

The Literary Memory of the Colonial War in Angola

Isabel Moutinho

Abstract: This study examines two Portuguese novels about the colonial war in Angola, unusual in that they do not present a personal, but a collective view of that war, from two perspectives: the Portuguese side (reevaluating the rhetoric of colonialism) and the Angolan side (including tentative representations of African oral history and agency).

Many Portuguese novelists make the colonial war in Angola (1961-1974) the focus of their narrative fiction from the mid-1970s onwards. Most of these novels have a strong autobiographical component, aiming simultaneously at the recovery and exorcising of personal and traumatic memories of the war.¹ Some, however, go one step further and strive to recall the memory of that war in broader, collective terms, attempting to include also a view from the other side, namely, the Angolan side. Such is the case with the two novels I propose to examine here: João de Melo's *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* (1984) [*Autopsy of a Sea in Ruins*] and Manuel Alegre's *Jornada de África* (1989) [*Expedition to Africa*].²

Unlike most other Portuguese novels of the colonial war, which move between one of the colonial war settings and Portugal, *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* is set solely in Angola. Its chapters focus alternately on the daily routine of a unit of Portuguese soldiers serving at the front in northern

Angola, and on that of indigenous Angolans living in a nearby enclosed village (*sanzala*) under the surveillance of the Portuguese military. The story of the Portuguese battalion and that of the Angolan *sanzala* people are presented in parallel, the Portuguese side of the plot unfolding in the odd-numbered chapters, and the Angolan in the even-numbered ones.

It is never exactly clear who the narrator of each chapter is, and this ambiguity is maintained as an effective technique for widening the scope of the narrative.³ On the Portuguese side, it could be the night sentry, or the captain, the quartermaster nurse, one particular soldier (Renato), or all of the soldiers. This deliberately misleading narrative technique unambiguously establishes the essential clue for reading the novel: *Autópsia* claims as its narrative impulse a collective voice, and one that is epic and poetic. The voice of this collective soldier at war (“eu aqui, soldado ocidental,” 24) is “occidental” because it is loaded with echoes of the history and epic of the country that Camões described as “ocidental praia lusitana” (I.1.2) [the occidental Lusitanian seashore]. It is a voice embodied by a collectively “forgotten” soldier (“esquecido” 24), one who sets himself a double task: first, to record the memory of his fellow soldiers, because private memory is fragile; and second, to prod the memory of their forgetful countrymen who did not go to war, because a country’s collective memory is even shorter than that of its soldiers individually: “sentei-me na noite, em Calambata, (...) e de lá vos mandei escrito de *toda a memória que há* sobre os dias desta guerra” (25) [I sat down at night in Calambata, (...) and from there I sent you (*plural*) the record of *all the memory there is* of the days of this war] (emphasis added).

This impression of a collective effort is achieved essentially through the use of variable internal focalisation. The reader continues being put off the track as to the identity of the narrator throughout the book. The narrative voice of the army chapters goes to extremes to confuse the reader as to its identity. Chapter 5 is told in the first person, and this first person insists on his stature as an eyewitness to the events he narrates: “Vi...vi...vi” (I saw). This, however, suddenly becomes: “Renato viu” (Renato saw). Chapter 7 puts more emphasis on the collective aspect of the narration by using the first person plural, but all of a sudden it throws the reader off the track again: “Eu vou endoidecer, pensou. (...) tenho medo do deus N’Zambi” (88) (I am going to go crazy, he thought. (...) I am afraid of the god N’Zambi). This sentence is doubly confusing because the character about whom we have been told that he is disturbed to the point of illness is the quartermaster nurse, not the soldier Renato; but the char-

acter who thinks of the Angolan god N'Zambi is the unnamed sentry of the first chapter. Could this be an African soldier? It is not until chapter 21 that it is explained that the sentry of chapter 1 was Renato too.

We must, then, take it as fictionally true that the narrator of *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* is Private Renato. His is an extremely self-effacing narrative voice. In any case, the narrative seems to follow most closely the point of view of the quartermaster nurse, who is the most frequent subject of focalisation. Renato and the nurse form a kind of inseparable double, the one doing the (ostensible) thinking and writing, the other taking the most active role in attending to the war-wounded. Disconcertingly, though, it is the nurse and not Renato who is described within the novel as being a writer himself, although apparently not of this book; and Renato is only presented as writing letters to his wife. Renato is meditative, the nurse, at the front, is exhaustingly busy. And yet it could be argued that, of the two, the nurse is the one best equipped and most inclined to think, ponder, and question (“tem a mania que é filósofo, faz literatura, vai ser génio um dia” (174) [he is convinced that he is a philosopher, he writes literature, he’s going to be a genius one day]).

In any case, the novel’s narrator multiplies himself not just into a double, but into many voices. The process is too complex not to be regarded as a deliberate strategy. To try to disentangle all the characters involved in this multiplication of the narrative voice would be to impoverish the reading of the novel, which itself at times underlines the importance of its collective aspect: “pensávamos nós em coro” (110), “responderam, à uma, os meninos do coro” (111), “sabiam que só era possível pensar em coro, todos à uma” (202) [we thought in chorus; they answered, in unison, (*like*) choir boys; they knew that it was only possible to think in chorus, all at once]. Although initially disconcerting, this is a very effective literary device in that it allows these chapters to be read as a collective narrative, the record of the entwined lives of a group of men thrown together by war.

