

The Fractured Affair of Timorese Ident/ities

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Abstract: East Timor's colonial past weighs heavily on the discussion of the country's cultural identity as constructed in its emerging literature. Two Timorese-born writers started publishing novels in the years immediately preceding East Timor's independence. Both Luís Cardoso and Ponte Pedrinha are diasporic writers, living and working in the former colonial metropolis. Ponte Pedrinha's *Andanças de Um Timorense [Roamings of a Timorese]*, of 1998, tells the life story of an East Timorese utterly committed to the Christian faith, whose dream in life is to become a Christian missionary in Africa. Luís Cardoso's four novels since 1997 reveal his preoccupation with a cultural identity perceived as fractured and occasionally as a source of embarrassment or at least ambivalence. His work has become increasingly more confident, as he lays colonial phantoms to rest and finds an ever more distinctive literary voice. Humour and a critical but not bitter engagement with Portugal's colonial history are the hallmarks of his work.

Identity is a difficult concept to define. It has been one of the most contested issues in contemporary cultural theory ever since Said pointed out that “the fundamentally static notion of identity [was] at the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism” and that, by the nineteenth century, “this kind of ‘identity’ thought [...] had become the hallmark of imperialist cultures” (xxviii). It is no doubt the ever-changing nature of identity that makes it so

difficult a notion to characterise. Nevertheless, most of us do manage to have a relatively strong feeling of identity, which we experience as a sense of personal continuity linking us back to the past, to the way of living with which we are familiar, and simultaneously allowing us to adapt to the future and to change around us, without too much personal destabilisation. Identity gives us a sense of belonging (to family, to community, to place), one which we must learn to negotiate, especially in times of great historical upheaval.

Both Anthony Giddens and Stuart Hall propose fruitful definitions of identity in a sociological context, which prove extremely useful in the inquiry into representations of a cultural sense of selfhood in literature, with marked relevance in the case of literatures emerging from those countries still “trying to resist the encroachments of Europe” (Said xxviii). Both theorists emphasise the processual and dynamic nature of identity. Defining self-identity as a “*trajectory* across the different institutional settings of modernity,” Giddens goes on to explain that “each of us not only ‘has,’ but *lives* a biography reflexively organised” (14; original emphasis). His definition becomes particularly valuable for the study of literature when he links it to the individual’s “capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (54):

The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing “story” about the self. (54)

For his part, Stuart Hall emphasises that identity is acquired as a process, “as a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (222). Hall sees cultural identity as “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (225) and, most importantly, as undergoing constant transformation. Identity, he affirms, results from our different ways of positioning ourselves within “the narratives of the past” (225). Just like Giddens, then, Hall recognises the strong element of narrative, or fictive, construction in our sense of self.

Few nations have endured as many violent attempts at rupturing their identity as the East Timorese, and few have succeeded in preserving and affirming a sense of cultural distinctiveness against all the odds. East Timorese history could well be presented as a perfect example of that course of production of identity and transformation along the process, as described by

Hall. Above all it is living proof of the resilience of a people's sense of cultural uniqueness as the source for an inexhaustible determination to achieve political independence.

Timor Loro Sae, the latest country to gain independence, at the dawn of the new millennium, after four and a half centuries of Portuguese colonial presence and almost two and a half decades of Indonesian military occupation, has a long tradition of oral literature—like many countries in the Pacific region. But it is only in the last few years that indigenous East Timorese have begun to produce a written literature. Luís Cardoso, the Timorese-born author who published his first book in 1997, while his country was still under Indonesian administration, was hailed as the first revelation of literature from East Timor and he saw his inaugural book immediately translated into half a dozen European languages. His three subsequent novels have proved that his initial success was not simply the measure of the old world's interest in the latest anti-colonial cause. Rather, they have come to confirm him as a writer of great literary merit, who happens to be a East Timorese living and writing in Portugal. The second Timorese-born author to publish a work of fiction, in 1998, still four years before his country's independence, writes under a pseudonym: Ponte Pedrinha. His book was commercially less successful, and it does not possess the striking literary quality of Cardoso's work. Nevertheless, for the purpose that concerns us here, namely the search for the fractured cultural identity in the emerging written literature of Timor Loro Sae, both constitute a rich source of information and provide different, but complementary, insights.

