

Negation of the Narrative Framework or the Failure of Narrative Memory: The Case of *Os cus de Judas*

José N. Ornelas

Abstract: As a narrative of the crumbling Portuguese empire written a few years after the colonial war had come to an end, *Os cus de Judas* denounces the affects and effects of that war, which are perceived as a hindrance to any positive representation of the individual and Portugal. The novel's unnamed protagonist is continually rendered impotent in his many attempts to escape the disturbing and obsessive images of the war and to restore a memory traumatized by recollections of the past. These images have a bearing on the articulation of his self and color his vision of a nation still beholden to the rhetoric of its fascist past, which has purposefully erased from its memory the atrocities and the horrors of the colonial war. As an individual condemned to live among the ruins of a former empire defined by a strong instinct for collective forgetfulness, the protagonist comes to the realization that it is pointless to construct a narrative that may provide coherence and unity to his life or give meaning to his country. His only option in life is to engage in a mode of self-referential narration without the possibility of closure.

The twentieth century is characterized by a whole series of abominable acts perpetrated by human beings against other human beings, acts that make the past century one of the most atrocious and violent in the history of mankind. The century, an era of convulsions and atrocities with two world wars, a large number of genocidal attempts including the Holocaust, several colonial wars, multiple acts of violence motivated by ethnic conflicts and hatred, and

innumerable acts of terrorism, provokes a deep fissure in the optimism of the Enlightenment project, that is, the idea of history as linear and evolutionary and the notion that the conjunction between reason and science would end all forms of prejudice and would make possible the perfection of mankind and society. In fact, these goals, as a result of all these convulsions, seem further away than ever. In the process, Enlightenment epistemologies have become deeply unsettled; their usefulness as justificatory strategies for projects that advance the human agenda and harness further knowledge have been called into question by a whole range of critics embedded in the new cynicism and skepticism of postmodern society. In a sense, the horrific events of the past century have “destroyed more than the Enlightenment belief in a teleologically ordained future, based on the progress of mankind through scientific reason; [they have] short circuited the future altogether” (Braidotti 48).

A major consequence of all these recent convulsions and atrocities with its consequent decline in the belief in reason as the motor of historical progress has been the appearance of several literary texts in the past three decades that incorporate the voices of the victims or survivors of the events mentioned above. Many critics consider that the comprehension of a particular event is impossible unless the voices of the victims, those who have first-hand knowledge of the events, are taken into account. Friedlander, in his book *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, states that “it is their voices that reveal what was known and what could be known. Theirs were the only voices that conveyed both the clarity of insight and the total blindness of human beings confronted with an entirely new and horrifying reality” (Friedlander 278). Given all the cataclysmic events of the twentieth century, it is only natural that testimonial mode narratives, those centered in the memories of eyewitnesses or victims, begin to play an important role in the communication and the discursive construction of historical reality and in the recuperation of events that were already well on their way to oblivion, as was the case with the Holocaust.

One may even assert that the artistic reconstruction of many traumatic events of this past century owes, in great measure, an enormous debt to those people who lived those events and transmitted them through the memory/recollection that they have of them. *Os cus de Judas*, Lobo Antunes’s second novel, is one of these literary texts that attempts to reconstruct the Portuguese past, the horrific period of the colonial war, through the traumatized memory of its anonymous male protagonist who was a medical doctor with the Portuguese army in Angola. As an eyewitness to many of the atrocities of that convulsive

past, the protagonist's memory of events assumes the character of a tribunal that condemns the fragments, the ruins and the scars of the Portuguese colonial past and its effects/affects in the present and views those events, and more precisely those related to the colonial war, as the direct cause for the total disintegration of his self and his country. His writing of the past is a painful (re) inscription of a specific period in the history of Portugal, which has, in fact, violated both his body and his psyche and undermined the possibility that he will ever find a coherent and stable self and a sense of closure to his traumatic experiences. "The most elementary narrative framework, which consists of the continuum of past, present and future, [has] disintegrated" (van Alphen 35) totally in *Os cus de Judas*. The illusion of continuity, the idea that a horrific situation must be followed by a solution, does not take place in the text. The unnamed protagonist still lives the reality of the colonial war, which precludes any possibility of a positive narrative framework that will restore meaning to his life. For him, there will never be a comforting closure to a horrific experience; he has in fact died not only in the figurative, but also in the literal sense of the word.