In the chapters focusing on the Angolans, the focalisation is also internal and variable, appearing to be most often inside Natália’s head, but also closely following Mamã Josefa, Vavó Katuela, Anica, and the women (all together) who need to rescue their husbands from their blind drunkenness. Sometimes the focalisation seems more external, particularly when it first follows Romeu, Natália’s husband, or Cavungi, Josefa’s husband, as if the narrative voice could not follow a man’s point of view as effortlessly as a woman’s. But it becomes internal again when it follows *soba* Mussunga, the local chief, and

the elder Loneque, as well as Romeu in later chapters. Here again, then, plurality is the dominant note. It is when Romeu is the subject of focalisation that we learn more of his connections with the guerrillas who fight the Portuguese army from beyond Angola's northern border.⁴ Romeu is very outspoken, he dares to vent feelings of revolt against the Portuguese that the others are too afraid to express. Nevertheless, when the narrative becomes truly engaged in the revelation of the Angolan people's profound aspirations for liberty and independence, it does so—as in the Portuguese chapters—in the first person plural:

Quase sempre, combatentes escondiam-se no meio do povo. Traziam notícias de outros combatentes para a família, levavam informações sobre a tropa. (...) passavam nas lagoas mansas da noite, nos ninhos quentes e nas sepulturas sem nome, onde que *a guerra, a guerra dos nossos*, esperava ainda a voz ausente e a respiração única deste povo. (157; emphasis added)

[Almost always the fighters would hide among the people. They brought news of other fighters to their families, they carried information about the army. (...) they'd pass by the quiet lagoons at night, the warm nests, and the tombs without names, to where *the war, the war of our people*, still awaited the absent voice and the breathing together of this people]

Thus the colonial war of the army chapters becomes “a guerra dos nossos” (“our war” or “the war of our people”) in the *sanzala* chapters. The entanglement of narrative voices, so carefully interwoven, becomes the principal strategy for achieving the impression of a collective account of the war: that of the Portuguese soldiers and that of the Angolan civilians, the latter adding echoes of another two involved parties, the guerrillas and the white settlers.

Furthermore, the role of the voice(s) we hear in the Angolan chapters is clearly presented as different from that of the army chapters: “Ih!, esses acontecimentos estão ter lugar na minha história, é porquê então?” (102) [Eh! those happenings are taking place in my story, why is that then?]. Here, someone is telling a story. And the oral aspect of this story is emphasised throughout the novel by its being punctuated with phrases normally used to catch listeners' attention in a situation of oral communication: “sabias?” (32), “Eu conto” (81), “Vê só” (181), “vou te contar” (103), “estou-te falar” (207), and so on [did you know?; I'll tell you; Look here; I'm going to tell you; I'm

telling you]. As such, in view of the predominantly oral character of the story told in the *sanzala* chapters of the novel and the emphasis on the telling, the narrator(s) of these should more properly be referred to as the storyteller(s).

Independently from just how many voices contribute to one or the other sections of the novel, there is the question of how far these voices engage in dialogue. To be sure, the voices of the Angolans are much more present here than in most Portuguese fictions of the colonial war, in which they are only very occasionally audible. Here, instead, they constitute a full half of a novel that gives equal weight to them and to the Portuguese soldiers' voices.

In fact, the very language of *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* changes as the narrative alternates between military and indigenous chapters. Those relating to the Portuguese soldiers are in standard Portuguese; those by the Angolan storyteller(s) are told in the local variety of Portuguese, with its "ungrammatical" traits ("um português desgramaticado" 71), which to a Portuguese reader immediately give an impression of foreignness. Naturally, the novel being by a Portuguese author, the language presented as Angolan Portuguese must remain an imitation, a literary re-creation of what the author perceives as the language of the Angolans living in the *sanzala*. Nevertheless, *Autópsia* does attempt to adopt the Angolan variety of Portuguese (or what a Portuguese speaker perceives as such) consistently, side by side with the European standard. This is a radical linguistic, even political choice in that it attributes the same literary prestige to both languages, rather than simply using the African variety to give exotic flavour to the speech of African characters included in a white person's narrative.

What *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* does very strikingly, which other Portuguese colonial war novels do not, is to remove the quotation marks from around the reported speech of the Other, thus much reducing the distance between Portuguese selfhood and Angolan alterity. Most of all, the inclusion on an equal footing of the chapters in Angolan Portuguese very successfully serves the purpose of rendering this novel a collective account of the colonial war, which to be truly "collective" must include the point of view of the Other. There would after all have been no colonial war if it were not for that indispensable Other. Admittedly, though, the only African voices we can hear in this novel are the ones that have learned a variety of Portuguese. By allowing the Angolan characters to express themselves in their own (albeit second) language, i.e., *as their own selves*, *Autópsia* transforms that alterity into a selfhood that becomes less and less unfamiliar to the reader as the novel progresses.

Intertextuality in *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* is yet another strategy by which collective memory finds expression. While the polyphony of the novel allows for the inclusion of synchronically co-existing accounts of the war, intertextuality brings forth another type of collective voice, a diachronic memory shaped by numerous previous literary texts dealing with Portugal's history, which inform the present-day view of the war: Camões's *Os Lusíadas*, Fernão Lopes's *Crónica de Dom João I*, and the *História Trágico-Marítima* are the most obvious ones. But *Autópsia* also engages with contemporary, censored representations of the war in the Portuguese media.

The most subtle instance of intertextual dialogue in *Autópsia* is perhaps the one the novel establishes with the poetry of Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935). Especially relevant here is the poem "O Menino de Sua Mãe." The poem's title is quoted directly, though not identified as a title (169), or with alterations ("à pobre mãe do seu menino" (134), "todos os meninos de suas mães," (167) three or four times in the novel. It is worth quoting a good translation of the poem's opening and final lines:

On the plain left alone / Where the breeze now softens, / With bullets in his
brain— / Two, once and once again— / He lies there dead, and stiffens. // His tunic
is bloodstained. (...) // (O nets the Empire knots!) / He lies there dead, and rots,
/ His mother's little boy. ("His Mother's" 36)

The situation in *Autópsia* corresponds closely to that portrayed by Pessoa fifty years earlier, and Pessoa's language is a point of departure for the shocking, gory imagery of the novel. For its thematic parallels with the war fatalities presented in *Autópsia*, this poem is mentioned above all in chapter 13, where there lie the nine corpses of young soldiers who had, until not long ago, also been their mothers' little boys. Many echoes of this and other poems by Fernando Pessoa can be traced at various points in the novel (including the fact that there are bells also in poems by one of his heteronyms, Alberto Caeiro), but such direct quotations and indirect resonances are not the most important form of intertextual dialogue with the poet's work in *Autópsia*.

