

*“dreaming of the Empire of Nostalgia”:  
John Mateer’s Southern Barbarians*

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**Abstract:** This article deals with the politics of observing and commenting on “elsewhere” in John Mateer’s “Portuguese collection” of poetry, *Southern Barbarians* (2011), with particular recourse to Marc Augé’s anthropological theories of places and non-places. It also attempts to establish connections between Mateer’s perceptions of Portugal and questions related to a Portuguese national identity as formulated by contemporary cultural commentators (Eduardo Lourenço, José Gil, Boaventura de Sousa Santos). In doing so, an exploration of the relationship between Portugal and Australia becomes inevitable.

**Keywords:** Australia; elsewhere; John Mateer; Portugal; *Southern Barbarians*

If one is to believe Marc Augé, “we live in a world where the experience that ethnologists traditionally called ‘cultural contact’ has become a general phenomenon” (109), and that is the main feature of “supermodernity”, the world we live in. Though a truism of sorts, such an assertion becomes challenging when Augé suggests that rather than simplifying the way we conceptualize the world, and necessarily, our position in it, this phenomenon adds layers of complication to our politics of space, as “[t]he first problem with an ethnology of the ‘here’ is that it still deals with an ‘elsewhere’, but an ‘elsewhere’ that cannot be perceived as a singular and distinct (exotic) object” (109). Thus even if the contours of “elsewhere” are becoming increasingly blurred, the encounter with other places is still carried out from a specifically situated and contextualised starting point, and that which is encountered still holds the potential for alienation and the ability to cause awe and misunderstanding in equal measure, making this “elsewhere” a source of enquiry into otherness as well as into selfhood.

In John Mateer’s travel book, *Semar’s Cave* (2004), an account of a journey to Indonesia, he reveals he is suspicious of the idea of cultural exchange, and rather than seeing the world as divided into discrete, different nations, he favours a model of flowing connections and overlapping cultural zones, a configuration that resonates with Augé’s theorization of “supermodernity”. In his poetic work Mateer seeks to further investigate those connections. He moves comfortably in the quicksand of observing and recording “elsewhere”, and he is aware of the vicissitudes of representing this “elsewhere”, of which the category of the

exotic is a pitfall. These interests mean that there is something of a pattern to be found in the way Mateer's more recent collections of poems have developed: they are poems about, or inspired by, the places he travels to. This methodological procedure has prompted a reviewer to refer to him as "the most recent reincarnation of the international poet, a post-expat literary explorer, perpetual student, and cultural chameleon" (Shook, 72). In his travels, Mateer restlessly attempts to find points of contact between other cultures and his own, this latter a difficult issue to pin down itself, for as he observes in an interview with Anne Kellas, he feels both at home and alien in South Africa (where he was born and lived during his childhood) and in Australia (where he has been living since 1989). This gives rise to a dynamic in his work that brings together both liminality and a craving for belonging, resulting in a tension between naming and distance.

Augé's theories of supermodernity entail a vision of the world divided into places and non-places. Anthropological places are described by Augé as "formed by individual identities, through complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living know-how" (101). These places are opposed to non-places, the domain of motorways, shopping centres, airports, and the internet. According to Augé, "non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality" (94). Augé further develops his notion of non-places by suggesting that: "[c]learly the word 'non-place' designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces" (94). Both Mateer's *modus operandi*, and Augé's suggestion that "[t]he traveller's space may thus be the archetype of non-place" (86), support the case for Mateer's experience of dislocation to be read as a poetic non-place, albeit not in the sense of motorways or shopping centres as dreary sites of transit, but in the sense of those spaces where people are forced into contact with large circulations of others, and in which trajectories cannot be predicted from their presence in those spaces.

Mateer feels none of the words available to describe people who are dislocated from their homelands applies to himself. In an interview with Mike Heald, when asked about his impressions of the "New South-Africa" after a visit in 2001, he says:

I have many feelings about the so-called New South Africa. To some extent I feel that I am lost to the country, that I don't belong there, and yet I also feel incredibly moved by it and its people, and I feel that some of my best poetry is about South Africa. There is really no word to name what I am in relation to the country. I don't fit the connotations of any words that come to mind: I'm not really an immigrant, an émigré, a refugee, an exile, a fugitive ... While this every so often gives me some kind of existential anxiety I think it is actually useful to me as a writer.

