man, a key figure in the Portuguese colonial tenure in Africa, a man with an intelligence before his time, according to his own daughter, who, ironically, holds stale beliefs on women and their role in society (108). This is the man who confesses to his teenage daughters his inability to be alone and asks them for guidance on his decision to remarry—a man the text depicts as fully equipped for military warfare, yet unable to face life's emotional demands.

This is not the only occasion in which De Castro undermines the patriarchal image of the military man and head of household. Just a few pages later in the memoir, under the guise of the empathy that any good daughter might feel for her father, she explains that she gathered the courage to get her first job to help her father, who could not support two households with his meager income. She writes: "A minha primeira impressão foi de pena, pena profunda pela angustia que devia atormentar o meu pai... Resolvi fazer frente à adversidade, desafiar a vida e dizer em silêncio mas com profunda convicção: 'Vou trabalhar, tenho de trabalhar, quero trabalhar.'" (177). Despite the aura of empathy that seemingly envelops this episode, De Castro's words emasculate her father, even if unintentionally. First, she shares he makes little money; second, she claims to feel sorry for him and his suffering; lastly, she decides to get a job, a decision that is neither considered lightly nor depicted as common, in order to put a stop to her father's anguish, to relieve him from a difficult situation. In a sense, she performs the role of the parent; while still a teenager, she steps up to the plate to share the responsibility of a breadwinner, one that has been traditionally associated with men. Furthermore, she gets a job as a writer in two different newspapers, *A Pátria* and *Diário da Manhã*, and a magazine, *ABC*. Ironically, not only does she resolve to get a job to

help him out, but she also gets a job as a writer for three public venues, a skill that her father tried to thwart throughout her childhood and as a young adult.

Interestingly enough, years later, when De Castro was married to António Ferro, she would get to play a very similar role. Under Salazar, António Ferro became the intellectual in charge of educating the world about the *Estado Novo*. This job required traveling all over the world and mingling with diplomats as well as artists and intellectuals. In addition to sharing the pros of Salazar's government, this initiative attempted to further cement the relevance of Portugal in the world. Because of her husband's assignment, De Castro, much like her mother, becomes an agent of empire. When in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for instance, António Ferro gives a keynote talk on *A Idade do Jazzy-Band*, followed by a poetry recital by Fernanda de Castro (180). Events of this sort, according to the memoir, constitute important cultural events in public venues and also illustrate the ongoing vexed relationship between women intellectuals and the nation. As Cynthia Enloe notes, the perpetuation of traditional gender roles and relations are key to the success of international politics, business, and diplomacy. Wives and children, thereby, constitute invaluable accessories as well as unrecognized, unpaid peons in the international political scene; they pay a high price to perform an unpaid job (114). It is Ferro who is depicted as a source of knowledge, as an authoritative voice; even though this event exposes De Castro's literary talents to a larger audience overseas, the recital can also be read as entertainment, which was traditionally the reason why girls and women were educated in certain circles. Furthermore, this event portrays inaccurately Portugal and Salazar's *Estado Novo* as a locus conducive to women's education and to the integration of women in society as public intellectual figures, which, as we have already mentioned, does not follow the precepts stipulated in the Portuguese Constitution of 1933.⁷

3. Building a Legacy: Women Working for a Change

Ao fim da memória introduces readers to the notion of female legacy and its impact in society. The example discussed so far is De Castro's mother's letter-writing in relation to De Castro's memoir writing; just as her mother embraces the epistolary genre, thereby becoming a chronicler of the Portuguese nation and empire, De Castro, even if unintentionally, follows her footsteps by crafting a memoir, which in essence is both a narrative of her life and of Portugal's 20th century. One must wonder to what extent De Castro's writing career was encouraged by watching her mother write.

⁷ "High illiteracy rates were a characteristic of the Portuguese New State. In 1930, 61.8 per cent of all people over the age of six were illiterate. Thirty years later, this had been reduced by a half, although it continued to be fairly high: 31.1 percent in 1960. Women were particularly prone to illiteracy: in 1930, 69.9 per cent of women were illiterate, while the rate for men was 52.8 per cent. In 1960, these proportions were 36.7 and 24.9 per cent respectively. While the difference between men and women had decreased, it remained significant" (Anne Cova and António Pino Costa, 132).