After the Holocaust and many other geopolitically conflicted upheavals that afflicted the Twentieth Century, in which one must also insert the Portuguese Colonial Wars, many critics and philosophers, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, have begun to reflect on the need to create works of art modeled on truth rather than simply the beautiful, the aesthetic. According to these critics/philosophers, every work of art must be a reflection on the tenor of truth in which the historical context must play a salient role alongside the aesthetic in the reconstruction of reality. As Márcio Seligmann-Silva notes, "[a]o pensarmos Auschwitz, fica claro que mais do que nunca a questão não está na existência ou não da 'realidade,' mas na nossa capacidade de percebê-la e de simbolizá-la" (49-50). Consequently, there is a need to resort to both the aesthetic and truth in order to find the correct voice to comprehend and symbolize the traumatic events that have impacted humanity, in such a devastating way, in the last century. In trying to reconstruct artistically such events, one must bear in mind the words of Douglas and Vogler, in *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma*:

In extreme cases the whole life of a victim can become living testimony to the traumatic experience, both physical and mental, the traumatized body and mind of the victim serving as evidence for the reality of the history that hurts, as the charred remains of a building witness its conflagration. (36)

Acts of memory have always played a crucial role in the construction of the history of Portugal. This phenomenon is even more apparent during the fascist period, which is associated with the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar. One may even sustain that fascism abused memory or, better yet, dis-memory to construct a mythical vision of a country, that is, a united homeland on the basis of a mythical identity whose political destiny derived its essence from God and Christianity, ideological pillars of the messianic vision of the country, and also from the evocations of paradigmatic images and symbols of a petrified historical past. The construction of a grandiose past through memory as the foundation for a specific sociopolitical cohesion and for the renovation of spiritual values and a Portuguese national awakening was a suitable discursive configuration to serve mainly the reaffirmation of the dominant ideology, in this case, fascist ideology. It does not come as a surprise that during the fascist period the knowledge of the Portuguese colonial world was transmitted, in great measure, by means of a mode of writing that underscored the active role that cultural memory played in producing models of a hegemonic and authoritarian discourse, which permitted a singular reading of the colonial reality, the one that fascist ideology wished to convey and best served its sociopolitical interests.

Cultural memory during the period of Salazar's dictatorship had essentially a dual purpose: self-aggrandizing and historical manipulation. The cultural memory of the Portuguese historical past, which stressed the civilizing mission of the country through time, was based on the nostalgic and imaginative use of a glorious and grandiose past that did not really quite possess these attributes, as fascist rhetoric constantly suggested, solely with the intention of enthroning an ideological ideal founded on the mythical identity of the nation, as mentioned above. Therefore, it was a historical memory disconnected from the sociopolitical context of the nation, a dis-memory. As it is generally perceived, Portugal has always defined itself, and not only during the fascist period, by a conscience that is obsessed with memorialization. Memory is an intrinsic part of Portuguese national character, a memory that often polemically reinvents the past in order to reshape the present, as is the case with *sebastianismo*. To underscore this point, it would be useful to quote Salazar in his *Declaration on Overseas Policy*:

The concept of nation is inseparable, in the Portuguese case, from the idea of civilizing mission, far beyond and very different from the introduction of new techniques and of the exploitation of the natural wealth of the territories found.

In the case of a collection of peoples of different races, languages and religions and of unequal economic levels, nationalizing action cannot cut itself off from the effort which molded the populations, turned to good account the useful elements in the cultures found along the way, sobered down tribal memories and divisive tendencies, made all take part in common work and finally awakened a conscience of the national, that is, created a fatherland and raised the populations to the level of a higher civilization. (35)

Salazar's words demonstrate exactly the way by which a different past/reality can be (re)imagined through memory in order to legitimize Portuguese geopolitical practices and the hegemony of the nation in the African context. The words, which are invested with national political agency and desire, serve as signposts in the geopolitical mapping of the Portuguese African territories and, at the same time, have as its ultimate goal the establishment of cultural homogenization of all the peripheral "others." Portugal is the norm, the desirable center, while the "others" are confined to the position of periphery in need of a center to construct a stable and coherent self, an identity. Finally, Salazar's words seem to stress paradoxically the evasion of memory itself since they are intimately tied to a mode of discourse that formalizes and projects memory while it erases and cancels it, given that historical memory is invented in the passage above. For the Portuguese dictator, acts of memory are solely the pre-history of the nation; their sole purpose is to serve the idealizing and monumentalizing impulses of the fascist regime, as well as his exacerbated sense of nationalism.