In fact, it could be said that the mediation of this anxiety is precisely what informs his writing the most. Mateer's experience of dislocation makes him particularly suited to chronicling the encounter with locations where complicities of belonging are only partly

occupied or even barely occupied at all, as he does in *Southern Barbarians*, his “Portuguese collection”.

In the first poem of *Southern Barbarians*, “The President” (21), Mateer has Xanana Gusmão struggling with a translation, an episode whose symbolism reverberates throughout the entire collection both in the poem’s focus on the most important link between Australia and Portugal – East Timor – and in its attention to translation as a subject matter. In *Southern Barbarians*, translation is revealed as the most effective means of mediation not only between cultures, but also between individuals. Throughout the collection, the poet appears as a translated subject attempting to find his ground amongst the possibilities and the frustrations offered by linguistic and cultural translation.<sup>1</sup> One immediately significant aspect of “The President” is the alignment of East Timor with Portugal through the fact that Gusmão has already written part of a *Lusiads* for East Timor – *The Lusiads* being an epic poem that supported and justified the Portuguese imperial project which was to eventually fail the Timorese with such disastrous results. Xanana Gusmão is struggling to translate himself into English (from Portuguese, a language itself struggling in East Timor), while maintaining support for a language, which albeit associated with colonialism, played an important role of resistance during the Indonesian occupation. This affective relationship with the Portuguese language on the part of the current generation of Timorese leaders is seen by many in Australia as economically and politically impracticable for an emerging nation in East Timor’s geopolitical situation, one which will still require the nation to translate itself into a more “global” language, as Gusmão is doing in the poem. And when he tries to find an English word that rhymes with “sadness”, it is licit to hear “madness”. In this poem, Xanana Gusmão is not just adopting a language, but also a foundational text, an identitarian framework that may seem inadequate to many. It is obvious to his Australian biographer, who cannot quite understand his poetic endeavour – “She was hoping he wasn’t struggling with that: her teeth were chattering” (21) – despite her willingness to write his story. This is also the first of several references to Australia that portray it as either indifferent to or ignorant of Portugal.

Mateer also takes on *The Lusiads* himself in *Southern Barbarians*, devoting a section of the book to six minor characters in Camões’s epic (69-71). These unsung characters acquire a voice that they never had in Portuguese history, and are an example of Mateer’s evocation of the overlooked to unsettle what is known. Throughout the collection, he spans a wide range of perceived “Portuguese-related” subjects: apart from East Timor and *The Lusiads*, he makes reference to Fernando Pessoa, codfish, port wine, and even Portuguese custard tarts; he mentions famous navigators and the River Tagus, as well as places which could conceivably be familiar to a tourist such as the Cemitério da Ajuda, and the café A Brasileira, for instance, but he also shows his knowledge of the country is not just superficial, claiming a position within the Portuguese realm which is clearly distinct from that of a tourist.

One section of the collection is about people Mateer met when he was in Portugal, and here his attachment to his native country becomes more apparent, for he mostly connects to these people through their shared African background. The people referred to here include

Eduardo Pitta, a Mozambican writer and literary critic, to whom he feels close via their shared experience of exile from Southern Africa; Ângela Ferreira, a prominent artist, also born in Mozambique; Ana Paula Tavares, a poet whom he calls “an Angolan mother to me” (49); and, through their love for Fernando Pessoa (brought up in South Africa), American writer Richard Zenith, Pessoa’s translator into English.

Fernando Pessoa himself features in several poems. In the poem “Richard”, where Mateer speaks of an encounter with Zenith, he recalls “Sitting out in the front under the umbrellas we discussed The Master / and how he never wrote of Africa” (45). In the same poem Mateer says “*My childhood paralleled his*” (45; italics in original), referencing, at least in part, their childhood in South Africa, and in “Pessoa as Photographed Child”, addressing Pessoa: “You are my Self captured in this photograph / And I am your sole-surviving heteronym” (27). Nowhere does Mateer show more acutely his desire to inhabit complicities of belonging than in this attempt to claim a connection with Pessoa, an icon of Portuguese and European modernist anxiety over the solidity of cultural reference points.

