

## The Serpent's Tongue: Gendering Autoethnography in Paulina Chiziane's *Balada de Amor ao Vento*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** This article discusses the gendering of power and language in Paulina Chiziane's first novel *Balada de Amor ao Vento* (1990). Drawing on Cynthia Ward's analyses, informed by Bakhtin, I argue that Chiziane undoes the gender hierarchy implicit in constructing a dominant, national literary language in opposition to the naturalized feminine domestic realm associated with the "Mother Tongue." Exploring the gendering of poetic language in transcultural narratives such as auto-ethnography, I demonstrate that Chiziane's novel ironizes the pastoral mode that is central to colonial and anti-colonial (auto)ethnography, by positing a feminine pastoral subject of disillusion and displacement. Chiziane thus transposes onto African men the traditional culpability of Eve for Man's postlapsarian disillusion, colonially reiterated in representations of the conquest as the Fall. This appropriative move enables her to express the materiality of feminine desire through areas of miscommunication and untranslatability in traditionally male contact zones, so that she effectively disrupts any unitary, pastoral concept of a feminine "Mother Tongue" as the necessary, constitutive "other" to national literary language.

Paulina Chiziane has emerged in the last ten years as one of the most original and significant new voices in the contemporary Mozambican literary world. Like many Mozambican writers of her generation writing in Portuguese, her relationship to Portuguese as the official written language of the country exists in productive tension with a wealth of oral storytelling tradition. Born in Manjacaze, Gaza in 1955, she moved to Lourenço Marques

in early childhood. Although her parents were Protestants, she was subsequently educated in a Portuguese Roman Catholic mission school in the capital city. Consequently, she was exposed early in life to four different languages. Chope was the first oral language she learned and spoke at home with her family in Gaza. Ronga was the oral language she had to speak with other Africans when she moved to the suburbs of the capital city at the age of six. Portuguese was acquired only in the context of literacy, by means of formal schooling and education in the Portuguese classics; her university degree studies at Eduardo Mondlane were in linguistics. In addition to this influential cultural heritage of Tsonga orature and Portuguese and Lusophone African literatures, her daily attendance at Catholic mass at her missionary school exposed her to spoken Latin (Laban 977). Not surprisingly, she has often described her background in inherently transcultural terms, resisting allegiance to any totalizing religious, class, or ethnic identification:

Sou o resultado de duas culturas e não consigo delimitar em mim mesma as fronteiras entre uma e outra cultura. [...] Penso e falo numa língua europeia para retratar a minha vida de africana. Só pode ser assim e não de outro modo se quiser comunicar-me com outras fronteiras e mesmo dentro do meu país. (Laban 975)

If her race, class and language background is complex and nuanced, her gendered acceptance into the male-defined literacy canon of Mozambique is no less so. Chiziane has explicitly aligned herself with the expression of a gendered perspective on Mozambican history and society during the colonial period and post-Independence era. Indeed, she stated in a 1999 interview, “não sou capaz de ter uma visão assexuada da vida” (Sousa Guerreiro 1). However, this declaration in the negative is still far from arrogating a unitary viewpoint that could be pinned to any postcolonial, feminist or African womanist orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup> In fact, as will become evident, and on the principle that attack is the best form of defense, Chiziane’s satirical critique of Mozambican masculinities is a defining element in all of her major published work to date.

Focusing on the cooperation between patriarchal systems of social organization under historically intersecting colonial, Marxist and post-colonial forms of rule, Chiziane necessarily complexifies the concept of a unitary feminist perspective in opposition to patriarchal control. At the same time, however, she clearly posits the need for a realignment of gendered power dynamics in southern Mozambican society, using a highly syncretic novelistic

discourse in which communication between different languages and symbol systems metonymizes different social systems of material and economic exchange. As the critic Cynthia Ward indicates in a study of officialized literary languages and artificially engendered “vernaculars,” which will underpin my analysis of Chiziane, the very idea of invoking a “woman’s perspective” in African literature tends to cast perspective as masculine, and the woman’s angle as different, partial, subjective, and, crucially for our purposes, materialized. According to Ward:

