

Who is written? The Representation of the Other in Rewriting Experiments during the Portuguese Colonial War and the Mozambican Liberation Struggle

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The title of my article, “Who is written?”, is a wanted dislocation of the question “who is writing?”. This dislocation should allow me to delimit the complex issue concerning what is (too easily designated) colonial encounter. Actually, in this encounter both a problem of writing and a problem concerning the configuration of the Other, or the assigning of the place of the Other, is involved.

At the same time, within the dynamics and mechanisms created in this context and in particular within the space-time of the colonial war on which the focus is placed here, it is important to grasp the tension between the narrative fabrications of the State pertaining to the community it governs, in the case of this paper, the nation (even if just a project) or the empire-nation, and the narrative constructions produced by its subjects which subvert the established order.

My article thus seeks to combine these two issues, writing and alterity, by choosing to study a very specific kind of writing of the nineteen-seventies, the poetic experiments, the lyrics of songs of soldiers during the colonial war in Mozambique as a work of deconstruction and reconstruction of ideological representations of identity and alterity in the constitution of the ties of belonging to a community.

I will take two texts as an example, one is part of the narrative production of soldiers¹ of the Portuguese colonial army and the other one was written by activists of the FRELIMO. In both cases using the concepts of Homi Bhabha (2004) I will discuss the workings of the *performative* dynamics from below in relation to the *pedagogical* statements of a state power. In each of the two cases we will be confronted with the irruption of gaps within a social as well as esthetical tissue which one believed to be homogenous and without fissures. Then it will become clear that these gaps, which disrupt and dislocate the grand narratives (Lyotard 1979), are finally nothing else but the result of a work on one's self and the other.

I will start with a poetical experiment conducted by an activist of the FRELIMO within the dynamics of a local editorial context. A brief description of the setting of these poetical productions is necessary for a comprehension of what is at stake here. During the Mozambican struggle for national liberation (1964²-1974) a part of its effort was dedicated to

¹ The term soldier is the only possibility to translate the Portuguese word "militar" which does not signify a rank but just the belonging to an army. Even if they were not written by high-ranking officers, the kind of texts evoked could have been produced by military personnel with various ranks.

² The FRELIMO was founded in Dar-es-Salaam in 1962 drawing from three movements (UDENAMO, *União Democrática Nacional de Moçambique*, MANU, *Mozambique African Nationalist Union*, UNAMI, *União Nacional de Moçambique*) that had been formed in exile by Mozambicans who had found refuge in neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi and were influenced by African nationalist currents as well as the recent independence of former French and British colonies. These Mozambicans were joined by those who had taken another path of exile passing through the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império* (1944-65) in Lisbon and then France before moving on to some North African countries. Conceived as a mirror of a pluri-racial and pluri-continental nation and designed to form the elites of overseas Portugal, the *Casa dos Estudantes do Império* was created by the Portuguese government. Paradoxically, it provided the breeding ground for the emergence of nationalist movements and a formative experience, in the case

information. Basically two types of publications existed, those published by the central authorities and edited in Dar-es-Salaam, the headquarters of the movement, and those which were elaborated in a local context by grass-roots activists or low-level officers in politico-military preparation camps such as Nachingwea³, the most important one, or military bases in Cabo Delgado, Niassa or Tete. In the first case, for example the very important journal *Mozambique Revolution* was published, in the second case a journal like *25 de Setembro* was edited in Nachingwea⁴. These journals featured poems and occasionally stories and life histories.

of Mozambique, for leaders of the FRELIMO such as Marcelino dos Santos, Sergio Vieira, Jorge Rebelo and Fernando Ganhão. In 1961 the exiled nationalists from the Portuguese colonies formed the CONCP – *Conferência das Organizações Nacionalistas das Colónias Portuguesas* – in Rabat, Morocco. This organisation was to play an important role in the definition of common models of anti-colonial struggle and political choices of the future nations. The liberation war in Mozambique started in 1964, in Angola in 1961 and in Guinea-Bissau in 1963.

³ The Nachingwea camp, in the south of Tanzania, would become a fundamental part of the symbolic narrative concerning the liberation struggle. It was considered by the leaders of FRELIMO to be the “laboratory” of the new society and of the Mozambican new man.

⁴ For all of this background and an analysis of these local journals see Maria-Benedita Basto (part 3, chapter 1).