One of Pessoa's most striking contributions to Portuguese culture was his creation of various heteronyms, characters he brought into literary existence with a life and a poetical style of their own. Pessoa even determined the time of death of some of his heteronyms. The entangled double that the narrators of the army chapters in *Autópsia* seem to constitute (i.e., Renato, as the

acknowledged and named narrator, and the quartermaster nurse, whose actions Renato can describe as separate from his own, but whose thoughts, feelings, and hopes have become inextricably fused with Renato's) could well be seen as a new heteronymous pair. Heteronymity was as essential to Pessoa's poetic universe as the doubling up, even the multiplication, of the narrator(s) is in *Autópsia* as a strategy for the gathering of a collective memory of the colonial war. The comparison appears all the more pertinent as the quartermaster nurse is often described as possessed by a madness ("loucura") very similar to that attributed by Pessoa to King Sebastian in *Mensagem*.⁵ As António Cirurgião points out, "King Sebastian's legacy to his people is his madness," a madness that was "the dream of an empire without frontiers and without sunset" (117). The quartermaster nurse's "madness" is his hope for the children of Angola; he appears repeatedly referred to as "the man whose hope were the children of Angola" (47-49, 92, 99, etc.). The nurse's madness, then, corresponds to a further historical development, which will only become possible *after* what already appears here as the inevitable collapse of the empire of which Sebastian first dreamt. His madness begins where King Sebastian's ends, but both share the same visionary, dreamy quality: one, that of the emergence of Empire; the other, that of the future of Africa (its children) beyond it.

Nevertheless, what leads us to see in the doubleness of Renato and the nurse a case of heteronymity created in the mould of Pessoa's heteronyms is the fact that Renato is killed at the end of the novel ("No dia em que eu morri na guerra" [283] [The day I died in the war]). The fact that the narrative continues in the first person (after "I died") confirms that someone else has to be writing the story that has so far been attributed to the named, narrating I that finally explains the deliberate entanglements of Renato and the quartermaster nurse. The two are, then, not strictly heteronyms in the Pessoaan sense (though it is appropriate to keep in mind that Pessoa provided dates of death for some of his heteronyms, thus also "killing" them), but they certainly fall well within the imaginative realm of Pessoa's creations. And they can well be viewed as the King Sebastian who got killed in North Africa and the madness that survived him.

Furthermore, the doubling up of Portuguese narrator/Angolan storyteller presents itself as a more substantial case of creative heteronymity in the Pessoaan model—more explicitly so when it involves the structure of the whole novel. While Pessoa created his heteronyms perhaps to be able to give

expression to different styles that did not ring true within his own voice, João de Melo appears to have devised a similar sort of heteronymy as a way to bring the voices of (some of the) Angolan Others into mainstream Portuguese literature, which has never otherwise seriously engaged with African cultures or given them more than a fleeting voice in its texts.⁶

Does *Autópsia* succeed in giving voice to the Angolans? Do the *sanzala* sections of the novel amount to a faithful representation of the life of a certain section of the Angolan population during the colonial war? We could only argue in the positive for a Portuguese readership. An Angolan reader would no doubt find that even this representation is merely external and flawed, or that it still perpetuates stereotypes. As Isabel Allegro de Magalhães underlines, “as suas vozes são sempre, porém, *traduzidas*, filtradas *portuguêsmente*” (*Capelas Imperfeitas* 187) [the (Africans’) voices are always *translated*, filtered *through a Portuguese mind*] in these narratives. Nor indeed could it be otherwise. First of all, there is the question of the language used in the *sanzala* sections. For a Portuguese audience, it is distinctly different from standard Portuguese, but only an Angolan could judge of its authenticity. But it is important to point out that the language used does not attempt to emulate the standard Angolan variety of Portuguese, as spoken and written by the educated Angolan classes, particularly the country’s intellectuals. It tries to represent the language of the partly acculturated Angolans living in the artificial conditions of a *sanzala* created for displaced civilians. And the novel makes no secret of the fact that this language could only be that of a small percentage of that population (for example, the acculturated *soba* must act as interpreter between the Angolan coffee-growers and the Portuguese colonists who come to buy the coffee). With these limitations then, yes, this is a case in which the African is heard speaking.

Furthermore, *Autópsia* attempts to validate African history by explicitly referring to its different mode. There are repeated references to the people’s memory of the war: “O povo sabia e guardava na memória o testemunho dessas histórias que todos os dias ficavam escritas na terra-mãe, nossa pátria bem-amada” (119) [The people knew and kept in their memory the testimony of those histories which every day were written in the mother-earth, our beloved homeland]. African history is oral; it has not been written in European-style chronicles, but it nevertheless remains recorded in people’s memories, which are transmitted orally, by the women and by the elders, with their special kind of wisdom: “são muito sábios, os mais-velhos, men-

tira? Ciência da vida está neles” (150) [they’re very wise, the elders, a lie? Science of life is in them].

It is certainly true that the *sanzala* chapters cannot in the end represent an authentically African voice, even though they attempt to present the story (and the history) from the point of view of the Angolans, and in (an imitation of) their language. The novel endeavours to represent the traditional orality of African culture by inserting marks of oral communication throughout, but the genuine “initial and final formulas” (Moser 43) that punctuate Angolan storytelling are missing. So too are the most genuinely African elements of those stories: folk and animal tales, myths, legends, songs, riddles, proverbs. Also, the more externally focused chapters, those dealing most extensively with the Angolan view of the war, sound in a way least authentic, because they become less oral in texture. The reader becomes aware that they are still part of a fictional written text, so that they are the least successful chapters in the novel—in the sense, as Homi Bhabha would say, that they “historicise the colonial experience” (115). They make it read as a master narrative, which is a European, not an African genre. This is perhaps simply because the perspective of the army chapters begins to pervade the *sanzala* chapters too, making us forget that elsewhere the novel also tries to give voice to the validity of an alternative form of history, and an alternative way of telling stories.