Objectivity is constituted as precisely that which is not given to those whom it objectifies. The authority, the power, of objectivity finds its basis in the materiality of the thus embodied others [women as mothers] who are always subject to their physical condition. The ‘silencing’ of women is not merely a condition of limiting their access to means of education, but central to the giving ‘voice’ to the invisible author. (121)

Fundamental to Ward’s Bakhtinian argument is the problematic of the feminized, materialized “Mother Tongue” as “primitive orality [reflecting] the dream of wholeness behind written language” (123). Taking issue with the gender blindness of Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *Decolonizing the Mind* and its apparent unconcern with depatriarchizing as well as decolonizing the mind, Ward asserts that the pure African “Mother Tongue” is itself a necessary fiction, always required by and posited against the masculine pen. Thus, so-called “vernacular” languages are artificially feminized or more specifically maternalized, as the objectification of feminine “matter,” in the monoglossic process whereby dominant literary (and written) languages appropriate oral (domestic) vernaculars as the knowledge they need to objectify in order to raise a literary language to the status of hegemonically national monoglossia.<sup>3</sup> Thus, as Ward puts it, the “‘matrix-as-mother-of-all-mothers’ does not appear outside of the monoglossic discourse that has been coded in advance” (120). Language becomes then a material thing, the objectifying panoptical standpoint associated with the white male gaze in European monoglossia not only, as theorists such as Walter Ong would have it, through being written down, but also when “national literatures [are] ‘dialogically’ engendered via the forcible appropriation of the feminized mother tongues by the father’s pen” (121). Consequently, in Ward’s view, the call for literature to be written in African vernacular languages that Ngugi wa Thiongo’s makes would fail to

avoid simply repeating this dialogic linguistic process, maintaining its hierarchical gender dynamic essentially in tact.

The gendered relationship between Tsonga orature and Portuguese writing has played a significant role in Chiziane's reception and status, particularly in the dominant metropolitan critical arena of Lisbon. Her acceptance into this normatively male-authored canon of marketable and exportable Mozambican literature over the last decade has been cautious and ambivalent. The following conditional acceptance from José da Silva Moreira is telling in this respect:

Quando Paulina Chiziane se obrigar a um rigor maior junto ao seu talento indiscutível de contadora de histórias, facilmente ascenderá à qualidade de "terceira mosqueteira" da literatura moçambicana, a par de Mia Couto e Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa. (22)

The implications are clear. Chiziane will join the top-selling, marketable ranks more decisively if she disciplines her use of Portuguese literary language to the appropriate, predefined (written) standard. Validating written standardization and uniformity in Portuguese over her "talento indiscutível de contadora de histórias" (22) da Silva Moreira effectively reinforces a prioritization of writing over orature. He requires that Chiziane's implicitly feminized oral storytelling should play the role of a synthetic natural, spontaneous (though ultimately disciplined) other in relation to Portuguese literary writing. If we accept Ward's assertion that "a fully rationalized market language best fully rationalizes a market economy and vice versa" (120), the drive to regularize language through monoglossia has clear commercial as well as national payoffs. Conversely, then, and significantly for Chiziane, the diversification of language and symbol systems allows her to encode (women's) non-containment in the monoglossia upheld by dominant economic, socio-cultural and national systems.

The dominant system under discussion in Chiziane's first novel *Balada de Amor ao Vento* (1990) is southern Mozambican polygamy. Refusing the centrifugal drive towards social conformity and linguistic monoglossia, Chiziane thematizes divorce in order to inscribe the taboo of women's non-maternal sexual desire into dominant discourses of material and economic exchange. Official opposition to polygamy was an important point of ideological continuity linking Christian colonial missions and post-independence marxism-leninism. Monogamy became a notorious source of hypocrisy and double-

speak among FRELIMO men, who had much to gain from practicing public monogamy and clandestine polygamy. As Chiziane points out, it also licensed serial monogamy as a covert form of polygamy without providing the economic structures for maintaining more than one family. Chiziane consequently refuses to draw a neat defining line between polygamous forms of social organization and the institution of monogamy, which may be serialized into a form of *de facto*, non-simultaneous polygamy. Comparing the two marriage systems, the Christian lack of responsibility for abandoned children of former marriages, and the fierce rivalry between polygamous wives, Chiziane concludes “com a poligamia, com a monogamia ou mesmo solitária, a vida a mulher é sempre dura” (108). The episodic narration of events in the novel follows a dialectical format allowing for comparison and contrast between different forms of social organization and affording the main narrator/protagonist Sarnau opportunity to comment on her own changing fortunes.