Likewise, one must wonder to what extent the women who stood for De Castro's right to an education stimulated her role as a social activist, an aspect of her life to which she devotes a healthy amount of pages in her memoir, which in itself illustrates her discomfort with the gender status quo, for it relegated women to the domestic realm.⁸

Alongside being a prolific writer, a mother, and the wife of a high profile man, De Castro founded and ran schools for the underprivileged children of Lisbon for forty years and made strives to educate the community on the importance of female education and gender equality. One can see in this effort the mark left behind by women such as her own mother, her aunts, and her school teachers, who are consistently depicted as indefatigable advocates for her education, unlike her own father, who believed a woman's place was in the home (128). The mission of De Castro's schools was to educate and provide basic meals to children of low-income families. She founded these schools during António Salazar's dictatorship (1932-1968), whose Constitution of 1933 stressed women's duty toward the well-being of the family thus relegating them to the home in the role of caregiver (Cova and Costa, 129).⁹

First, she created *O Pássaro Azul*, an art school that was geared to underserved children and that was closed because of, as the author mentions in passing, government cuts in funding to continue financing the colonial wars in Africa (264). Later, she opened her first *Parque Infantil*, a school with the same mission run mainly with money from donors. In doing so and also pointing to the lack of help from Salazar's government, De Castro unveils a need in Portuguese society, one that is neglected in order to advance the Portuguese empire in the world. Hence, much like her mother did when her father was deployed to Africa, but on a larger scale, she makes sure that the home/nation is taken care of in the absence of the father/the state. From a position

⁸ According to Anne Cova and António Costa Pinto, Salazar's *Estado Novo* adhered to the Catholic Church's precepts in relation to gender roles: women's place was the home and their duties were being wives, mothers, and housewives (129). Ana Paula Ferreira's enlightening analysis of femininity and the *Estado Novo* explains this dynamic further by arguing that the *Estado Novo* "relied on and in turned generated a consensual fictional poetics of woman-hood and femininity" that contained women within the constraints of the home and the family unit, for the regime deemed the domestic realm as the cornerstone of the larger national project envisioned by the architects of the *Estado Novo* (*Home Bound*, 134).

⁹ While Salazar's *Estado Novo* did promote female literacy to some degree—which in itself does not mean it fostered female intellectuality nor does it mean it supported the idea of female public intellectuals not aligned with the precepts of the *Estado Novo*—it did so to advance its own agenda. Women, Ana Paula Ferreira claims, "were assigned a far-reaching educational, but, above all, economic mission," is so that they were educated exclusively to become "savvy mother-housewife," and ultimately be tethered to domesticity in order to meet the needs of their husbands and children (*Home Bound*, 135). Thus, far from aiming to birth well-rounded and free-thinking intellectuals who could aspire to be trailblazers in the public realm, the *Estado Novo* produced an army of civil servants that would "turn the home into the ideal birthing ground of nationalistic, authoritarian rule" at the service of the *Estado Novo* (*Home Bound*, 135).

that could be read as “mother of the nation” and therefore without overstepping her boundaries as a woman, De Castro filled a void in her community.