In the same way that acts of memory have played a crucial role in the construction of the nation and in the relationship between Portugal and its colonies, especially during the fascist period, they have also contributed significantly to the representation and the evocation of the colonial war in the period following the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974. Rui de Azevedo Teixeira, in *A guerra colonial e o romance português*, declares firmly that several texts of the post-revolutionary period that focus on the colonial war are, in fact, *romances de memória* and that all of them are part of a defined group of texts about that war, which analyzes the interrelatedness present in that literature "entre a descrição de uma agonia imperial, colectiva (a nível textual), e a revelação, mais ou menos dissimulada, [not too dissimulated, I would claim] de uma catarse autoral, individual (no plano do sub-texto)" (17).

Among the many novels that rely on acts of memory, one finds *A costa dos murmúrios* by Lídia Jorge, *Os cus de Judas* by António Lobo Antunes and *Per-*

cursos by Wanda Ramos. Even among the novels that do not resort as much to acts of memory for their representation of the colonial war, as is the case with *Autópsia de um mar de ruínas* by João de Melo, *O capitão Nemo e eu* by Álvaro de Guerra, *Nó cego* by Carlos Vale Ferraz and *Os navios negreiros não sobem o Cuando* by Domingos Lobo, historical memory still plays a prominent role in the fictionalizing of the African experiences.

Memory assumes a multiplicity of roles in the discourses about the colonial war: memory as individual and national trauma; memory as a way to erase what one wants to forget about war experiences; memory as a form of reconstruction and manipulation of truth itself; memory as a way to problematize and to make even more enigmatic the discourses on the colonial war; memory as an assailing specter as a result of the terror/fear/horror/violence of the war without any possibility of erasure; memory as excess of reality of the war; and memory as a supporting or oppositional term of Portuguese history itself. All of these aspects of the discourse of memory, as well as many others, are indispensable to theorize the multiplicity of representations of the colonial war and also for a deeper comprehension of post-revolutionary Portuguese contemporary narrative.

Rui de Azevedo Teixeira, in his book on the literary representation of the colonial wars, writes that

Com mais de 10.000 mortos, cerca de 20.000 deficientes físicos e ainda, possivelmente, 140.000 neuróticos de guerra, rara é a família portuguesa—salvo os ricos e os influentes do antigo regime e não poucas das mais conhecidas famílias da oposição—que não foi ferida pela Guerra Colonial. E se os custos humanos foram de grandes dimensões para um pequeno velho país de menos de dez milhões de habitantes, as perdas materiais atingiram um nível muito próximo da ruptura económica. (88)

Ex-president Ramalho Eanes has said that this war was both unjust and avoidable. “Nesta guerra, em que o regime português não reconhece o papel director do tempo, a História, forçada de novo, mais uma vez se vinga” (Teixeira 89). This is the message that is present in all the texts that make use of the most recent tragic episode of the Portuguese imperial enterprise, the colonial war, as theme.

If in some of the novels that narrate the experiences of the colonial war, one can already discriminate the conversion of a traumatized war experience into full hope by the announcement of a new history, which will be inscribed

over the history of empire with all its mechanisms of exclusion and domination and by the sense that peripheral resistance to assimilation and homologation will achieve success and lead to the construction of a new self/identity, in other novels there is a more pessimistic tone. In these works, political, moral and individual agency has been rendered totally ineffective by traumatic experiences of the colonial war that still hold control over the psyche and body of individuals, even many years after the end of the war. In the latter novels, the possibility of overcoming the trauma of the colonial conflict will always remain illusive; these narratives do not enable their characters to move beyond a state of helpless victimage. For them, there can never be an end or a sufficiency that will allow them to overcome the trauma; even after the colonial war is over, there is still further loss of self.

Os cus de Judas, whose anonymous protagonist is traumatized both by his inability to envision a future and to perceive his self as continuing over time, belongs to the second group of novels. In the novel, the main character/narrator relentlessly experiences an existential anguish and hell while living in a sort of social, individual, ideological and cultural exile, characterized by a sense of alienation, pain, loss and death. He feels trapped in an impossible no-where space without any exit, a space that has been constructed by Portuguese cultural and ideological fixity in order to erase, in the army doctor's opinion, the atrocities and the horror of Portugal's African (mis)adventures, the nightmarish hell that he really cannot overcome. He clashes incessantly with the values that are immanent to Portuguese society, a society that he really despises and loathes. According to him, Portuguese society practices continuously arbitrary ideological and cultural closures, which lead to injustice, symbolic poverty and the privileging of its values through the exclusion of others, the root cause for the perpetration of violence against the "other" in the colonial war and the reason for the narrator's continually anguished state of mind. "[D]escíamos para as Terras do Fim do Mundo, a dois mil quilómetros de Luanda, Janeiro acabava, chovia, e íamos morrer, íamos morrer e chovia, chovia, sentado na cabina da camioneta, ao lado do condutor, de boné nos olhos, o vibrar de um cigarro infinito na mão, iniciei a dolorosa aprendizagem da agonia" (Lobo Antunes 43).