*Balada de Amor ao Vento* describes the trials and tribulations in love of Sarnau, a young Tsonga woman in Inhambane province during the colonial period. Sarnau loves and loses Mwando several times. As an intending Catholic priest, Mwando breaks the rules of the seminary, makes love to Sarnau and gets her pregnant, only to abandon her with the pretext that a monogamous marriage has been arranged for him by his Christian family. Sarnau meanwhile makes a wealthy match becoming the number one wife and future queen in a polygamous union with the heir of the throne in Mambone. Abused by her husband she develops solidarity with her mother-in-law, the Queen, but suffers the rivalry and witchcraft of the other polygamous wives. Sarnau is supplanted in Nguila’s affections, when she fails to produce an heir. She accepts Mwando back as her lover, when he returns to her after his Christian monogamous marriage has failed. Sarnau finally produces a son but through her relationship with Mwando, not with her husband. Unaware of the child’s illegitimacy Nguila unwittingly accepts the child as heir to the throne but Sarnau and Mwando are forced to flee the kingdom when an embittered rival wife, Phati, betrays them to Nguila and the adulterous relationship is discovered. Mwando takes Sarnau to Vilankulos where he becomes a fisherman but his fear and guilt take over when he is pursued by a vengeful Nguila, and he abandons Sarnau again. The latter part of the novel switches its attention to Mwando for the space of three chapters, depicting the direct impact of the colonial regime on black African men, which Sarnau experiences only indirectly through Mwando and Nguila.



Mwando is arrested by the colonial authorities and deported for correctional labor on the Angolan plantations because he had an affair with a woman whose boyfriend turned out to be a *sipaio* who accused him of rape. The *sipaios* were colonial plantation foremen, usually Asian, whose job it was to oversee the workers for the white masters and whose mediatory position is often associated with betrayal, in anti- and post-colonial Mozambican texts. Despite the harsh conditions of the plantation, Mwando eventually makes good, using his seminarian skills in reciting Latin masses and funeral rituals to set up as a barefoot priest or “mafundisse,” in league with the colonial authorities. Returning to Lourenço Marques at the end of the novel, Mwando finds Sarnau selling vegetables on a stall in Mafalala, where the story began. Reduced to prostitution to repay her “lobolo” to the king of Mambone, she demands the price of her honor or “resgate” from Mwando, in terms of the accumulated marriages her “lobolo” bought for her brothers, stating:

Só as vacas do meu lobolo, fizeram outros vinte e quatro lobolos. Tiraste-me do lar, abandonaste-me, tive que lutar sozinha para devolver as trinta e seis vacas, pois se não o fizesse, todas seriam recolhidas em cada família, o que significa vinte e quatro divórcios. (113)<sup>4</sup>

Making her stand, symbolically in the market place, Sarnau creates a critical subtext on the gendered power structures that had always underwritten the narrative of the Mozambican revolution.<sup>5</sup> As Patrick Chabal has rightly noted, at the time of its publication the novel was “construed as an acid statement about the present” (92).

*Balada* was written in the late 1980s and published in 1990 when FRELIMO was experiencing a deepening crisis in state control. In their attempt to combat the growth of RENAMO’s neo-traditionalist counter-insurgency, FRELIMO sought to increase the international standing and national membership of the FRELIMO party with a broadening of popular appeal and an extension of religious tolerance. One result of this was FRELIMO’s controversial withdrawal at its Fifth Party Congress in 1989 of the official policy, which refused party membership to men who engaged in “traditional” religious practices such as polygamy and *lobolo*.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly in this context of incipient transition, then, Chiziane uses the highly topical polygamy/monogamy debate to frame a transcultural contact zone, which effectively connects three historical periods, the pre-colonial, the colonial and post-inde-

pendence marxism-leninism. Read allegorically, the novel reveals the status of women being pressed into instrumentalist service as a symbolic and material bargaining chip in FRELIMO's political transition from marxist-leninist state socialism to capitalism and liberal democracy.

