

FOREIGNERS IN MUTATION: THE IMMIGRANT FROM FRANZ KAFKA TO ELISA LISPECTOR

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*Lídia, ignoramos. Somos estrangeiros
Onde quer que estejamos.
Lídia, ignoramos. Somos estrangeiros
Onde quer que moremos. Tudo é alheio
Nem fala língua nossa.
Ricardo Reis/Fernando Pessoa*

ABSTRACT: Diasporic, foreign and immigrant, the Jew may epitomize the condition of the stateless, deterritorialized, uninterruptedly in mutation individual. The theme appears in the works of two twentieth-century fictionists, Franz Kafka's *Amerika*, or *The Man who Disappeared*, and Elisa Lispector's *No Exílio*, both from a European reminiscent of the Austro-Hungarian empire, one of them residing in Prague, from where he rarely left, the other, settled in Brazil, where the author produced her literary work.

KEYWORDS: Franz Kafka; Elisa Lispector; immigrant; Jew; deterritorialization.

RESUMO: Diaspórico, estrangeiro e imigrante, o judeu talvez sintetize a condição do indivíduo apátrida, desterritorializado, em ininterrupta mutação. O tema aparece na obra de dois ficcionistas do século XX, *América*, ou *O desaparecido*, de Franz Kafka, e *No exílio*, de Elisa Lispector, ambos da Europa remanescente do império austro-húngaro, um deles, residente em Praga, de onde raramente se afastou, a outra estabelecida no Brasil, onde produziu sua obra literária.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Franz Kafka; Elisa Lispector; imigrante; judeu; desterritorialização.

1. Travelers, foreigners and immigrants

Travelers, foreigners and immigrants share the experience of moving from one geographical space to another, as well as the contact with cultures distant from the ones in which they were formed. Travelers appear as characters of mythical and epic accounts since Antiquity, such as Gilgamesh and Odysseus, protagonists of the books they name. For this reason, epics and travel narratives have coincided for many centuries, reappearing in such classics as Virgil's *Aeneid* or Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. When the voyages coincided with the Great Navigations, they began to anchor the plot of Renaissance poems, such as Luís de Camões' *Os Lusíadas*. The fertility of the theme eventually gave way to an independent genre – the travel literature, to which contributes the 13th-Century *Book of Wonders*, written by Rusticiano de Pisa, based on the stories told by Marco Polo.

Foreigners are equally recurrent figures in the history of literature: Odysseus, the traveler, presents himself as an outlander not only when, castaway, he reaches the land of the Phaeacians, but also when he arrives in Ithaca, his homeland. In both cases, he adopts a false identity, while

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denouncing some dose of truth: after so many years since his departure, having been considered missing, Odysseus had probably changed, which motivates the effort to gain recognition. However, that can only happen after proving his worth as a hero, either by the account of his exploits, as in the court of Alcinous, or by the victory over the suitors, or, finally, by the recollection, with Penelope, of the conquest of his beloved woman.

Foreign characters in classic works oscillate between simulation and authentication of identity. Aristotle (1966) emphasizes, in his *Poetics*, the importance of *anagnorisis* as one of the stages of development of the tragic plot, considering the excellence of the work a result from the success in the treatment of this issue, as verified by Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Preceded by similar scenes to be found in Aeschylus' *Coheraphors* and Euripides' *Electra*, whose verisimilitude is doubtful, Sophocles excels: recognition in *Oedipus Rex* is what seals the fatality that condemns him because, upon discovering himself the son of Laio and the husband of Jocasta, his mother, the protagonist can only accept that the oracles were correct and that he had done nothing other than running towards his previously traced destiny.

Oedipus incorporates, in the moments in which he believes not to be Theban, the prototype of the foreigner: he feels inferior to the natives, a minority translated by his deformed foot, and strives to integrate himself into the group, aiming for the comfort of belonging to a city, a social class and a family. If he did not experience the nuisance of difference, perhaps his fortune would have been otherwise, for he would not challenge, in the confrontation with his brother-in-law, Creon, the political norm, nor, in the dispute with the fortune-teller Tiresias, the rules emanating from the gods. Oedipus's fearlessness is a sign of his inadequacy, because he is the foreigner whose origin, which he claims to be high, lies in the scrutiny of Theban aristocracy, who interprets him as a parvenu.

Travelers come and go; because they are not fixated, they are more accepted than foreigners, the "usual suspects". When they settle down and aim to take root, foreigners become immigrants; and if the foreigner's position may be transitory, since, returning to their lands of origin, they resume the condition of natives, that of immigrant is permanent, since the hypothesis of the return is not part of their project. This is not the only aspect to point out the nature of the immigrant: they carry with them the marks of origin (the mother tongue, which is not unlearned, and which determines the idiolect in which they express themselves, the customs, the eating patterns, the relationship with their homeland) that don't abandon them. In contrast, unlike the traveler and foreigner, the immigrant's ambition is to roost, stay, settle down.

2. Waves of immigration

The immigrant is a historical character because he depends on an event that, in most cases, transcends their particular will. Although constituted as an individual, like the traveler or the foreigner, he is bound by processes of transferring groups from one place to another. Immigration policies are collective endeavors, driven by national States, private entities, and political groups. Even when the immigrant decides to move to another place on his own, his initiative is guided by a broader framework, to which, consciously or not, he is integrated.

