African, Lusophone, and Afro-Hispanic Cultural Dialogue

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

YAW AGAWU-KAKRABA AND KOMLA AGGOR

African, Lusophone and Afro-Hispanic Cultural Dialogue is a collection of essays of broad historical and geographic scope that advances analytical perspectives regarding a highly transcultural and changing African continent enmeshed in the vestiges of slavery and colonialism and in the complex dynamics of post-colonialism. Mostly grounded in literary studies the essays discuss the interconnections between Africa and its Lusophone and Afro-Hispanic diaspora as they particularly relate to the politics of identity and assimilation, migration and displacement, the notion of nation, Eurocentrism and racial essentialisms as well as Black aesthetics.

In "The Internet Is Afropolitan," Achille Mbembe argues that, for centuries, Africa has been a highly transcultural, mobile and changing continent. This "cultural mixing" or "the interweaving of worlds," he believes, has long been an African "way of belonging to the world" irrespective of whether one lives on the continent or not (28). This uniquely African phenomenon, which Mbembe refers to as an "Afropolitan mindset," does not only pay homage to the past but also sets the stage for an eventual pronounced circulation within the African continent and beyond. For her part, Selasi Taiye, who is credited for popularizing the term *Afropolitanism*, posits that Afropolitans are "not citizens, but Africans of the world."

Despite its apparent initial celebratory ethos, there has been a significant backlash against the term. Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina, for instance, considers Afropolitanism as superficial and flippant.The word evokes for him images of pop culture and consumerism that underpin the privileged status of adherents to the term who live in the diaspora and attempt to connect with a mentally constructed Africa. "An Africa of the Afropolitan imaginary," as Wainaina calls it. Emma Dabiri wonders whether Afropolitanism can truly be considered a more far-reaching counter-cultural movement, given its inability to challenge the perennial questions of divided and categorized societies, which Franz Fanon recognizes as one of the damaging obstacles to post-colonial African independence**.** In her article, "The Afropolitan Must Go," Marta Tveit

concludes that the "'Afropolitan' is just such a group identity. It is exclusive, elitist and self-aggrandizing."

The conversation and debate surrounding Afropolitanism is relevant to the collection of essays in this book in one significant way: the recognition that, by virtue of its history, its interactions and interweavings with the world, Africa has had to, and still contends with, transculturalism, circulation, mobility and a reality of unfixed identity as a way of belonging to a world that is constantly evolving. It is within this context that the pesent collection of essays explores the cultural nexus between Africa and its Lusophone and Afro-Hispanic diaspora. In this critical endeavour, the notion of diaspora and home occupy center stage as they particularly relate to cultural identity and essentialisms, subalternity as well as Black and cultural aesthetics. The concept of *culture* that the book advances is to be understood in its broad sense, as pertaining to such social facets as language, music, philosophy, education, traditions and customs, history and especially literature.

The geographic parameters—the Lusophone, the Hispanophone, the Francophone African—covered by the selected essays distinguishes the volume against a pervasive Anglo-centric focus in the field. As an example, the edition is attentive to post-colonial Angola and Mozambique and their cultural interface with Afropolitanism in Spain and Brazil, thus bringing to the fore a vital, ongoing spatio-temporal interchange that is often marginalized in contemporary cultural studies scholarship.

The collection begins with Arthur Hughes's "Re-imagining Spatial Boundaries: Mia Couto's *My Father's Wives* and José Agualusa's *Sleepwalking Land*." In this essay, Hughes examines the consequences of an unparalled Portuguese colonialism within the context of later conflicts that afflict both Mozambique and Angola. He argues that the aftermath of gradual colonization is a reflection of the metropolis's own de-spatialized nature and subaltern European identity. This stream of colonization, as Hughes sees it, is still palpable today, particularly in the form of "disrupted bloodlines," violence and contested spaces that interrogate the notion of nation. In order to reimagine identity and community, Hughes reads Mia Couto*'s My Father's Wives* and José Eduardo Agualusa's *Sleepwalking Land* as metaphors that engender identity formation through space and its delineation within the boundaries of the nation's territorial configuration.

In "Debunking Racial, Ethnic and Cultural Essentialisms: Miscegenation/s and the Call toward Global and Cosmic Citizenship in Mia Couto's *The Other Foot of the Mermaid*," Irene Marques demystifies essentialist paradigms with a view to examining history critically and to constructing

subtler colonial and post-colonial narratives of nationhood. Using Mia Couto's novel as her point of departure, Marques suggests that the author transcends the oversimplified portrayal of Africa as a mere victim and Europe as the sole victimizing agent. For Marques, Couto offers complicated, fluid and historically-engaged individuals who go beyond identities and positionalities because of the exigencies of their times as well as the cultural and racial assimilation that underpin multicultural and multiracial interactions where different cultures, races and ethnicities intersect and transact. Under these kinds of circumstances, Marques affirms, no one particular ethnic group or race can be considered as oppressors and oppressed or violators and violated. Instead, what emerges, she believes, is a congregation of a multifaceted group of people who perform different roles and identities. Marques's deconstruction of essentialism, then, offers an opportunity to comprehend better the framework within which the dialectic relationship between colonizer and colonized is operated.