Two poems in this collection particularly relate Mateer’s troubled historicizing of these reference points in conjunction with Augé’s anthropological theory of supermodernity: “Caparica – The People’s Beach” (32), and “On the Train from Cascais to Lisbon” (38). By setting the first poem on a commuter ferry, Mateer inscribes it in one of Augé’s non-places. From that non-place, the poet looks at an anthropological place – Lisbon. The physical starting point of the poet on the shores of the River Tagus is the same as that from where the caravels and galleons used to leave on the great voyages of exploration. On the commuter ferry, heading for a beach in part of Lisbon’s hinterland on the south side of the river, the poet encounters Africa in the form of the immigrants of Cape Verdean origin, but turns his attention to the Portuguese who are not interested in Africa as much as in enjoying the beach: “instead of staring far into the haze awaiting the return of King Sebastião. / Now that vigil is reserved for the foreigner in us, / for he who would happily and endlessly ride a commuter ferry” (32). King Sebastião, apparently ignored by the contemporary Portuguese according to Mateer, evokes and embodies one of the strongest national myths: that someone will come to return Portugal to its lost position of power and significance in the world.<sup>2</sup> To some extent then, Mateer challenges Augé’s assertion that “elsewhere” cannot be perceived as a distinct object, insofar as he searches relentlessly for distinctive characteristics in the places he visits, although he sometimes finds, as in this poem, that the experience is not so exotic after all, for the description of the people on the beach sounds as if it could be about people in Australia (including the echoes of the culturally loaded Australian beach). This moment of realisation leads him to conclude that looking for the messianic King Sebastião is something ironically reserved for the tourist, the foreigner who tries to relate to some archetypal Portuguese mythic identity; that in fact it is this identity that *is* the lost King Sebastião.

In “On the Train from Cascais to Lisbon” the sudden sight of gum trees also disrupts the description of a Portuguese scenario, in another disjunction between the putative elsewhere of the exotic and its display of markers identified as belonging to the everyday of where he has come from – Australian gum trees. Being on the train, in transit

from one anthropological place to another, Mateer is again in one of Augé's non-places, where "the blur of Portuguese conversations" (38) and the familiar sight of a piece of typical Australiana, a stand of eucalypts, prompt the question about his geographical location and, immediately connected to this, the question of his own identity. The humorously self-aware comment that closes the poem – "by the wonder of whether in my abrupt forgetfulness / I should ask, / *Where am I?* Or, being the poet, *Who am I?*" (38; italics in original) – seems to imply that there is a close connection between the places where we are and who we are, or more exactly, the places where we think we are and who we believe or desire ourselves to be. And even here, the poet's position is uncertain. In a review of *Southern Barbarians*, Adam Aitken makes explicit the itinerant poet's condition:

The world's privileged (including its artists and writers) have unprecedented means to travel the globe and to wear the trappings of happy hybridity, but no easy means to overcome alienation from the native's deeper and more authentic experience of their place. Mateer's achievement is another archive and critique of the moments of connection of tourist/poet with the other.

Mateer's connection with Portugal is a close one: he likes it to the extent of often having his poetic voice identify with the Portuguese as "we". He refers to the Portuguese language as "that tongue / I love, of slurs and growls and lispings" (60) in the poem "The Seen and the Heard", and he connects with Portugal beyond the temporal experience of location in "There Remains another Place" (61), for example, where he finds connections with Portugal even when he is elsewhere. This poem also gestures towards two of Augé's defining characteristics of anthropological places: "complicities of language and local references" (Augé, 101) in its use of words in Portuguese ("uma bica", "saudade"), its mentioning of specific locations ("café A Brasileira") and its reference to Pessoa's travel guide written in English *Lisboa: What the Tourist Should See*. Such references are present throughout the collection and indicate a familiarity with his subject which is greater than that of the occasional tourist.

In the search for connections within *Southern Barbarians*, an evocation of Kenneth McIntyre's *The Secret Discovery of Australia* (1982) becomes inevitable and is referred to in a two-part poem (83-4) bearing the same name as McIntyre's book. This poem is inserted in a larger section, "Secret Discoveries", where three elements that historians have used as "proof" of the Portuguese having been the first Europeans to sight Australia are dealt with: three keys thought lost by Cristóvão de Mendonça, a shipwrecked caravel dating from the early sixteenth century, and the origin of the name Abrolhos (islands off the coast of Western Australia). In the poem about the caravel, "On seeing the replica of a ship believed wrecked near Warrnambool, also circa 1520", the Portuguese arrival in Australia recedes into a dream world: the caravel is "mythic" and exists only, albeit intensely (it shines), in his mind. But perhaps more significantly, this caravel is a replica, it does not exist as the real thing: "There, seen between the old broken pines, / run aground in a country frontyard, / the dark hull of the half-built caravel, / like a boulder blown from the lip of a volcano / is mythic – inhuman – and shining behind my closed eyes" (84).