The army doctor, after his African experience in the colonial war, feels that he inhabits a no-where and a no-place and that he has been condemned to a life of unmitigated ontological insecurity and an endless voyage of anguish where night and death are forever symbolically associated with his personal journey:

[...] achamo-nos condenados, você e eu [narrator addresses unnamed woman: he has met in a bar], a uma noite sem fim, espessa, densa, desesperante, desprovida de refúgios e saídas, um labirinto de angústia que o uísque ilumina de viés da sua claridade turva, segurando os copos vazios na mão como os peregrinos de Fátima as suas velas apagadas, sentados lado a lado no sofá, ocos de frases, de sentimentos, de vida, a sorrir um para o outro caretas de cães de faiança numa prateleira de sala, de olhos exaustos por semanas e semanas de apavoradas vigílias. (167)

As opposed to other novels about the colonial war that underscore the various links between representation of the colonial war experiences, its meaning, and the mastering/restoring of traumatic memory by characters to achieve meaningful narrative coherence, a coherence intimately tied to life histories as continuous unities, *Os cus de Judas* can never establish the linkage between representation, meaning and mastering of traumatic memory, a fact that does not allow the army doctor to overcome the trauma caused by the violence of the war and which leads him to conclude that he is dead: "E descobri, uma tarde, sentado numa esplanada de Algés, na borbulhosa presença de uma garrafa de água das Pedras, que estava morto" (135). He continuously seems to be resisting any sort of comprehension of the events associated with the colonial war, a reality brought about, in my opinion, by the excess of reality of his experiences in Angola, which creates a split between language and the experience since language cannot recover/translate/narrate the real.

The protagonist's memory of the experiences seems to be imprisoned in a quandary of both necessity and impossibility: on one side, it has a pressing need to narrate lived experiences and, on the other, it realizes that language is insufficient to translate the experiences, given that they are in fact beyond narration and/or representation. Consequently, he is condemned to live the traumatic memory of the colonial war without ever being able to construct a narrative that will restore coherence and unity to his life. He is suffering from the effects of traumatic flashbacks, as described by S. J. Brison, in "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," unable to escape the intrusive and perpetual images of the war. "Traumatic flashbacks immobilize the body by rendering the will as useless as it is in a nightmare in which one desperately tries to flee, but remains frozen" (43).

Indeed, every time that the narrator of *Os cus de Judas* reenacts his traumatic experiences in which events of the past acquire a supposedly active perception in the present, which should contribute, in a sense, to their com-

prehension and a possible transformation of his debilitating trauma and/or obsessive reminiscences into something useful or, at least, the beginning of a personal recovery, he is never able to attain any positive therapeutic effect through the reenactment. Even less can he use the reenactment for the construction of a self with the ability to produce closure, resolution and harmony in a life traumatized by the colonial problematics. The fundamental issue is that the narrator, in his somatic and chaotic discursive reconstruction of the past, is still the object of the “other” or “others,” that is, of those who perpetrated the violence against his body,

[...] os que mentiam e nos oprimiam, nos humilhavam e nos matavam em Angola, os senhores sérios e dignos de Lisboa que nos apunhalavam em Angola, os políticos, os magistrados, os polícias, os bufos, os bispos, os que ao som de hinos e discursos nos enxotavam para os navios da guerra e nos mandavam para África, nos mandavam morrer em África e teciam à nossa volta melopeias sinistras de vampiros. (186)

The passage that follows taken from the novel also reveals the protagonist's lack of control over events.

[M]as não podíamos urinar sobre a guerra, sobre a vileza e a corrupção da guerra: era a guerra que urinava sobre nós os seus estilhaços e os seus tiros, nos confinava à estreiteza da angústia e nos tornava em tristes bichos rancorosos, violando mulheres contra o frio branco e lúcido dos azulejos, ou nos fazia masturbar à noite, na cama, pesados de resignação e de uísque, encolhidos nos lençóis. (221-22)

The anonymous main character is the victim of another's discourse, the colonial/fascist rhetoric, which impedes him from being the author of his own reality/world. Others are the direct cause of the disintegration of his self and his coherence, a fact that denies him the possibility of overcoming his trauma and, consequently, of creating a narrative framework to make sense out of his life. Without a radical change in his relationship with the world and “others” or, better yet, without the desire or the ability to overcome his status of victim and to assume a role as producer of his world view, which implies a shift from being an object of another's agency to being the subject of one's own, he is doomed to failure. It will always be impossible for him to transform his traumatic experiences “into a coherent narrative that can then be integrated into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world, but also by reintegrating the

survivor into a community, reestablishing connections essential to selfhood" (Brison 39-40).

