

**Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya, *The Portuguese in the East. A Cultural History of a Maritime Trading Empire*, London / New York, Tauris, 2008. ISBN 978-1-84511-585-2**

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The survival of Portuguese Creole languages in Asia is among the most fascinating subjects of Luso-Asian history. Much of the scholarly work associated with it is linguistic or socio-linguistic in scope, though the history of Luso-Asian interactions is also often included. This is a relatively small field of study where scholars have been able to follow each other's work rather easily. It comes as a surprise, then, that issues should arise regarding the originality of individual scholars' research.

Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya's *The Portuguese in the East* raises some questions of this sort which it seems important to address at some length in the interest of the scholarly community as a whole. The book deals with a number of aspects of Luso-Asian cultural history, but the bulk of the issue concerning the originality of De Silva's work is to be found in the second chapter ("Luso-Asian Literature"), which I will here focus on before making some remarks about the rest of the volume. On pages 14-22, Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya publishes the 56 stanzas of two nineteenth-century Sri Lanka Portuguese Creole (SLPC) songs taken from the manuscripts of Hugo Schuchardt (1842-1927), the Austrian pioneer of Creole studies. She publishes the texts in three versions: the Schuchardt Manuscript version, a Modern Standard Portuguese version, and an English translation. These are introduced as follows: "I located a late nineteenth-century manuscript with two Indo-Portuguese of Ceylon ballads (56 stanzas) in the University of Graz, Austria, among the Hugo Schuchardt Collection. Schuchardt included them in his essay 'On the Indo-Portuguese of Ceylon'" (12). Some crucial information has been omitted though.

The 56 stanzas were already printed in 1999 at the end of an article signed by De Silva, published in *Portuguese Studies*.<sup>2</sup> That article was by and large an English translation of an unpublished German essay of Schuchardt, made by the linguist Theodora Bynon of the School of Oriental and African Studies (approx. 3,700 words). This came with a generic introduction by De Silva (approx. 1470 words), and the transcription of the 56 stanzas

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<sup>2</sup> Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya, "On the Indo-Portuguese of Ceylon?: a translation of a Hugo Schuchardt Manuscript", in *Portuguese Studies* [King's College London], 15 (1999), 52-69.

already mentioned, along with their translations into English and Portuguese. De Silva claimed authorship for the article as a whole. Within the article, she claimed authorship for the English and Portuguese translation of the verses in particular, though acknowledging in her introduction that Theodora Bynon had actually translated Schuchardt's essay—the bulk of the publication—from German into English. The authorship of the transcription of the SLPC stanzas remains unclear.<sup>3</sup> The reason why I bring this up here is that in *The Portuguese in the East*, there is no reference to Theodora Bynon nor to the 1999 article. There is also no bibliographical reference to the original Schuchardt manuscript in Graz. And if one seeks some further information on the subject, one only finds the following lines later in the volume (114): “The late nineteenth-century data are from the two manuscripts that I have translated: the Hugh Nevill Collection in the British Library and the Hugo Schuchardt Collection in the University of Graz, Austria (de Silva Jayasuriya 2001a).”<sup>4</sup> The appropriation of Bynon's translation seems to go back to De Silva's book *An Anthology of Indo-Portuguese Verse* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), where De Silva wrote: “The Hugo Schuchardt collection in the University of Graz, Austria, includes a manuscript, *Zum Indoportugiesischen von Ceylon* (“On the Indo-Portuguese of Ceylon”), which has been translated into English by de Silva Jayasuriya (1999b).”<sup>5</sup>

From pages 22 to 34 of *The Portuguese in the East* a comparable issue arises, though with further ramifications and perhaps graver implications. Here, De Silva refers to her work on a well-known manuscript from the Hugh Nevill Collection in the British Library. She writes: “My translations of the Hugh Nevill collection into Portuguese and English have been published in *An Anthology of Indo-Portuguese Verse* by the Edwin Mellen Press [...] Mr K.D. Somadasa, a former Librarian of the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, who later became the Curator of the Nevill Collection, invited me to translate this manuscript, which had been overlooked for a century. The scholars who consulted the Collection (2227 manuscripts) were orientalist [...] The Nevill manuscript is illegible in places. Several scribes have recorded the stanzas or copied them from another manuscript. I had problems in transcribing the manuscript [...]” (22-23).