Emphasizing the continuities linking colonial and pre-colonial hierarchies of gender in African societies, what Elleke Boehmer has termed the "history of intersecting patriarchies that was part of colonialism" (7), and extrapolating from this to contemporary post-colonial politics, Chiziane foregrounds the fact that women often figure the intersection point in male-authored (anti)colonial narratives.<sup>7</sup> As symbolic border guards of cultural tradition, women become the scapegoats for conflicted male identifications, embodying, mediating or absorbing the contradictions that the contact zone produces, doubly materially disadvantaged by the cultural transactions of the contact zone, losing one form of gender agency without acquiring another.<sup>8</sup>

Chiziane dramatizes this political *impasse* for women in terms of poetic language conflict as she rewrites and transforms the autoethnographic narrative, showing how it can operate as a medium of gender betrayal. As Pratt explains, "if ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations" (*Imperial Eyes* 7). However, colonial ethnography itself has a specifically gendered history, casting women as the object of study and traditionally over-relying on the greater accessibility (and conductivity) of male informants.<sup>9</sup> "Ethnographical objectification" by missionaries and anthropologists established a "fixed object of study that could be described, 'known,' and thus controlled" (Ward 124). This largely accounts for the counter-emphasis placed on sociology, anthropology and (auto)ethnography in the construction of the anti-colonial discourses that informed the consolidation of (masculine) national subjectivities.<sup>10</sup> How then do women, the sexual "others" of the colonized Other employ the (auto)ethnographic medium to enter into dialogue with *both* metropolitan representations of sexualized native otherness *and* the internalization and perpetuation of these sexualized representations by "Europe's subjugated other," the African male speaker of anti- and post-colonial discourses?

Chiziane engages with this in *Balada* by producing an ironic appropriation of the pastoral narrative on which Christian colonial ethnography relies.<sup>11</sup> As Sidonie Smith has noted, "there is a long history that conjoins pas-

toral visions and colonization” (171). The structure of the pastoral turns on the split between the rural idyll and the coming of commerce and war as the founding movements of urban civilization.<sup>12</sup> In this scenario, the objectification of the feminine is inherent to colonial ethnography because the pastoral imagination relies for its construction of eternally lost native innocence on the myth of Genesis and the doctrine of the Fall. Nostalgic for a lost world corrupted by the Fall from Grace, which may correspond to the coming of an Age of War, colonial conquest, or industrialization and the growth of money economies, the pastoral *topos* is equally available to colonial and anti-colonial ethnographic discourses of prelapsarian nostalgia.

In this context, African woman in particular is made to embody a pure, maternal and primitive essence, a hyper-materialized matrix or Mother Tongue “ahistorically trapped within nature” (Ward 120). The pastoral time/space of the Golden Age corresponds then to an inchoate, presymbolic, feminized ideal, deprived of the power of public expression through authorized (national) monoglossia. Chiziane’s pastoral problematizes woman’s culpability for the Fall, which inaugurates the pastoral by deploying a female pastoral subject whose journey through suffering and life, symbolized throughout by the journeying waters of the River Save, provides the trajectory of exile and displacement between locations that enables pastoral convention to delineate its necessary contrasts. Chiziane has remarked that “aquilo que eu faço em termos de escrita é uma tradução da oratura à literatura” (Owen 1999) but her process of translation and cross-cultural communication between zones is conspicuously, artfully incomplete and can never reinstitute lost wholeness.

