THE SURPLUS HISTORICITY OF A DISCARDED ARMY BOOT: MIA COUTO, POLITICAL VIOLENCE, AND THE "WITHERING AWAY" OF THE POSTCOLONIAL NATION-STATE

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> To be welcomed into the comity of nations a new nation must bring something new. Otherwise it is a mere administrative convenience or necessity.
>
> C.L.R. James[1]

> Só um mundo novo nós queremos: o que tenha tudo de novo e nada de mundo.
>
> Mia Couto

Mia Couto's narration of post-independence Mozambique resembles, on the face of it, what Phyllis Peres defines as the "ironic imagining of the nation" in Manuel Rui's *Quem me dera ser onda* (1982). What for Peres underpins this irony is the Angolan novelist's contrast between "the collective euphoria" of the liberation struggle and "the ironies of independence, as the line separating colony from nation grows fainter by the day" (98-97). One of Rui's more effective procedures, she argues, is to have the schoolchildren (*pioneiros*) who are the novella's protagonists appropriate and re-signify the rhetoric of the anti-colonial revolution. While the main example she discusses centers on the ironic repetition of a verse from Agostinho Neto's renowned poem ("Havemos de Voltar"), the very title of Rui's novella glosses another of Neto's memorable lines: "O meu desejo de ser onda" ("Sombras" from *Sagrada Esperança* 59), which expresses a coded yearning for national independence. That this is the final wish expressed by the children (it is, in fact, the last line of the novella) provides a measure of Rui's irony. In this closing scene, one of the young heroes reiterates the novella's *leit motiv*

("Quem me dera ser onda"), "cheio daquela fúria linda que as vagas da Chicala pintam sempre na calma do mar" (69).

In "Sombras," Neto places his own subversive desire in a homological relation with that of "a praia que quer ser onda / alar-se em vida" (59). The poem depicts the Angolan shoreline as haunted by the ghosts of colonialism's countless victims as well as of those "que hão-de vir." It is this future generation that the revolution's young "pioneers" in Rui's narrative supposedly represent. And it is, in a sense, also with the latter that Angola's late poet laureate shares his emancipatory wish ("e com elas repartirei / o meu desejo de ser onda." The significance of the Angolan littoral to the long and complex history of contact with the Portuguese—a history which harkens even farther back than the slave trade—should of course not be overlooked. Ironically, then, almost a decade after political independence has nominally been achieved, the revolutionary desire uttered by the nation's founding father on the eve of a protracted armed struggle (1960) still retains its urgency.

A similar procedure undergirds one of Mia Couto's early stories about an old hunchback called Rosa Caramela who falls in love with a "monumento de um colonial, nem o nome restava legível" turning it into the object of her "amor sem correspondência" (*Cada Homem é uma Raça* 17). After opposing "com violência e corpo" an official decree to "circumcisar" the statue "para respeito da nação," because "o monumento era um pé do passado rasteirando o presente" (20), Rosa is sentenced to a term in a re-education camp "para cura de alegadas mentalidades" [20]) for the truly sublime political crime of reproducing in the post-independence period what, under the colonial dispensation, had been a subversive and coded desire for freedom. The militia chief, who determines that "a loucura da corcunda escondia outras políticas razões: saudosismo do passado" (19), has apparently no knowledge of the poem composed in a colonial dungeon by a FRELIMO militant which urges the reader to "amar uma pedra […] mesmo que te chamem louco [...] ama[r] essa vulgar pedra [...] como se ama / apaixonadamente / a independência da nossa pátria / a liberdade de qualquer povo" (Nogar 47-9). The struggle continues, as it were.

The belief in the necessity of armed violence to bring about substantive political and social change—the "much-awaited armed struggle" whose political shortcomings Mahmood Mamdani investigates in a recent study (223)—is shared by several other African artists and intellectuals, the most notable of whom being perhaps Sénégal's Ousmane Sembène and Ghana's Ayi Kwei Armah. Indeed, Amílcar Cabral's own *Unity and Struggle* motto suggests that (as Fanon puts it) in the fight for independence, "the future nation is already indivisible. The armed struggle mobilizes the people, that is to say, it throws them in a single direction, upon a one-way path [...] The people become convinced that liberation has been each and everyone's task and that the leader has no special merit. Violence raises the people to the level of the leader" (Fanon *Les damnés de la terre* 69, 70). It is in a similar spirit that the protagonist of Sembène's *Le dernier de l'Empire* argues that "the African countries quickest to free themselves from dependence on others will be those where people have been half-military, half-civilian, and have fought for their freedom" (233). For Ngũgĩ, too, *a luta continua* refers to the future of a pan-African resistance movement.[2] It signifies an advanced stage of this liberation struggle, a phase which the recently liberated Luso-African countries had supposedly already reached precisely by dint of their *violent* opposition to what Amílcar Cabral calls Portugal's "minute and rotting" imperialism (*Unity and Struggle* 76), for, as Mamdani remarks, "the armed struggle registered its most spectacular gain with the collapse of Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique and Angola" (233).

It is thus all the more troubling that, in another of Couto's early narratives ("A história dos aparecidos"), the slogan should be re-appropriated to define the relationship between the "liberated" Mozambican population and the "revolutionary cadres" who assume political control after independence. At the end of the story, this anti-colonialist watchword is pressed into service as the battle cry in a struggle against the very leaders who once wielded it in their name. The meaning of this reversal remains nevertheless ambivalent. For the perdurable and ironic relevance of the phrase seems to indicate that the new nationalist leadership, in a political gesture that is virtually paradigmatic of post-independence African régimes, has forfeited, indeed betrayed the revolution's promise. Yet, in a more disruptive sense, this reiteration of an anti-colonial watchword raises the possibility that this "forfeiture" and "betrayal" were already prefigured in an historical narrative whose plot consists in the rationalization of emancipatory promise into a teleological design.[3] As Mahmood Mamdani indicates, "radical African states [were] the true inheritors of the colonial tradition of rule by decree and rule by proclamation, or subordinating the rule of law to administrative justice so as to transform society from above" (135).

Relocated in a post-independence context, *a luta continua* is therefore divested of the militant unilinearity and sense of logical necessity which defined it as a revolutionary *mot d'ordre*.[4] Like the colonial statue which Rosa Caramela converts into the object of her politically suspect affection, the slogan constitutes "um pé do passado [colonial] rasteirando o presente [da nação]". Along with the old army boot "de tamanho sobrado," which Uncle Geguê brings home to his orphaned nephew in a story by Couto entitled "O apocalipse privado do tio Geguê," the slogan "tinha percorrido os gloriosos tempos da luta pela independência" (*Cada Homem* 30). In the words of the FRELIMO liberation song, it has followed the guerrilla's unswerving forward march (*Canto Armado* 47), "a marcha da vitória / A Independência Nacional" (Santos *Canto Armado* 105). Both the army boot and the motto are, in sum, "garantida[s] pela história" (*Cada Homem* 30).