The formation of human societies came from different migratory waves, which motivated the mobility of the first groups of individuals towards regions where they could find food and shelter. These nomadic nuclei eventually settled in certain geographical spaces at some point in their trajectory, and sedentary communities gave way to cities, peoples, and nations (Harari, 2018). Nomadic bands did not disappear, but the sedentary were the ones who determined the distinction between native and foreign, as well as naming the being that stood between the two poles - the immigrant.

America, among the continents occupied after the era of the Great Navigations, has been one of those spaces in which immigration has been present ever since the first Europeans landed

in the New World. An exploratory enterprise since its inception, it has motivated the displacement of Old Worlders in search of wealth, and of religious communities in search of tolerance and freedom of worship. In both cases, the settlers came across the local populations, whom, from the beginnings of the conquest, they tried to discredit: they were considered savages, given their habits; primitive, because of their worldview; inferior, because of the color of their skin; incapacitated, because they did not fit the type of job destined for them (Quijano, 2000). Therefore, they could be annihilated, and replaced by those to whom, forcibly imported into the American continent and subjected to the power of violence, the work to be performed would be entrusted: blacks from Africa, enslaved and subjected to another modality of migratory waves, fruit of the imposition, control and rupture with the social, cultural, linguistic and religious horizons to which they were previously associated.

The history of America is mixed with the trajectory of immigration. This, however, had distinct facets over time, not only a result of the initial occupation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the 19th century, difficulties arising from the impoverishment in the countryside and the formation of national states led to the exodus to the Americas of the Irish, Portuguese, Italians and Germans, above all, as well as the Japanese, Turks, Lebanese and Armenians. The damaging results of World War I once again moved Italians and Germans across the Atlantic Ocean towards the New World. In the first decades of the 21st century, fratricidal struggles in the Middle East and Africa motivated contingents of population to seek shelter in other territories, with America appearing on the horizon of possible refuge.

The transfer of Jews to American soil participates in this larger context. However, it has particularities arising from the specific history of the Hebrew people, who have experienced the diaspora since the time of Nebuchadnezzar, when the people of Israel went into captivity in Babylon. The dispersion, however, occurred at a time of Roman domination, insufficient, nevertheless, to favor the dissolution of Jewish identity among the populations with which the exiles began to interact. The persistence of religion, and of the book that represented it, ensured cultural cohesion and self-recognition as an autonomous nation, regardless of where – in North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, or Western and Eastern Europe – it was located.

The condition of exile and the worship of a common tradition maintained the unity from which came the permanent status of foreigner experienced by the Jewish people. In their turn, persecutions, which manifested themselves in various ways in different periods of Western history, placed them in the condition of a group in continuous migration. As such, America was part of its migratory horizon – in the sixteenth century, when New Christians participated in the colonization of Brazil; in the early 20th century, before World War I, when immigrants were sponsored by bankers such as Baron Hirsch and Edmond de Rothschild; after that war, when the formation of the Soviet Union and the occupation of Ukraine forced the departure of groups rooted there; in the 1930s, with the rise of the Third Reich; in the following decade, with shelter given to refugees who survived concentration camps.

Diasporic, foreign and immigrant, the Jew may epitomize the condition of the stateless, deterritorialized, uninterruptedly in mutation individual. Hence, the theme appears in the works of two twentieth-century fictionists, both from a European reminiscent of the Austro-Hungarian empire, one of them, Franz Kafka, residing in Prague, from where he rarely left, the other, Elisa Lispector, whose family settled in Brazil, where she produced her literary work.

3. Karl Rossman, the foreigner

Amerika, or *The Man who Disappeared*, is one of the narratives that Franz Kafka, deceased in 1924, left unfinished. Its writing began in 1912, with the chapter entitled “The Stoker”, published independently as a short story, and lasted until 1917, when the author abandoned it, probably in the name of projects that attracted him most, such as *The Process*,

which was begun in 1914, and also left unfinished. However, 1912 is also the year of the writing of *Metamorphosis*, one of the few works published in life and without the interference of Max Brod, heir to the Czech writer's literary legacy.

In *Amerika (The Man who Disappeared)*, some traces of *Metamorphosis* can be perceived, such as the protagonist's mutation, in this case that of Karl Rossmann, who presents himself as a “negro”, as stated in the final part of the narrative. If Gregor Samsa wakes up one day transformed into a “monstrous cockroach” (Kafka, 2007, p. 84), Rossmann, marginalized throughout the episodes of the story, eventually identifies himself with African Americans, victims of prejudice and considered subhumans, *Untermenschen*, as Arthur Holitscher calls them, in his book on America that, as will be shown, supports the creation of Kafka's novel (Holitscher, 1912, p. 361). In other words, Karl would also be regressing on the scale of his humanity.

Samsa and Rossmann also share the fact that they are travelers, the first working as a salesman for the office in which he is employed, the second crossing the ocean towards the United States, which makes him an immigrant, thus a foreigner, as indeed is the condition of various characters of *Amerika (The Man who Disappeared)*. As noted, foreigners, not necessarily immigrants, are frequent figures in Western literature, dating back to the foundational Ulysses in Homer's epic. Ulysses goes the opposite way to Rossmann's, since he longs to return home, but when he reaches the land of the Phaeacians he does not clarify his identity, which is discovered only after he exposed his past to the court audience of King Alcinous. Identity, in turn, which he had previously lost, when he presented himself to Polyphemus as NoOne, in order to escape the revenge of the Cyclops.