Both Luís Cardoso and Ponte Pedrinha are diasporic writers, living and working in the former colonial metropolis. This has to do mostly with the common historical trajectory of twentieth-century East Timorese, many of whom either went to Portugal to pursue a tertiary education that at the time was still unavailable in their country, or otherwise escaped Indonesian invasion and the civil war it unleashed by leaving Timor for Australia. Those in the latter category more often than not ended up in Portugal as well, whether voluntarily or simply because the Australian government would not grant them refugee status. Both authors use Portuguese, the long established language of colonisation, as their literary language, though in very different registers.¹ As to the fact that their work is published in Portugal and therefore perhaps not as accessible to their fellow East Timorese as they may wish, that too is a common fate in the history of the young literatures of many so-called postcolonial countries, whose economies

remain tied up with that of the former colonial power in intricate ways that are more accurately described as neo-colonial. But we should not regard this as strictly a limitation. As Arjun Appadurai points out, in our new, globalised world, while diasporic writers lose some of the audience they may wish to reach, they simultaneously gain “a growing number of diasporic public spheres” in which they “start new conversations between those who move and those who stay” (22).

For the sake of keeping the analysis of the continuities in Luís Cardoso's novels as a whole, and also because Ponte Pedrinha's volume deals with East Timorese identity less distinctively, we shall turn our attention to the latter's only book first, although chronologically it was published one year after Cardoso's *The Crossing*. Ponte Pedrinha's *Andanças de Um Timorense* [*Roamings of a Timorese*], of 1998, tells the life story of a Timorese man utterly committed to the Christian faith, whose dream in life is to become a Christian missionary in Africa. As already mentioned, this book has modest literary quality, but it is interesting from three perspectives. First, it emphasises a fundamental component of East Timorese identity: Catholicism—a foreign religion initially imposed by Portuguese colonialism, which nevertheless became an essential defining trait of the East Timorese nation. Ironically, it was under the rule of Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim country, that Christian belief intensified exponentially in East Timor. As Indonesia immediately prohibited the use of Portuguese in any sphere, the Catholic Church obtained from the Vatican the right to conduct Mass in Tetum, which dramatically strengthened links between the Church and the community. So too, and more importantly, did the Church's later role as sole refuge for the population under Indonesian atrocities.

The second reflection that Pedrinha's *Andanças de Um Timorense* inevitably brings to mind springs from the un-closed end of the novel: the protagonist goes to Africa to follow his dream of becoming a missionary, only to disappear in some vaguely mentioned civil war that is tearing apart the country of his choice. To a Portuguese readership, this is an instant reminder of yet another myth associated with Portuguese colonialism, the Sebastianist legend, which engendered the hope for the return as a saviour of young king Sebastian after his disappearance in battle in sixteenth-century North Africa. Thirdly, the book is written in a conspicuously archaistic register of the Portuguese language, which acts (deliberately or not) as a declaration of allegiance to a Portuguese Timor. Paradoxically, then, the fragmentation of Timorese identity reveals itself in Ponte Pedrinha's *Andanças de Um Timorense* by the book's inability to resolve satisfactorily these three disparate elements.² Whereas the bold affirmation of

a militant Christian faith represents a very distinctive East Timorese trait, the choice of mythology and symbols and old-style language in the book refer us to a conscious or subconscious acceptance of a foreign worldview.

Luís Cardoso's first book, *Crónica de Uma Travessia* [*The Crossing*], of 1997, is also a life story. Postcolonial studies have taught us that the life story (or *récit de vie*, to borrow Philippe Lejeune's 1980 term) is the genre most commonly adopted by writers of new literatures, so that the choice of these two East Timorese authors is not surprising. "The ongoing 'story' about the self," as Giddens calls it, no doubt gives writers the opportunity to reflect about personal and wider trajectories, all the more important when a sense of national identity is not yet clearly defined. Thus, Cardoso sets his narrator's life story in the larger framework of the social-historical context of contemporary East Timor, which allows him to express political and cultural concerns about his country in times of great upheaval and uncertainty.