About ten journals are involved of which only two, *25 de Setembro* and *Os Heróicos* appear in relevant bibliographies, in particular Ilídio Rocha’s (2000), the most accomplished work up to the present. The other ones, *3 de Fevereiro*, *Jornal Semanal de Tunduru*, *O Camarada*, *A Luta Continua*, *Rasgando as Trevas* are practically unknown. Certain journals – *Rasgando as Trevas* and *O Camarada* are the products of FRELIMO schools in Tanzania, whereas the majority is the result of activities in preparation, hosting or educational camps such as Nachingwea and Tunduru, or military bases such as Cabo Delgado in the case of *Os Heróicos*, Eastern Niassa for *A Luta Continua*, or Tete for *3 de Fevereiro*. These publications were typewritten and reproduced with stencils or very basic manual printing machines. The pages are yellowish and the paper rough. Issues have an average of six to

At the end of 1971 the FRELIMO drew material from these journals in order to elaborate its anthology *Poesia de Combate*, one of the first books published by the FRELIMO with the aid of printing machines offered by Finnish students⁵.

I became interested in the discursive production of these journals and particularly the poetical experiments that were conducted there during my research on the relation between literature and nation in Mozambique. I wanted to find out if this anthology, which everyone seemed to take for granted, reflected the practices of FRELIMO activists, thus confirming the perfect correspondence between the book and the writings of the soldiers it claimed to represent and who in turn stood for the new (national) Mozambican poetry. My research unveiled a more complex reality, a single line of poetical production had been taken into account, excluding other forms of expression, namely, and this is the case of the poem I have chosen here, those where these activists decided to rewrite the Portuguese⁶ *imperial library*⁷.

eight pages, but the number of pages can vary between one for many issues of *Jornal do Centro* and twenty for certain issues of *25 de Setembro*. There are no photographs, but sometimes drawings or cartoons namely in *25 de Setembro* and *Os Heróicos* are included.

⁵ See Basto (362). I obtained this information from an issue of the journal *25 de Setembro* found during my research in the archives of the FRELIMO.

⁶ For the devices of rewriting see Basto (ibidem). In this study these devices are confronted with the theory of resistance within post-colonial studies in a critical analysis which, drawing from the work of Jacques Rancière and José Craveirinha suggests an alternative conceptualisation for the term “counter-discourse”.

⁷ Inspired by V.Y. Mudimbe’s term *colonial library* (1988) and Homi Bhabha’s *English book* (chap. 6) the term *imperial library* refers to the sum of orientations for the reading of canonical texts, such as the epic poem *The Lusíades* by Camões, through which they are transformed into symbols of an imperial ideology. The finality of this ideology is situated at three levels – the historical, the anthropological and the legal – respectively conveying the

One of the canonical texts which was invested by these activists is “O Mostrengo”, written by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, a poem which forms part of his work *Mensagem* published in 1931. What interested the poet-guerilleros was the figure of Adamastor recreated by Pessoa from the text *Os Lusíadas* by Luis Camões (1572) where it appears in the fifth canto.

This figure was to become extremely popular in the Portuguese imaginary, particularly in the version of Fernando Pessoa, which places a double emphasis on the nationalist nature of this episode. First of all, through the act of highlighting the character by dedicating a poem to him, secondly by producing a dramatic effect, through the creation of a true theatrical scene which did not exist in *Os Lusíadas*, involving the Portuguese on the one hand, represented by the commander of the ship and, on the other hand, Adamastor/Mostrengo. Spotlighting the courage of the Portuguese in their obedience towards the principles of patriotic duty, this scene accentuates the powerful and authoritarian character of Adamastor. Adamastor symbolises the victory of maritime Portuguese expansion and legitimates the establishment of its empire and its civilising mission within the ideological framework of the *imperial library*.

Written by Maguni⁸, the chosen poem is entitled precisely “O Gigante Adamastor” (The Giant Adamastor)⁹. This

value of the Lusitan race, its civilising mission and the legitimacy of empire. Forming part of the historical and ideological context of the Portuguese *Estado Novo*, the readings associated with the *imperial library* are part of a contradictory cultural project which simultaneously consists of demarcating one’s self from the other through the use of dichotomies, and of fixing the other within an image of the same which erases its alterity.