Contrary to what would be expected, and to the eagerness with which Portugal is always ready to reclaim past glories, McIntyre's thesis that the Portuguese arrived in Australia more than 200 years before James Cook<sup>3</sup> was not enthusiastically or blindly accepted in Portuguese academia, and has been refuted, particularly by Luis de Albuquerque, one of Portugal's foremost historians of the period of maritime expansion. Albuquerque is supported by an engraved rock found in South Africa which seems to prove that Cristóvão de Mendonça, the Portuguese captain who supposedly arrived in Australia between 1519 and 1524, was actually in Africa at the time (Albuquerque, 101-102). Albuquerque closes his argument with a sentence that finds a curious echo in another poem by Mateer dealing with the Great Voyages, "After Returning from a Voyage of Exploration": "In [Cristóvão de Mendonça's] wanderings in search of the island of Gold, he almost certainly never even saw Australia" (Albuquerque, 102; my translation). Something of an uneasy relationship with Australia emerges from the poem "After Returning from a Voyage of Exploration" – possibly an expression of Mateer's own ambivalent feelings towards his adopted country, a hypothesis supported by the use not only of a first person narrator, but of his own name. Here he is a navigator "swearing he can't see Australia" and dreaming "that one day there will be a poet / named John Mateer, just as there was once, / off the edge of maps, a monster / called Australia" (41).

Why Portugal has never made any serious attempt to claim any sort of historical primacy over Australia is puzzling given the centrality in the national imaginary of the achievements of the supposedly defining period of Portuguese maritime expansion and the historic rivalry of Portugal and Britain as colonial powers. But the reasons why Australia might be intermittently interested in constructing an alternative European origin speak of a desire to break with a particular framing discourse at the same time as the practical inconsequentiality of the Portuguese having arrived before the British allows a familiar, safe matrix to be maintained, a desire that can only be read as emphasising a history of arrivals and possession rather than one of native belonging. This desire is part of a larger school that, as Lars Jensen put it in *Unsettling Australia*, "sees Australian culture as arising from a series of radical breaks from a British based, hierarchical value system, which is understood to be intrinsically alien to Australians" (31). Furthermore, siding with Portugal rather than with Britain is to support the underdog, which in colonial history was Australia's own position with respect to the imperial origin. In Boaventura de Sousa Santos's crucial study of Portuguese identity, "Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Inter-identity", he advocates that Portuguese colonialism was a "subaltern colonialism" (9), subordinate in particular to British colonialism:

Portuguese colonialism was the result both of a deficit of colonization – Portugal's incapacity to colonize efficiently – and an excess of colonization – the fact that the Portuguese colonies were submitted to a double colonization: Portugal's colonization and, indirectly, the colonization of the core countries (particularly England) of which Portugal was dependent (often in a near colonial way). (9-10)

According to Santos, this was a consequence of the semi-peripheral position Portugal has occupied in the capitalist world system since the seventeenth century.

Not completely unlike Mateer's poem "After Returning from a Voyage of Exploration", the Portuguese seem to deny the existence of Australia in the sense that despite the putative or actual historical connections with the country, they are not particularly interested in them.<sup>4</sup> This contrasts with the texts that regularly come out of Australia, both historical such as *Luca Antara: Passages in Search of Australia* by Martin Edmond (2006) and *Beyond Capricorn: How Portuguese Adventurers Secretly Discovered and Mapped Australia 250 years before Captain Cook* by Peter Trickett (2007), and fictional such as *Wrack* by James Bradley (1997) and the feature film *Sweet Talker* directed by Michael Jenkins and starring high-profile Bryan Brown (1991), all works that reach back to Portugal as a possible place of origin. If anything, the Portuguese read Australia through their reservations with respect to Australian attitudes toward and designs over East Timor, and as David Callahan puts it in the introduction to *Australia: Who Cares?*, most of the (very few) news items arriving in Portugal about Australia portray it somewhat negatively as:

a heartless spurner of the weak and needy, an incarcerator of those desperate refugees who get through, and, on the iconic location of the beach, a thuggish dealer of violence to certain minority groups who manage to make it out into the community, as well as a nation that arrogantly refuses to support initiatives to reduce greenhouse gases or even to take in Pacific Island neighbours who have lost their homes as a result of rising ocean levels. (1)

Although Mateer arrived at Portugal as a subject via South Africa, Australia becomes inevitably present in his relationship with Portugal inasmuch as it is a site of both displacement and home, albeit in ways that challenge the poetic imaginary to make connections when rupture and voyaging appear to characterise both his personal history, the history of his relationship with Portugal, and the history of Portugal itself.