Recognized among the Phaeacians as one of the Trojan heroes, Ulysses becomes someone and receives the necessary nautical equipment to return to the homeland, the Ithaca of his ancestors and his wife, Penelope, and their son, Telemachus. However, he again opts for anonymity, disguised as a beggar, when he appears at the royal palace. The regaining of his name takes some time, being necessary several trials, from the victory over the suitors to Penelope, the probable widow, to her persuasion, suspicious that she was that this man who presented himself as Ulysses might be someone else who had taken the King's place.

Ulysses is not an immigrant, but as a foreigner, he participates in many of the situations experienced by subjects forced to leave their birthplace, beginning with the loss of identity and continuing with the distrust of the natives, to whom the foreigner must assimilate to be accepted. As Ulysses is not an immigrant, he does not have to go through the integration process, but he indicates it exists and requires taking action, not always dependent on individual initiative.

It is Karl Rossmann who converts the model of the foreigner, embodied in Ulysses, into the allegory of the immigrant, anticipated by the mutation process that transforms Samsa into a repulsive figure of the animal kingdom.

4. Karl Rossmann, the man who disappeared

The opening paragraph of *Amerika (The Man who Disappeared)* chronicles, in third person, Rossmann's arrival in New York Harbor:

As the seventeen-year-old Karl Rossmann, who had been sent to America by his unfortunate parents because a maid had seduced him and had a child by him, sailed slowly into New York harbour, he suddenly saw the Statue of Liberty, which had already been in view for some time, as though in an intenser sunlight. The sword in her hand seemed only just to have been raised aloft, and the unchained winds blew about her form.²

² In the original: Als der siebzehnjährige Karl Roßmann, der von seinen armen Eltern nach Amerika geschickt worden war, weil ihn ein Dienstmädchen verführt und ein Kind von ihm bekommen hatte, in dem schon langsam

‘So high,’ he said to himself, and quite forgetting to disembark, he found himself gradually pushed up against the railing by the massing throng of porters. (Kafka, 2007, p. 3)

Such as in *Metamorphosis*, the narrative begins as soon as the founding event of the protagonist's future trajectory is presented. In the 1912 novel, a short sentence tells of the character's radical transformation: “When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself changed into a monstrous cockroach in his bed.” (Kafka, 2007, p. 84). In *Amerika (The Man who Disappeared)*, the period is merely more contorted, with the main clause being preceded by three subordinates, but, similarly, it summarizes the antecedents of Karl's life and shows that henceforth nothing will be as before: he was seduced by the maid, became a father and is in New York, from where he will no longer return.

For Karl, as it had been for Gregor, there is no second chance: the rupture is complete, and the subject who experiences it changes status, and even physical appearance.

The biggest difference between the two openings concerns style, and perhaps for this reason Kafka never considered the book to be finished. However, to the reader, it is not the style that surprises, but the image of the city that is displayed in the protagonist's eyes. He calls it *Newyork*; and sees "the Statue of Liberty," in whose arm he distinguishes a "sword."

However, that was likely what writer Franz Kafka identified in Arthur Holitscher's book *Amerika*, also from 1912, in which he found the following photograph immediately on the front page of the first chapter, whose title is:

BREMEN – NEWYORK



Source: Arthur Holitscher (2007, p. 11)

One is bound to agree with Kafka or at least Rossmann: the raised right arm seems to hold a sword. And for a young man who had been expelled from his house by his parents for being seduced by a maid, nothing more representative of the universe with which he is now faced than the reception by a goddess carrying a weapon straight from the doorway.

The beginning of Karl Rossmann's American journey amounts to a birth. In a way, he seems to be doubly the son: of the parents who expel him from Europe; and of the maid who seduces him, the reason of a diaspora – or loss of paradise – that arrives without guilt, but

gewordenen Schiff in den Hafen von Newyork einfuhr, erblickte er die schon längst beobachtete Statue der Freiheitsgöttin wie in einem plötzlich stärker gewordenen Sonnenlicht. Ihr Arm mit dem Schwert ragte wie neuerdings empor und um ihre Gestalt wehten die freien Lüfte.

charged with punishment. Along this journey, whose duration is not timed, Karl goes through different places and experiences contradictory and even anomalous situations.

The first of these happens on the boat in which he traveled from Hamburg to New York: in search of the umbrella he had forgotten, he encounters a stoker, who, questioned by Karl, gives vent to his revolt against his rival, the Romanian Schubal, who, to his indignation, occupies a superior position, while not being German, the nationality of the steamboat where they work. Due to his insubordination, the stoker is challenged by the boat authorities, being defended by Karl, an action that increases the protagonist's self-esteem:

If only his parents could see him, fighting for a good cause in a strange land before distinguished people, and while he hadn't won yet, he was absolutely ready for the final push. (Kafka, 2007, p. 18)

The action soon follows another direction, as one of the authorities present on the scene is Mr. Jakob, coincidentally Karl's uncle and a person of great public influence, "State Counselor", able to leverage his nephew's career in the new land. Jakob tells the others of Rossmann's past, repeating what was anticipated in the opening paragraph (seduction of the boy by the maid and further expulsion) and highlighting the elation of finding the savior relative:

[...] the parents, to avoid scandal and paying maintenance, had their son, my dear nephew, transported to America with, as you may see, lamentably inadequate provision – thus leaving the boy, saving those miracles that still happen from time to time and particularly here in America, entirely to his own devices, so that he might easily have met his death in some dockside alleyway on his arrival. (Kafka, 2007, p. 20)