Nevertheless, the *sanzala* chapters of *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* do give expression at least to the inauthentic, lives of “mimicry” that the Angolans lived under the colonial war. One good example here is the party described as taking place in the *sanzala* on a Sunday afternoon. A traditional party in Angola, a *sunguilamento*, would have occurred in the evening, when the cool hours invite relaxation and entertainment. Such a *sunguilamento* would then culminate in storytelling, generally by the elder women (see Moser 43). The *sanzala* party in *Autópsia* is but a pale imitation: a joyless, adulterated occasion in the afternoon heat, with drums and Portuguese music playing from a portable radio. The point is that the *sanzala* chapters of *Autópsia* cannot, indeed should not, be expected to represent the diversity of authentic Angolan cultures; they must settle for an overview of the life of a displaced and semi-acculturated population, which has been robbed of its real cultures by the colonial presence itself. Indeed, how could the *sanzala* people hold a *sunguilamento* when there is a war curfew on?

In the final analysis, though, *Autópsia* is reasonably successful in portraying the lives of Angolans in those altered conditions that the colonial war

imposed, and also in representing the obscure, intricate ways in which the Portuguese monologue and the Angolan monologue in the end do engage in, albeit tentative, dialogue. In the initial chapters of the book, the reader may worry that the novel still perpetuates an imperialistic view of the world in Portuguese terms. Even the intertextual echoes reinforce such an impression, taken as they are from Portuguese epic and from the mythology that has shaped the Portuguese view of themselves for centuries. More worryingly, the fact that the *sanzala* chapters initially come from a female voice and concentrate on a collective memory of rape seems to perpetuate an imperialist view of Angola (or any colony) raped by (and powerlessly accepting or enduring the rape of) Portuguese colonialism, which the army is there to defend and uphold. This would amount to what Laura Chrisman has called “imperialism as sexual allegory” (501).

However, there is a radical change precisely as the *sanzala* chapters become more collective and follow the point of view of male as well as female characters. The inclusion of male voices brings with it a shift from the impotent endurance of imperial rape to an indictment of the practices of the capitalist economy that went together with colonialism (specifically in the final chapters, where the whole community is forced to sell the product of a year’s work for miserable amounts to the wealthy, obese Portuguese colonists). Here there is no question of any Portuguese civilising mission any more. Here the finger is unequivocally pointed at the political economy that accompanies colonialism, the practical side of imperialism. What the army now sees in Angola is that they are there to defend, not the elevated notion of an imperial fatherland, but the capitalist interests of the colonists (in this case cheap labour and cheap coffee).

Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas uses heteronymy as the basis for its narrative structure, precisely because it opens up the possibility of representing in literature that fundamental split in Portuguese culture: the encounter with the African Other that made Others of the Portuguese too. But the dual narrative structure, and the “heteronymous,” split/doubled/multiplied voices within each part do not remain impervious to each other: their “inter-illumination” is there to be detected, though it could only take place with great risks, in times of war, between an army and its “enemy.”

Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism implies interrelation between two different views of the world, as expressed by their respective “social languages.” Monologue, in his terms, is typical of authoritarian regimes, which always

want to have “the last word” (250). One could argue that in this novel nobody has the last word. Renato has already been killed in the penultimate chapter. Romeu, the most active guerrilla-sympathiser amongst the *sanzala* characters, is on his way to being finished off, already almost beaten to death in the novel’s last page. Nevertheless, Renato’s voice continues to be heard, via an obscure, alternative (heteronymous) narrator, though fictionally still in his own words, from beyond death. And so too do the voices of the *sanzala* people continue to be heard. Each and all of the characters has a *lasting* word, which becomes more important than having the last one—words that will last as part of two nations’ collective memory.

What this novel achieves most successfully is the summoning and recording of the various voices that make up a collective memory of war, voices of the dead and voices still alive. Included too, therefore, must be the echoes of important milestones of Portuguese literary heritage with which the novel establishes its intertextual dialogue, as well as an attempt at representing the orality of the other side of the story, the marks of the Angolan cultural heritage, because the collective memory of a nation is inextricably bound up with the texts (written or oral) that record it. In this novel of dual structure and double/multiple narrators and storytellers, memory too has a double role: first, to record the personal experiences of not one, but multiple soldiers, who made the war and either were killed or survived. The novel’s narrative time is contemporary with the war, so that such experiences are narrated as in a chronicle (i.e., as if not yet a memory). The second role is to preserve the memory of those experiences for future generations, thus aiming to become a new epic—one that rebuts the rhetoric of the old texts with which it engages and therefore brings closure to the discourse that gave rise to the earlier epics. And memory in this novel works in yet another double way: it recalls a Portuguese literary canon that is written and has maintained its prestige throughout and after the colonial war; but it becomes also the repository of moments of an Angolan history that had not yet been institutionalised in writing. *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* thus becomes a collective memory of the colonial war in Angola.

Manuel Alegre, too, constructs a collective memory of the colonial war in Angola in *Jornada de África*. As with *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas*, poetry plays a major role in the composition of this novel, many pages of which directly quote lines by Portuguese and other European, as well as African poets. In the first chapter, for example, there appear passages from poems by

the Portuguese Herberito Hélder and by the Angolan Agostinho Neto (who, like Manuel Alegre himself, was both a poet and a politician in his country). Nevertheless, of the three epigraphs placed at the opening of the novel, only one is taken from a poet, from Rilke's prose-poem *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke* [*The Lay of Love and Death of Lieutenant Christoph Rilke*], quoted from a Portuguese version. The other two epigraphs are taken from prose works, one by René Char, alluding to a war in which political considerations are at stake, and the last from Jerónimo de Mendonça's homonymous sixteenth-century chronicle *Jornada de África*, which records the expedition undertaken by King Sebastian in 1578 against the Moors at Alcácer-Quibir (now Ksar-al-Kebir, in Morocco), where the visionary young king lost his life, leaving the way open to Spain's sixty-year rule of Portugal.