As the opening paragraph of "Apocalipse privado" underscores, however, the trouble with history—personal no less than national—is its disquieting signifying motility:

> História de homem é sempre mal contada. Porque a pessoa é, em todo o tempo, ainda nascente. Ninguém segue uma única vida, todos se multiplicam em diversos e tranmutáveis homens. Agora, quando des-

> embrulho minhas lembranças eu aprendo meus muitos idiomas. Nem assim me entendo. Porque enquanto me descubro, eu mesmo me anoiteço, fosse haver coisas só visíveis em plena cegueira. (*Cada Homem* 29).

This figuration of self-discovery as a crepuscular descent, as a retreat into blindness, remits us to the collection's closing lines: "o destino de um sol é nunca ser olhado" (*Cada Homem* 181). It is Pepetela's (Hegelian) association of self-determination with the sight of the sun in *Muana Puó*, as well as Agostinho Neto's use of Plato's familiar allegory to symbolize the oppressive situation of colonized subjects yearning for "dias de sol" (*Sagrada Esperança* 61), that is here put into question. The story casts a similar doubt upon the assurances that "outras cores brilhavam no longe," and upon the "expectâncias aldrab[adas]….impossíveis lugares e tempos," the "lições de esperança," in sum, which Geguê liberally dispenses to his skeptical nephew (30).

Having "aconteci[do] num tempo de caminhos cansados," "quando já havia desfalecido o futuro" (*Cada Homem* 30), the young narrator-protagonist is understandably reluctant to accept these faded dreams of a better tomorrow, or indeed to ascribe to the ancient army boot the historico-nationalist seal of approval which his uncle is all too ready to confer upon it. "São botas veteranas [da luta armada], essas" (30), the latter insists. In effect, the very excess of the boot's dimensions appears to ratify its metonymic association with the history of the armed struggle. Yet when Geguê and a FRELIMO Secretary submit "a temática da bota" to political analysis, the party official asseverates that the boot is "demasiado histórica" (32)—a surfeit of history which corresponds to its excessive size. Like the content of the future proletarian revolution which, in Marx's quotable dictum, goes beyond the phrase, the boot's historical symbolism overflows the symbol. One would expect that its exorbitant historicity would preclude its consignment to the rubbish heap (of history?). But the Secretary concludes surprisingly that the "porcaria" must be thrown away. Shouldn't such an "herança" be preserved, though?; isn't it "muito histórica" to be discarded, wonders Geguê? "Por isso mesmo," replies the party official, the boot must be drowned in the swamps, away from "vistas públicas" (32).

Paradoxically, however, upon his return from this clandestine "un-historical" mission, Uncle Geguê wears a trace of the boot's persistent historical resonance: "uma braçadeira vermelha, onde estava pintado a letras negras G.V. [for *Grupo de Vigilância*, the revolutionary militia or guard]" (33). A relationship of inversion now comes to govern the story's plot. The history buried in the shape of the boot resurfaces, bereft of all doxological certainties and symmetries, to work illogically and arbitrarily upon the present, to "trip it up." Although he seems more liable to be placed under guard ("vigiado") than empowered (by the Secretary) as a civilian guardian ("vigilante"), given the legitimate "gorda suspeita" (30) surrounding his mode of earning a living, Uncle Geguê undergoes training as "um defensor da Revolução" (34). It is like "entregar-se a chave da porta ao próprio ladrão," the narrator-protagonist observes. Soon after he comes back from boot camp, having learned little more than how to march, Geguê receives another visitation from the past. His young niece Zabelani, fleeing "dos terrores do campo. O mundo lá se terminava em flagrante suicídio" (35), arrives to stay with them. These "terrors" signal the opening and as-yet distant salvos of the civil war, the return of armed conflict not as a stage in the Revolution or the necessary passageway into emancipation, but a perennial condition, a kind of all-devouring atemporality. "A guerra," as the nursing home caretaker in *A Varanda do Frangipani* confesses to the investigating officer, "cria um outro ciclo no tempo. Já não são os anos, as estações que marcam nossas vidas. Já não são as colheitas, as fomes, as inundações. A guerra instala o ciclo do sangue" (127). Not too long after Zabelani's appearance, Geguê takes advantage of his negligible military training to devise a scheme to "desenrascar" in this life (*Cada Homem* 38). Holding his own niece captive, he coerces his nephew into collaborating with him in unleashing a campaign of terror in the area: "espalhar confusões, divulgar medos [...] execut[ar] maldades....vastas crueldades" (38, 39).

Once his uncle inducts him into the militia corps as an auxiliary, and offers him a shotgun,[5] he succeeds in perfecting his craft, alternating as thief and cat burglar. Not only does he steal and destroy property but arrogates to himself the authority to dispense punishments and issue penalties: "Aos poucos, por obra minha e do Geguê, nascera uma guerra.... Casa, carro, propriedades: tudo se tinha tornado demasiado mortal. Tão cedo havia, tão cedo ardia. Entre os mais velhos já se espalhara saudade do antigamente.—Mais valia a pena..." (40). The protagonist of "Apocalipe privado" appears here to follow the strategy of anti-government "bandos," as described by one of the narrators of *Terra sonâmbula*. For he, too, "alvejasse não as casas mas o tempo, esse tempo que trouxera o cimento e as residências que duravam mais que a vida dos homens" (*Terra* 24). The prophet-shaman in the same novel contends similarly that the war is waged "para envenenar o ventre do tempo, para que o presente parisse monstros no lugar da esperança" (215). In the end, "Apocalipse privado's" narrator also "dispar[a] contra todo aquele tempo, matando esse ventre onde, em nós, renascem as falecidas sombras deste velho mundo" (*Cada Homem* 44). The troubling question which the two "apparitions" pose in "A história dos aparecidos" therefore persists on the lips of many in "Apocalipse": "Foi para isto que lutámos?" (40).

With the arrival of Zabelani, the refugee from the incipient civil war, a sort of counterfeit warfare thus erupts in the region. By the end of the story, however, a "real" conflict has broken out. Geguê's terror for profit scheme has unleashed the dogs of war, as it were, as "outros desordeiros cresciam, soldados de ninguém Em todo o lado se propagavam assaltos, consporcarias, animaldades. A morte se tornara tão frequente que só a vida fazia espanto" (*Cada Homem* 42). In this way, the civil war emerges as a kind of extension, or, brutal *actualization*, of the exploitative and expropriating "policies" which the erstwhile "defenders of the Revolution" had begun routinely to implement after independence. To coin the Foucauldian pun on Clausewitz's well-known aphorism, in post-colonial Mozambique, politics becomes war carried out by other means. By the same token, the time of hope which the "bandits" ruthlessly put in their sights was already under siege by the very revolutionaries who had once fought to the death to usher it into the world.