Playing with other genres of European origin, Luís Cardoso calls his book a chronicle (which we associate rather with the historiographical register), but the second noun in the title emphasises the metaphor of the crossing,³ so often the dominant note in the literatures of previously colonised countries. The crossing of the title is presented both as a physical journey (from Timor to Portugal) and as a search for cultural identity. The narrator tells us principally his father's life. However, one of the most significant physical journeys is the one undertaken by the narrator himself, who, having come to view Ataúro as his native place, must leave the small island in order to pursue his studies on the main one. The question of the importance of education as an essential step towards professional training, which opens the doors to employment—and simultaneously brings the colonised closer to supposed European quality—is therefore central in *The Crossing*. It is the narrator's father, a nurse who is not only acculturated but also profoundly imbued with the belief that one must live and die "in the shadow of the Portuguese flag" (*mate-bandera-hum* 3),⁴ who insists that his son complete his education. Eventually, the adolescent leaves the Jesuit seminary to pursue his studies first in Dili and later at university in Lisbon, with a coveted government scholarship. He is thus well and truly embarked on the road that makes colonised people begin to feel the need—and the desire—to fashion themselves in the image of the colonisers.⁵

Nevertheless, the most tortuous and painful crossing is the one that leads from colonial alienation to the threshold of a new identity, towards which the son progressively moves, as he frees himself, little by little and always hesitatingly,

from the influence of his father's beliefs. This is no doubt the most demanding and harrowing journey, and it finishes—very appropriately—with the symptomatic detail of the father's loss of memory (in senility), which of course symbolises the loss of colonial memory. That is the memory that the son attempts to recover by writing the father's life story, a process during which the young man eventually attains, almost despite himself, his own cultural emancipation.

The figure of the father is present in the entire book, and he is not only the much loved biological father of the narrator, but also, in the context, a father figure in the classical sense, representing continuity and identity. Although firmly steeped in East Timor's traditional way of living, this old man has so thoroughly internalised the Portuguese colonial presence and the desire to resemble the coloniser⁶ that he goes to die in Portugal, in this way remaining truly faithful to his *mate-bandera-hum* ideal. His whole being is painfully divided between his unconditional loyalty to the coloniser, who remains in his eyes a superior being, and his profound cultural roots in his own society—a heartrending rip similar to the one Frantz Fanon describes so movingly amongst Algerians.

In chapter nine we witness what we may call the progressive Timorisation of the narrator, always ambiguous, always tentative, since he continues to feel torn between the colonial ideal propounded by his father, who is also his hero (137), and the discovery of different possibilities, revealed to him by the pro-independence Timorese he meets at university in Lisbon. Thus, this narrator continues to experience feelings of cultural alienation: no longer simply the sense of cultural dislocation that afflicts him in Portugal but now also a feeling he cannot yet accurately pinpoint, derived from being on the brink of acquiring a new sense of self, culturally and politically, one that rejects and betrays the beliefs he has inherited from his father. Cultural emancipation is much more difficult for him to achieve than for the pro-independence Timorese living in Portugal. He must take the laborious path of a cultural self-critique (“my self-criticism for my bourgeois, decadent past and my counter-revolutionary experiences” 130), which he is lucky not to find too outlandish as he had already experienced something similar in his early days of weekly confession in the Jesuit seminary. He never considers the possibility of joining the East Timorese armed resistance, for his own struggle will be the cultural one. His role is to maintain, through writing, the memory of an East Timor threatened in its ancestral traditions and in its very existence first by Portuguese colonisation and then, much more dangerously,

by the atrocities of the Indonesian invasion (“the Indonesian army’s besiege-and-destroy campaigns were proving brutally effective” 132), which aimed at the total annihilation of East Timor’s sovereignty, as well as its national and cultural identity.