⁸ Maguni figures in *Poesia de Combate 2* (1978) with three poems, written between 1970 and 1972 without repeating these experiments and becoming a kind of “non-consecrated official poet-guerrilleiro”. Along with Jose Craveirinha, Maguni would receive, next to Craveirinha, the Nachingwea medal. For the date of publication of *Poesia de Combate 2* see Basto (idem 504).

text allows me to elaborate my argument which seeks to analyse writings that play on the knowing and ignorance of the other in what has been called the colonial encounter, raising the starting question “Who is written?” in the war context.

Maguni’s poem begins with the rewriting of a verse of Fernando Pessoa in a progressive deconstruction of the poem of this author. To put it differently, the whole poem is progressively deconstructed starting from this common point. A common point which marks, or is marked by the question with which the commander of the Portuguese ship is confronted by Adamastor and which is precisely an enquiry that pertains to the identity: “Quem é aquele que?” (Who is the one who?).

This situation is depicted in the first strophe:

Quem é aquele	Who is the one who
Cujo nome eu não conheço	Of whom I don’t know the name
Quem é aquele	Who is the one
Que quer a liberdade?	Who wants liberty?

(Maguni, 1967, p. 5)

However, in the poem of Maguni the person confronted is not placed in a situation of “invasion” as the one described in *Os Lusíadas*/“O Mostrengo”. In their pursuit of maritime adventure in these texts the Portuguese dared to enter into a space which until then had been considered off limits. Here, to the contrary, the person confronted wants “freedom”. This word, inscribed at the beginning of the poem, completely subverts the imperial reading of the texts, introducing a conflict between two ways of living, colonialism and the right to independence of colonised

⁹ Among the different poems which rewrite the figure of Adamastor, I also suggest reading Jorge Nyasengo’s poem “o dia 25 de Setembro”, (1971, September 25) *25 de Setembro*, 68 (ano 7), 5 and “O monstro” by Armando Guebuza, (1970, February/March, no date), *25 de Setembro*, 56, 12.

peoples. Those who want freedom find themselves legitimised in their struggle.

But the deconstruction of the poem is situated yet at another level. Precisely because one knows the original which is squatted by the Mozambican poem, we understand that the first question must have been uttered by the giant Adamastor. The further unravelling of the poem confronts us with an unexpected version which is expressed in the following strophes:

Ouvi um certo dia	I heard on a certain day
Falar dele	Speaking of him
Quando estive no dia	When I was on the day
Do primeiro combate	Of the first battle

Muitos dizem,	Many say,
E eu creio;	And I believe;
Que é o Guerrilheiro	That it is the guerillero
Suposto “Gigante Adamastor”	Supposed to be “Giant Adamastor”

In the first strophe we do not know who speaks, but it cannot be Adamastor. This “someone” who is speaking says that he has heard about that man who is searching for liberty the day of his first battle. In the second strophe, although, a first revelation is made: this man of whom one has heard people speak is the guerillero “supposed” to be Adamastor.

One can therefore remark that the Mozambican author did not choose to take the same path as the two Portuguese poems, *Os Lusíadas* and “O Mostrengo” suggested. Here, he turns around everything, presenting an upside down world, by changing the characters. The guerillero now is Adamastor.

But the intertwining of the original and the Mozambican text does not stop here. Let us read the final strophes:

Chamado assim,	Called like this,
Porque não conhecem	Because they don’t know
Quem faz a Guerra	Who wages War

Dentro de Moçambique

Dizem os próprios portugueses,
Que desde ao principio
Ate hoje em dia;
Que são pigmeus

Eles desconhecem,
Que pessoas são;
As vezes chamam por “Bandidos”

Outras, por “Gigante Adamastor”

Within Mozambique

Those same Portuguese say,
That from the beginning
Until today’s day;
They are pygmies.

They do not know,
Who these people are;
Sometimes they call them
“Bandits”

Other times, “Giant
Adamastor”

One can therefore see that in the end the poem interlaces the vision of the self with the vision of the other. The guerilleros are called by the Portuguese in this way, and by doing this the latter are caught up in their own myth. The Portuguese have invented a new giant with which they are once again confronted. Centuries after the first encounter, which opened the gates to the conquest of the lands of Mozambique, the figure who wanted to stop them in their conquest rises now, not from the sea as before, but from this earth itself. If the Portuguese associate them with Adamastor, they also show that they do not know against whom they are fighting the war, “They do not know who these people are”. And this phrase comes to co-answer the initial question. It is placed within the framework which concerns the questioning of identity that moves from the question – who is this? – to an anthropological approach – knowing the other. The Portuguese are not only ignorant about the others they have dominated, but also about themselves. They think they are fighting against a giant, but they call their adversaries “pygmies”, and, in their refusal to see their own weaknesses, they are tricked by their own myths.