There is no doubt a considerable distance separating the "cause" for which "Apocalipse privado's" narrator-protagonist takes up arms (or wields his uncle's shotgun) and the one which Jorge Rebelo's combatant extols in a poetic missive to his mother/land, for example: "É por ti também que eu luto, mãe! / Para que não haja lágrimas / nos teus olhos […] Mãe, / eu tenho uma espingarda de ferro! [...] [que] vai quebrar todas as correntes….vai matar todos os tiranos / [e] restituir a terra ao nosso povo / Mãe, é belo lutar pela liberdade! / Há uma mensagem de justiça em cada bala que disparo, / há sonhos antigos que acordam como pássaros" (*Canto Armado* 79). The *struggle* which Geguê's nephew *continues* has little in common with the "necessária e imperiosa" one that Sérgio Vieira pledges to carry on after Eduardo Mondlane's assassination: "Nós juramos / que a luta continua […] / juramos que as nossas metralhadoras / abrirão clareiras de esperança"(*Canto Armado* 88, 89). And the image of "a machamba da Revolução,"[6] which Marcelino dos Santos urges Mozambicans to cultivate (*Canto Armado* 101-6) has obviously been upended as well. As a character in *Terra sonâmbula* (one of the few bold enough to utter what everyone knows, but no one says) explains: "Agora [ca. 1990] em Moçambique, a guerra é como se fosse uma machamba….gera[ndo] altos tacos. Cada um semeava uma guerra particular. Cada um punha as vidas dos outros a render" (140). "A guerra," affirms the main narrator of the same novel, "é uma cobra que usa os nossos próprios dentes para nos morder" (*Terra sonâmbula* 17). As in "Apocalipse privado," then, war exists precisely "para autorizar o roubo (*Terra sonâmbula* 114). "A guerra dos negócios e os negócios da guerra" have become interchangeable (*O Último Voo do Flamingo* 200).

In this manner, the boot's stubborn re-emergence from a mud puddle long after its semi-official burial in "Apocalipse privado," becomes "o sinal" (*Cada Homem* 41) of an historical repressed which insistently and inappropriately returns. It trips up the present rather like the ghostly heroes of anti-colonial resistance who in *O Último Voo do Flamingo* return to haunt the dreams of the corrupt administrator Estevão Jonas. For these phantom combatants, the formula for restoring order "no mundo nosso de hoje" is to expel "os novos colonos que tanto sofrimento provocaram na nossa gente" (*O Último Voo* 172). It is of course no accident that, to Jonas' shame, the returning ancestors identify him as one of the oppressors, as one of "os que abusam do Poder." He must consequently endure the ignominy of seeing "os resistentes da nossa gloriosa História chutando-nos fora da História" (*O Último Voo* 173). To borrow Anne McClintock's expanded definition of the fetish as "the embodiment of an impossible irresolution," Couto's army boot thus incorporates "the traumatic coincidence not only of individual but also of historical memories held in contradiction" (McClintock 184-5).

The army boot, as the protagonist's father in *Último Voo* affirms in a different context, thus affords an index of the incommensurability between the country's current political leaders and the anti-colonial militants: "os nossos ante-passados nos olham como filhos estranhos. E quando nos olham já não nos reconhecem" (*Último Voo* 212). The boot embodies in this sense the implacable judgment of a "tradition" of radical insurgency upon a present in which FRELIMO's dreams of freedom and social justice have been scrapped in favor of rampant profiteering and brutal property relations. It issues "o triste julgamento dos mortos sobre o estado dos vivos" (*Último Voo* 220), upon a nation which has come to resemble a beached whale agonizing on the strand: "A morte nem sucedera e já as facas lhe roubavam pedaços, cada um tentando o mais para si" (*Terra sonâmbula* 23). In this autophagic economic order, "tudo era convertido em capim, matéria de ser comida, ruminada e digerida em crescentes panças. E tudo isso mesmo ao lado de aflitivas misérias" (*Varanda* 113). Mozambique's revolutionary ruling elite has hence become compulsively bulimic: "nós roubamos e reroubamos. Roubamos o Estado, roubamos o país até sobrarem só os ossos.—Depois de roermos tudo, regurgitamos e voltamos a comer" (*Último Voo* 216-7).

As Malyn Newitt writes, "robbery, or confiscation, became a way of life not only for Renamo bands but for everyone in Mozambique. As the economy became more and more dominated by aid, so those who could redistribute the aid for their own personal gain or that of their friends, family or network were the survivors" (Newitt 576). A new set of "cannibalistic" social relations now prevails. Foreign donations destined for de-mining projects, for instance, are routinely embezzled by local rulers. Even the international demining campaign is converted into a source of revenue for corrupt officials in *Último Voo*. In order to maintain both international focus and funds in the area, "plantavam-se e desplantavam-se minas. Umas mortes à mistura até calhavam para dar crédito ao plano. Mas era gente anónima, no interior duma nação africana que mal sustenta seu nome no mundo" (*O Último Voo* 200).

This reliance on international donations ultimately transforms the country's self-image altogether, arguably even "national culture" itself. According to Newitt, for example, "by the early 1990s foreign aid of one kind or another constituted 70% of GNP" (574). Where in the past the directives from higher echelons forbade the exposure of a begging Nation, "o País com as costelas todas de fora," in the new dispensation, "era preciso mostrar a população com a sua fome, com suas doenças contaminosas," in other words, to play to the hilt Mozambique's dubious honor of generating one of the lowest GNPs in the world: "Essa é a actual palavra de ordem: juntar os destroços, facilitar a visão do desastre" (*O Último Voo* 77). "Somos um povo de mendigos," concludes the father of one of *Terra sonâmbula's* narrators, "nem temos onde cair vivos"[7] (117). The nation has evidently traveled a long and circuitous path from the long-awaited days of independence when it seemed possible to decree that "nenhuma pobreza teria mais esteira" (*Último Voo* 165). It is, in any event, the formation of this new national "identity," an identity founded on an abject dependence on global charity, that Couto's *Terra sonâmbula* in part records. For the harried inhabitants of the nightmare-scape that is the nation in the throes of a vicious civil war, relief and sustenance can arrive only from abroad. It is as though time in post-colonial Mozambique has receded into the misty regions of an ethnocentric Renaissance myth about "savages" who habitually deify culturally superior European travelers. In this "magical realist" temporality, the cargo cult has been turned into the nation's principal form of "foreign relations."

After the relief supplies from a sunken ship wash ashore, for instance, as though re-enacting the Adamastorian curse against future Portuguese fleets, "se escutavam tambores consecutivos, rezas obscurantistas em todas as praias, clamando aos antepassados para outros navios se afundarem, suas cargas se espalharem e desaguarem nas mãos dos famintos" (*Terra sonâmbula* 61). As if to underscore its unqualified failure to protect the welfare of its own people, the State ascribes to itself an exclusively intermediary function in this extraction process. It claims, in essence, the role of the "middleman": "Os do governo deram ordens rigorosas. A recolha dos bens do navio devia ser organizada. Explicavam eles que apenas se pretendia que os destroços chegassem ao destino de forma ordenada e obedecendo às hierarquias, passando primeiro pelas estruturas competentes" (61). This postcolonial cargo cult is thus the residue of the promise of modernity. At one and the same time, it echoes the absence of history, which arguably defines the colonial condition, as well as the radical draining of all meaningful historical activity which is presented as a distinctive feature of the fascist state in recent Portuguese narrative fiction about the colonial wars in Africa.[8] Ironically, what metropolitan narratives such as Manuel Alegre's or João de Melo's propose as the radical alternative to this historical stagnation are exactly the anti-colonial struggles whose definitive closure the revival of the cargo cult appears to signify. Not only does the latter place under erasure the politico-historical difference between colony and nation, but it intimates an unsettling "ideological" continuity between the weak postcolonial state and Portugal's dictatorial régime.

