In José Saramago’s novel, *A Jangada de Pedra*, the Iberian Peninsula breaks off from Europe as a geological chasm appears along the Pyrenees. The Peninsula drifts out into the Atlantic in the direction of North America, only to turn south, eventually coming to a halt in the South Atlantic, mid way between Africa and South America. The novel was first published in 1986, the year Portugal and Spain entered the European Union, and is a fairly clear statement that the author saw the future of the two countries as lying more with the nations they had spawned over the centuries of their imperial history than with Northern Europe, and in particular, the richer members of the European Union.¹ Thinkers on the left in Britain had also questioned the desirability of giving precedence to membership of a European political and economic community over traditional links with the countries of the Commonwealth. What is interesting here is that we have a Portuguese writer including both his own country and its traditional rival, not to mention potential enemy, in his utopian solution to an Iberian future, an attitude that stands in contrast to the narrower Portuguese nationalism of the old colonial dictatorship that came to an end in 1974.²

Yet if we can accept what might be termed an overall Iberian presence in the Atlantic based on linguistic and cultural similarities, and a commonality of strategic interests that was not necessarily limited to the sixty years of the Habsburg dominion between 1580 and 1640, it also should be remembered that the Portuguese role in the traffic of humans and cultures backwards and forwards across the Atlantic was far more important than that of the Spanish. Even before the Treaty of Tordesillas formally delineated Portuguese and Spanish spheres of influence, the Portuguese

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¹ The novel was published in English translation in 1994, under the title of *The Stone Raft*. Saramago won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998.

had virtual freedom to explore and exploit resources on the coast of West Africa down into the Gulf of Guinea. Soon, Portuguese interpretations of the North/South line agreed by the Treaty enabled the country to lay claim to what would become the coast of Brazil, and when sugar cane was introduced into the coastal belt from across the South Atlantic in São Tomé, the largest ever traffic in human labour would begin. Indeed, over a period of three centuries, the Portuguese carried approximately 45% of African slaves taken across the Atlantic from Angola and the Kongo, mainly through the ports of Luanda and Benguela, and Brazil received 45% of all Africans affected by the slave trade, most of these originating in Central Africa and carried across the South Atlantic. So the very heart of the Lusophone Atlantic lies in the Angola-Brazil axis. Indeed, so important was Angola to Brazil that the relations between these two Portuguese colonies was more dynamic than that with Portugal itself, and it is no coincidence that Luanda was recaptured from temporary Dutch control in 1654 by a naval task force raised in Brazil. Nor is it surprising that in the eventual treaty whereby Portugal recognised the independence of Brazil in 1825, the new nation undertook not to seek to take Angola with it.

If the role of the Portuguese in the slave trade between Angola and Brazil was the engine of what we can now term the Lusophone Atlantic, two further questions must be considered. To what extent, did the Portuguese play a cultural role outside their immediate sphere of political influence? In other words, do the cultures of the Lusophone Atlantic infiltrate into other colonial worlds? From the late fifteenth century, the Cape Verde Islands assumed a growing importance as a refuelling station and an entrepôt for trade in textiles, rum, and slaves with the adjacent Guinea coast and the kingdoms of the interior. The language that became in

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3 The Portuguese sought to tap the gold trade through the fort of São Jorge da Mina (present-day Elmina in the modern state of Ghana). The fort was built in 1482, and was in Portuguese hands until 1642. It became an important regional hub for the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The Treaty of Tordesillas between Portugal and Spain was signed in 1494, assigning to Portugal all lands east of a longitudinal line drawn 370 leagues west of the Cape Verdes.