Chiziane refuses any form of assimilative, enforced monoglossia, rather emphasizing oral and written heteroglossia as a field of “untranslatability” across systems, marked by inexact symbolic correspondences, deliberate epistemic fracture and ironic double-voicing. By allowing Sarnau as a journeying woman to be both the expressive subject of pastoral nostalgia and the passive object of the “natural” essentialist mythology that the pastoral requires, Chiziane uses the gender hierarchy of the pastoral *topos* to synthesize a deconstructive speaking position for Sarnau, which takes account of specific poetic and linguistic histories of silencing. Thus Sarnau’s unfixable voice constantly speaks from two places at once. The novel begins with her explicit declaration of her pastoral positioning, between the “now” and the “then,” as she states: “tenho saudades” (9). Looking back to the Eden of her youth by the River Save, she contrasts her past with the present “paraíso de miséria” (9)—



the urban slum of Mafalala where she has a market stall. Expressing Sarnau's successive disillusion with two gender dystopias, Christian and Tsonga, Chiziane creates a field of "double vision," a pastoral within a pastoral, contrasting her village childhood among ideal nature, not only with Mafalala in the capital city, but also with the degenerate royal court of Mambone and its corrupt, cumulative polygamy economy based on polygamy and *lobolo*.<sup>13</sup> Thus the novel's double temporality, its present/past dynamic, is chronotopically expressed as a series of shifting, contrasting double spaces and double voices as Chiziane splits and subdivides the pastoral longing for pure maternal wholeness, the fiction of artificial oral monoglossia.

The novel's appropriation of Genesis begins by paradigmatically establishing the impossibility of unitary "maternal" meaning, setting up an ambivalent, centrifugal aesthetic of doubling and splitting in the courtship of Sarnau and Mwando, who are explicitly likened to the original creation couple in the Garden of Eden. Sarnau first falls in love with Mwando following their respective initiation rituals. In Tsonga terms, this is the point at which adult sexual relations between them would normally be sanctioned. Mwando, however, is training for the priesthood in the Catholic seminary. Their burgeoning sexual relationship is therefore dramatized as a linguistic conflict between Christian and Tsonga nature symbolism, between Portuguese writing and Tsonga orature, and between differently authorized definitions of transgression. Sarnau and Mwando disagree in their versions of Genesis as the founding narrative of sexual difference and initiation, and this disjuncture can be traced through the shifting meaning of the snake in their declarations to each other and to g/God.

Sarnau's vision of a spontaneous Paradise is firmly rooted in the beauty of the natural world around her, where human sexuality follows the rhythm of the seasons. Mwando has internalized his Garden of Eden through the scriptural format of the Bible taught at the Catholic college. For Sarnau, nature, not Christianity, is a medium of instruction and an instrument of wisdom, while for Mwando, nature is an unwelcome intrusion on civilization and a threat to the intellect. Indeed, his attraction to the priesthood is neither spiritual nor material but a question of aesthetics, appearances and dominant linguistic ritual as he remarks, "eu quero ser padre, usar batina branca, cristianizar, baptizar" (16). While Mwando associates Sarnau with a snake, awakening him from the "ventre fecundo da inocência" (15), Sarnau does not see the snake as evil, but rather as discrete and passive, since "a serpente junto

ao ninho, fecha os olhos, discreta, não vá ela interromper os beijos dos pássaros que se amam, crescem e se multiplicam” (15). Sarnau exculpates the snake, and, by future inference, herself, from occasioning original sin. For Mwando, the serpent is the (feminized) agent of evil in Christian consciousness, and “como o Adão no Paraíso, a voz da serpente sugeriu-lhe a maçã, que lhe arrancou brutalmente a venda de todos mistérios” (15). His troubled conscience is aware of imminent transgression when he asks, “porque é que Deus não protege os seus filhos mais devotos, e deixa serpentes espalhados por todo lado, porquê?” (16). Fearing yet secretly desiring his expulsion from the paradise represented by the gardens of the Catholic college, Mwando remarks, “se o padre descobrir a minha paixão expulsa-me do colégio na frescura do entardecer tal como Adão no Paraíso” (16).