Mozambique's revolutionary leaders have thus sunk from being the continent's political vanguard (on the eve of independence) to that level of stagnation and subservience to the industrialized west which Fanon was vehemently denouncing over forty years ago. They have effectively turned themselves into a "long-toothed caste, greedy and voracious, ruled by a huckstering spirit," all too eager to turn itself into a "caricature of Europe" and ready to content itself with the dividends which the former colonial powers promise to toss its way (*Les damnés de la terre* 131). It is as though Couto lends "fictional" corroboration to Mahmood Mamdani's suggestion that "radical African states [were] the true inheritors of the colonial tradition" (135). No wonder, then, that in *Último Voo* the heroes of the resistance have come back to expel the veterans of the liberation war from History. As Estevão Jonas seems begrudgingly to recognize, the new rulers have become parasitic. They are *in excess*: "já não aguenta tantos demónios. Estamos a receber os excedentes aqui na Terra.... E nós, os antigos revolucionários, fazemos parte desses excedentes" (*Último Voo* 98).

In a redoubtable vision, the father of *Último Voo's* protagonist witnesses the ancestors—unhappy about "os andamentos do país"—cast the entire nation into a bottomless chasm: "Já acontecera com outras terras de Àfrica. Entregara-se o destino dessas nações a ambiciosos que governaram como hienas, pensando apenas em engordar rápido […] Vendo que solução não havia, os deuses decidiram transportar aqueles países para esses céus que ficam no fundo da terra" (*Último Voo* 220). The new ruling class has here become as excessive as the oversized boot, which appears to the young protagonist, as he gives it a final symbolic burial, "escapar do seu tamanho, quase sem fronteira de si" (*Cada Homem* 41). On the other hand, the boot's superfluity may be a measure of the vast, indeed universal proportions of FRELIMO's emancipatory dream. "Como dizer-vos o tamanho / do nosso sonho?" asks the FRELIMO song, "O nosso sonho tem o tamanho / da Liberdade" (*Canto Armado* 43, 44). This is a dream which has evidently ceased to fit a conjuncture which seems to have room only for narrow self-interest.

In contrast to the heady promise of June 25, 1975, it seems as though, in the post-independence period, "o próprio tempo [fosse] girando de encontro ao tecto. Como se o futuro ali se enroscasse, sem saída" (*Um rio chamado Tempo* 216). It is this nationalist dream, then, the "sonhos lindos e promessas de um tempo fortunado," which pour out of a guerrilla's back-pack in "Mastros do Paralém" (*Cada Homem* 175), that the young protagonist of "Apocalipse privado" buries alongside the resurrected boot, in a rite which strongly suggests the antithesis of Independence Day, that is, the counterpoint to "a consumação de todos [os] sonhos" (*Terra sonâmbula* 17): "Eu então lhe peguei [na bota] e, numa poça de água, lavei o dentro e o fora. Lhe apliquei cuidados como se fosse uma criança. Um menino orfão, tal qual eu. Depois, escolhi uma terra muito limpa e lhe dei digno funeral. Enquanto inventava a cerimónia me chegaram os toques da banda militar, o drapejo de mil bandeiras" (*Cada Homem* 41). Just as the generation which comes of age during the civil war is "orphaned" from a Nation that had presumably been collectively imagined,[9] the boot, as well as the national project which it putatively symbolizes, cannot but be a castoff, a kind of wayward waif of history, in a time when the "geração da traição" (*Um rio chamado Tempo* 249) appears to be calling all the shots. As one of *Terra sonâmbula's* protagonists remarks upon witnessing the passing away of an elder, the ancestors have become "orfãos da terra" (93).

It is the foreclosure of this collective dream which the title of Couto's first novel (*Terra sonâmbula*) denotes as well. The *sleepwalking land* is both the reminder and the telluric remainder of the discarded dreams (or illusions) of an emancipated Mozambique. For, as several of the novel's characters concur, the other major casualty of the civil war is that imagined community itself. In the words of Tuahir, the old man who acts as guardian to the novel's adolescent hero, the war has rendered both the dead and the living irrevocably alone: "agora todos estamos sozinhos, mortos e vivos";

"Agora já não há país," he proclaims (*Terra* 165). In a broader sense, though, the night-walking land serves as the repository for all the shattered utopias. The novel's young protagonist, Muidinga, spends his nights inside the burnt-out hulk of a bus destroyed by rebel fire, on the side of an abandoned road cluttered with charred corpses and spent ordnance, and awakens every morning to an inexplicably protean landscape: "Será que a terra, ela sozinha, deambula em errâncias?" (109). Or, perhaps "Era o país que desfilava por ali, sonhambulante" (147). Upon seeing a wounded elephant hauling its oozing carcass across the war-ravished countryside, Muidinga reflects that the dying pachyderm is the image of the land bleeding, "moribundando" for entire centuries in the savannah (39).

The ghost of Muidinga's father finally elucidates the matter: "A terra anda procurar dentro de cada pessoa, anda juntar os sonhos. Sim, faz conta ela é uma costureira dos sonhos" (195). And the shaman's foreboding prophecy of a bleak "neo-colonial" future corroborates this dire assessment of the war's effects on the national imaginary, as it were:

> Fizeram esta guerra para envenenar o ventro do tempo, para que o presente parisse monstros no lugar da esperança....esta guerra não foi feita para vos tirar do país mas para tirar o país de dentro de vós.... Roubaram-vos tanto que nem sequer os sonhos são vossos, nada de vossa terra vos pertence, e até o céu e o mar serão propriedade de estranhos. Será mil vezes pior que o passado pois não vereis o rosto dos novos donos e esses se servirão de vossos irmãos para vos dar castigo. Ao invés de combaterem os inimigos, os melhores guerreiros afiarão as lanças nos ventres das próprias mulheres. E aqueles que vos deveriam comandar estarão entretidos a regatear migalhas no banquete da vossa própria destruição....vivereis no reino da brutalidade....em todos haverá medo da justiça (*Terra* 215).

The differend between the people and the nation, which was arguably already discernible at the moment that the colony/nation reversal was being publicly performed, has here reached almost paroxysmal proportions. It has given rise to a generalized state of alienation. The grand universalist dream of development and social justice, which the independent nation was to embody, gives way abruptly to the socio-economic nightmare of globalization. If, as Jacques Depelchin and the late Aquino de Bragança argue, it is because Mozambique sought since independence to disengage itself from global capitalism, to dismantle the social system and property relations implanted during the colonial period, that the civil was unleashed; if "os bandos armados não foram mobilizados para criar um movimento político, mas para destruir e desmoralizar," to produce out of the resulting wreckage "um regime de reconstrução nacional" responsive to the interests of international capital (in *Estudos Moçambicanos* 48-9), then, its military capitulation and subsequent political defeat notwithstanding, the objectives of RENAMO's destabilization program would appear to have been achieved in full.