Luís Cardoso’s second book, *Olhos de Coruja Olhos de Gato Bravo* [*Owl’s Eyes Wild Cat’s Eyes*],⁷ published in 2001, reads almost like a confirmation of the narrator’s Timorisation announced at the end of *The Crossing*. This is a story totally immersed in a culture strikingly unfamiliar to a Portuguese or European readership. There is a strong element of magical realism in the book but a very different one from its Latin American counterpart inasmuch as the world here presented teems with marks of East Timorese ancestral traditions: the symbolic importance of midwives, the belief in the *rain-fila* all but briefly mentioned in *The Crossing*, the existence of sacred sites where the spirits of the dead roam free, the institution of marriage as a way of establishing family alliances after wars, dowry payments in buffalos, allegiance to local kings and chieftains, the areca palm and betel nut chewing habit, cockfights as recreation and source of income, and so on. *Olhos de Coruja* is again a life story, but this time of a girl, born to elderly parents, who already had twin sons. Her father is a catechist of mixed Chinese and Timorese blood, her mother, a woman of European and Timorese parentage. The girl is born with huge owl-like eyes, which leads to her father’s rejection of the baby, for he feels threatened by her capacity to see too much.

The plot constantly plays on the light/shade opposition (the girl with the huge eyes—the light—which are blindfolded by the priest—the shade), but this is only one of several binaries in *Olhos de Coruja*. As a matter of fact, the author uses many such pairs precisely to highlight questions of cultural identity in this novel. The figure of the girl’s father, in particular, is built upon binaries: light and shade, animism and Christianity, the Bible and local storytelling, Portuguese and Tetum. This Catholic catechist of Chinese-Timorese descent, “homem comprometido com a palavra de Deus e submetido à dos espíritos da terra” (29) [“a man pledged to the word of God and faithful to the spirits of the land”], who feels lucky that he has the double protection of the Christian God and the “gods of fortune and incense” (32), is the first to accept the existence of different forms of spirituality:

Quando ele traduzia oralmente para *tétum* a sua leitura da Bíblia ficava surpreendido com as coincidências das histórias contadas por eles com aquelas traduzidas por ele. (32)

[When he translated orally into Tetum his readings from the Bible, he was surprised by the coincidences between the stories told by those people and those translated by him.]

Para o velho catequista Um e o Outro completavam-se nas explicações e complementavam-se no temor do que ficou por esclarecer. (33)

[For the old catechist One and the Other completed each other in their explanations and complemented each other in the fear of that which remained unexplained.]

Such contrasts, then, are presented not as irreconcilable opposites but as binary complements, as is the man's figure itself, always dressed in white when he sets off to attend to his Christian duties, to safeguard "[a]lvura das almas dos gentios, dos negros, dos mestiços, dos chinas e até dos albinos" (45) ["the whiteness of the souls of the gentiles, blacks, half-breeds, Chinese and even albinos"], riding a horse called Gentio ["Gentile"]. There is no hint of racial discrimination here, the society portrayed is thoroughly mixed, the true melting pot of ethnicities that make up East Timor. And this must be one of the most delightful, gentle and humorous examples of that hybridity which some scholars see as the defining trait and "empowering condition" (Suleri 226) of the cultural identity of formerly colonised peoples.

The story gains a new direction when the priest who baptises the girl covers her eyes with a blindfold that she must never remove. Forever blindfolded and accompanied by her aunt, she embarks on "uma longa travessia marítima" (117) ["a long sea crossing"], which takes her to Lisbon and back to Timor fifteen years later. Her time in Portugal is often spent with Father Santa, the priest who blindfolded her, a well-intentioned supporter of the Portuguese regime.⁸ The treatment of the role of the Catholic Church as the ally of Portuguese colonialism and instrument for the perpetuation of obscurantism is humorous and sophisticated in this novel. And with the sea voyage twist the parallels between its plot and that of *The Crossing* become evident: during her prolonged stay in Lisbon, the protagonist of *Olhos de Coruja* experiences the same geographical and cultural displacement as the narrator of *The Crossing*. Her comments upon her return to Timor plainly bring out the unsettling effect that such an absence from one's country has on one's sense of self:

Quinze anos separavam-me desse regresso. Por momentos fiquei na dúvida sobre o lugar da minha pertença, não falava a língua com que as pessoas se entendiam, não tinha na memória um lugar que fosse meu. (139)

[Fifteen years separated me from that return. At times I had doubts about my place of belonging, I did not speak the language with which people understood each other, I did not have in my memory any place that was mine.]