When Mwando is finally won over by Sarnau’s physical charms, he commits his feelings to writing. Posturing as a romantic poet, he writes a love letter to Sarnau replete with local, natural imagery for his feelings, even though he knows that Sarnau cannot read it; he begins: “que pena, não saberes ler. Escrever-te-ia uma carta linda, longa” (17). The act of writing is a materializing of Mwando’s cultural dilemma, an attempt to assume a Portuguese lyric subject position that ultimately betrays him by occasioning the very thing he had hoped to avoid, when the letter accidentally falls into the hands of the priest. Padre Ferreira uses it as evidence that gives credence to the “línguas de serpente” (17) warning him of sexual misdemeanours in the school. He expels Mwando and his friend Salomão, but not the school cook who he has caught in bed with Salomão. This comically infers the priest’s sexual hypocrisy but also, in contrast to Mwando, it underlines his impunity under his own laws.

The conventional treachery of the serpent is transposed onto the civilized literate world of Catholic colonialism, which is exposed as a fraud and a risk for those seeking assimilation to it, precisely because it embodies social law in writing. The serpent meanwhile retains a Tsonga association with the continuity of nature and the forces of love. When Mwando and Sarnau finally make love, Sarnau openly defies the Christian God saying, “a serpente deume uma maçã e o Adão vai trincá-la mesmo debaixo do vosso nariz. Ide, ide queixar-vos a Deus que eu não me importo, as ervas serão nossas confidentes” (19). Mwando’s eventual “sin” in Tsonga terms consists precisely in his not keeping faith with the world of the serpent. He breaks his Tsonga commitment to Sarnau after their lovemaking when he does not pay the ritually

required dues: “dinheiro, rapé e pano vermelho” (20) to Sarnau’s ancestral protector. When he leaves her pregnant so that he can contract a Christian monogamous union, a deadly snake threatens him and Mwando realizes that “os teus defuntos estão contra mim, mandaram esta cobra para me aniquilar, o que significa isto?” (23).

Mwando’s masculine identity in the Tsonga patriarchal system draws him into the danger zone of transcultural contact, where imitative colonial power becomes his only mode of survival and yet also his greatest risk. Mwando’s risks are always underwritten by the hard labor of Sarnau, however, and, as the text makes clear, she has been “enslaved” by marriage, more effectively and permanently than Mwando will ever be by his corrective labor on the Angolan plantations. Mwando’s experience of deportation and corrective labor ultimately provides him with an opportunity to thrive at the expense of his fellow convicts, although it is his liminal position in the contact zone, between Christian colonial literacy and the world of Tsonga orature, which causes his arrest in the first place. Just as Sarnau was initially tricked by Mwando, he too is now deceived when he unwittingly has an affair with a woman whose boyfriend, or possibly pimp, is a *sipaio* who accuses Mwando of theft and rape. As a literate, Christianized, black man, nonetheless refused admittance to full citizenship, it is precisely Mwando’s incomplete assimilation, his good Portuguese and his ability to write beautifully, conjoined with the racist stereotype of black sexual monstrosity, which are used to justify suspicion. He receives the excessively harsh punishment of deportation merely because his “caderneta” does not have the right stamps for the “indígena” (93) group in which he is officially classified. His formally perfect but incomplete obedience to the laws laid down by the dominant colonial semiotics, embodied in the “caderneta” law, leaves him in an administrative and linguistic limbo, a victim of assimilative transculturation. At the same time, from a gendered point of view, Chiziane affords a certain poetic justice in that Mwando’s misjudged sexual encounter causes him to fall to the wrong side of the very discourse of assimilation that he had previously used to cheat Sarnau of her rightful due when he deflowered her.

Unlike Sarnau, Mwando learns to assimilate the white man’s lesson of exploitation and duplicity when he turns deportation into an opportunity for material gain; as Chiziane prophetically notes, “o escravo liberto torna-se tirano” (93). Reinventing himself as “Padre Moçambique” he performs rituals for the dead among his workmates with considerable success because:

Leu as orações num latim tão perfeito que nem o melhor pároco, dando mais solenidade no acto. Apesar do trabalho forçado, encontrou felicidade no degredo. Finalmente conseguiu satisfazer a ambição de usar batina branca, baptizar, cristianizar. (100)

Undercutting the local competition with lower rates for saying mass, he eventually becomes a combination of Padre Ferreira, who educated him in sexual hypocrisy, and the *sipaio* who kept faith with the colonial authorities by having Mwando deported. Echoing the *sipaio*'s role as colonial agent, Mwando comes to be trusted as intermediary between the white colonial powers and the workers, finally earning enough money to return to Mozambique, where he finds Sarnau and claims poverty, obliging her to take him in.