The opening chapter of *Amerika (The Man who Disappeared)*, published in an independent version in 1913, sets out the basic coordinates of the novel and, by extension, Karl's status as an immigrant to the United States. His departure is not voluntary and corresponds to a birth, a new individual to a New World, which, for its part, generously welcomes those who seek it and provides them with security to face an auspicious future. The uncle's adoption of this newly landed nephew completes the favorable picture, distinguishing him from the other "poor little immigrants" (Kafka, 2007, p. 28), who may have no place to live or who may not be allowed to enter the country:

His uncle, from his knowledge of the immigration laws, even thought it highly probable that he might not have been admitted into the United States at all, but would have been sent straight back again, never mind the fact that he no longer had a home. (Kafka, 2007, p. 28)

Thus Karl was a "fortunate one": "the fortunate few seemed quite content to enjoy their good fortune with only the pampered faces of their friends for company." (Kafka, 2007, p. 28). And Jakob not only welcomes his nephew, but seeks to provide him with an education that can distinguish him, beginning with learning the local language: "But naturally Karl's first and most important task was learning English." (Kafka, 2007, p. 31). He is introduced, as well, to horse riding, good manners, and fine clothes, associating with his uncle's rich and influential friends, who are also his business partners.

The protagonist's good fortune does not last, however. Believing that Karl had acted wrong when visiting Mr. Pollunder, where he had sent him, Jakob expels the nephew from his acquaintance. Karl once again falls into disgrace and is left adrift, and cannot even return to his uncle's city or residence. From this point onward, the boy experiences his second exile, wandering the region's roads in search of the city of Ramses (sic), where he could find employment. He ends up being hired as a lift attendant at the Hotel Occidental, meeting other people from his homeland (Bohemia, where Prague is located, the city where Franz Kafka was

born and resided), but most of them are better off than him, a minority of which he is aware: “he kept thinking that in their lives they had an advantage over him, which he needed to make up for by greater industry and a certain self-denial.” (Kafka, 2007, p. 99)

Willingness to work, polite and generous behavior, subordination – none of this is enough to satisfy his superiors, and he is fired and thrown back onto the road. At the penultimate station of his *via crucis*, he is again in New York, now exploited by Robinson and Delamarche, his former partners, themselves wanderers and, unlike him, cheaters. Finally, he runs into the opportunity he was looking for: joining the Oklahoma Theater (sic) troupe, which recruited staff through a very flashy poster:

At the racecourse in Clayton, today from 6 a.m. till midnight, personnel is being hired for the Theatre in Oklahoma! The great Theatre of Oklahoma is calling you! It's calling you today only! If you miss this opportunity, there will never be another! Anyone thinking of his future, your place is with us! All welcome! Anyone who wants to be an artist, step forward! We are the theatre that has a place for everyone, everyone in his place! If you decide to join us, we congratulate you here and now! But hurry, be sure not to miss the midnight deadline! We shut down at midnight, never to reopen! Accursed be anyone who doesn't believe us! Clayton here we come! (Kafka, 2007, p. 202)

As described by the narrator, the poster looks rather ‘incredible’, and presents “one great drawback” because “there wasn't a single word in it about payment”. Still, it contains, for Karl, a “great lure”: it ensures that “all are welcome”. The narrator comments: “All, even Karl. Everything he had done up until now would be forgotten, no one would hold it against him. He could turn up for work that was not a disgrace.” (Kafka, 2007, p. 202).

The unlikelihood of the poster characterizes its uniqueness, in addition to the fact that it offers a unique opportunity to those who seek the Theater: it is open without discrimination, but only on the appropriate day in the text. It is located at Clayton Racecourse, a three-hour walk from New York and where Karl is headed.

The name of the place may be a product of Kafka's fantasy, as New York State's Clayton is almost on the Canadian border. But the name of the theater, including the duplicate spelling mistake by the Czech writer, was probably taken from Arthur Holitscher's book, when the mention of the region appears as a caption to the following photograph:



Idyll aus Oklahoma (Holitscher, 1912, p. 367)

The photograph belongs to a chapter called “Der Neger” (The negro) and describes the racial divisions Holitscher encounters on his trip to the southern United States. It portrays the strange fruits of Abel Meeropol's poem, interpreted in song form by Billie Holiday, and surely must have impressed the Czech novelist. Perhaps for this reason he preferred to use the noun Oklahoma, misspelled in the photo caption, but used correctly by Holitscher throughout his book. Thus, Kafka leads his protagonist to the American Midwest after he has been approved by the Theater's recruiters and has identified himself as Negro, when, similarly to Ulysses, in the episodes of the *Odyssey*, he is asked to name himself:

But there was one further delay, when he was asked for his name. He didn't reply right away, he was reluctant to give his real name and have that entered. If he got the smallest job, and was able to perform that satisfactorily, then he would happily divulge his name, but not now, he had kept it secret for too long to betray it now. Therefore, as nothing else came to mind just then, he gave what had been his nickname on his last jobs: ‘Negro.’ (Kafka, 2007, p. 209-210)

Karl is admitted to the group hired by the Oklahoma Theater, and this is the last stage of his itinerary, as it follows the journey towards the West, where the protagonist seems to disappear.

