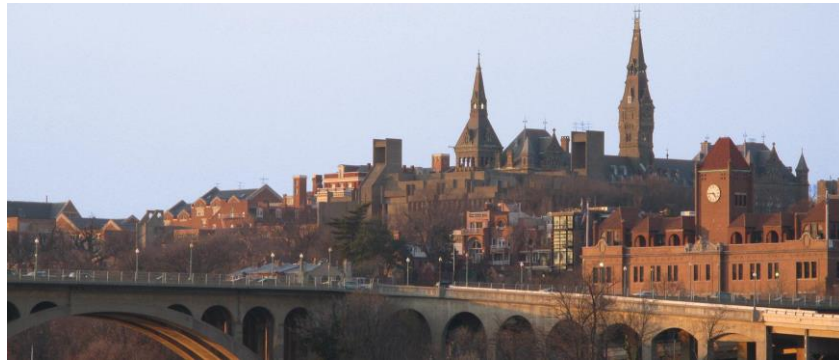




A CHALLENGE, A PRIVILEGE AND AN ENLIGHTENING EXPERIENCE



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I was awarded a Fulbright grant to be a visiting scholar at the University of Georgetown in Washington DC in the academic year of 1995-1996. There, similarly to what had happened in the previous year to my colleague Teresa F. A. Alves, then also teaching American Literature and Culture at the English Department of the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon, I was welcomed by the American Studies Program and hosted by its director, Professor Ronald M. Johnson.

This Program joined faculty from several departments, a circumstance that allowed for the establishment of a rewarding and fruitful dialogue with colleagues in the English Department, among them Lucy Maddox, Editor of the journal of the American Studies Association, *American Quarterly*, and several others, such as Randy Bass, Director of the Center for Electronic Projects in American Studies.



Therefore, the opportunity offered by the Fulbright grant to do post-doctoral research at Georgetown University indeed proved to be most enriching both in professional and personal terms.

First, I would like to mention the extraordinary experience of enjoying the resources of a great library, like Lauinger Library. I had visited it some years before as a complement to the Library of Congress where I was doing most of the research work for my PhD thesis, but I had only briefly taken advantage of Lauinger Library collections. This time, it was quite different because I was living in the Georgetown area and could spend as many hours as I wished at the library on a daily basis – weekends included. In those pre-Internet days this was really precious. The rich and constantly updated collection of volumes together with a vast amount of journals available at the tip of your fingers, both recent and back issues, was almost an embarrassment of riches. It allowed for my understanding of the vastness and diversity of American literature and culture resources and critical studies, pointing to directions I had had no inkling of before and opening avenues of thought that would prove to be most interesting both for my teaching and research.

Second, it is important to highlight the learning opportunity afforded by my sitting in classes taught by my peers at Georgetown. Less expository and much more open to the dialogue with students, their ways of teaching helped me to put my own practice into critical perspective and, after returning to Lisbon, to encourage my Portuguese students to adopt a different attitude and become more active participants in class.

Among several others, I attended classes on the literature of the American West, taught by Lucy Maddox, and a MA seminar on American history of the nineteenth century, led by Ronald Johnson. In this last one I was invited to present a paper and discuss it with all the participants, an experience which made me feel as if I were a real student in a graduate program. Both the subjects taught and discussed and, above all, the interaction between the several members of this seminar were enriching beyond my expectations. This experience allowed me to have a better understanding of my own circumstances as a Portuguese (in both



personal and professional levels) and of how different was my way of looking at several subjects under scrutiny, when compared with that of my American seminar colleagues, whose distinctions of point of view and cultural backgrounds I also learned to appreciate. It also provided me with a more insightful and down to earth approach to the history of the USA as lived by the people that built the country, with their dreams, opportunities or lack of them, stamina, and much more, thus expanding even more my knowledge of the complexity of the USA as a country that, as Whitman wrote, "contain[s] multitudes".

Thirdly, my experience as a Fulbrighter was also enhanced by the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Enrichment Program in Washington DC, due to the exchanges among grantees of different origins and disciplines that it fostered, as well as the field excursions outside Washington, such as the one to Monticello, which offered privileged occasions for a better understanding of a country shaped by ideals, concrete attention to detail and opportunity, and a wide variety of peoples and cultures.

Last but not least, while in Georgetown, I also took the opportunity to further consolidate the successful negotiations held by my colleague Teresa in the previous year, which had resulted in the signing of a faculty exchange agreement between the English Department of the University of Lisbon and the English Department and the American Studies Program of the University of Georgetown. This demanding faculty exchange program became effective in the following academic year and would, over the years, involve several Portuguese and American scholars of different fields (fiction, autobiography, theater, cinema, and more). It also allowed me to join it a few years later and teach American Modernism to Georgetown students, an experience I'll never forget. It placed me in a highly challenging but also rewarding position as a teacher, since I had to adjust my teaching practice to a quite different learning environment and audience. But it also put me in real-life contact with a practice that only years later would appear in Portugal, that of the evaluation of teachers by students at the end of the semester. This would later help me to deal with the changes introduced in



Portugal in terms of faculty evaluation and also to discuss it with colleagues who were very much against this procedure.

I had welcomed Fulbright scholars in Lisbon previous to my actually receiving the opportunity of being one. But the experience of having this grant meant a change in my professional life and my attitude towards my object of study, the USA that goes beyond what can be described in these short comments. It gave me breath and scope, it gave me tools, it gave me an outlook on my profession and mission as a Portuguese scholar that I doubt I would have been able to acquire otherwise.

Moreover, I further realized how important the Fulbright program was and how much valued it was in the USA – any time I chanced to mention my Fulbrighter status, the response was always, "wow!".

Being a Fulbright scholar was, indeed, a privilege, for which I am really thankful.