With the declaration of what can only be termed "open season" on the country's natural resources (not just its soil but the heavens and the sea), the Marxian notion of the withering away of the state—socialism's purportedly inevitable *telos*—undergoes a profoundly ironic turn. It is actualized by a corrupt and tottering apparatus, a "mafia state"[10] whose concept of political representation approximates the radical autotelism of early-twentieth-century artistic vanguards, a parasitic organism that "vive do crime, se alimenta de imoralidade" (*Varanda do Frangipani* 128). In this fashion, the "spiriting away" of the nation-space prophesied by the shaman in *Terra sonâmbula* figures at one and the same time the brutal cancellation of the nationalist project as well as its cynical abandonment in favor of an unbridled overture to international "investment," a venture whose windfalls will accrue exclusively to the facilitators of this unregulated exploitation, to its "middle men."

What the new political leadership ends up expropriating in the process is futurity itself. The linguistic determinism which according to a character in one of Couto's stories overrides local conceptions of time ("Pois o futuro o que é? Se nem temos palavra na nossa maternal língua para nomear o porvir") now acquires nation-wide acception: The future "é um país que não se pode visitar" (*Contos do Nascer da Terra* 133). In *Último Voo do Flamingo,* a shaman tries to explain the same temporal dilemma to a UN official: "Estou vivendo apenas em rascunho, amanhando uns biscatos de futuro.... Nada é nosso nos dia de agora. Chega um desses estrangeiros, nacional ou de fora, e nos arranca tudo de vez. Até o chão nos arrancam....estamos a ser empurrados para onde não há lugar nem data certa" (*O Último Voo do Flamingo* 156). Thus far, Couto's critique of the post-independence betrayal of nationalism's promise does not differ significantly from the one which broadly characterizes Africa's literary production after the first decade of independence.

From the middle of the sixties, a similar political disillusionment regarding the emergence of despotic régimes and a kleptocratic political culture pervades African narrative fiction. Kwame Anthony Appiah designates these "novels of the second stage—the postcolonial stage [as] novels of delegitimation," noting that they reject "the Western imperium, it is true, but also [reject] the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie" (152). These critical narratives depict Africa's post-independence period as defined primarily by an ever-widening gap between the state and the people. What is frequently posited as an alternative to this "Afro-pessimism" is the recuperation of a hitherto rejected and neglected local knowledge, a reevaluation of "tradition" for successful indigenous models of social organization, as well as a concerted effort on the part of Africa's elites to re-establish "vital inner links" with the subaltern. As Partha Chatterjee argues, community "is very much part of the here-and-now of modernity, and yet it is an idea which remains impoverished and limited to the singular form of the nation-state because it is denied a legitimate life in the world of the modern knowledges of human society" (237-8).

It is precisely with the promise of a community different from this singular national form that *Terra sonâmbula* appears to close. After evoking the dismal vision of the nation's future quoted above, the prophet-shaman announces that a morning "cheia de luz nova" will nonetheless remain.

> Se escutará uma voz longínqua como se fosse uma memória de antes de sermos gente. E surgirão os doces acordes de uma canção, o terno embalo da primeira mãe. Esse canto, sim, será nosso, a lembrança duma raiz profunda que não foram capazes de nos arrancar. Essa voz nos dará a força de um novo princípio e, ao escutá-la os cadáveres sossegarão nas covas e os sobreviventes abraçarão a vida com o ingénuo entusiasmo dos namorados. Tudo isto se fará se formos capazes de nos despirmos deste tempo que nos fez animais. Aceitemos de morrer como gente que já não somos. Deixai que morra o animal em que esta guerra nos converteu. (*Terra* 216)

This augury of a time of communal redemption has an echo in the impromptu festival which erupts in a refugee camp. Reflecting on its incongruity, and wondering how it could be possible to "festejar" in the midst of so much "desgraça," the novel's second narrator (Kindzu) concludes that "forças subterrâneas" must exist where souls "se recuperam." "A festa é a tristeza fazendo o pino." In it people celebrate themselves in "um futuro sonhado" (205). Alternately, the shaman's prophecy appears to resolve the aporia surrounding the referent of the pronoun *we* in the prediction which the narrator of "A derradeira morte da estátua de Mouzinho" puts forth about the nation's future: "O resto seremos nós a descobrir sem que nos digam como devemos fazer" (*Cronicando* 162). The morning that remains after the dissolution of the promise of freedom, the tenacious vestige of a hope "que não foram capazes de nos arrancar," the possibility of "um novo princípio," all signify "o resto" that the "people"—now irrevocably torn asunder from the "nation" (as conceived by its current rulers)—will have to invent for themselves. For, as the foreboding vision recorded at the end of *Último Voo* strongly suggests, the political elite have effectively forfeited their right to imagine the nation.

In that vision, the protagonist's father beholds the gods' consignment of an extended and dysfunctional family of

African nations to the void, a sort of telluric counterpart to the firmament: the "céus que ficam no fundo da terra" (*Último Voo* 220). There, these benighted nations are "em suspenso, à espera de um tempo favorável para regressar ao seu próprio chão. Aqueles territórios poderiam então ser nações, onde se espeta uma sonhada bandeira. Até lá era o vazio do nada, um soluço no tempo." (*Último Voo* 221). This then is the ancestors' solution to the post-independence predicament. Since the "imperious and necessary" socio-political task which confronted the national elite at independence (*o resto*) not only remains undone but has in fact been renounced; since it has been buried out of sight like an old army boot exactly because of its excessive and vexing historical meaning, it shall now be up to the subaltern to take up that *resto*. The exorbitant size of that army boot may now be re-read precisely as a sign [*um sinal*] of this remainder, of a future yet to be discovered. At the same time, the boot's apparent flight from its own size, "parecia escapar do seu tamanho," its lack of well-defined borders, "sem fronteira de si," points to more than the fact that, as with (and contrary to) Marx's nineteenth-century revolution, Mozambique's project for social transformation must also go beyond the (dialectical materialist) "phrases" into which it has tended only too frequently to be corseted.

The boot's overflowing dimensions may in this specific sense indicate the superfluity of the particular teleological conception of history with which it is metonymically linked. Indeed, whether the boot had belonged to a FRELIMO guerrilla or a colonial soldier remains an open question in the story. Its historical meaning is ultimately undecidable. Whatever lesson it is meant to impart tenaciously eludes the hermeneutic attempts of the exegetes inside as well as outside the text. Its excessive size, then, may suggest that this "official" historical narrative, like the personal history of "Apocalipse privado's" protagonist, cannot but be ineffectually told, recounted in discrete and incompatible idioms. In other words, its surplus may signify the fragmentation of FRELIMO's familiar long story into disparate minor tales. Just as the country itself must be swallowed up in a (political) vacuum so that the elusive time of plenitude and self-identity may finally be permitted to come into being, just as, for Marx, the proletarian revolution "must let the dead bury their dead, in order to arrive at its own content" (Marx 19), so must the boot that symbolizes the shattered pledge of emancipation be laid to rest in order for the territorial expanse called Mozambique to become a nation.