One sees how Maguni plays with the images and returns them. The coloniser has a negative image of blacks that the word pygmy expresses: they are inferior beings. Ironically their small height is opposed to the image of the giant who the poet now places into the mouth of the Portuguese themselves. The myth which helped the Portuguese to affirm their strength also serves here to avow their weakness in facing the Mozambican soldiers.

Two types of ignorance interplay in this case, an anthropological and a political. In the first instance the colonised does not exist for the coloniser except as colonised. He does not recognise him beyond this assigned position, beyond the status and the place which he gave him as a coloniser within the colonial system. And because of that this force with which the Portuguese are now confronted can only be something new, something unknown.

In the second case of political ignorance the Portuguese do not recognise who is waging war because within a “one and undividable nation” the people that resist can only be considered bad citizens of this nation. They are “bandits”, “terrorists” and not soldiers. They are outlaws who are illegitimate in their combat. The colonial war, which defends the nation against its fragmentation, hence receives its full justification¹⁰.

¹⁰ See how one politically plays on the contradictions between knowing/ignoring, i.e., in recognising/non-recognising one's self in the answers of Silva Cunha, the former Minister of the Colonies and of Defence in an interview by Jorge Ribeiro: “do ponto de vista jurídico eram grupos [refere-se à Frelimo, PAIGC, etc] que estavam subordinados à soberania portuguesa, e portanto a autoridade podia exercer-se (from the legal point of view there were groups [he is referring to the FRELIMO, the PAIGC, etc.] that were subjected to Portuguese sovereignty, and nevertheless authority could be exercised)” (Ribeiro 209-10). The colonial war thus became legally justified because the whole issue was related to “disobedient” Portuguese and the State had the obligation to punish them. And when Jorge Ribeiro confronted him and told him that this might be the legal framework, but that the reality was not like this, because militarily and politically organised forces existed, the ex-minister answered: “Eram forças com apoio exterior, isso era conhecido. Juridicamente não se pode falar em crimes de guerra.

The second form of not-knowing is a consequence of the first one, of the image that the Portuguese power has constructed: minor people, fixed within a binary conception which associates the colonised with the figure of a savage (beast), the devil, the inferior, the non-human¹¹. The activist-journalists of *25 de*

Para haver crimes de guerra era preciso haver uma qualificação internacional de guerra. (They were forces with exterior support, a fact that was known. Legally one could not speak of war crimes. In order to have war crimes it would have been necessary to have an international qualification of war)” (Ribeiro *ibidem*). The same thing is evoked in *Resenha Histórico-Militar das Campanhas de África (1961-1974)*, published by the General staff of the army: “[...] Portugal não poderia reconhecer a existência de um estado de beligerância como se estivesse travando uma luta com Forças Armadas de um Estado inimigo. (Portugal could not recognise the existence of a state of belligerence as if it would be waging a struggle with the armed forces of an enemy State. – my translation)” (vol.1. 2nd edition, Lisbon, 1998. 248, cited in Vaz, 1997. 9). Nuno Mira Vaz pursues the argument by stating: “Em consonância com este entendimento, a documentação oficial produzida no período referia-se às forças militares e militarizadas portuguesas como as *Nossas Tropas* (NT), enquanto os sublevados foram designados durante um período de tempo assaz longo, por *terroristas* ou, de forma mais acintosa, por *turras*; quanto aos movimentos de libertação que os enquadravam, nunca foram referidos como tal e só alguns anos após o início das operações militares ganharam direito ao designativo – clássico em contexto de conflito internacional – de Inimigo. (In accordance with this understanding, the official documentation produced in the period refers to the military and militarised Portuguese forces as *Our Troops* [*Nossas Tropas*, NT], whereas the insurgents were designated for a quite long period of time as terrorists or, in a more provocative fashion, as *turras*; as far as the liberation movements which organised them are concerned, they were never referred to as such and only a few years after the beginning of military operations they won the right to the term – classic in the context of international conflict – of Enemy.)” (Vaz *idem* 10).