Interpretations given to the final scenes of *Amerika (The Man who Disappeared)* can be summarized into two main groups: the work, unlike the others produced by Kafka, would finish with a happy ending, with the protagonist finding a place in the world; on the other hand, it is understood that Karl's final voyage would justify the title of the novel, with the character fading on the horizon and, in this respect, dying, a fate shared with Gregor Samsa, from *Metamorphosis*, Josef K., from *The Process*, and K., from *The Castle*.

However, it should be remembered that, heading West aboard the train that assembles the Oklahoma Theater troupe, Karl heads to the region denounced as the most intensely racist in North America by Holitscher. And that, if Karl calls himself ‘black’, he, dead or alive, will be repressed like the country's African Americans. Karl's transfiguration into ‘black’, the *Untermenschen*, as Holitscher (1912, p. 361) points out in examining the issue in the United States, is the last step of his fall into misfortune, downgraded as he was from the very beginning by a blame that he admittedly did not have.

Holitscher's chapter devoted to black people stands out for denouncing racist behavior in regions located in Southern and Western North America. The journalist talks to black movement militants who work especially in Chicago, and one of them comments on the similarity between blacks and Jews: “We're in the same boat!”, he says. After recounting episodes that would prove Americans' rejection of immigrant Jews, Holitscher concludes that, in many ways, Jews and blacks are perceived in the same way, namely, in public life, in the administration and in the army, warning that, if blacks suffer more than Jews, “the principle remains the same” (Holitscher's, 1912, p. 365).³

Kafka must not have been indifferent to this observation, since the protagonist of the novel admits his black identity in the final stage of his career. Admitting it is also revealing his “Jewish” face, which may not be so evident in his original name – Karl Rossmann – but in his uncle name, Jakob, which surname he alters to thrive in American society.

In its turn, Karl Rossmann's “Judaism” is equally symbolized by his dislocation toward the city of Ramses or Rameses, where he heads after being dislodged by his uncle. The allusion to Rameses makes sense, because the name Jakob refers to the biblical patriarch, father of Joseph, who is kidnapped by his brothers and led to Egypt, where, as an adult, he occupies a

³ In the original: *Tatsächlich haben Juden und Neger in manchen Punkten der Einschätzung gleicherweise zu leiden, im öffentlichen Leben, in der Verwaltung, im Heer. (Die Neger stärker als die Juden, selbstredend, aber das Prinzip bleibt dasselbe.)*.

prominent position next to the Pharaoh. His descendants, however, are enslaved and, according to *Exodus*, obliged to build the “storage cities, Python and Rameses.” (Bíblia, s. d., p. 63)

Novel of a lone immigrant, Rossmann is also the synthesis of the mutations through which the groups of people transferring to the New World underwent, all subalternized and humiliated, because of their alleged sub-humanity.

5. Lizza in transit

Elisa Lispector (1911-1989) published her first novel, *Além da fronteira*, in 1945, two years after her younger sister Clarice Lispector debuted in literature with *Perto do coração selvagem*, a work that achieved some resonance among literary critics of the period. *No exílio*, Elisa's second book, appeared in 1948, followed by *Ronda Solitária*, 1954, *O muro de pedras*, 1962, *O dia mais longo de Thereza*, 1965, *A última porta*, 1975, and *Corpo a corpo*, 1983. She is also the author of the short stories *Sangue no sol*, 1970, *Inventário*, 1977, and *O tigre de Bengala*, 1985. In the 1940s, she collaborated with short narratives on *O Jornal's* Women's Supplement, and in the 1960s, on *Diário de Notícias*, both newspapers from Rio de Janeiro. She left *Retratos antigos* unpublished, posthumously edited in 2011, under the responsibility of Nádía Gotlib.

It is neither a sporadic or insignificant production, nor a devalued one, since she won the José Lins do Rego Award from the José Olympio Editora in 1962 and the Coelho Neto Award from the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1964. However, her books have never navigated the mainstream of national literature, and most of them have been sold out for many years, signaling the timid reception and modest repercussion of her creations.⁴

According to the works devoted to the life of her most famous sister, Clarice, Elisa Lispector's fiction would contain notoriously autobiographical elements, being *No Exílio* one of the main references concerning her childhood, with emphasis on the transfer from Europe to Brazil. Sometimes exceeding the necessary mediation between the imagined and the historical, biographers tend to take for granted facts only suggested in the novel to support theses that are difficult to substantiate.⁵

Entirely or partially autobiographical, *No Exílio* recounts what could have been the existence of the Lispectors in Ukraine in the post-revolutionary period, the crossing over land and sea towards America, and the assimilation into Brazilian life after landing in the new homeland. If considered autobiographical, the book ascends to the class of testimony; but it is the fictionalization of the episodes that gives greatness to the narrative and interest to those who wish to understand the difficult process of moving from one territory to another – the discomfort with the former, and the need to adapt to the latter.

No Exílio seems to fill in the gaps left by *Amerika*, for, if Rossmann's course has no before (the first years in his homeland) nor after (the events after joining the Oklahamma Theater), Lizza's story occupies the whole arc of time, from the first to the last decades of the early half of the twentieth century.

Taking into account the plot, the novel could be divided into three stages: the first corresponds to the last stage of Lizza's story, when the mature character returns from a period in which she was admitted to a clinic due to her melancholy, motivated by the 'unfolding of the

⁴ The latest edition of *No Exílio* is from 2005. *A última porta* was reedited in 1975, *O muro das pedras*, in 1976, *Inventário*, in 1977, *O dia mais longo de Thereza*, in 1978, *O tigre de Bengala*, in 1985, *Além da fronteira*, in 1988.