One could therefore observe, albeit with tongue rather close to cheek, that the narrative presentation of this matchless army boot offers none of the "satisfying plausibility" that Fredric Jameson encounters in Heiddeger's famous reading of Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant boots in the "Origin of the Work of Art" (8). In the latter, Heidegger assures us, "vibrates the silent call of the earth [...] this equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman" (*Poetry, Language* 34). Wreaking considerable havoc on the Heideggerian notion of *world* (putatively the investment of history and social being upon the non-signifying ipseity that is the *earth*), one might propose that Couto's army boot emerges not within the gap between the "meaninglessness" of the African savannah in which it enigmatically surfaces (e.g., *earth*) and the freedom call that wordlessly resonates in it (*world*), but rather within the fissure which rends this very emancipatory "address" ineluctably asunder. Couto's representation of the boot, in sum, does not so much allow the disclosure of what the struggle "*is* in truth" (*Poetry* 36) as it reveals its splintering into multiple and heterogenous truth*s*. Couto's boot never quite comes to stand "in the light of its being" (*Poetry* 36). Like the life history of "Apocalipse privado's" narrator, it culminates not in a state of rest but persists in unsettling motility (multiplying itself "em diversos e tranmutáveis homens....[sempre] ainda nascente[s]" [*Cada Homem* 29]), an unrest, moreover, which ultimately produces an occlusion: not the "unconcealedness of its being," not "the being of the being [coming] into the steadiness of its shining" (*Poetry* 36), but a "discovery" that is paradoxically crepuscular (a becoming night [anoitecer]), as though there were things visible only "em plena cegueira" (*Cada Homem* 29).

There is, to be sure, a figural rift between the nation and the earth in Couto's fiction, between a forfeited idea of collective identity (that is, "the [revolutionary] certainty of a new world") and a land which in *Terra sonâmbula*, for example, works as something like the telluric remnant of those abandoned hopes and dreams. In Couto's last novel, it is the earth which finally exacts revenge for "os desmandos dos vivos" (*Um rio chamado Tempo* 181-2). In *Último Voo*, it is the earth as well which executes the retributive stroke of "sobrenatureza" that consigns the harrowed nations of Africa beyond "a última berma do mundo" (219). Yet this gap, I would insist, is not the site into which a whole repudiated autochthony and sense of community are drawn together and ultimately revealed as a forgotten primordial truth. For the earth is also and inevitably incompatible with the peculiarly human vocation to project oneself beyond one's present state and moment, the "vocação....de desordenar paisagens" (*Cronicando* 171). To aspire "habilitar-se a chão," as a character in one of Couto's stories recognizes, is to negate this vocation, to relegate oneself to "o desfuturo" (*Contos do Nascer da Terra* 211). The future, on the other hand, "é um país que não se pode visitar"; it is "o além-mundo" (*Contos* 133), "o lugar para além de todos os lugares" (*Estórias Abensonhadas* 100), and which one reaches "sem ter que mudar o chão" (*Na Beira de Nenhuma Estrada* 119). It has everything of the new and nothing of the earth.

The gap between earth and nation produces the dehiscence out of which heterogeneous and transmutable utopian visions emerge. It is, in this sense, a figure for a growing irreconcilability between the national development line imposed from the top and the alternate subaltern imaginings of community erupting from below, overflowing the former, as it were. It is perhaps these pullulating local dreams that in *Terra sonâmbula* keep the national soil in a restless somnambulist state, and send it peregrinating into the long historical night that the latter's present has become. Thus, the novel's second narrator, who is engaged in a mythic quest to join up with *naparama* shaman-warriors,[11] wonders about halfway through his search whether he is not in fact merely fulfilling his fate as "sonhador de lembranças," an inventor of truths. A sleepwalker strolling through the fire. A sleepwalker like the land where he was born (117).

Indeed, although arguably a colonial throwback, the cargo cult itself proffers an "oppositional" vision of the future—if only insofar as it, too, ultimately affords a glimpse of the abysmal failure of those in power to live up to their self-ascribed responsibility for social transformation. But there are several other equally cogent instances of characters inventing their own personal utopias, characters who seem to nourish the hope that their own micrological narratives will ultimately take hold at the national level—in what would be simultaneously a reversal and a duplication of the process by means of which Uncle Geguê's "private apocalypse" is converted into a collective nightmare. In *Terra sonâmbula*, Tuahir, the protagonist's (Muidinga's) surrogate father, speaks of "um mundo que nem há," dressing up his visions. "A nossa terra se ia aquietar, todos se familiariam, moçambicanos. E nos visitaríamos como nos tempos" (73). At the end of the novel Tuahir decides to face death by setting off on a small boat which had once belonged to Kindzu, the novel's second narrator: "Começa então a viagem de Tuahir para um mar cheio de infinitas fantasias. Nas ondas estão escritas mil estórias, dessas de embalar as crianças do inteiro mundo" (209). Thus, against a scorched and violated earth, the sea emerges as the key element linking these utopian visions together, the "site" where imagined new worlds come ultimately to rest.

The sea plays a central role as well in the vision of community which Kindzu shares ephemerally with the Afro-Indian grocer Surendra Valá in *Terra sonâmbula*:

> Nós, os da costa, éramos habitantes não de um continente mas um oceano. Eu e Surendra partilhávamos a mesma pátria: o Índico. E era como se naquele imenso mar se desenrolassem os fios da história, novelos antigos onde nossos sangues se haviam misturado. Eis a razão por que demorávamos na adoração do

> mar: estavam ali nossos comuns ante-passados, flutuando sem fronteiras. (26)

This elicitation of an imaginary water world represents more than the expression of Kindzu's wish to find another continent in Africa (*Terra* 103). It represents something other than a mere vision of "África liquefazendo sua carne térrea" or "o continente se oceanifica" (*Cronicando* 82). Indeed, Kindzu's fantasy of an oceanic continent inside the African landmass conflates Agostinho Neto's desire to be a wave with his quest "em busca de todas as Áfricas do mundo" (Neto 63), expressed in the closing line of his poem "Sombras." This unbounded cultural space echoes the metonymic association between the army boot's lack of a "frontier with itself" and the oversized emancipatory dream which the post-independence nation proceeds narrowly to constrict. What the absence of borders indicates in both instances is a dream of a community that transcends racial and ethnic divides.

It is to a certain extent in keeping with this oneirical "logic" as well that Surendra later disavows this imagined maritime homeland, as "suas palavras matavam a miragem de um oceano que nos unira no passado" (*Terra* 28-9) precisely in the name of the earth. When, at the outbreak of the civil war, RENAMO "bandits" rob and set fire to his store, the Indian merchant, discouraged and disillusioned by the fact that Kindzu is the only townsperson who has come to offer him his sympathy and support, redefines himself as a man without a "pátria" and decides to leave the country. Despite an abiding utopian impulse, Kindzu himself recognizes at the moment of their parting that "Surendra estava sozinho, sem laço com vizinhas gentes, sem raiz na terra" (29). With the salty taste of his own tears upon his lips, Kindzu clings to a notion of community which his own heart refuses to "authenticate" ("entregando ideias que meu peito não autenticava"): "aquela terra também era a dele [Surendra], que todos cabiam nela" (29). "Que pátria, Kindzu? [Surendra asks.] Eu não tenho lugar nenhum. Ter patria é assim como você está fazer agora, saber que vale a pena chorar" (29).