¹¹ See as example of this construction of a form of ignorance, as instance of a the staging of a condemned and/or animalised alterity an extract of a discourse of the minister of the army, Mário Silva made in May 1961: “[...] o exército não transige. Vamos combater selvagens. Vamos combater feras. Feras que não são portuguesas porque agem às ordens do comunismo internacional. Vamos enfrentar terroristas que têm de ser combatidos como se

Setembro are extremely lucid about this play of knowledge and ignorance and consider it to be another struggle to engage in. In an article entitled “Bandido” Assikulava shows with fine irony the way how language is used as an ideological device in the fabrication of an identity which allows the Portuguese power to justify the war: “[...] Caros Irmãos, o português até aqui não sabe quem é “Bandido” ou “Terrorista” apesar de serem puramente portuguesas as palavras; portanto cabe a nós Revolucionários ensinar ou mostra-los quem é um “Bandido” ou “Terrorista” (Assikulava p.4).¹² In another text entitled “São Coitados”¹³, signed by Nelson Bamaya, one can see the same kind of dismantling of the construction of an image of the Other, the image of the FRELIMO fighter:

combatem feras. (The army doesn't compromise. We will combat savages. We will combat wild beasts. Wild beasts that aren't Portuguese because they act on behalf of the orders of international communism. We will confront terrorists that need to be fought like one fights wild beasts.)” (Vaz idem 158). One can note the link with communist organisations and states which organise (and legitimise) this combat within the dichotomising space of cold war.

Two elements however remind us that the idea of colonial ignorance presented here cannot render the entire complexity of the situation. First of all, the army itself became aware of the fact that, in order to gain the support of the populations, it needed to obtain knowledge about the other, even if this did not necessarily lead to questioning the claim towards supremacy. Secondly, similar to their French and British counterparts, some colonial administrators adopted a “humanist” ethnological position which, while seeking to reach an understanding of “blacks”, was liable to reinforce their confinement within an identity of difference. For an example of such an endeavour see Manuel Dias Belchior's book *Compreendamos os Negros*, (Let us understand the Blacks) (1960).

¹² “Dear brothers, until now the Portuguese do not know who is the “bandit” or the “terrorist”, those words being purely Portuguese; so it is the task of us revolutionaries to show them who the “bandits” or “terrorists” are.

¹³ “They are pitiful people”

Coitados dos soldados de Salazar que embarcam sem saber que vêm combater; [...] porém, os que têm a sorte de sair prevenidos são avisados que os “pretos” estão armadas só de azagaias (mostrando-lhes filmes do século XVIII). Mas quando chegam e se aproximam alegres das montanhas, a bazooka lhes faz nascer o desespero e surgem agora contradições... (Bamaya 6)¹⁴

I would now like to place the emphasis on another writing experiment. Let us switch over to the side of the Portuguese army.

It is doubtlessly extremely pertinent to recall the need to study the “writings” of the Portuguese soldiers¹⁵, in particular the body of texts written to be sung known by the name of *Cancioneiro do Niassa*, Songbook of Niassa¹⁶. Jorge Ribeiro

¹⁴ “How pitiful the soldiers of Salazar are, that embarked without knowing that they are coming to fight; [...] nevertheless, those who have the chance to leave warned, are warned that the “blacks” are only armed with spears (they show them movies from the 18th century). But when they arrive and come close to the mountains, the bazooka gives birth to hopelessness and now the contradictions arise...”

¹⁵ I am currently working on the supplement “Coluna em Marcha” (Marching column), published during the colonial war in Mozambique in the state newspaper *Notícias* (Lourenço Marques). This supplement, in which the soldiers are invited to write poems evoking their patriotic mission, can be considered as the governmental equivalent to the “Songbook of Niassa”. The challenge is to find the fissures or gaps in this project.

¹⁶ In the book of testimonies by Salgueiro Maia, *Capitães de Abril – Historias da Guerra do Ultramar e do 25 de Abril*, the author also refers to the importance of the *Cancioneiro do Niassa* and the “Hino do Lunho”, as well as the “Fado de Mueda”. Salgueiro Maia recounts that for having sung the “Hino do Lunho” to an assembly of officers in Guinea in 1972, he was submitted to “an investigation and a disciplinary procedure because, according to the participants, “they had never seen the military institution so insulted” (Salgueiro Mata 50). Salgueiro Maia concluded: “The moral of the story: it was complicated to say the truth!” (ibidem). The “Hino do Lunho” was sung with the music of “Vampires” by Zeca Afonso, and also used the

(1999) has collected a certain number of songs, but the greatest part of these texts can be consulted on the site dedicated to this body. According to Jorge Ribeiro, the songbook appeared between 1969 and 1971 in the artillery corps BART 2889 based in Vila Cabral. However, in the documents available on-line, this corps has another number, BART 2838, and the reference of a specific regiment CART 2326, while the songbook concerns the years between 1968 and 1970.