The possibility of cure or recovery is not really an option for many of the individuals who were traumatized by the colonial war. These, usually, inhabit a state of consciousness that is grounded in a continuous and obsessive dramatic memory of the war experiences, which continually destroys the self through time and space, a self that will never be allowed to have a present or a past, and much less a future: "o futuro é um nevoeiro fechado sobre o Tejo sem barcos, só um grito aflito ocasional na bruma" (Lobo Antunes 109). Or as the anonymous protagonist, in the night that the narration of the novel takes place, tells the woman whom he meets in a bar, a woman who just happens to be another one in a long line of one-night stands:

[...] nenhum de nós sente pelo outro mais do que uma cumplicidade de tuberculosos num sanatório, feita da melancólica tristeza de um destino comum; já vivemos demais para correr o risco idiota de nos apaixonarmos, de vibrarmos nas tripas e na alma exaltações de aventura, de nos demorarmos tardes a fio diante de uma porta fechada, de ramo de flores em riste, ridículos e tocantes, a engolir cuspos aflitos de José Matias. (168-69)

The reference to José Matias, the protagonist of Eça de Queirós' short story "José Matias," the embodiment of platonic love and of quintessential adulation and adoration of woman as a divine being, juxtaposes the army doctor's current situation with that of José Matias, a man who only lives for the person he loves, the divine Elisa. The pure and spiritual passion that he feels for the goddess Elisa gives meaning and sustenance to his life and allows him eventually to transcend his physical self and reach the space of pure spirit, that is, pure love. No such level of passion can be expected of the tormented and anguished army doctor, for the space of love and the spirit is beyond his reach. Unlike José Matias, he lives in a world totally devoid of master-narratives, a world that can best be characterized by negative transcendence, the death of the spirit, the loathing of most values, a shift from representational to non-representational practices, and a disbelief in any political and historical teleology.

In this world, language is viewed as an unstable exchange between speakers, which makes any attempt at real communication a futile experience. In such a world, there is no possibility of love, a truly communicative act. Even the sexual act, in spite of the many sexual encounters between the army doctor

and women that he meets in bars in Lisbon, as well as his constant alleviation of sexual frustration either through masturbation or with black women in Angola, lies outside a true communicative framework. All the self-masturbatory acts and the many sexual encounters are simply symptomatic of the sterility and his sense of emasculation in the “cus de Judas,” a symbolic and unproductive sexual territory that invokes images of sodomy with the power to invert the very concept of “colonialism as impregnation with that of colonialism as ‘sodomy’” (Madureira 25). Indeed, the army doctor feels that he had been forced by colonial discourse to become unwittingly a participant in the sodomy of the African continent and that he, in turn, had also been personally sodomized by that very discourse, a situation that is, in effect, the real cause of the protagonist’s impotence and incapacity to trope and penetrate any social, cultural, ideological and sexual territory, that is, to reach symbolic climax. Thus, every sexual act in the text must be interpreted as a reflexive act or as a sign of sexual frustration; it can never be interpreted or viewed as a positive sign of cross-fertilization that would give meaning to the world, restore effective communication and effect change. Just like the narrative act of *Os cus de Judas*, every sexual act is always self-referential and symbolically non-climactic. Neither ever transcends itself or becomes meaningful.

If, for example, in *Jornada de África* one can still articulate an exit, albeit a symbolic one, from the difficult situation in which the protagonist, Sebastião, and the nation find themselves, the same cannot be done with regards to the nameless protagonist of *Os cus de Judas* and his homeland. For both, there is no possible exit. No one is going to witness in this text the heroic and symbolic birth of a new man and a new nation, as occurs in *Jornada de África*, even if for such a symbolic event to take place is necessary the disappearance of Sebastião, as had occurred with his namesake King D. Sebastião centuries before, naturally now, as the empire crumbles, in a totally differentiated and transformative ideological path. As one of the anonymous protagonist’s aunts tells him, “[s]empre esperei que a tropa te tornasse um homem, mas contigo não há nada a fazer” (244). And right afterwards the text continues: “E os retratos dos generais defuntos nas consolas aprovaram com feroz acordo a evidência desta desgraça” (244). In fact, what the reader is really witnessing is the death of the narrator of *Os cus de Judas* and along with his death the dissolution and the crumbling of an imperial power, which is no longer able to appeal to ontological certainty to produce its discursive strategies and mechanisms.