The ambivalence of Surendra's rejection is perhaps manifest enough to dispense with commentary. Suffice it to say that his re-conceptualization of *pátria*, which ostensibly renounces his earlier dream of an oceanic homeland, recuperates that idea at the very moment that it repudiates it. If *pátria* is indeed defined by Kindzu's tears, then it cannot but run counter to the notion of earth/land (*terra*) from which Surendra deems himself excluded. What Kindzu is weeping for, after all, is the "mirage" of the "communal" ocean which Surendra is in the process of killing off discursively. Ultimately, then, Surendra's characterization of Kindzu's tears as the sign of autochthony surreptitiously undercuts his proposition that what determines communal belonging is one's rootedness in the land, since Kindzu is mourning exactly the alleged impossibility of transcending that narrow sense of indigenousness in imagining a national community. In effect, Surendra continues to keep faith with his maritime utopia even as he is rejecting it, when he reaffirms his preference for "homens que não tem [*sic*] raça"[12] (29). Much later in the novel, upon observing first-hand the flagrantly racist policies of local leaders, Kindzu also reveals his abidance to its spirit when he surmises that it would take several centuries before "cada homem [*sic*] fosse visto sem o peso da sua raça" (124). Despite Surendra's disavowal of his utopian vision, then, the sea remains an appropriately protean "site" which exceeds measurable time and space, a place where all the utopias called forth by an "orphaned" population are to be patiently awaited, celebrated in anticipation, nurtured.

In a way, the futures collectively summoned here symbolize a new rounding of the Cape, this time in reverse direction. These imagined trajectories have neither example nor precedent. They are irreducibly other both to nation and empire, and propose an erasure and retracing of the latter's interlocked itineraries. In a more specific historical sense, Surendra's evocation of the Indian Ocean as a cultural homeland which Africans and Indians would allegedly share in common recalls K.N. Chaudhuri's postulate that the Indian Ocean, much like the Mediterranean for Fernand

Braudel, was "the product of the unities of material life and the physical environment," that it constituted, from the rise of Islam to the middle of the eighteenth century, a neutral zone where merchants "by definition operated across national political frontiers" (Chaudhuri 25, 38). What the "miragem de um oceano que nos unira no passado" (*Terra* 29) ultimately invokes, then, is a kind of pre-Hegelian, and indeed pre-Vasco da Gama globality.

It adumbrates what Heidegger might have named the *end* of "the end of philosophy [which] means: the beginning of the world civilization based upon Western European thinking"[13] (*On Time and Being* 59). It reaches back to the period before the arrival of Gama's caravels, when "the Middle East, southern Mediterranean, and parts of the western Indian Ocean....[evidenced the] political, economic and cultural unification [characteristic of] a world system, [a network] stretching all the way from the Indian Ocean to the Strait of Gibraltar" (Chaudhuri 384-5). It is not simply for the restoration of this "lost world" that Kindzu is calling, though, when, toward the end of *Terra sonâmbula*, he nearly surrenders to a symbolic and self-annihilating desire to drift into the ocean, when he professes his unwavering solidarity both with Surendra and his maritime vision: "No final, Surendra é o único de quem eu aceito companhia. O indiano mais sua nação sonhada: o oceano sem nenhum fim" (214).

Rather, what Surendra's and Kindzu's oceanic community exhumes in the last instance is the trace of the peripheral position and experience of transitoriness which Portugal occupied in relation to the world system which predated by centuries its inaugural depredations in the east. To put it in other terms, this imagined ocean world summons up the sense of doubt, the ephemerality and danger—the epochal aporia, as it were—that is registered, for example, in the question Fernand Braudel poses: "How was it that....Arab navigation stopped short just before 'the powerful current of Mozambique, which carries ships....south', [and thus] did not lead to Arab domination of the world?" (Braudel 412). The imaginary recuperation of this historical contingency seeks to tear an "enabling opening" in the fabric of the master narrative which has continued to define the official shape of Mozambique's future.

The earth/world gap in Couto's fiction is hence not the (fractured) sign of a renewed nativism in favor of which the emancipatory project inaugurated by the anti-colonial struggle is peremptorily rejected as inauthentic. If "inauthenticity" there is, then it would have to reside in the fundamentally "ideological" (in Paul de Man's sense) attempt to posit an impossible conflation between the earth and the revolutionary "new world." It would have to lie in the confusion between "natural reality" and the linguistic projection which any nationalist project necessarily constitutes. This is a confusion which Couto's writing not only refuses to make, but which it consistently exposes. As one of his recent stories ("O escrevido" from *Na Beira de Nehuma Estrada*) suggests, the itinerary of his fictional discourse tends to be doubly parabolic. At one and the same time, it retraces the asymptotic relation between his "subaltern subjects" and his narration of them and it rehearses the (parabolic) "flight of writing" back to the privileged site of its production. It insistently foregrounds writing's quandary, in other words, its irrevocable inadequateness to its example.

Thus, *Terra sonâmbula* surreptitiously establishes a relationship of mutual "dependency" between the self-consciously literary "magical-realism" of Kindzu's notebooks, which Muidinga discovers in the wreckage of a shelled-out bus and reads nightly to Tuahir, and the latter's own life histories. In the course of the novel, Kindzu's notebooks come to light as one of its more conspicuous utopian sites. To young Muidinga, for example, "os escritos de Kindzu traziam....uma memória emprestada sobre esses impossíveis dias" (136). By the same token, Tuahir, *literalizing* the celebration of "um futuro sonhado" enacted in the improvised festival which breaks out in a refugee camp, detects in the notebooks the correlate to "forças subterrâneas" (205) which rejuvenate the soul: "Não podemos dançar nem rir. Então vamos para dentro desses cadernos. Lá podemos cantar, divertir" (136). For his part, Kindzu seems to recognize, *avant la lettre*, the destiny and function of his scriptural production: "escrevo conforme vou sonhando," he tells his father, in order to "ensinar [the hypothetical reader] a sonhar" (195). It is Kindzu in fact who has the narrative's last word. In a scene which vacillates between the real and the oneirical, he meets a child who turns out to be his girlfriend's long lost son.[14] As if to reaffirm that, like all the utopias disseminated throughout the novel, this reconciliation can take shape only within the covers of a text, Kindzu's notebooks fall out of the young boy's hands: "Então, as letras, uma por uma, se vão convertendo em grãos de areia e, aos poucos, todos meus escritos se vão transformando em páginas de terra" (218). The rift between earth and world is thus finally repaired in the space of writing, as the nocturnal perambulation of the land now turns out to be a figure for the movement from left to right performed by the black script which contains the earth itself.

Here I would hesitate before asserting, along with Patrick Chabal, that the closing lines of Couto's *Terra* "suggest a continuation of that elusive dialectic between the words that produce an account of events and the soil that holds the country's cultural heritage" ("Mia Couto or the Art of Story-telling" 114). To propose such a direct link between national soil and culture is, I believe, to read a little too cursorily and ultimately to ignore the exogenous and errant currents which have historically flown in to produce the nation's "cultural heritage." I would insist rather that the "elusive dialectic" between narrative discourse and native soil remains precisely elusive, suspended in the space of writing. Nor does Couto's fiction constitute an outright repudiation of the utopian impulse of the national liberation struggle. On the contrary, Couto wishes to retain this emancipatory spirit. Once again, I shall let one of his characters illuminate the point. In his latest novel, the old man Mariano, explaining to his militant son the source of his distrust in FRELIMO's program for political and social change, argues "que o mundo não mudaria por disparo. A mudança requeria outras pólvoras, dessas que explodem tão manso dentro de nós que se revelam apenas por um imperceptível pestanejar do pensamento" (*Um rio chamado Tempo* 223). It is to the heterogeneity of this utopian thought, of this yearning for "futuros mais-que-perfeitos" (*A Varanda do Frangipani* 20) that Couto's narratives bear witness.