They also reveal the extent to which the need to piece together a Timorese identity disrupted by colonialism and absence continues to preoccupy Luís Cardoso.

In his third novel, *A Última Morte do Coronel Santiago* [*Colonel Santiago's Final Death*],⁹ published in 2003, the author seems at last to have resolved his previous narrators' dilemma as to the definition of their cultural identity. Perhaps this has to do with a new confidence inspired by the fact that East Timor had finally obtained its independence the year before, or perhaps simply with the fact that, as a writer (if not as an individual), Luís Cardoso had been able to find literary solutions to the conflict that haunted his narrators from the beginning of his writing career. The title of the third novel announces this resolution. The father figure that first appeared as biological father in *The Crossing*, and then was split into the binary catechist/blindfolding priest in *Olhos de Coruja Olhos de Gato Bravo*, makes a clear third appearance in this book as Colonel Pedro Santiago, who prolongs and transforms the Father Santa of the previous novel. The two (the catechist in *Olhos de Coruja* and the colonel in *A Última Morte*) share a preference for wearing a white colonial hat. But whereas Father Santa's *alter ego*, the catechist, rides a horse called Gentile, Colonel Santiago with his white hat is usually accompanied by a black dog. The colonel too has an *alter ego*, Pedro Raimundo, his shadow, who takes it upon himself to rewrite History and to right its wrongs;¹⁰ as a consequence he ends up killing Santiago. As to the profound impact of Catholicism on traditional East Timorese society, here too it continues to be acknowledged in the choice of apostles' names for the protagonists, two Pedros and one Lucas (the colonel's son).

In *A Última Morte do Coronel Santiago*, the question of national (rather than cultural) identity now appears on the very first page, but in a relaxed, tongue-in-cheek manner, indicating that there is no more anxiety about it:

Quando acabou a guerra entre os estrangeiros, isto é, entre os pequenos japoneses e os enormes australianos, [...] todos se foram embora cada um para a sua terra sem se importarem com quem ficava para trás [...] e mais de sessenta mil mortos entre os nativos. (9)

[When the war was over between the foreigners, that is, between the tiny Japanese and the huge Australians, (...) they all went away, each to his country, without any thought for those who remained (...) and more than sixty thousand dead amongst the natives.]

The choice of vocabulary (“natives”) situates the chapter in a colonial time now past, but it also at last affirms nationhood (“foreigners”). So too does Colonel Santiago’s dismissal of the midwives at his son’s birth appear to signal the end of an era (Timorese traditional living), at the same time as the gradual whitening of his skin heralds the arrival of a new one (the colonial period) and places the colonel in the sphere of the acculturated. Soon we read a line that becomes a refrain (repeated with slight variations) throughout the first chapter and sets the playful tone for the whole book: “Nunca se sabe, coronel Santiago, as partidas que uma identidade pode pregar” (11) [“You never know, colonel Santiago, the tricks that an identity can play on you”].

Colonel Santiago is once again a man torn between conflicting loyalties, but these are now presented in a light-hearted manner: “Tinha um pé num lado de lá e o outro no lado de cá” (28) [“He had one foot on one of the other sides and the other one on this side”], but this is not a confrontational remark because it refers to his being considered “um morto-vivo” (28) (“a living dead” or “a phantom”), rather than to his political allegiance. The reader has the impression that the character (or the author behind him) has come to terms with the vicissitudes of history and has no axe to grind. However, in the second chapter we realise there are perhaps still other bones to pick. This chapter has a totally different spatial and temporal setting: it focuses on Lucas, the colonel’s son, living and writing books in Lisbon. Lucas (no doubt an acronym for Luís Cardoso) has written a book entitled *Crónicas do Sexta-Feira* [*Friday’s Chronicles*], with Friday hinting at Defoe’s character and *Crónicas* clearly echoing the author’s first title. Apparently, he has been denounced by other Timorese for having written “a book that had nothing to do with the cause” of East Timor, and severely criticised for having chosen as his protagonist (Friday) “a collaborationist” (40) instead of heroes from his own country. Lucas shows compassion in the explanation he provides for