These texts are remarkable not only from a historical point of view but also when considered to be relevant scriptural devices, which, as in the case of the texts of the activists of the FRELIMO mentioned above, take the shape of devices of rewriting. My analysis starts with the fact that the texts of the *Cancioneiro do Niassa* are mainly written within a very particular format of Portuguese writing, the fado. We will see how the selected text points at the issue of the symbolic dimension of the fado in the construction of a Portuguese identity. It is thus certainly no coincidence that Portuguese

verses of this song which received here a new tragic dimension: “On the ground of fear/fall the losers/are heard the cries/in the stifling night/lie in pits/victims of a belief/and the blood of the herd does not run out (Zeca Afonso 51). In the “Fado de Mueda” one can read in the first strophe: “Mueda land of war/I will sing you this fado/ that I’ve composed recently/Mueda sacred land/of grenade attacks/which drives a guy crazy” (Zeca Afonso 48).

In 1999, in Portugal a record on the EMI label entitled “Canções Proibidas/Cancioneiro do Niassa” was published with part of this Songbook. It was sung by different singers and musicians such as, João Pinto Maria, Rui Veloso, Carlos do Carmo, João Afonso, Mário Laginha, Janita Salomé, Tetvocal.

In 2000 Margarida Cardoso made a documentary entitled “Natal 71” (Christmas 1971). The title evokes the record which the National Women’s Movement offered to the soldiers in that year. In this film, Margarida Cardoso works both with the record and the cassette “O Cancioneiro do Niassa”. The cassette was recorded in secret in Mozambique and was passed on among soldiers.

soldiers take up the most well known fados in order to dislocate them with words that now speak of a situation which can only be lived in its communitarian as well as subjective dimension.

It is also necessary to consider that the songbook was written collectively by several “hands” that indistinctly belonged to different ranks in the military hierarchy, and had different outlooks. It is a phenomenon which arose from a certain spontaneity, producing material that was distributed on clandestine cassettes and even was the subject of a local radio program of the marine corps of Metangula (Niassa), but which could also, at least as far as some of its less subversive texts are concerned, form part of the reception of a high ranking officials visiting the base. In this case one can imagine that the songs were tolerated because of their cathartic function in alleviating the stress of combat. More generally, the diversity of situations associated with the songbook and its repertoire points at the insight that there is no homogenous social tissue when speech circulates.

One of the texts/songs is called “Fado dos Turras.”¹⁷ It was written on the lyrics of “Fado Corrido” and, contrary to the vision produced and disseminated by the dominant discourse, the image of the “terrorist” it conveys is quite different.

This text is important in another sense as well, due to the fact that it establishes a real play of alterity(ies). Written by a Portuguese, the lyrics are enounced by the voice of the Other. It is the other who speaks and who, through this irruption, deconstructs the possibility of returning to sameness.

Se de mim nada consegues me	If you can get nothing from
não sei porque me persegues me	I do not know why you pursue

¹⁷ Name by which the guerilleros of the FRELIMO were called, representing a depreciating diminutive of “terrorist/terrorista”.

constantemente no mato!
Sabes bem que sou ladino,
smart guy,
que tenho andar muito fino
walking
e me escapo como um rato.

Lá porque és branco e pedante
and pedant
Pretendes ser arrogante
Por capricho e altivez!
Eu que tenho sido pobre,
mas que tenho a alma nobre
talvez te lixe de vez!
for all!

Como ando sempre alerta,
tua arma não me acerta,
on me,
nem me deixa atrapalhado!
E assim num breve instante,
por mais que andes vigilante,
tu serás sempre emboscado!

Por isso toma cuidado!
E não me venhas com o teu fado

dizer que branco é melhor.
Eu já muito codilhado
estou sempre desconfiado,
e irás deste p'ra pior.
(Ribeiro 263 and on-line texts)

constantly in the bush!
You know well that I am a
that I have a very fine way of
and I escape like a rat.

Just because you are white
Pretend being arrogant
With caprice and haughtyness
Me who has been poor,
but who has the noble soul
maybe I'll do you in once and

As I am always alert,
your weapon never zeroes in

neither bothers me
And thus in a brief moment,
the more you walk with care,
the more you will always be
ambushed!