Some of the novel's most illuminating studies read it as an attempt to redefine Portuguese identity after the loss of the colonial empire.⁷ Other scholars have seen *Jornada de África* as an anti-epic and as a work that engages in profound intertextual dialogue with Portugal's literary heritage. Following the lead of the novel's blurb, Clara Rocha calls it an "anti-epic of the colonial war" as well as "a novel of action." Margarida Ribeiro sees it (in 1999) as "the story of the personal and collective anti-epic which the colonial war was" ("Percurso" 210), although she had earlier (in 1998) considered the novel to be "a 'modern epic.'"⁸ Likewise, despite actually pointing to several aspects of the novel that seem to contradict the claim, Rui de Azevedo Teixeira concludes his analysis with remarks about "the time of the anti-heroes" and "the colonial war [as] anti-epic" (328). Both Rocha and Azevedo Teixeira also address questions of metanarrativity and intertextuality as narrative strategies in the novel, establishing extensive lists of the authors directly or indirectly quoted in *Jornada de África*, with some important omissions.

The novel's first chapter indicates precise locations (London, Lisbon, Mexico, Coimbra, Luanda), where various events relating to the beginning of the colonial war in Angola are taking place at a precise historical moment: 1960. Given that the second chapter begins on a more specific date two years later (19 June 1962), and that the plot of the novel develops from that date on, following NCO Sebastião's commission at the front in Angola, it is fair to see the first chapter as a brief historical introduction to the events upon which the novel concentrates.

Soon the narrative presents a quick survey of contemporary political events, disclosing real names and locations: in London, in the House of

Commons, the first international press conference of the MPLA, the PAIGC, and the CPG takes place, where the names of the Angolan activist Agostinho Neto and of the Portuguese Prime Minister, Salazar, are freely used. In Lisbon, the activities of the political figures who attempted to introduce democratic reforms in Salazar's regime are described. In Mexico, there is a hint at the preparations by Henrique Galvão, another historical figure, which led to his 1961 seizing of the luxury cruise ship *Santa Maria*, a hijacking that captured the attention of the Portuguese public for weeks, since it was one of the few overt acts of political dissent in the country in decades. And in Lisbon, in the Aljube prison, the political prisoner Agostinho Neto writes poetry. All these political facts are presented as taking place behind the scenes of the novel's plot. And these characters, which can be described as historical in the sense that they are real-life figures summoned into the novel's universe, are above all political figures.

Simultaneously, the reader briefly follows the actions, in Luanda, of Domingos Da Luta, a semi-literate Angolan who has been a political prisoner but is now free and continues to hope for opportunities for political action. The story of this character is clearly set apart in that it is told in long parentheses and in italics, as if it were merely an aside. The parentheses thus reflect graphically the only possibility that there would have been in the Portugal of the early 1960s to pay attention to the point of view of the African. This character's status is not exactly clear; his story is full of historical details, including the fact that he, too, has met Agostinho Neto, but his name, Domingos Da Luta [Domingos of the Fight], endows him with an allegoric dimension, so that we can see him as the epitome of the Angolan (MPLA) independence fighter.⁹

Most of all, the inclusion both of extensive details about the political lobbying that aimed at bringing about the end of Portuguese colonialism (taking place in various locations) and of the political activities of one MPLA fighter taken as the epitome of his country's pro-independence guerrillas serves one particular purpose in the novel: to emphasise the extent and importance of the agency of the Angolans, which certainly is unusual in the Portuguese novels of the colonial war. Written almost fifteen years after the end of the armed conflict, and also written by an author who in real life has had a long career as a politician and parliamentarian, *Jornada de África* widens the portrayal of the African independence wars in contemporary Portuguese narrative to include a strong political edge and, above all, to

attribute a dimension of real agency to the actions of Angolans. It is appropriate to point out here that Domingos Da Luta is famous (in the novel) not for indiscriminately killing large numbers of Portuguese troops with unerring rifle shots, but specifically for killing Portuguese army officers only, so that not only his guerrilla skill is stressed, but above all his political determination and purpose.

This specific emphasis on the agency of the Angolans is a new element in the genre, where the presence of the Africans is not necessarily erased, as we have seen, but where they are mostly presented as beings who elicit either distant compassion (for example, in António Lobo Antunes's *Os Cus de Judas*, 1979, also set in Angola), or fear derived from lack of direct contact or lack of understanding (in José Martins Garcia's *Lugar de Massacre*, 1975, or in Álamo Oliveira's *Até Hoje*, 1988, for instance, both set in Guinea-Bissau). The same is true even of *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas*, where Africans have a much stronger presence than in any other of these novels, but are nevertheless not really portrayed as agents of their own historical change, except for the echoes of the guerrilla fighters' activities that reach the *sanzala* people. It is for this reason that *Jornada de África* is much more a political novel than an action novel. It appears that, as time progresses from the date of the end of the conflict, Portuguese narrative becomes more capable of presenting the colonial war in a different perspective, finally encompassing the political agency of the Other.

Historical and fictional characters cross paths in this novel. Some are "real," contemporary, political, or military figures transfigured, either renamed (with recognisable names) or unnamed (the Chief—Salazar; the General—the then commander-in-chief in Angola—General Venâncio Deslandes; the Colonel—António Spínola). Others are the real-life sixteenth-century expeditionists who accompanied King Sebastian to Alcácer-Quibir, now brought back to life in literature as the group of military men around this latter-day Sebastião: Jorge Albuquerque Coelho, who loses his legs like his earlier namesake; Leandro, the first one to lose his life in both *Jornadas*; Luís de Brito, the last one to see (one and the other) Sebastião alive; João Gomes Cabral, Duarte de Meneses, Miguel Noronha, Vasco da Silveira, Alvito, who share names and vicissitudes. The first group is contemporary with the novel's setting; the second is made up of historical figures rescued from time's oblivion by Jerónimo de Mendonça's chronicle.