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<sup>3</sup> De Silva explains that Schuchardt's *Zum Indoportugiesischen von Ceylon* “was written in German and consists of Schuchardt's essay on Ceylon Portuguese (here translated by Theodora Bynon), and includes two Ceylon Portuguese songs (here translated by myself)” (“On the Indo-Portuguese of Ceylon: a translation of a Hugo Schuchardt Manuscript”, 52).

<sup>4</sup> The title quoted as “de Silva Jayasuriya 2001a” is De Silva's *An Anthology of Indo-Portuguese Verse*, Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Shihan de S. Jayasuriya, *An Anthology of Indo-Portuguese Verse*, 2.

What De Silva fails to mention is that the Nevill manuscript was explored by Kenneth David Jackson, and its SLPC contents transcribed and published almost integrally by Elizabeth Jackson in Kenneth David Jackson's *Sing Without Shame* in 1990.<sup>6</sup> An English paraphrase by Elizabeth Jackson was also included in *Sing Without Shame*, whilst a standard Portuguese paraphrase by Isabel de Sena, the daughter of the poet Jorge de Sena, was made available in 1996 in the book *Cantha sen vargonya*.<sup>7</sup> And yet there is no reference to Kenneth David Jackson's, Elizabeth Jackson's nor Isabel de Sena's work in De Silva's *The Portuguese in the East*. One is led to wonder how this omission may have come about. In fact, De Silva's earliest publications on the subject do refer to Jackson's work. In 1996 for instance, De Silva published an article in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, in which she engaged critically with Jackson's work, pointing out in a scholarly fashion some issues in the latter's transcription and interpretation, and explaining that she wished to correct its "shortcomings".<sup>8</sup>

The aim in itself of proposing alternative readings and interpretations of these extremely difficult verses some time after their first publication by David and Elizabeth Jackson was legitimate. Creole verses are floating texts that are not easily transferred from the oral to the written tradition. Even when a text is fixed on the paper, it is not easy to identify its "meaning", which may moreover vary from one performer to the other. When one goes back to songs written down over a century ago, these problems become even more intricate, making it impossible to establish a straightforward correspondence with current Standard Portuguese, let alone offer a watertight translation into any other language.<sup>9</sup> It is thus useful that different readings of the same text are made available to the public, and it must be said to De Silva's credit that some of the English translations she derived from her reading of the Nevill text are plausible alternatives to the ones proposed by Jackson. Yet this is in no way reason enough to disregard the work carried out by the latter and create an impression of absolute originality. It is crucial that sources and previous

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth David Jackson, *Sing Without Shame. Oral Traditions in Indo-Portuguese Creole Verse*, Amsterdam / Philadelphia / Macao, John Benjamins Publishing Company / Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1990. The transcription is integral, but comes with some accidental omissions of verses and single words.

<sup>7</sup> K. David Jackson & Isabel de Sena (transl.), *Cantha sen vargonya. Tradições orais em verso crioulo indo-português. Com transcrição e análise de um manuscrito do século XIX em português cingalês*, Macao, Comissão Territorial de Macau para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses / Fundação Macau, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya, "Indo-Portuguese Songs of Sri Lanka: the Nevill Manuscript", in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, LIX, 2 (1996), 253-267.

<sup>9</sup> These problems were already pointed out by Ian R. Smith in his review of *Sing Without Shame* in the *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 8, 2 (1993), 291-296. Jackson accepted Ian R. Smith's criticism and thanked him in *Cantha sem vargonya* (1996) for his assistance in revising the transcription and paraphrase of the Nevill Manuscript verses for the Portuguese edition.

readings remain easily traceable for the reader. It is not acceptable that someone should erase traces and create an aura of pioneering scholarship, referring to her own transcriptions and translations of the Nevill verses as the only available publications of the material without acknowledging the existence of Jackson's work. Such practice would be comparable to, say, someone proposing a new reading of Diogo do Couto's *Década Oitava* without mentioning the work of Maria Augusta da Lima Cruz; or venturing a new translation of the *Lusiads* without referring that others have done so before.