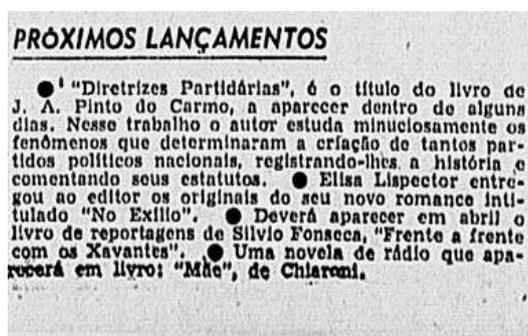
⁵ See, for instance, Moser (2009).

events of Lake Success,⁶ concerning the problem of Palestine⁷ (Lispector, 1971, p. 8). On her return, she hears the newsboy announcing the ‘breaking news’: ‘the Jewish State was proclaimed’.



Source: *Diário da Noite* (1948)⁸

The news, literally and as a headline, but not entirely transcribed, comes from *Diário da noite* on May 14, 1948. However, the originals of the book would have been delivered to the publisher before that date, as reported by *Correio da Manhã*, from Rio de Janeiro, on March 28, 1948:



Source: *Correio da Manhã* (1948)⁹

⁶ In 1947, the UN’s General Assembly nominated a special committee to deal with the Palestinian issue, which decided for the termination of the British Mandate in the Region. They suggested, at the same time, a plan for the division of the territory into two independent states.

⁷ In the original: “desenrolar dos acontecimentos de Lake Success, relativos ao problema da Palestina” (Lispector, 1971, p. 8). In the 1948 edition, the excerpt is as follows: “o desenrolar dos acontecimentos em Lake Success em relação ao problema da Palestina.” (Lispector, 1948, p. 6). (All translations of *No Exílio* are our own).

⁸ Headline: Jewish State proclaimed in Palestine.

⁹ Title: Next releases. Body: * “Diretrizes partidárias” is the title of J. A. Pinto do Carmo’s book, to be released in a few days. In this work the author studies closely the phenomena that determines the creation of so many national political parties, recording their history and commenting their statutes. * Elisa Lispector has delivered to the editor the originals of her new novel titled “*No Exílio*”. * In April, Silvio Fonseca’s non-fiction book, “*Frente a frente com os Xavantes*” should be released. * A radio soap-opera that will appear in book form: “*Mãe*”, by Chiaroni.

The novel is released at the end of the first half of 1948, according to a note published in the newspaper *A Noite*, June 21, 1948:



Source: *A Noite* (1948)

This information is reiterated in the supplement *Letras e Artes* (1948) on July 4th, and in the *Fon Fon* (Brito, 1948, p. 10) magazine, on July 17th. Between the delivery of the originals and the final version, released in June, the author probably altered the initial pages.

It is the news reproduced on the front page of the novel that immediately begins the second stage of the work. After hearing the headline proclaimed by the newsboy, buying the newspaper, and reading the news, which brings her relative serenity, she hears a comment that catches her attention:

- ... “Jewish State!” – she hear someone comment in anger, underneath the wagon’s window. “These Jews...” (Lispector, 1971, p. 8)¹¹

The narrator, though in third person, translates the thoughts of the character, now "without resentment", because "so many times she had heard similar comments that they no longer had the power to disturb her."¹² She is compensated by the hope that “humanity was redeeming itself” and “at last began to pay off its debt to the Jews” (Lispector, 1971, p. 8).¹³

¹⁰ Title: New Books. Subtitle: “No Exílio” - Novel. - Elisa Lispector – Pongetti Editora. Body: 1st column: The children of Israel have provided great themes to the novelist of all ages. Resulting from the drama that has been the life of this suffering and persecuted people. Elisa Lispector, who offered us, some time ago, “Além da fronteira”, has just published “No Exílio”, which we do not know how to classify – as a novel or an autobiography. /The fact is that, as it is known, Elisa Lispector’s family came with her family to Brasil exactly when in Russia, her homeland, the great revolution started that [...] // 2nd column: [...] to delve in sociology, subject of her preference. From this cultural formation, improved in the conviviality of great books, of an indisputable tendency to the letters, arose the novelist of “Além da fronteira”. It was a premier that revealed the admirable writer whose inclination toward the tragic demanded an equivalent capacity for the introspective analysis of characters, without which the failure would have been irremediable. / In “No Exílio”, which has just been released, Elisa Lispector seems to have written the book that slept in her soul. It could indeed have been an autobiography should the author thus wish to define it. / The story of Pinchas and Lizza, harrowing in its human structure, is a cry of anguish [...].

¹¹ In the original: - ... “Estado Judeu!” – ouviu alguém comentar irado, por baixo da janela do vagão. “Esses judeus...”.

¹² In the original: “tantas foram as vezes em que escutara comentários semelhantes, que já não tinham o poder de perturbá-la”.

¹³ In the original: “a humanidade estava-se redimindo” and “começava, enfim, a resgatar sua dívida para com os judeus”.