This re-appropriation of names of previous historical and/or literary characters is part of a more general strategy for the re-interpretation of the coun-

try's collective memory of its imperial past, intricately bound up as it is with the colonial war to which it eventually led. The summoning forth of a whole literary tradition (which dealt with, informed, and glorified Portugal's imperial venture) amounts not just to a rereading of that canon, but indeed a rewriting of it in a new light. What Manuel Alegre does in *Jornada de África* is to test his readers' literary memory to the limit, by transcribing, quoting, misquoting, rewriting, or simply alluding to a whole array of texts of the Portuguese literary tradition, including its ramifications in Brazil and Africa. By this means he constructs something similar to what Kristeva calls a "mosaic of quotations" (though quotation is here too restrictive a term), in which "any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). Such a mosaic makes use of the European canon too,¹⁰ which is important also as a strategy for the building of a novel type of epic; *Jornada de África* is thus inserted into a long, illustrious European tradition, not because the European authors with whom it engages are necessarily epic but because their inclusion heightens the general tone of the novel.

Pessoa's is a case in point here, precisely because, together with Camões, he is one of the poets most used in *Jornada de África*'s "ventriloquism." However, while Pessoa fragments the notion of authorship by creating his heteronyms, the narrator of *Jornada de África* emphatically undermines the notion of individual authorship by parodically pushing it to the limit in the opposite direction: who is the author of *Jornada de África*? "O A.?" (216)—"the A.?" Alegre? The chronicler Jerónimo de Mendonça, whose work is, so to speak, repeated in this novel? The poet Rilke, whose *Cornet* determines the form and to some extent the contents of this new *Romance de Amor e Morte*? The other Jerónimo de Mendonça, "the Writer," who is a character in the novel? So the author of *Jornada de África* becomes a collective author, built up from a vast cultural memory.

The reader soon realises that this Sebastião must disappear at the end of the novel, as did the other, more illustrious Sebastião. Whatever end the novel's narrator might like to give to its plot, he cannot escape the necessity of that disappearance. "Estava escrito" (174) [it was written], says Bárbara with all the irony and ambiguity of something having been written in the stars, or written by a previous author, or simply being indelibly inscribed in our collective memory. Fate or intertextuality, the possibilities are humorously left open to interpretation. Is it possible for a literary work to escape its predestined conclusion? Is it possible for a country to escape the notion of its

historical destiny as written by its epic poets, perpetuated by its governments, and engraved in its cultural memory?

The irony implied in the possibility that events are written by fate is particularly strong in a book that rewrites Sebastião's story. The disappearance of the earlier Sebastião, presumed dead at Alcácer-Quibir, was the starting point for the long-standing belief that the sixteenth-century king would one day return to Portugal to restore the country to its former glory, the basis for the Sebastianist myth that has repeatedly found literary expression and popular support among sections of the Portuguese population. The myth that King Sebastian will one day return and rescue the Portuguese from the mediocrity of a present that does not match the glory of their past is of course responsible for an attitude of generalised "desviver" [unliving] (to use the term coined by Manuel Alegre), that is, a morbid attachment to the past with consequential avoidance of responsibility in the present.

The narrator of *Jornada* begins by questioning Pessoa's attitude of detachment from the world:

Repugnava-lhe essa festa do avesso, o narcisismo da renúncia e a tão portuguesa autoternura da derrota. Agora procura escapar ao império tutelar e totalitário daquele heterónimo de si mesmo. (...) Nem Ode Marítima sem viagem, nem Mensagem sem acção. Não ao escrever-se desvivendo. O poeta, o narrador, sabe-se lá quem, quer outra vida, outra escrita. (21)

[He loathed that inside-out celebration, that narcissistic renunciation, and that oh-so-Portuguese self-pity in defeat. Now he tries to escape the protective and totalitarian empire of that heteronym of himself. (...) Away with a Maritime Ode without voyage, away with a Message without action. Away with writing while unliving. The poet, the narrator, who knows who, wants a different life, a different writing.]

Here for the first time we come across two notions that become very significant in the whole novel: that of an "inside-out" reality and that of "desviver" [to unlive], as an accusation directed by the narrator at Fernando Pessoa, but also more generally at the sort of lifestyle imposed by Salazar's regime on the Portugal of the sixties. The statement can almost be read as programmatic for the whole book. The narrator has just declared that Pessoa has already said everything (20) and that his own path is like that of an inside-out Pessoa ("Pessoa do avesso" 21). This, then, is a novel preoccupied

both with turning inside out Pessoa's work and with reversing a generalised attitude of non-engagement with the present in Portuguese society. For this narrator, there is a clear need to find novel ways of expression: "outra escrita," a different kind of writing.

Jornada de África attempts the different kind of writing that its narrator desires, and it also engages intertextually with the whole mythology of a country obsessed with its glorious maritime past, with the voyages of discovery, with magnificent military expeditions and the conquest of other peoples and territories. But it chooses to draw attention to the first such expedition that went wrong, that of King Sebastian to Alcácer-Quibir. His was the first defeat in the history of Portuguese overseas expansion, ominously spelling out an eventual, much larger defeat, which would mark the end of Portuguese colonialism. In this novel in which nothing is innocent, in the sense in which Umberto Eco refers to the loss of literary innocence in post-modern literature, the defeat thus foretold can be seen as fate (history repeating itself) or as a point of departure for new ventures. While the loss at Alcácer-Quibir gave rise to "that oh-so-Portuguese self-pity in defeat," which has led the Portuguese to Sebastianism and nostalgia for the past, it has also spurred others, such as the narrator of *Jornada de África*, to try to find new ways forward, even new kinds of writing. The poet-narrator finds himself at a particularly interesting confluence in time, simultaneously pulled towards the past (the yearning) and towards the future (the desire to create that which is lacking). This tension underlies the very original voice of the narrator of *Jornada de África*, whose love of Portuguese culture makes him engage with the authors of the past, but whose desire for new directions in literature (as in life) leads him to search for new ways of writing. Consequently, in order to be faithful to its purpose of engaging with the present, that search must also include contemporary literary works.