Steven Sloan's essay, "Racial Identity in the 1930s Urban Landscape in the Novels of Jorge Amado, José Lins do Rego and Lúcio Cardoso" is a study of the symbolic role that the city plays in the works of José Lins do Rego and Lúcio Cardoso. In their work, both writers seek to critique Brazil's nationalistic project, spearheaded by Getúlio Vargas, President of Brazil from 1930 to 1945 and from 1951 until his death in 1954. Sloan suggests that José Lins do Rego and Lúcio Cardoso critique the marginalization that emerged within Vargas's nationalist project, which was designed to propel urbanization, industrialization and cultural unification on a national level. The city becomes a foil through which these writers highlight the underlying racial implications inherent in the project. For Sloan, even though José Lins do Rego and Lúcio Cardoso offer unique perspectives on race relations through their Afro-Brazilian characters in progressive ways, in comparison to their predecessors and contemporaries such as Jorge Amado, they, nevertheless, resort to the same racial stereotypes and myths that they sought to challenge. Still, Sloan considers the three novels that he discusses as contributing positively to a nuanced national debate on race relations.

In "Towards a Poetics of Francisco Félix de Souza," Paula Gândara resorts to historical documents and family memoirs to discuss the current status that Francisco Félix de Souza, an enigmatic historical figure, enjoys in present day Benin and in Brazil. Gândara indicates that, because of de Souza's position as a potential freed slave who ends up in Dahomey as a millionaire slave trader, he is seen as a polarizing figure with an identity that historical records and evidence contradict and undermine. Gândara argues that it is not only de Souza that is engaged in his identity formation.

Archival sources and their analysis, she notes, portray him as an allegory, an interpretative subject. Given de Souza's recent unstable re-imagination and re-incarnation, Gândara proposes examining his history within the framework of Michel Foucault's "devenir," a process that is in constant making and re-making via a recognition of itself as a redefinition of new meanings on the basis of the imagination of both the watching and the reading subject.

In "Displacement and Alienation: The Challenges of Successful Integration into the Eurocentric Ideal in Nelson Estupiñán Bass's *El último río*," Samuel Mate-Kojo studies the question of indiscriminate assimilation and its power to divide and to alienate individuals through identifiable value systems. These systems, asserts Mate-Kojo, purport to be universal but are in reality inimical to any narrative that challenges them. This critic isolates Eurocentric normative narrative as one such value system that the protagonist in Estupiñán Bass' *El último río* embraces, only to descend into denial, alienation and seclusion. As the protagonist ascribes to—and embraces uncritically—the racialist ideology of culture and progress, that same paradigm not only rejects him but also destroys him, his achievements and his legacy.

Dieudonné Afatsawo's essay, "Branding Spain: Marca España, Casa África and Spain's African Overtures," and Inmaculada Díaz Narbona's "They Look at You and Nobody Cares Who You Are or What You Do: Writings of Strangerhood," complement each other. These two essays explore, on the one hand, Spain's reaffirmation of its ties with Africa and, on the other, the challenging experiences and lives of recent immigrants, the so-called nameless people who have found their way to the Peninsular and have made Spain their home. Afatsawo points out that, not long ago, Spain's Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación established *Casa África* to signal a strong diplomatic push toward the African continent. The goal, Afatsawo believes, was to allow Spain to brand itself as a global entity for the new millennium. Towards that end, seven African artists were invited to visit various cities in Spain and to present their visions of their host country at the end of their stay. In his essay, Afatsawo discusses the implications of this visit within the context of *Marca España*, the Spanish brand, and concludes that Spain's strategic branding overtures toward Africa are, at best, mixed.

For her part, Inmaculada Díaz Narbona contends that recent works that have emerged in Spain dealing with the experiences of immigrants in Spain are not necessarily designed to find a place in Spain's well-established and elitist literary establishment. Writers of these works, Díaz Narbona contends, are interested in chronicling how recently-arrived

immigrants came to Spain, where they came from, their motives for coming and, most importantly, how they now conceive of the Eldorado that they dreamed about. Most of these works, Díaz Narbona believes, are cautionary tales of unfulfilled dreams.

In "Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Léopold Sédar Senghor: A Comparative Study of Black Aesthetics," Charles Désiré N'dre resorts to prior critical perspectives of Black aesthetics to establishthe linkages and commonalities between these epistemologies in studies in Africa as well as in the Americas. N'dre contends that, with no clear-cut distinction between Black aesthetics and how Blacks in general conceptualize their understanding of the world, it is impossible to deny the role that functional and collective art plays in societies ranging from the Dogon of Mali to the Lucumí of Cuba and the Yoruba of Nigeria. For N'dre, it is hard to contemplate art without contending with the fact that it always originates from an ontology that is unitary and existential. N'dre arrives at his conclusions by drawing on the works of Léopold Sédar Senghor, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and, to some extent, Fernando Ortiz.