their condemnation of his choices: “Reivindicavam uma outra identidade, uma outra herança, uma outra pertença” (41) [“They laid claim to another identity, another heritage, another belonging”], a comment that makes us appreciate how much the question of cultural identity and what can be perceived as betrayal of a nationalist ideal still preoccupies the author. A propos of the killing of Colonel Santiago because of his having been in the service of Portuguese colonialism, the narrative voice compassionately affirms:

Coisa que mais ou menos toda a gente fez em devido tempo. Uns mais do que outros e mais tarde reivindicada por alguns dos antigos ferozes oponentes que mais ou menos também se foram rendendo aos encantos da mãe-pátria. (42)

[(Serving the interests of Portuguese colonialism was) something that more or less everybody did in due time. Some more than others, and this was later claimed by some of the previously ferocious opponents (of colonialism) who more or less also ended up surrendering to the attractions of the mother-country.]

There is no doubt a slightly apologetic note here, though it is not personal but collective, revealing an understanding of human failings in general and of the ensnaring situation in which many East Timorese must have found themselves.

In any case, *A Última Morte do Coronel Santiago* strikes us as a third phase in the meditation on East Timorese identity that has occupied such a large place in Luís Cardoso's work. In *The Crossing*, the first-person (male) narrator tells the story of his father's life, making no apologies for the fact that he supported Portuguese colonialism with honourable conviction. At the same time, he candidly presents the burden of guilt this signified for the son at a time when many East Timorese in exile in Lisbon were pro-independence anti-colonialists. And the narrator starts out on the difficult path that leads from colonial alienation to the discovery and deliberate construction of a new identity. In *Olhos de Coruja Olhos de Gato Bravo*, the first-person (female) narrator meticulously observes—with her huge “eyes wide shut”—the two sides of Timorese identity: the traditional life perpetuated mostly by the women, more often than not reduced to silence, and the foreign values imposed by Portuguese colonialism. Her mother very tellingly disappears half way through the novel, at about the same time as the daughter undertakes her voyage to Portugal (symbolising the vanishing of the traditional Timorese way of life when colonial contact occurs). As a consequence, many of the

characters in this novel have a double (the catechist and Father Santa, in the first instance, but also the catechist (light) and Pantaleão (dark), the twin brothers, the mother who disappears and the aunt who replaces her). As to the dual aspects of the personality of certain characters, these are already clearly presented as positive: religious syncretism, advantageous diglossia and even polyglossia, double benefit from exposure to two or more cultures, in short, the empowering hybridity of a new identity to be assumed with full pride and mercifully free of cultural cringe.

Finally, in *A Última Morte do Coronel Santiago*, the question of East Timorese identity is addressed increasingly with good humour (rather than with any authoritarian ideological fervour), which may relate to a buoyancy derived from the achievement of East Timor's independence at last, just before the book's publication. Colonel Santiago, the father, with his pro-Portuguese sympathies and imperial imagination, is presented as a figure now definitely of the past, who has a right to be respected but whose time has clearly expired. Although he is murdered in the novel, the reader has the impression that he has come to the term of his natural life. Lucas, the son and fictional writer within the book, claims to have made his choices regarding his cultural identity: "Recusava ter uma família, uma religião, uma terra, uma pertença" (87) ["He refused to have one family, one religion, one place, one belonging"]; but he continues to be accused of sitting on the fence, of being ambivalent about both Portugal and East Timor (106). On the contrary, at the strictly literary level, the author's choices are very clear: the novel is confident, ironic, playfully intertextual, engaging critically and therapeutically with Portugal's imperial history and Europe's Christian heritage, offering a geographically decentred, pluralistic view of a (technically) decolonised world.