Os cus de Judas is a first-person narrative with both autobiographical and testimonial characteristics, which has as its salient theme, as mentioned previously, the colonial war. It is an associative narration that begins late in the evening in a Lisbon bar and which meanders through a series of events, most of them related to the protagonist's experiences in Angola, and follows the details of a one-night stand with a woman that he meets at a bar whose voice is absent from the narrative, which has its denouement in the failed coitus in the apartment of the army doctor later on that evening. I say "failed" because both come to the realization that there can never be a climax between them since they are decomposing human beings who are unable to interrelate with each other. Just like the narrative, the coital act cannot have any closure; both are defined by impotence and non-climax. The two characters cannot come together because they both possess an excess of lucidity to really accept the possibility of any meaningful relationship. She is also indifferent towards or even fearful of the army doctor, and he is simply impotent to untangle himself from a discourse grounded on endless traumatic recollections characterized by repetitive and associative traits. It is the colonial war, the foremost obsession of the narrator/protagonist, which acts as the principal factor in the failure of the one-night stand:

O que de certo modo irremediavelmente nos separa é que você leu nos jornais os nomes dos militares defuntos, e eu partilhei com eles a salada da ração de combate e vi soldarem-lhe os caixões na arrecadação da companhia entre caixotes de munições e capacetes ferrugentos. (143)

And this reality, as well as the difference in perception of the same reality by both characters, constantly interferes with a transcendental love relationship and even the failed coitus of that evening, since in the most inappropriate moments the trauma of the colonial war bursts forth in a series of disjointed and discontinuous images in the narrator's discourse. At the end of that night, daylight will not follow; it will still be metaphorically night for the main character. Nights and bars are in fact sites of refuge for the anguish and the landscape of impotence that have become an integral part of his normative self. He is powerless to confront the ferocity of the day because he is well aware that in it he will not find his salvation. Night becomes him, not daylight. The only option available to him is to continue:

[...] enredado no seu mundo de dor, culpa e acusação, em que ninguém sai limpo com excepção dos guerrilheiros, fracassa no casamento, no trabalho, na ideologia erigindo-se como o símbolo dessa geração destruída nos cus de Judas e que, após o conhecimento do inferno, ergue as mãos na procura, pelos corpos, pelas noites, pelos copos. (143)

In effect, he only survives in the imagination of an inexistent time of innocence, which the colonial war has stolen from him forever:

De modo que, se faz favor, chegue-se para o meu lado da cama, fareje a minha cova no colchão, passe a mão no meu cabelo como se tivesse por mim a sequiosa violência de uma ternura verdadeira, expulse para o corredor o cheiro pestilento, e odioso, e cruel da guerra, e invente uma diáfana paz de infância para os nossos corpos devastados. (217)

In spite of his desire that a time of innocence be reinvented, the narrator understands fully well that such a time cannot really exist in his desolate landscape. However, that is the only respite that he can get from his painful and anguished journey, as Maria Alzira Seixo insinuates in *Os romances de António Lobo Antunes*:

Nesta agonia que perdura na sobrevivência do corpo vazio, apenas um côncavo de sala, de corpo, de paisagem, de mulher ou de memória lhe pode dar ainda a vida da palavra reencontrada e insistente que promove a fala, a imagem do barco (inapercebido) que recolha o naufrago isolado que ficou nos cus de Judas, o frémito do pássaro que voa para longe a caminho da meninice do futuro, na viagem longuíssima até casa. (65)

Yet, even the journey home to a time of blissful youth is doomed to failure since he no longer possesses any apparent coordinates of subject location. He simply cannot and will not identify any more with the geographical, ideological and cultural outlines of a defined place, the main underlying foundation for any concept of subjectivity. His condition is really that of an exile since his life is marked by a sense of loss and separation from all types of mappable spaces that could serve as anchors for the construction of a stable and coherent identity or, as Kathleen M. Kirby puts it, "the fixed parameters of ontological categories, making them containers of essences, in relation to which one must be 'inside' or 'outside,' 'native' or 'foreign'" (19). The main character is

even afflicted by a sense of dislocation and displacement from his home, the ultimate anchoring point and/or the walled site of belonging, where he feels that he is an intruder:

Uma noite, há pouco tempo, ao atender o telefone, perguntaram-me de um número completamente diferente do meu. Julga que desfiz o engano e desliguei? Pois bem, dei por mim a tremer, de palavras enroladas na garganta, húmido de suor e de aflição, sentindo-me um estranho numa casa estranha, a invadir em fraude a intimidade alheia, uma espécie de gatuno, percebe, do universo doméstico de um outro, pousado na borda da cadeira num excesso de cerimónia culpada. (146)