While Camões's *Os Lusíadas* can be said to have given rise to and simultaneously to have embodied a love for the epic in the Portuguese, the contemporary novels of the colonial war are in a way creating a similar epic interest among the post-revolutionary Portuguese reading public. These novels keep alive the memory of the lost colonial wars, which the country would perhaps prefer collectively to forget. *Jornada de África* does so in a more literary self-conscious way than most other novels of this sub-genre, by engaging in unobtrusive but powerful intertextual dialogue with the very novels of the colonial war that are shaping the country's re-imagining of itself in the

present. Curiously, while critics have so far brought to light the extensive interplay between *Jornada de África* and the more or less canonical Portuguese literary heritage, its important intertextual engagement with other novels of the colonial war appears not to have been noticed.

First of all there is the name by which Bárbara affectionately refers to Sebastião: Olhos-Azuis [Blue-Eyes], which is exactly what the flight-attendant in Lobo Antunes's *Os Cus de Judas* (120) calls the protagonist of that novel. Even the fact that both female characters are flight-attendants cannot be coincidental. In *Os Cus de Judas*, the narrative situation requires her to be a flight-attendant; in *Jornada*, the fact that Bárbara is a flight-attendant seems almost an afterthought in the portrayal of a character who is fundamentally an Angolan political activist and an avid reader of Angolan poetry. In chapter 7, there is an unusual expression directly lifted from Lídia Jorge's *A Costa dos Murmúrios* (a 1988 novel dealing with the colonial war in Mozambique): the military who have seen action and developed a taste for cruelty are described as "gente que já fez o gosto ao dedo" (*Jornada* 58), Lídia Jorge's own striking formulation (*Costa* 49). Nor can the scars displayed by Miguel Noronha in *Jornada* ("uma grande cicatriz no braço esquerdo, outra no peito, vê-se através da camisa aberta," 98 [a large scar on his left arm, another one on his chest, you can see it through the open shirt]) fail to remind us of Captain Forza Leal's magnificent specimen of a scar proudly displayed through equally open and deliberately transparent shirts, on which the narrator of *A Costa dos Murmúrios* lavishes her ironical attention more than once.

In chapter 12, the unusually detailed physical description of the military men sitting around the table appears to be a send-up of the group of men that the protagonist of Álvaro Oliveira's *Até Hoje* first encounters in Binta, Guinea. The insistence on the physical beauty of the latter is as initially surprising in *Até Hoje* (62) as the detailed physical description of the former is unexpected in *Jornada* (98), a novel that does not otherwise devote much time to such descriptions.

The words with which the commander captain signals his readiness to attack, "Vamos a eles" (*Jornada* 101), while not unusual in colloquial Portuguese, nevertheless sound very much like the imaginary title that the narrator of *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* invents for the war memoirs that one of the characters in that novel may one day write. The fact that four pages later (in *Jornada*) there is a sentence using exactly the same mock medieval language that appears in *Autópsia* confirms that there is a real intertextual intention.

It is no doubt also from *Autópsia* that the narrator of *Jornada* gets the model for the format he uses in this novel: the separation of the passages and chapters dealing with the Angolan Other. In *Autópsia*, the chapters are totally independent; in *Jornada* there are sometimes independent chapters, sometimes independent sections separated by parentheses. And, as in *Autópsia*, *Jornada's* narrative voice also emphasises the oral character of Angolan culture when, in chapter 17, which deals with the victory the guerrilla fighters have just scored, it is the telling of the story and the process of transmission of oral history that come to the fore: “cada um conta à sua maneira” (139), “desde menino os mais velhos lhe contaram,” and “ainda se fala da grande vitória de 1907” (140) [each tells it in his own way; the elders have told him since he was a child; they still talk about the great victory of 1907].

Likewise, Sebastião's thoughts about “o racismo de uma gente que se desforra aqui das frustrações vividas em Portugal” (219) [the racism of people who avenge themselves here for the frustrations they once endured in Portugal] may simply describe a situation that various writers encountered in colonial Angola, but it does sound remarkably close to Wanda Ramos's formulation of the same phenomenon in *Percursos* (46-47), another novel dealing with the colonial war in Angola.

Furthermore, while blue eyes are not uncommon in Portugal, blond hair is rather more unusual. Nevertheless, both NCO Roque in chapter 7 and Captain Garcia in chapter 8 are extremely blond, perhaps recalling the fact that the most sinister characters in José Martins Garcia's *Lugar de Massacre* are surprisingly blond. Much more clearly reminiscent of *Lugar de Massacre* is the use of prolepses initiated by the phrase “within a few years:” “Daqui a uns largos, largos anos” (*Jornada* 100) is a very frequent line in Martins Garcia's novel (151, 153, 155, 156, 159, etc.). Moreover, I should also like to suggest that the spelling of Domingos Da Luta's surname with the uncharacteristic capital D is an intertextual response to the equally uncharacteristic d' spelling of Count d'Avince's surname, the aristocratic character in *Lugar de Massacre*.

On the other hand, there is a strong possibility that the choice of this name for the MPLA fighter amounts especially to an homage to the work of the Angolan novelist (and political activist) José Luandino Vieira, the best-known writer of his generation. Not only are some of Luandino's memorable black characters motor-mechanics like Domingos Da Luta, but this independence fighter's name also can be seen as a direct reference to another of

Luandino's characters, Domingos Xavier, the political activist brutally killed by the PIDE in his first novel, *A Vida Verdadeira de Domingos Xavier*.

There is yet another very likely echo of Luandino's work in the passage where Sebastião recalls his childhood in Coimbra. The activities of the group of four young boys growing up in the Portuguese city are very reminiscent of the activities of the four young boys (white, black, and mulatto) in Luandino's novel *Nós, os do Makulusu*. As if to confirm the literary homage to Luandino, the narrator mentions a few pages later the "negros, mestiços, brancos de Angola" (*Jornada* 87) [blacks, mulattoes, and whites of Angola].