A craving for belonging, accompanied by the painful realisation that however much one identifies with a place and its people, one is perceived as a stranger, is felt in the poem "Cemitério da Ajuda" where, walking through a graveyard and looking in on the crypts the poet becomes overwhelmed with sadness and weeps "as I never do in my adopted country" (31). But when he walks past three old women wearing mournful black clothes "they don't murmur *Bom dia*. To them I am less than the dead, / not even a curator of remains, not even a ghost-writer – *a tourist*" (31; italics in original). Mateer's disappointment is understandable, as the role of the tourist lacks the authority recognised as belonging to any of the agents involved in the establishing of a cultural unit, as accounted for by Seyla Benhabib in "On the Use and Abuse of Culture":

all analyses of cultures, whether empirical or normative, must begin by distinguishing the standpoint of the social observer – whether an eighteenth-century narrator or chronicler; a nineteenth-century general, linguist, or educational reformer; or a twentieth-century anthropologist, secret agent, or

development worker – is the one who imposes, together with local elites, unity and coherence on cultures as observed entities. (5)

Whatever role the locals inscribe him in, Mateer is absorbed in surveying both the mythical Portugal and the modern Portugal, albeit a very selective modern Portugal. It can be said that he looks in anthropological places for something essential and authentic, something that is not to be found elsewhere, and particularly not in the homogenised, uncharacteristic non-places that are everywhere, but as Susan Stewart states in her book *On Longing*:

[w]ithin the development of culture under an exchange economy, the search for authentic experience and, correlatively, the search for the authentic object become critical. As experience is increasingly mediated and abstracted, the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world is replaced by a nostalgic myth of contact and presence. 'Authentic' experience becomes both elusive and allusive as it is placed beyond the horizon of present lived experience, the beyond in which the antique, the pastoral, the exotic, and other fictional domains are articulated. (133)

To these can be added the fictional domain of the past, the fictional domain at the heart of the most interesting debates related to Portugal's national identity, and one which Mateer is ever aware of and determined to locate the traces of.

Apart from the aforementioned article by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, few studies dealing with what might be termed "a questioning of Portuguese identity" have achieved such iconic status as Eduardo Lourenço's *O Labirinto da Saudade* [*The Labyrinth of Longing*] and José Gil's *Portugal, Hoje: O Medo de Existir* [*Portugal, Today: The Fear of Existing*]. However, the phrase "a questioning of Portuguese identity" can only be used reluctantly here, and always within inverted commas, according to both Lourenço and Gil. For Lourenço the Portuguese do not have a national identity problem as such; rather, identity issues become focused on national images or modes of representation, as the aspects that tend to characterise a nation, or indeed divide it – such as territory, language, shared myths and ethnic background – have been fixed in Portugal for over 800 years. In Lourenço's words: "[o]ur question is one of our *image* as a product and a reflection of our historical existence and project down through the centuries, and in particular in the modern era, in which that existence was submitted to severe and crippling deprivations" (11, my translation).

Both Lourenço and Gil trace the current difficulties in creating a positive self-image to the right-wing dictatorship (1926-1974), which particularly under Salazar was considered by many to be one of the most repressive in Europe. Moreover, it was unlike other oppressive régimes that tried to create a sense of the individual as a part of a wider, more significant whole, in that it worked towards a dilution of any sense of a forward-looking national project in favour of occupying symbolic identificatory locations that were supposed to be timeless and intrinsic to the nation.