Following the reassuring reflection, she alludes to the “distant episodes” of “escapes, misfortunes, persecutions”, as Lizza “began to recall the exodus of which she participated, in an endless night of specters and terror” (Lispector, 1971, p. 8)¹⁴.¹⁵ The second stage is thus occupied by the memory of the border crossing that would take her family, along with other emigrants, out of Ukraine, where they had been beset by *pogroms*, the “Jewish massacres” (Lispector, 1971, p. 31), led alternately by Red Army and White Russian militants.¹⁶

By the time the narrative begins, Ukraine was part of the Tsarist empire, from which it was emancipated in 1918, not in a peaceful manner, remaining in struggle against the Soviet Union, to which it was annexed in 1921.¹⁷ Due to internal dissent, part of the region is occupied by Poland, including Galicia, a region inhabited by a large numbers of Jews.

However, the narrative takes events a little further back in time because, after realizing the weaknesses of emigrants seeking a new home away from that conflicting region, of well-known anti-Semitic tradition, events are conducted into the period of Pinkhas’¹⁸ and Marin’s wedding, Lizza’s parents. It is Pinkhas who recalls this somewhat idealized time, for, despite the uncertainties, life followed the paths expected by the young couple, the husband working, the wife running the home, the daughters – Lizza, Ethel and Nina – being born and growing.

The retrospective – directed from this point only by the omniscient narrator – extends to events after 1917, succeeding the *pogroms*. As the “White” army approaches, the Jewish community believes that new times could guarantee some prosperity, but soon afterwards, waves of massacre follow, leaving the characters in misery. The situation of insecurity and the absence of a better horizon determine the option to leave their homeland: “we are going abroad”, because “we still have our whole life in front of us” (Lispector, 1971, p. 47),¹⁹ Pinkhas decides.

But the departure is not simple: in addition to the painful preparations, which include many resignations, there is the threat of failure in crossing the border, an episode that opens the second stage of the narrative and is developed with detail in later chapters, since the migrants are intimidated and deceived by smugglers hired to drive them out of the country. New difficulties come with the lack of news from relatives that could help them settle in the United States. Finally, “the letters of call from Brazil came” (Lispector, 1971, p. 87),²⁰ and the family can move to South America.

¹⁴ In the original: “distantes episódios” of “fugas, desditas, perseguições”, as Lizza “começou a recordar o êxodo de que participou, numa interminável noite semeada de espectros e de terror”.

¹⁵ In the 1948 edition, the alteration is not only stylistic, because Lizza “começou a *reviver (relive)* [replaced, in the new edition, by *recordar (remember)*] a sua primeira fuga, o grande êxodo de que participara, numa interminável noite semeada de espectros e de terror...” (Lispector, 1948, p. 6. Our italics).

¹⁶ About this, Berta Waldman writes: “Os ecos da Revolução de 1917 soavam em dupla direção: de um lado, os “vermelhos” tentavam vencer as dificuldades da fome; de outro, os “brancos” procuravam sufocar a revolução e promoviam pogroms, isto é, violentas perseguições aos judeus, com estupros, saques, assassinatos, pelos territórios que iam ocupando. Tendo sido obrigados a abandonar Moscou, dominada pelos comunistas, os “brancos” alojam-se na Ucrânia, tornando-a inóspita aos judeus. Assim, com a Revolução bolchevique, a situação continua difícil para os judeus perseguidos por um antissemitismo ancestral, submetidos a massacres e humilhações de toda ordem.” (Waldman, 2014) [The echoes of the 1917 Revolution sounded in two directions: on one hand, the “red” tried to overcome the struggles of hunger; on the other, the “whites” tried to suffocate the revolution, and promoted *pogroms*, that is, violent persecutions of Jews, with rapes, robbery, murders, throughout the territory they occupied. Having been forced to abandon Moscow, taken over by the communists, the “whites” settled in Ukraine, making it inhospitable to the Jews. Therefore, with the Bolchevique Revolution, the situation is still difficult for the Jews persecuted by an ancestral anti-Semitism, subjected to massacres and humiliations of all sorts.]

¹⁷ Viktor Chklovski (2018) narrates this episode with notable realism in his autobiographical novel *Viagem sentimental*.

¹⁸ Spelled Pinchas in the first edition.

¹⁹ In the original: “vamos para o estrangeiro”, because “ainda temos a vida inteira à nossa frente”.

²⁰ In the original: “as cartas de chamada do Brasil vieram”.

In the New World, the situations experienced are not particularly auspicious: Marin never recovers from the traumas caused by the *pogroms*, by walking across inhospitable areas to the port from which she would depart for Brazil, by the difficulties of adaptation. Lizza assumes the role of the mother and, alongside the father, follows the unfolding of tragic events of the European War, driven by the Third Reich, which will have the Jews among its most numerous victims.

The third part of the narrative corresponds to the period immediately after the end of the war, when Lizza follows, on the one hand, the fate of the Jews who left the concentration camps, in her view, oblivious of all; on the other, the Zionist projects in Palestine, aiming at achieving the establishment of a Jewish state. The report becomes almost journalistic, narrating, in the final part of the book, the political disputes in Europe and the Middle East, events that depress her and lead to her hospital admission.

The narrative continues the exposure of political confrontations that evolve into war, with the delay in solving the “Jewish problem” (Lispector, 1971, p. 190). Simultaneously, Lizza gets released and undertakes “the return trip” (Lispector, 1971, p. 190). In the end, she longs to overcome the disease, while waiting for the promises contained in the creation of the United Nations (UN), summarized in the “Atlantic Charter”²¹ and represented in the “promising Four Freedoms” (Lispector, 1971, p. 191),²² to be confirmed in a new time, full of hope.