Mwando's multilingual skills, his Portuguese and his spoken Latin, enable him to gain the trust of his fellow convicts, which he then uses to support Angola's white plantation owners. Both languages are shown to be historically masculine prerogatives in the colonial Christian context, although levels of access to them remain racially overdetermined. Specifically, though never totally, empowered under patriarchal culture to move between Tsonga and Christian symbol systems, Mwando's sexual and linguistic duplicity reverses the scapegoating of Eve and the serpent for Man's expulsion from paradise. His gender betrayal at the outset is responsible for the Fall. In an ironic rewriting of Genesis then, already signalled in the youthful sexual/linguistic conflicts between Sarnau and Mwando, Chiziane undoes the mythology of the female translator, the Malinche figure, whose sexual complicity is responsible for colonial penetration.<sup>14</sup> Finally abandoning any illusion of pastoral longing, Sarnau concludes "enterrei o passado" (117) as the youthful perspective of "saudade" disappears, to be replaced by a painful and uneasy compromise, the end of a pastoral journey in which no equilibrium can be restored.

Written in a climate of female disillusion with the conditional and contingent benefits of modernity proffered by FRELIMO, the dialectic movement of this novel cannot be closed, nor its problematic resolved. Rather, it leaves open women's refusal to embody the contradictions of a false rationalism. The subtext is evident. Marxism, like Mwando, has betrayed women once too often. Further, the depatriarchizing of language and of society will not arise from displacing one monolithic discourse in favor of another. As a critique of Mozambican masculinity under the Christian colonial and "traditional" Tsonga belief systems, syncretically personified in Mwando and

Nguila, *Balada de Amor ao Vento* marks a significant move to depatriarchize the literary and social text of southern Mozambique. Developing a narrative poetics that can account for the gendered power struggles between dominant written and oral media, Chiziane avoids privileging oral narrative as African feminine expression *par excellence* without relinquishing the strategic ability of the oral to remind dominant literary language of its contingently “manufactured” status. One valuable result of this is that Portuguese as the national (literary) language of Mozambique is not artificially reified in the masculine singular. Another is that Chiziane asserts the desiring feminine body (adultery, transgression, illegitimacy and divorce) in terms of an economic materiality, which the traditionally privileged materiality of the Maternal cannot account for, thus denaturalizing women’s relegation to a sphere outside of history, progress or the emergence of national literary language(s).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board for funding my Research Leave in 1998, and the British Academy and Sir Ernest Cassel Educational Trust for funding the research trip to Mozambique in 1999, which enabled me to conduct much of the research for this article. I am also indebted to Paulina Chiziane for her helpful comments and productive discussion in interviews in 1998 and 1999.

<sup>2</sup> See Mary Modupe Kolawole, *Womanism and African Consciousness*, for a discussion of African Womanism as opposed to feminist thinking.

<sup>3</sup> In an interview with Michel Laban, Chiziane provides an interesting biographical insight into her father’s attempts during her childhood to confine domestic, oral languages and official, written languages to their appropriate spheres of influence. “O meu pai é muito radical, sim: ele nunca permitiu que se falasse português em casa. Não aceitava. Ele considerava que nós tínhamos obrigação de conhecer a nossa própria língua. Agora, a língua de comunicação, de progresso, isso é lá fora porque em casa não deve ser assim” (977).

<sup>4</sup> As Allen and Barbara Isaacman have noted on the issue of divorce in Tsonga systems of polygamy, “if [the father’s lineage] refused to sanction the separation, i.e. to repay her *lobolo* to her husband’s lineage, her only option was to flee from her husband’s home. Many of the women who migrated to Maputo and congregated in the few low-paying jobs open to women or who practiced prostitution were trying to earn enough money to repay *lobolo* and end their marriages in the only way that the society legally recognized” (4). Taking a specifically historical view, Sihaka Tsemo has argued in a 1992 study for *Estudos Moçambicanos* that dilemmas such as Sarnau’s arose in part from the transformation of the southern “lobolo” system when migrant labor to the South African mines established an “economia monetarizada” to which women had little independent access, other than by selling their own bodies. In this context, according to Tsemo, “a impossibilidade de se divorciar do seu esposo sem lhe devolver o lobolo [...] levou em determinadas circunstâncias, certas mulheres à prática da prostituição” (202).