Indeed, the army doctor lives in a world of constraining enclosures that define him and determine what he can do and cannot do. The metamorphosis (to become a man) that is expected of him when he departs for Angola does not materialize because any positive articulation of the self in the face of a fascist/imperialistic rhetoric whose aim is total appropriation of the physical, psychological, cultural and symbolic space of the self for ideological purposes is simply illusive. If there is a metamorphosis, it is from ontological uncertainty as he departs for active duty in Angola to even greater uncertainty and personal estrangement, given that his self undergoes further violation and habitation from a colonial/fascist hegemonic discourse solely engaged in harnessing its population towards its self-representation on behalf of the “senhores sérios e dignos de Lisboa” (186), the political elite mentioned by the army doctor in the text. He had already foreshadowed such an outcome for his (mis)adventures in Africa:

[...] quando embarquei para Angola, a bordo de um navio cheio de tropas, para me tornar finalmente homem, a tribo [he is referring to his family], agradecida ao Governo que me possibilitava, grátis, uma tal metamorfose, compareceu em peso no cais, consentindo, num arroubo de fervor patriótico, ser acotovelada por uma multidão agitada e anónima semelhante à do quadro da guilhotina, que ali vinha assistir, impotente, à sua própria morte. (17)

In reality, and taking into account that the unnamed army doctor is, in Lobo Antunes's view, the symbol of a Portugal portrayed as a disintegrating, abject and devastated landscape, an empire in ruins, one may argue that in *Os cus de Judas* the whole nation is impotently contemplating its own death and

also unwilling to comprehend and/or accept the imminent displacement of its historical narrative. As Phyllis Peres observes, in “Love and Imagination Among the Ruins of Empire,” the passage quoted above from the novel “is not the epic passage from nation to nationhood, but rather the failed rites of a decadent imagining of empire and manhood that leave impotent both nation and narrator” (193). Portugal, in its negative and abject portrayal, mirrors the image of the protagonist masturbating amid photographs of his military ancestors frowning down on him from the mantle, they themselves “meaningless showcase images from the discursively constructed past” (Peres 199). The army doctor loathes both the war and his country, “um velho país desajeitado e agonizante” (58) or “*Portugal dos Pequeninos* corporativo que fez do Estado Novo uma constante aberração por defeito ou por excesso” (42), as well as all the cynical and selfish ideals “[d]os senhores de Lisboa que disparavam contra nós as balas envenenadas dos seus discursos patrióticos” (205), the real executors of his African nightmarish hell. In the words of Rui de Azevedo Teixeira,

[...] [e]nlevado pela patriofobia, *Judas* é um romance ressentido que investe de forma biliosa contra a *totalidade portuguesa* nas décadas de sessenta e setenta. A narrativa de Lobo Antunes, em toada de alergia a tudo o que é nacional, escreve-se contra a Guerra Colonial e o sistema político e económico que a produziu e ainda contra o Portugal pós-revolucionário—apenas o curto período revolucionário merece o apoio do protagonista. Neste quadro geral de doentio negativismo, de crítica sem perspectiva, cega, só são minimamente respeitados os portugueses que combateram numa Guerra tornada segredo público quer antes quer depois do 25 de Abril. (312)

In his book, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Milan Kundera writes that the “struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetfulness” (qtd. in Brison 49). In *Os cus de Judas*, the protagonist’s relentless hyperbolic diatribes against his own country, the imperial power, may be interpreted as the struggle of memory against forgetfulness of a tragic episode in the history of Portugal, which violated and traumatized a whole generation. In order to soothe its anguish and its inability to have any sexual/love encounter based on positive and transcendental values, this generation of which the protagonist is a part has retreated totally into a life of alcohol and cynicism. It is a generation totally adrift capable only of articulating a self in the undesired, nightmarish and wretched space of south of nowhere.

The protagonist's invective against those responsible for his hell in no way will enable his reintegration into society. In fact, it only serves to underscore his sense of nonmastery over the events, which precludes memory as a healing integration. Moreover, his incoherent, chaotic and associative form of enunciating his experiences highlights even further the notion that he lacks narrative mastery over those events. The protagonist's memories compulsively repeated in the novel show that traumatic memory still holds sway over him. Unfortunately, he also lacks another key component in the remaking of the self, a listener to bear witness to his traumatic memories. As Dori Laub observes, the process involves a re-externalizing of traumatic memory that "can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside" (69). The protagonist needs the empathy of other human beings, he needs listeners who feel his pain and who care about him and are willing to listen to him. They are essential for the army doctor to construct a narrative, a signpost of recovery from the trauma of the colonial war. All acts of memory, as Mieke Bal notes, come about in a cultural context and they are characterized by an "exchange between first and second person that sets in motion the emergence of narrative" (x).