The third part seems to contradict what is narrated in the first pages, when Lizza reads, in the newspaper, the proclamation of the Jewish State, since what seems like a possibility in the closing of the narrative is exposed in advance as having been brought to reality in its beginning. But it is likely, as noted earlier, that the initial passage was added after the originals were delivered, but before the book was released in late June 1948.

The 1971 printed book states in the title page that it is a “revised by the author” edition (Lispector, 1971, Title Page). The most obvious changes concern style and do not profoundly affect the content of the ensemble, as the opening can be adjusted to its end, even if, in retrospect, it seems compelled. In turn, what secures the unity of the text is not the consummation of the founding project of a Jewish state, but the fact that Lizza finds herself on the road, at the beginning and the end of the plot. Apparently, in the way it is exposed in the two pages with which the narrative begins, it would be a way back. However, this alternative is left open, since the moving train, where the protagonist is located, “plunged back into immensity”, an excerpt that, in the 1971 edition, achieves greater emphasis thanks to the adopted paragraphing:

²¹ The *Atlantic Charter*, the “primeiro documento relevante que precedeu a Organização das Nações Unidas, resultou do encontro do Presidente dos EUA, Franklin D. Roosevelt, com o Primeiro Ministro britânico, Winston Churchill, em agosto de 1941, no contexto das difíceis relações que permeavam a Segunda Guerra Mundial”. [first relevant document to precede the United Nations organization, resulted from the meeting of USA president, Franklin D. Roosevelt with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, in August, 1941, in the context of the difficult relations surrounding World War II.] (Biblioteca Virtual de Direitos Humanos).

²² The *Four Freedoms* consist in a series of four paintings, produced by the American painter Norman Rockwell in 1943, composed by the works *Freedom of Speech*, *Freedom of Worship*, *Freedom from Want* e *Freedom from Fear*.

<i>In Exile</i> - 1948 Edition	<i>In Exile</i> - 1971 Edition
<p>"... They did not die in vain ..." the wheels on the tracks began to sing as the train began to move and plunged back into immensity. Lizza closed her eyes and rested her head on the back of the chair. Distant episodes miraculously rose alive in her memory. – Escape, misfortunes, persecution. (Lispector, 1948, p. 6)²³</p>	<p>"... did not die in vain ...", the wheels on the tracks began to sing as the train started to move and plunged back into immensity. Lizza closed her eyes and rested her head on the back of the chair. Distant episodes resurfaced in her memory, astonishingly vivid: – escape, misfortunes, persecution. (Lispector, 1971, p. 8)²⁴</p>

Thus, the beginning of the novel, which is also the last stage of Lizza's history, intensifies the gesture that permanently puts the character in transit, drawing a life without a definite course, which reiterates and accentuates the exile – the deterritorialization – announced from the title.

Indeed, the protagonist is never comfortable in the land she inhabits. As in Kafka's narrative, she has no space, though quantitatively she owns more history. If there is little to be known about Rossmann, we know a lot about Lizza – origin, family relationships, European and Brazilian experience, domestic and sentimental frustrations. However, the girl is also a permanently moving figure, and it is no coincidence that her journey begins where Karl's ends – a train ride that takes her to a modest station but does not lead her to a home because she may not have her own place.

In this respect she is equally a mutant – not in physical form, like Samsa and Rossmann, but in territories, without being acceptable anywhere. Therefore, neither novel has a successful ending, although apparently their protagonists have solved their problems. However, Karl is the “man who disappeared,” and Lizza the “exiled,” as the titles of the works show.

The immigrant, represented in the fiction of Kafka and Lispector, synthesizes the outcast and the wanderer. Aiming at regions in North and South America that forged identities at the expense of the mobility of people from different continents, they, perhaps by default, reveal the fragility of national constructions and destabilize images of economic progress, social equality, security, personal fulfillment, and collective future, associated with the reception of people from distant provinces.

They are inevitably *foreigners*, a situation which, like so few, Jews embody, either explicitly, as in Elisa Lispector's fiction, or allegorically, as Franz Kafka's novel implies. They also become the “disappeared” or the *strangers*. They are, thus, the absent, those who founded the history of America, but are at the same time denied in their condition as inadequate, failed, unhappy. Contrary to the success stories in which nations seek to recognize and understand each other, immigrants point to another narrative and, in their constant mutation, reveal that travel – or transit between continents – is no longer the hypothesis of successful return, but the absence of homeland and the lack of place.

It is in the trajectory of characters like Karl and Lizzie that travelers, foreigners and immigrants meet, to narrate what society, which should welcome them and not always does so,

²³ In the original: - ...Não morreram em vão... começaram a cantar as rodas nos trilhos, enquanto o trem se punha em movimento e tornava a mergulhar na imensidão. Lizza fechou os olhos e recostou a cabeça no espaldar da poltrona. Distantes episódios reergueram-se miraculosamente vivos em sua memória. – Fugas, desditas, perseguições.

²⁴ In the original: “...não morreram em vão...”, começaram a cantar as rodas nos trilhos, enquanto o trem se punha em movimento e tornava a mergulhar na imensidão. // Lizza fechou os olhos e recostou a cabeça no espaldar da poltrona. Distantes episódios ressurgiam-lhe na memória, espantosamente vívidos: - fugas, desditas, perseguições.

ignores, rejects or denies: a traumatic process based on forgetfulness. Fictionists like Franz Kafka and Elisa Lispector, by denying the denial, give visibility to the hidden wound and offer society the opportunity to seek the therapy that can cure it.

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