Cardoso's latest novel, the 2007 *Requiem para o Navegador Solitário* [*Requiem for the Single-Handed Sailor*], still circumnavigates many of the identity-related questions that dominate his first three books. All its main characters variously deal with the problem of "confusão de pertenças" (22) ["muddle of belongings"], which clearly reminds us, through the lexical choice, of the refusal to belong to one single place as expressed in *A Última Morte* ("Recusava ter [...] uma pertença" [87]). But the more disturbing question of the undesired paternity no longer appears in *Requiem*. Although the novel is set at the dawn of World War II and the colonial Timor here portrayed is under Portuguese rule and preparing for the arrival of the Japanese, the general impression the reader gets is of a small island bracing itself for whatever may

come, waiting (without any real hope) for a Portuguese ship to arrive with military reinforcements while simultaneously expecting to do business with the Japanese or the Australians, as the need may be. There is a vague feeling of abandonment and a continued perception of colonial Timor as dumping ground for political exiles from Portugal, but also a very strong awareness of the vitality that the presence of Batavians, Goans, Balinese, Cape Verdeans or any other group represents for the island. Here any notion of an East Timorese identity includes all the individuals present on the island, seen as an addition (temporary as it may be) rather than a fracture.

At a more immediate level, the first-person narrator is a Chinese girl from Batavia living in Dili, where late in the novel she learns to her great sadness of her father's death back home. The absence of her father throughout the novel parallels the absence of Portuguese military support in the expected war. If there is a real father figure here, one who can provide support and advice, even if he too is not easily accessible and his own life is endangered, it is Malisera, the Timorese leader whom nobody except Catarina has actually seen. Malisera must hide in the mountains because, for the Portuguese authorities, he is the "foragido de Manumera" ["the outlaw of Manumera"], but for the Timorese he is the "Auswain," a word that conveys an almost mythical dimension and implies a measure of supernatural powers.

Given that *Requiem para o Navegador Solitário* seems to herald a break with previously divided representations of East Timorese identity in Luís Cardoso's work, only time—in the form of future publications—can tell whether *A Última Morte do Coronel Santiago* really represents the final death of the colonial father figure, as foretold in his third novel. Meanwhile, one is tempted to believe that he may come back occasionally as a mythical ancestral father figure, in the manner of that other famous colonel, Aureliano Buendía, repeatedly casting his sometimes benevolent, sometimes threatening and ferocious shadow over the literary construct of a cultural identity.

Notes

¹ I regret my inability to investigate how non-Portuguese speaking East Timorese perceive their cultural identity. That would require a sound knowledge of the sixteen indigenous languages spoken in Timor Loro Sae, along with Portuguese and the later imposed Bahasa Indonesia (Malay). However, I have no indication at this stage that any of the Timorese vernaculars used for traditional storytelling and poetry has yet become the vehicle for a written literary prose.

² Maria Luísa Leal classifies this book as testimonial and also notes its "lack of unity" (12),

although for different reasons.

³ Maria Alzira Seixo thoroughly examines the many crossings in this book, at the literal and the metaphorical levels.

⁴ For convenience, quotations are taken from the English edition, with page numbers given in brackets in the text. Cardoso uses the Tetum expression, *mate-bandera-hum*.

⁵ As Homi Bhabha emphasises, Frantz Fanon was the first to couch the notion of the cultural alienation of the colonised in the psychoanalytic terms of demand and desire.

⁶ I am thinking of Bhabha's well-known definition of colonial mimicry, according to which the colonised is "almost the same, *but not quite*" as the coloniser (*The Location of Culture* 86).

⁷ Translations of quotations from this edition are mine.

⁸ The priest's surname is the rather unusual Santa, probably hinting at his connection with Salazar, who always proclaimed that he was a humble man from Santa Comba Dão.

⁹ Translations of quotations from this edition are mine.

¹⁰ Raimundo shares his name with another famous literary rewriter of History, the editor Raimundo Silva, the protagonist of José Saramago's *História do Cerco de Lisboa*.

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