In an aetiological tale (about the origin of night) retold to the protagonist of *Último Voo*, by the ghost of his dead mother, a flamingo which dwells in a mythical land where time had yet to invent night confesses his desire to fly "para um sítio onde não há nenhum lugar" (117):

> Queria ir lá onde não há sombra, nem mapa. Lá onde tudo é luz [...] Então o flamingo se lançou, arco e flecha se crisparam em seu corpo.... Dir-se-ia....que era a própria luz que voava. E o pássaro ia des-folhando, asa em asa, as transparentes páginas do céu. Mais um bater de plumas e, de repente, a todos pareceu que o horizonte se vermelhava.... Tudo se passando como se um incêndio. Nascia, assim, o primeiro poente. Quando o flamingo se extinguiu, a noite se estreou naquela terra. Era o ponto final. No escurecer, a voz de minha mãe se desvaneceu (118-9).

Once again, Agostinho Neto's familiar image returns: "terra quente dos horizontes em fogo" (Neto 55). Yet, from the heavenly pages, to the night (of print), the full stop and the evanescent voice, the scriptural provenance of this intricate invocation of a literally *revolutionary* future—that is, a new day induced by a planetary *revolution*—is carefully inscribed into the fragment. In this fashion, the flamingo's last flight simultaneously registers an enduring promise of emancipation and the betrayal of that promise. It is precisely in this sense that Couto would, I believe, concur with Derrida: "Not only must one not renounce the emancipatory desire, it is necessary to insist on it more than ever, it seems, and insist on it, moreover, as the very indestructibility of the 'it is necessary.' This is the condition of a re-politicization, perhaps of another concept of the political" (Derrida 74-5).

To put it in more practical terms, what Couto gestures to at the end of *Último Voo* may not be fundamentally dissimilar from the critical appropriation of militant nationalism for which Mahmood Mamdani calls at the end of his magisterial book:

> To bridge the rural and the urban through a politics both noncoercive and democratic, it is necessary to transcend the dualism of power around which the [postcolonial] state is organized. To do so requires that the nature of power in both spheres, the rural and the urban, be transformed, simultaneously. Only then will the distinction rural-urban—and interethnic—be more fluid than rigid, more an outcome of social processes than a state-enforced artifact (301).

The final flight of the flamingo thus points to "another opening of event-ness as historicity that [permits] one not to renounce, but on the contrary to open up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise: as *promise* and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design" (Derrida 74). As I have been arguing, this is the enabling opening that Couto seeks to uncover in his fiction. It is the opening with which *Último Voo* closes, and which will serve as the epilogue to this essay.

At the end of the novel, the protagonist's father performs what is surely a signature move in Couto's fiction: he boards a canoe and begins to row seaward. In the horizon, the boat assumes the shape of a bird in his son's eyes: "Um flamingo que se afastava, pelos aléns" (*Último Voo* 223). Just as Kindzu finally embraces Surendra's ambivalently disavowed oceanic community, *Último Voo*'s narrator, too, takes the Italian UN official at his word, and accepts his assurance that "há-de vir um outro." Wondering whether the journey his father had just embarked upon was not "the last flight of the flamingo," he then sits quietly down "na espera de um outro tempo. Até que escutei a canção de minha mãe, essa que ela entoava para que os flamingos empurrassem o sol do outro lado do mundo" (225). *A luta continua...*

Notes:

1. "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," in *C.L.R. James Reader*, ed. Anna Grimshaw.
2. i.e. "The classes fighting against imperialism....have to confront this threat with the higher and more creative culture of resolute struggle" (*Decolonising the Mind* 3).

3. As Marcelino dos Santos recalls, "a Revolução tem as suas leis" (*Canto Armado* 102), and revolutionary labor painstakingly traces "o grande desenho da vida" (in *Antologia temática I: A Noite grávida de punhais*, ed. Mário de Andrade, 130).

4. "A linha de combate….é lá onde a FRELIMO determina...é lá onde a Revolução me leva" (Santos *Canto Armado* 107); "o tempo da certeza / da realização das esperanças […] O tempo da Revolução" (Santos *Canto Armado* 106); "Lutar p'ra nós....é uma ponte entre a descrença / e a certeza do mundo novo)" (Jorge Rebelo *Canto Armado* 83-4)

5. "Olhei a arma, cheirei o cano, o perfume da morte" (39).

6. The "new life" and National Independence, "o fim da exploração do Homem pelo Homem."

7. *Não temos onde cair vivos*, literally, "we don't even have a place to fall into living," is an untranslatable pun on the common Portuguese idiom for poor, *Não ter onde cair morto*, literally, not to have a place to be buried in, or fall into dead.

8. To recall the words of Manuel Alegre, "nada acontece aqui [in Salazarist Portugal] [...] tudo o que é acção e história e rasgo e risco se passa sempre do outro lado....do lado de lá dos Pirenéus" (Alegre 19).

9. As in: "o que é importante / não é o que tu queres o que eu quero / *mas o que nós queremos*" (Santos *Canto Armado* 107).

10. I am once again reminded of Fanon: "Par son comportement la bourgeoisie nationale de certains pays sous-développés rappelle les membres d'un gang" (*Les damnés* 130).

11. The *naparama*, who arose in 1991, "were the armed followers of a charismatic leader called António [who] claimed to be immune to Renamo bullets and under his inspiration local militias were formed." (Newitt 573). The emergence of the *naparama* initially helped the government cause, as the tide of the war briefly turned in its favor. Renamo suffered some crucial defeats and many of the "displaced" began returning to their villages throughout much of central Mozambique. Ironically, as Newitt remarks, Frelimo's success was brought about "not through the conventional means of the modern state but by enlisting those very traditional beliefs which it had been determined to uproot" (573). After António's death in a conflict with Renamo forces, "the brutal stalemate" between the rebels and government troops reasserted itself.

12. The exchange that leads to this familiar conclusion is worth quoting in full. After Surendra professes not to like blacks, Kindzu wonders if he prefers whites. "Dos brancos….também não," replies Surendra. "Já sei, gosta de indianos, gosta da sua raça," Kindzu suggests. "Não. *Eu gosto de homens que não tem raça.* É por isso que eu gosto de si, Kindzu" (*Terra* 29; italics added).

13. In evoking Heidegger in this "postcolonial" context, one must admittedly bracket the philosopher of being's perplexing insistence on discerning the "other" of western metaphysics exclusively in the thought of the pre-Socratic Greeks (rather than in that of Judaism, say).

14. As the boy (Gaspar), whom Farida had given up for adoption, was the product of a rape by a Portuguese land owner, he would have been in

late adolescence at the time the novel takes place (the late 1980s). This lack of verisimilitude therefore marks the scene as a dream sequence.

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