There seems in any event to be a great gap between the way the Portuguese see themselves and what they would like to be seen as. Whereas the conventional domain of the past still plays an important role, there is a consensus that instead of looking out to sea and to their historical maritime vocation, they should be looking more towards the rest of Europe (despite Santos's realisation that Portugal's subaltern type of colonialism "has continued to reproduce itself in the way in which Portugal has become part of the European Union" (9)). Consistent to both perspectives is, on the one hand, a feeling that there is not enough recognition of Portugal's historical feats as a nation, and on the other, an almost pathetic gratefulness for any sort of recognition whatsoever. Gil summarises this duality when he says:

The examples of the 'good image of Portugal in the world' do not suffice to obliterate the dispirited climate that envelops us. Because we come from such a profoundly unbalanced situation (which the Salazar regime both reactivated and created in manifold aspects), anything that the rest of the world can offer us as narcissistic valorisation (from the Nobel Prize for Literature to the renown accorded Portuguese soccer players) is never enough to satisfy our eagerness for compliments. (132, my translation)

Mateer does accord Portugal sensitive recognition, a recognition moreover that perceives that the country is all too ready to write itself in the same discourses as those European nations it looks to. With *Southern Barbarians* however, John Mateer is on a quest for the "authentic" Portugal; he is not interested in the Portugal of modern shopping centres open every day until 11pm, of one of the most advanced ATM systems in the world, or the sophisticated mobile phone technology which invented the pay-as-you-go system. He prefers the Portugal of Fado, of the resonant historical past and what he calls "the Empire of Nostalgia" (40, 61). But just how many Portuguese people relate to that vision of their own country and feel it to be the blueprint of their identities remains a challenge to the seeker after exposure to the supposed real place of the authentic, and one Mateer is duly self-conscious about. Despite his predilections, he makes it clear on more than one occasion that he is aware that the cultural unit is an illusion. Benhabib explains why this illusion might be tempting, and how this hegemonising perspective is necessarily the position of an outsider:

Any view of cultures as clearly delineable wholes is a view from the outside that generates coherence for the purposes of understanding and control. Participants in the culture, by contrast, experience their traditions, stories rituals and symbols, tools, and material living conditions through shared, albeit contested and contestable, narrative accounts. From within, a culture need not appear as a whole; rather, it forms a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it. (5)

In the end, nowhere remains more elsewhere than an elsewhere whose existence is foreclosed by the very search for an authenticity that is by definition ideal, and thus, ironically, guaranteeing that it will remain elsewhere for ever. In the way it keeps

presenting itself as a mystifying experience to Mateer, i.e., the more he attempts to define it with any degree of precision, the more elusive it becomes, Portugal is nevertheless granting him a type of citizenship, a way to belong. In this quest for a mirage that takes shape in the poems articulating its absence, Mateer finally reveals himself as a Portuguese poet after all.

## Notes

1. Examples of this can also be found, for example, in the poems “Translators are Angels” (29), “Richard” (45) and “The Translator” (71).

2. King Sebastião (b.1554) reigned from 1568 to 1578. His death during the battle of Alcácer Quibir, in the North of Africa, before he had left any heirs to the throne, eventually led to a sixty year period of Spanish domination, between 1580 and 1640. As his body was never found, the idea that King Sebastião would return to save the Portuguese from the Spaniards and regain national independence became established. This myth outlasted the Spanish rule and it continues to resurface in the Portuguese imaginary.

3. McIntyre was the first to lay down this theory *in detail*; others had already advanced it before him.

4. It is indeed puzzling that for all the interest and debate that such an argument has caused in Australia (which may not have been that great, but has been varied), the range of responses on the Portuguese side remains very narrow. Even when the possibility is not dismissed, the question as to why the “rights” derived from primacy were not pursued goes unexamined. Some of the reasons might include the following: by the early sixteenth century Portugal had made the arrival in Brazil official and a lot of effort was being put into colonising it; and the country was also trying to secure prickly commercial relationships that it had recently established with China and Japan. Both situations were proving highly profitable, and yet as the demand for money by the court was wildly in excess of the money the empire was making, it probably felt wiser to stick to what was known than embarking on a new enterprise. Shortly after the date that is proposed for the arrival in Australia, Portugal fell into a sixty year period of Spanish rule, the first for 400 years, so secrecy must have been intended in order that the fabled Island of Gold (which Australia might have been) would not fall under Spanish control. And possibly one of the most important factors is that arriving in Australia actually meant that the Portuguese had breached the Treaty of Tordesillas dividing up the world with Spain, and that being the case, Portugal would have incurred the displeasure of both the Pope and Spain.

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