<sup>5</sup> As Inocência Mata indicates, Chiziane’s work moves narrative constructions of the feminine beyond their confinement to objectification in nationalist poetry, which she describes as “[o] discurso que recicla o trabalho poético que edita a imagem da mulher na sua quase exclusiva vinculação ao projecto nacionalista” (36).



<sup>6</sup> See Kathleen E. Sheldon, *Pounders of Grain* 195-227. Sheldon concludes regarding the 5<sup>th</sup> FRELIMO Party Congress, held in 1989:

In this case, the expansion of FRELIMO membership appeared to appeal to men, and traditional men at that, while requiring women's continued subordination. [...] One explanation was the strength of patriarchal attitudes among male leaders in FRELIMO who apparently saw traditional men as more valuable potential recruits than women. (204)

<sup>7</sup> For discussions of women's role as symbolic border guards of culture in anti-colonial nationalism, see Florence Stratton 39-55 and Nira Yuval-Davis 39-67.

<sup>8</sup> Pratt defines the contact zone as "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6). As Chiziane points out in *Eu Mulher*, one of the more "harmonious," non-conflictive contact zones between her own cultural legacies centred on Christian and Tsonga agreement regarding the inferior status of women, as "encontrei harmonia na matéria que dizia respeito ao lugar da mulher na vida e no mundo" (14).

<sup>9</sup> As Kathleen E. Sheldon points out, for example, the Swiss protestant missionary and ethnographer, H. A. Junod, relied solely on four male informants for his 1908 study of the practice of widow inheritance among the Ba-Ronga. *Pounders of Grain* 27 and 41, n.143.

<sup>10</sup> A classic example of colonial missionary ethnography in Mozambique is Henri A. Junod's *Usos e Costumes dos Bantu*. Far from being a product of the Portuguese colonial system, this two-volume ethnography was written in English and first published in 1912/13, Junod's interest in the then emergent discipline of anthropology having been awakened by contact with British academic pioneers in the field. Significantly, even José Fialho Feliciano's preface to the 1996 edition of *Usos e Costumes*, which otherwise affords necessary context and critique for Junod's work, singles out the fact that Junod "deu valor ao tradicional como uma matriz" (20) as central to his lasting academic value.

<sup>11</sup> In *Usos e Costumes dos Bantu. Tomo 1*, Junod projects a pastoral world of lovers and goatherds, "estas raças tanto tempo imobilizadas" (28), threatened by encroaching mercantile "civilization" and the money economy of the Johannesburg mines, which will sexually corrupt the innocent unless they are subject to (his) paternalistic Christian guidance. As Sidonie Smith indicates in her discussion of the pastoral's implication in colonialism, "the lowly are projections of the universal subject's desire for innocence, integrity and uncomplicated meaning" (171).

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Williams significantly argues that the city/country divide inherent to the European pastoral finds modern expression in the colony and metropolis relationship, in the post-Industrial era of 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonialism and its capitalist and imperialist visions of progress. For Williams, then, "one of the last models of 'city and country' is the system we now know as imperialism" (277). On colonialism and the pastoral mode, see also Peter Weston, "The Noble Primitive as Bourgeois Subject" 166-80.

<sup>13</sup> In *Eu Mulher em Moçambique*, Chiziane compares women's demonization under Christian Genesis myth with Tsonga mythologies perpetuating the scapegoating of women for drought, crop failure and epidemics. Firmly rejecting both of these overlapping forms of sexual essentialism, Chiziane writes: "as diversas mitologias não são mais do que ideologias ditadas pelo poder sob a máscara da criação divina" (12).

<sup>14</sup> See Norma Alarcón, "Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism" 86-7.

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