Attention to all these details may seem excessive, but they are important in the definition of what *Jornada de África* attempts to do: to recover a country's collective memory of its most recent war, and to search for a new way of doing so, one which no longer looks only towards the past for models but must learn to engage with the present and find models in contemporary literature too. To build a new epic must not mean destroying the old epic tradition, because part of a country's epic sense of itself comes indeed from a feeling of continuity and collective identity, which epic tradition both constructs and reinforces. Rather, the fashioning of a new epic must imply engaging with and transforming the tradition, or, as Margarida Ribeiro suggests, metaphorically "revisiting Alcácer Quibir," the complex process that constitutes the very fabric of *Jornada de África*. But the narrator of the novel also explores new possibilities. Perhaps a new epic mode must now be found in prose, not in poetry, given that it is in narrative fiction that most contemporary authors are dealing with the colonial wars. As such, even though the text is interspersed with a myriad of echoes from poetic works, it also calls forth a vast number of narratives dealing with the same theme both from Portugal and from Angola.

The inclusion of Angolan literary works in the corpus that *Jornada de África* erects as canonical for a new kind of epic takes on special significance towards the end of the novel. The Angolan and the Portuguese literatures are presented side by side as fulfilling different functions, both connected with the memory of the colonial war. On the Portuguese army side, what we see is a fear that the country will forget its soldiers: "os mortos serão esquecidos. Mais tarde ninguém contará" (124), "ninguém nos cantará" (186) [The dead will be forgotten. Later nobody will tell; nobody will sing of us]. This novel and many others dealing with the colonial war are the actual proof that this is not the case, but the formulation of such a fear appears always in very pes-

simistic terms, and grammatically in the negative. Curiously, the need for keeping the memory intact appears in more positive words at the end of chapter 28, when Sebastião's disenchantment with the war is at its highest. The narrative voice suddenly turns away from military concerns to speculate about two African writers. The Angolan Mário de Andrade is probably writing his anthology of African poetry in Portuguese at that very moment; or else he is reading the work of Senegalese author David Diopp.¹¹ A passage from Diopp is quoted, which finishes with the mention of the role of poetry in "preserving the memory of Africa" (209). In a statement that shows that the optimistic, self-affirming attitude of postcolonial writers applies not only to their writing but even to their confidence in history's memory, the African positively affirms that poetry will preserve the memory of his continent, a sharp contrast with the depressing fear on the Portuguese side that they will be forgotten by their country.

Thus, towards the end, *Jornada de África* gathers lusophone pace again by contrasting Portuguese fear of collective oblivion and Angolan confidence in collective, literary remembrance. It does so also by means of a further literary quotation taken from Agostinho Neto, in which the Angolan author and politician claims: "Nós somos uma encruzilhada de civilizações e ambientes culturais" (220) [We are a cross-roads of civilisations and cultural environments]. Perhaps the lesson that *Jornada de África* suggests should be drawn is that the memory of the colonial war will best be kept alive in the literature not only of Portugal but also of the (now independent) Portuguese-speaking African countries, so that once bitterly opposed political enemies in the future can find a common ground that transcends their past political differences. This will be achieved by the various literatures that inextricably share the common linguistic and cultural heritage once imposed by colonialism, which both sides may one day come to see as a mutual source of cultural enrichment.

Both *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* and *Jornada de África* show considerable empathy with Angolans, so that their narrators include, to some extent at least, the other side of their stories, that is, Angolans' view of the colonial situation, or what the narrators perceive as possibly being their view. *Autópsia de Um Mar de Ruínas* gives equal weight to the memory of the war by certain members of the Portuguese army and by some members of the Angolan community living in the *sanzala*, even by some of the guerrilla fighters. *Jornada de África* expresses such empathy not only through the inclusion of the point of view of one particular independence fighter, but also through the attention

it pays to the literatures of various African countries, especially Angola itself. Limited as this may be, still it gives these books a very distinctive character, rarely found in the narrative fiction of any war.

Notes

¹ However, not all novelists of the colonial wars in Africa actually participated in them.

² Citations throughout this article are from the editions listed in the Works Cited, and translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

³ Margarida Ribeiro, in "Percurso Africanos," makes the very interesting point that "the elaborate narrative construction" of this novel "contains in itself a structure that absolves the Portuguese narrator" (144). I agree to a large extent with her observation but believe that there is more at stake here. It is not simply a question of absolving the Portuguese narrator, it is an attempt to multiply him, to make him a collective voice; and then also to absolve him, in the sense that there is safety in numbers, that if we are all implicated, we are more likely to all be absolved.

⁴ The connection with the guerrillas is not necessarily the prerogative of the males. Anica, too, is described as having been the wife of a guerrilla fighter who left her to join the MPLA army. The storyteller herself is privy to much information that reveals close contact with the insurgents.

⁵ "D. Sebastião, Rei de Portugal" is the fifth poem in the third section of *Mensagem's* first part ("As Quinas").

⁶ On this subject, see Isabel Allegro de Magalhães, "The Last Big Voyage Out": "Our literature about the colonial wars is almost entirely bereft of African characters [...] rarely do we hear a person-to-person dialogue. [...] Blacks become invisible to the Portuguese soldiers [...]. The African Other is almost not seen" (398-400); see also her later, more in-depth study, "Narrativas da Guerra Colonial."

⁷ See in particular Vecchi.

⁸ See "Revisiting Alcacer Quibir." In fact, this article presents a more cohesive study of the novel than the segments included in "Percurso Africanos." Given the vagaries of the publication process, it is not impossible that the 1999 essay was written before the 1998 one.

⁹ His name is always spelt with a capital D, Da Luta, uncharacteristic as it is of Portuguese surnames. Azevedo Teixeira, 255, uses lower case and identifies him as Pedro Afamado, better known as "o Mata-Alferes," an ex-soldier of the Portuguese army.

¹⁰ Euripides, Sophocles, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Pound, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Camus, and Pirandello are all there, more or less disguised.

¹¹ The standard spelling of the French West African author's surname is Diop.

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Isabel Moutinho lectures in Spanish and Portuguese in the School of Historical and European Studies, La Trobe University, Australia. Her main research area is contemporary Portuguese literature, particularly fiction dealing with the colonial wars in Africa. Other research interests include comparative literature (contemporary European) and the literatures of other Portuguese-speaking countries. She is author of *The Colonial Wars in Contemporary Portuguese Fiction* (Tamesis, 2008). Email: I.Moutinho@latrobe.edu.au