An examination of some of De Silva's earlier publications reveals that De Silva began in the mid-1990s to gradually minimize Jackson's work and claim full credit for the first exploration of the Nevill Manuscript. In 2001 De Silva published *An Anthology of Indo-Portuguese Verse*, a full transcription of the Nevill manuscript, at the Edwin Mellen Press. There, De Silva wrote: "Orientalists working on these manuscripts had overlooked this Indo-Portuguese manuscript for almost a century until Mr K. D. Somadasa [...] of the British Library who catalogued the Nevill Collection requested me to translate the manuscript as I had a knowledge of Portuguese" (xiii). The first reference to Jackson appeared in that book on page 21 regarding a relatively minor issue of textual interpretation. Jackson's *Sing Without Shame* was still cited in the final bibliography, but references to it in the text were scarce, and no mention was made of the full transcription of the Nevill manuscript by Elizabeth Jackson.<sup>10</sup> *An Anthology of Indo-Portuguese Verse* is currently not available from Edwin Mellen Press.

A third, perhaps less vital, but symbolically important issue appears on pages 23-26 of *The Portuguese in the East*. Here De Silva presents, transcribes and translates a poem by Jorge de Sena, *Cantiga de Ceilão*. There is nothing wrong with this at first sight. The poem refers to the last speakers of SLPC and is a perfect fit for any work concerned with this community. Yet in this specific case it seems important to refer that Kenneth David Jackson used the poem in the introduction to *Sing Without Shame* with a very similar scope, and that Jorge de Sena composed the poem under the impression of the recordings of SLPC folk songs that Jackson himself, as a student, had brought to Santa Barbara and played to him in the course of his doctoral work in March 1974.<sup>11</sup> This is not to argue that Jackson shall be the sole person entitled to use the poem in his publications. Yet it does

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<sup>10</sup> Similar situations are to be found in two other works of De Silva: "Portuguese and English Translations of some Indo-Portuguese Songs in the Hugh Nevill Collection," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka*, New Series, vol. XL (1996), 1-102 and *Tagus to Taprobane. Portuguese Impact on the Socio-Culture of Sri Lanka from 1505 AD*, Dehiwala, Tisara Prakasakayo, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> The poem is dated "SB, 24/3/1974" but was not published before the author's death in 1978. See Jorge de Sena, *40 anos de Servidão*, Lisbon, Moraes, 1979, pp. 164-66.

imply, I believe, that the specific terms in which De Silva uses it without mentioning Jackson, in a context where she also avoids referring to any of Jackson's fieldwork in Sri Lanka, are deceitful. De Silva writes: "it was refreshing to find my sentiments being voiced by Jorge de Sena, one of the foremost contemporary Portuguese poets, in his *Cantiga de Ceilão* (1982): *estes versos portugueses* [sic] leio como se leêm [sic] as pedras no fundo de água turva" (23).<sup>12</sup>

What term to best describe De Silva's practices may be a matter of discussion. What seems evident to me is that there are serious issues around the originality of parts of the work presented by De Silva as being her own, and that this should not have gone unnoticed by the publisher I. B. Tauris. There is no doubt that De Silva has worked with important manuscripts over the years and made some interesting contributions to the field. Yet the practice of gradually dropping, and finally omitting references to the publications of a colleague who has worked as a pioneer on exactly the same texts at an earlier time does not strike me as good practice.

All this being said, one may still ask whether *The Portuguese in the East* offers any other valuable contributions to the field. After all, the title of the book goes well beyond Sri Lanka, and the subtitle is even more promising: *A Cultural History of a Maritime Trading Empire*. The general aim of the book is to offer a panorama of the cultural interactions between the Portuguese and Asia focusing on music and linguistics. After a generic overview of "The Portuguese and the Indian Ocean" (chapter 1), De Silva sets out to explore some aspects of "Luso-Asian Literature" through SLPC verses (chapter 2, discussed above – note that the applicability of the term "Literature" is not examined critically at any point in the book). The Nevill Manuscript ballads originally transcribed by Elizabeth Jackson are described as a "mixture of eastern and western poetic imagery" with medieval roots on the Portuguese side, yet when some of the themes of the Creole tradition, such as "Bela Infanta," are mentioned, one misses again references to the earlier work of Kenneth David Jackson on the same subject.<sup>13</sup> In chapter 3, De Silva goes over to dealing with "Music and Postcolonial Identity." The chapter offers an overview of different genres, ranging from the Goan *Mandó* to the Malaccan *Keroncong*, and including the popular Sri Lankan *Baila* and *Kaffrinba*. An interesting part here is the passage dealing with the musical culture of Afro-Sri Lankans brought to the island as slaves at different moments of the Early Modern period (61-64), though given the lack of bibliographical references the

<sup>12</sup> The date here seems to be based on the second, revised, edition of *40 anos de Servidão* from 1982.