In fact, *Ao fim da memória* suggests that her activism transcended the scope of feeding the children in the community: she practiced feminist pedagogy by educating the children and their families about basic gender equality. One of the ways in which De Castro ensured this was by establishing a *sine qua non* requirement: “[que] cada parque fosse sempre frequentado por igual numero de rapazes e de raparigas” (253). She goes on to explain the rationale of her rule as follows: “porque as mães tinham tendência a impingir-me os filhos, porque as filhas, coitadas, com sete, oito e nove anos já eram úteis em casa... Eu achava que isto era muito injusto, bastante cruel, de modo que cortei o mal pela raiz” (253). De Castro’s rule clearly challenges the precepts of the Constitution as well as the *Estado Novo*’s gender agenda even if she does not articulate her disagreement overtly. Her actions as much as her words depict her as an activist for gender equality and women’s rights.¹⁰ Although the mothers were following, even if unsuspectingly, the rule of the land, the fact that De Castro blames them and not Portuguese society as a whole, including conservative governments such as Salazar’s, allows her to openly criticize, without repercussions, this ingrained attitude towards women as a social injustice. Thus, a small project that started modestly and that did not command any public attention (“não houve noticias nos jornais, não houve convites, não houve discursos, não houve nada” (250)) became imbued with a healthy dose of feminist pedagogy that aimed at changing the minds and the attitudes of a community regarding women for, as De Castro notes, even the boys in the schools were “pequenos machistas em potência” (253). Hence, *Ao fim da memória* depicts De Castro as a woman

¹⁰ In her thorough study of women’s organizations under Salazar’s *Estado Novo*, Irene Pimentel argues that women’s organizations such as Obras das Mães, Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina or the Movimento Nacional Feminino were conformed by the small elite of the regime and their *raison d’être* was to assist the Salazar regime to set in motion an educational initiative that would educate mothers into motherhood and childrearing, promote pregnancy and reduce infant mortality, and educate girls (121). In addition to pointing out that these and other objectives such as assisting poor women and their families weren’t met and that, for instance, courses of hygiene and childcare were replaced by those on morals and religion, Pimentel claims that these organizations also failed in transforming the attitudes of women and their families toward women and their role in society (122). In sum, Pimentel contends that women’s organizations set out to work alongside the regime in “creating a patriotic ‘new woman’ who would contribute to the restoration of the nation,” but failed to meet the needs of underserved women (124). The difference between the ethos of these women’s organizations and that of Fernanda de Castro’s schools is stark. Although, very much like most of the women who integrated these movements, De Castro was also a woman of the Salazarian elite, her initiative, as she herself explains, had no ties to the *Estado Novo* or its political agenda. Furthermore, there is a clear intent on her part to address the needs of the underserved and, most importantly, to change attitudes toward gender roles and toward the role of women in society particularly. Her project, as described in her memoir and unlike the women’s movements discussed by Pimentel, does rest on feminist pedagogy, rather than on a desire to reconfigure and implement a model of womanhood geared toward strengthening a totalitarian and fascist regime. Examined from this angle, De Castro’s schools and their mission come through as even more subversive and revolutionary.

ahead of her time, who contributed to her community and Portugal in ways that defied the societal status quo as represented by the mothers as well as the patriarchal laws crafted by the powers that be. In doing so and by writing about it, she points to the deficiencies of António Salazar's *Estado Novo*, of which, as I mentioned earlier, her own husband was an architect. Although at face value she does what any good Catholic woman should do, that is, to take care of the basic needs and education of less fortunate children, her initiative simultaneously stresses the fact that while Portugal was focused on maintaining its empire overseas and a performance of power, there were children in Portugal who were underserved, little girls in particular.

As Morão points out, *Ao fim da memória* certainly sheds light on twentieth-century Portugal by the hand of one of Portugal's best-known intellectuals. In addition to bearing witness to most of a century, De Castro crafts what, at a superficial level, can be read as a rather conservative memoir and creates a persona that seemingly adheres to the traditional, patriarchal roles of daughter, wife, and mother, as well as abides by societal gender roles, and speaks from a locus of modesty. In sum, the author writes a memoir complying with what she is well aware she is expected to be. As it has been shown, this performance of modesty, of playing by the rules, and of simply being a woman of her time constitutes De Castro's tricks of the weak. It is this very performance, that of someone who knows her place in society and the way she is perceived as a woman, that allows the text to unfold in layers of memories that subtly both expose and defy pernicious gender roles and the effect on imperial wars in Portuguese society by rewriting Portugal's national script reevaluating women's contribution to society on many levels. Examined from this prism, not only does *Ao fim da memória* emerge as a window to 20th-century Portugal, but also as a text that bears witness to the complexity of the role of women in the nation as both gatekeepers and agents of change.

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