The woman whom he meets at the bar does not or cannot in fact bear witness or empathize with his situation since she herself is also a victim of the same discourse. It is not that she denies those traumatic events; it is simply that she is his soulmate, an individual adrift in the space of the "cus de Judas," a mutilated and violated body that can never assume the role of the listener. Furthermore, as Phyllis Peres claims, the silence of the woman "is more the interpolative embellishment to the impotent narration whose meaning cannot be shared and can only be matched by the sterility of silence" (195). In reality, the narrator seems to accept readily the woman's silence and the fact that she cannot assume the role of a true listener since he is well aware that his performative speech act is truly a failed and impotent act of narration. Even though he may not want and/or realize that he cannot get an empathetic listener to bear witness to his trauma, the fact remains that without one the narrative framework fails and his body/self remains inscribed with someone else's language. As a consequence of the inscription, the narrator is simply unable to regain his subjectivity and his voice, both necessary conditions for the nameless army doctor to be identified with a proper name, a signifying marker that will permit him to become connected with a vast interlocking system of cultural and ideological structures.

As Kathleen M. Kirby notes, “a person’s proper name is, even more than the address, a signifier locating the subject in discursive and ideological structures. The proper name propels its bearer into an extracorporeal complex” (250) that connects the individual to the spaces of nation, community, gender, and ethnicity. There will not be any access to these spaces for the army doctor, since his traumatic memories totally resist integration. On the contrary, he is condemned to inhabit a space among the ruins of empire where he is forced to indulge in a form of self-referential narration and/or self-referential linguistic masturbation without the possibility of closure in order to reinvent the nation and the self. The prison-house of language in which he finds himself renders him impotent to partake of the reinvention. However, he seems to accept his spatial surroundings, which he likens to a tomb:

Esta espécie de jazigo onde moro, assim vazio e hirto, oferece-me, aliás, uma sensação de provisório, de efêmero, de intervalo, que, entre parêntesis, me encanta: posso assim considerar-me um homem para mais tarde, e adiar indefinidamente o presente até apodrecer sem nunca haver amadurecido. (155)

Both the affects and the effects of the empire in ruins are the source of the impotence and the self-referential nature of the medical doctor’s narration. They are also the main reason why his traumatic memories of the colonial war still color his vision of the self and the nation. The colonial war may have ended, the empire may have collapsed, but the narrator still has great difficulty in accepting such facts as a closure of what happened to him and to his country. His anguish does not end with the liberation of the former Portuguese colonies and the Revolution; it is only further highlighted and intensified by a national post-revolutionary discourse defined by silence and forgetting vis-à-vis the colonial war, a discourse that already permeated the fascist period. In essence, his perception of what has happened and is happening in his country does not allow the army doctor to work through his traumatic past, a working through that involves self-reflexivity, distance and re-externalizing of his war memories. The way that the country is dealing with its past only serves to keep his wounds open; it only leads to a further (re)traumatizing of the main character.

In his case, traumatic memory cannot be replaced by narrative memory, which entails both a mastery of a positive narrative framework and the construction of a coherent and integrated self. The traumatic events of his past do not ever enter narrative memory; they always remain at the level of the

unnarratable, of trauma. He is still alive after Angola, but in reality he does not survive Angola. He is alive but dead for all practical intents and purposes. One may then conclude that after the narrator's traumatic experiences in the colonial war his "basic cognitive and emotional capacities are gone or radically altered" (Brison 44) and that the resulting epistemological crisis has left him "with virtually no bearings to navigate by" (Brison 44). He himself seems to agree with the evidence of the previous statements:

Porque foi nisto que me transformei, que me transformaram, Sofia: uma criatura envelhecida e cínica a rir de si própria e dos outros o riso invejoso, azedo, cruel dos defuntos, o riso sádico e mudo dos defuntos, o repulsivo riso gorduroso dos defuntos, e a apodrecer por dentro, à luz do uísque, como apodrecem os retratos nos álbuns, magoadamente, dissolvendo-se devagarinho numa confusão de bigodes. (193)

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José N. Ornelas is Professor and Director of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is the author of many articles on Portuguese contemporary narrative with a particular focus on women writers, José Cardoso Pires and José Saramago. He has also published other essays on different periods of Portuguese literature, as well as on writers of other countries of the Portuguese-speaking world. He is currently working on several projects dealing with the production of subjectivity, national identity, globalization, postcolonial practices and discourses and the use of memory to reconstruct the past. E-mail: ornelas@spanport.umass.edu