Then watch out!
And don't come to me with
your fado
saying that white is better.
I'm already very fucked
I'm always distrustful
and you'll be doomed.

We therefore see that the vision/position (understood as the place of which one speaks) of these Portuguese soldiers is not the one of warlords. The “turra” neither is the savage, nor the one who has to be taught. The foundation itself of the civilising mission, which relies on the inequality of intelligences, has no

more reason to exist, given that finally the Africans are not anymore portrayed as a “child-people” which has to be lead from shadows to light. In Jacques Rancière’s terms the idea of progress is here “une fiction pédagogique élevée à une fiction de la société entière”¹⁸, at the heart of which lies “la représentation de l’inégalité comme retard”¹⁹ (197-98). On the contrary, the guerillero is not an inferior being, but possesses knowledge. He is even getting by better than the colonial soldier, being sly, noble and sure of his victory. Meanwhile, the discourse in polyphonic play portrays the Portuguese soldier as pedant, arrogant, and somebody who does not know how to walk²⁰ (on the African ground which is not his) and feels that he can lose²¹. In this multiple play of voices the text confronts a symbol of Portuguese identity, the fado, the historical writing of a certain destiny, transformed into a prophetic form of enouncing history. One has to get over with the version of history where the white is always the winner, says the voice in this text. He who is written, or better, those who are written, within these writings,

¹⁸ ...a pedagogical fiction raised to a fiction of society as a whole.

¹⁹ ...the representation of inequality as delay.

²⁰ One could draw a parallel here with the multiple allusions made to “walking” by Mia Couto in his novel *O Último Voo do Flamingo* (2000). Fábio Risi, an Italian chosen by the United Nations to unravel the mystery of the disappeared Blue Helmets throughout the novel is initiated into the art of walking like an African, of knowing how to touch the earth in a light fashion.

²¹ On a photography found at the Frelimo archives one can see a sign at the entrance of the Portuguese military camp of Mueda with an inscription saying “Aqui vive-se, luta-se e morre-se” (Here one lives, fights and dies).

It is important to refer to a remark of Nuno Mira Vaz in the above cited book in which he considers that the obligation of many army officials to become acquainted with the documents published by the enemy in order to prepare psychological action ended up, in a strange boomerang movement, providing more intimate knowledge of the reasons for the struggle and thus creating destabilising influences among members of the army (Vaz idem 266).

which are produced by appropriating earlier textual spaces, are soldiers of two armies confronting each other under *national* banners. As such these texts are witnesses to the fact that the nation contains its own “counter-narratives”. In Homi Bhabha’s words:

[c]ounter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities (213).

Conclusion

These poems of the activists of the FRELIMO, who dislocate the Portuguese canonical literature disseminated by the *imperial library*, show precisely the capacity of the colonised to surprise, to make use of the elements of the dominant power, by rereading them and subverting them in relation to their own interests. The dream of a radically new society has led the FRELIMO to obliterate and evacuate the entire past, not just the colonial one, but also the traditional past, in its national metanarrative. This approach has kept the FRELIMO from grasping the material at hand, these other writings of which “O Gigante Adamstor” is one of the examples. These other writings show and prove that the colonised subjects are neither passive nor determined by an abrogative logic. On the contrary, their approaches are very subtle and complex. The poem which I took as an example also demonstrates the centrality of the issue of the non-knowing of the other in the colonial encounter. What is at stake here is the question of the relationship with the other as subjected to the devices of homogenisation and assimilation, both within the colonial context and within the nationalisation of the liberation movement itself.

On the terrain of the Portuguese colonial army, the Portuguese soldier can realise that the cannibalistic vision of the Negro, the one who needs to be taught and saved, is false and

that behind it the struggle for independence takes a completely different sense. And in this respect, the colonial war loses the reason for its existence. One finds here the explanation for the inclusion of a poem of the FRELIMO in the Songbook of Niassa, consultable on-line, which was found on a base and indexed under its title "Poem of an activist".

Both cases support an argument for the abolition of a dualistic logic, a Manichean representation, finally taking into account a time of experience, such as it is conceived by Achille Mbembe in *On the Postcolony* (2001), a time of heterogeneity, of everyday inventive performativity, opening, as Homi Bhabha (idem, p. 54-55, 212-213) suggests, towards a space of negotiation, a space of construction of sense as space where different narratives intermingle, different narratives in the constitution of the self in the view towards the other.

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