<sup>13</sup> Namely Kenneth David Jackson, "'Bela Infanta' of Sri Lanka: Ballad Fragments in Portuguese Creole Communities", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka*, New Series, 19 (1975), pp. 17-25.

reader is once again left with the impression that De Silva has been the sole pioneer to work with the *Kaffir* community of Puttalam district, in the North-Western Province of Sri Lanka. I am aware of at least two other scholars who conducted fieldwork with this fascinating group in the 1980s (M. Goonatilleka—quoted by De Silva in another passage—and again Kenneth David Jackson).<sup>14</sup>

In chapter 4 De Silva sets out to explore “Portuguese Expansion and Language Contact.” She offers brief paragraphs that describe the historical context for contacts in different linguistic areas of Asia, followed by short lists of words that transited from Portuguese into local languages. None of this strikes me as new, but one may find it useful to have examples of lexical borrowings from such a wide range of places brought together in one chapter, and references to the main authors consulted on this subject are given correctly. In chapter 5, De Silva goes on to explore the linguistic contacts between Portuguese and Sinhalese in more detail, presenting thematic clusters of borrowed words (on “Civil Administration,” “Land Administration,” “Clothing,” “Cuisine,” etc.). Chapter 6 deepens the analysis for Sri Lanka after an interlude on Malaccan *Papia Kristang*, whilst chapter 7 broadens the panorama to include Portuguese Creoles spoken in India.

On page 153 De Silva states that “a contact language which developed in Cochin from 1501 could have spread to Sri Lanka and Malacca.” If properly explored, this hypothesis would be significant, but I am not sure it is consubstantiated by the analysis given in the book. Inferences from nineteenth- and twentieth-century materials to the situation in the sixteenth century are naturally problematic, and it is certainly easier to imagine different scenarios of linguistic exchange in places like Cochin, Cannanore, Goa, Colombo or Malacca during the first decades of the Portuguese presence than to produce evidence for them. De Silva’s strategy of combining linguistic scrutiny with an examination of the historical contexts in which language contacts happened seems an interesting option, but the connections between both spheres of analysis—linguistic and historical—remain unclear. Part of this may be due to the weakness of the historical sections in *The Portuguese in the East*. Most passages dealing with the history of the Portuguese in Asia are rather poorly structured and fail to convey a clear picture of what De Silva may have to say. Chapter 8 on the “Twilight of the Estado da India,” for example, is a medley of political, economic and cultural data that constitute basic knowledge on Portuguese expansion in the East. Only in its concluding section, which also rounds up the book as a whole, does De

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<sup>14</sup> Later in the book, De Silva offers a brief overview (pp. 114-115) of the fieldwork carried out by scholars working on SLPC, but again omits any reference to the campaigns of Kenneth David Jackson.

Silva manage to formulate some coherent—though hardly novel—ideas on cultural change and the resilience of the Portuguese imprint in Asia after 1640.

The questionable quality of much of *The Portuguese in the East* is in contrast with De Silva's self-fashioning as a leading scholar. There is a good deal of rather cumbersome self-referencing in this book, as exemplified in the following quotes: "ballads which I transcribed, edited and translated [...] together with my interpretations of the stanzas through my knowledge of both Portuguese and Sri Lankan cultures" (xiii); "I also demonstrate how Indo-Portuguese ballads sung in the East Coast of Sri Lanka influenced this composition by Jorge de Sena" (xiv); "Portuguese lexical borrowings in Sinhala reveal cross-cultural contact (de Silva Jayasuriya 2000a, 2000b)" (7); "I have used my training as a pianist in the Western classical canon (Trinity College of Music, London) to arrange the song, *Mare Nutem Fundu*, for the piano" (28). The tone of large parts of the book is that without Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya's work *Asian Portuguese Creole Studies* would be nowhere today. This is well encapsulated in the following sentence: "Schuchardt felt that any study of Indo-Portuguese should be based on the Indo-Portuguese of Ceylon due to the large literature available at the time. By including twentieth-century data, for this important contact language, I have widened the dataset included in my linguistic analyses" (9).

Much of this book is problematic and reveals a worrying lack of attention on the side of the publisher. Yet the most pressing issues are those discussed in some detail above.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> I have made every effort to scrutinize all relevant materials as thoroughly as possible for the present review in order not only to identify and weigh the problems fairly, but also understand any possible reasons that may help explain them. My attempts at obtaining further information from the author of the reviewed work have remained unsuccessful.