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CHAPTER ONE

RE-IMAGINING SPATIAL BOUNDARIES: MIA COUTO'S *MY FATHER'S WIVES* AND JOSÉ AGUALUSA'S *SLEEPWALKING LAND*

ARTHUR HUGHES

Abstract

In My Father's Wives *and* Sleepwalking Land*, the protagonists' search for family ties and relationships leads them to crisscross their nations' territories and boundaries, a neo-colonial project that calls to mind Benedict Anderson's description of the map, census and museum in the articulation of the national body. This re-imagining of spatial limits, however, uncovers features that highlight Slavoj Žižek's tautological gestures on the basis of identity construction, a retroactive and arbitrary performative act that seeks to enclose a bundle of anxieties. These anxieties point to the micro spaces where relationships are built and external criteria imposed on them to make them conform to the hierarchical power structures that create knowledge and privilege in defining both human and spatial agency. This essay analyzes the effects of an exceptional Portuguese colonialism in the posterior conflicts that afflict both Mozambique and Angola, a piecemeal colonization that is both a reflection of the metropolis's own de-spatialized nature and subaltern European identity.*

In Mia Couto*'s My Father's Wives* and José Eduardo Agualusa's *Sleepwalking Land*, the reader is struck by the profusion of spatial descriptions, especially by the seemingly endless crisscrossing of southern African spaces in the former, and by the transformations Mozambican landscapes undergo in the latter. Both novels describe spatial journeys in which the protagonists' search for relatives proves fruitless or ends in ambiguous terrain, a metaphorical no man's land. In narratives that suggest a historical trajectory common to both, *My Father's Wives* begins with the announced death of the protagonist's putative father, while *Sleepwalking Land* ends with the death of the protagonist's father-figure, a

narrative homicide accurately reflecting events in the colonial period with their corresponding occurrences in the post-independence epoch. This double death suggests the impossibility of the paternal metaphor and entry into a Lacanian symbolic in both periods. Furthermore, the death problematizes the notion of ancestry through bloodlines as well as the uncertainty of voluntary affiliation as a means of establishing community. Though presented as one of the consequences of the civil war conflict, the novels' disruption of kinship and geographical ties points to the tensions resulting from the colonial era and the war as an indirect outcome of these muddles. Identity is thus linked to space and a re-tracing of the territorial configuration of the nation becomes a necessary step in re-imagining community. The two novels propose a phenomenological reversibility that aims at reintegration into an ecologically harmonious relationship between humans and the inanimate world. Spatial boundaries are a result of the hierarchizations introduced in time and space with the consequent relegation of the spiritual and the magical realms (Quayson 162).

As raw material for human agency, space usually is seen as passive, a notion that Edward Soja has referred to as "the illusion of opaqueness"; that space only exists to the extent that it can be measured and quantified. In other words, space is fixed, dead and undialectical (Soja 7). For Soja (50) capitalism is particularly to blame for this obfuscation through its "homogenization, fragmentation, and hierarchization" practices that produce and reproduce geographically uneven development. A similar critique of a passivity of space as objective material for human agency has been explored earlier by Gaston Bachelard and Michel Foucault among others, though the former limited himself to space's poetics with particular relation to the phenomenology of home and architecture. Even within this restricted enunciation, Bachelard (xxxvi) signals the differences between quantified and imagined spaces, regarding the former as closer to "hostile space" whereas the human soul identifies with the latter. Inhabited space, as Bachelard (47) notes, transcends geometrical space, which, in turn, is linked to the dialectics of inside and outside, the notions of being and non-being that underpin philosophical thinking.[1] As mentioned earlier, Bachelard's phenomenology of spaces centers its analysis on the poetics of the home and its study of the images humans create of these spaces, images that in turn imbue these spaces with agency. Foucault acknowledges the foundational nature of Bachelard's analysis, but his is

[1] Bachelard (212) goes even further to attribute spatiality to thought: "Philosophers, when confronted with outside and inside, think in terms of being and non-being. Thus, profound metaphysics is rooted in an implicit geometry which—whether we will or no—confers spatiality upon thought."

more inclined towards an examination of microspaces and heterotopias as more relevant in the instrumental association of space, knowledge, and power (*Power* 361).[2] Where there is space, Foucault seems to say, there is always a tendency towards homogenization, fragmentation, and hierarchization. Privileging one space or body over another or others is a function of criteria external to the spaces themselves. It is criteria that are superimposed on these spaces, based on the presumption of space's passivity.

Benedict Anderson's identification of the census, map, and museum extends Foucault's ideas to show how different ways of spatial imaginings (quantification of space/illusion of opaqueness) bring to bear the forces of power. Implicit in their quantification and measurement is a passivity that already structures paradigms of domination. Measured spaces are deemed passive: they are denied the ability to effect change by themselves. Nevertheless, the two novels studied here suggest that space has an agency that humans may either brutally suppress (as is the case in most urban planning) to their detriment or one with which they can identify in a harmonious relationship. Infusing primordial spaces with supernatural qualities ties humans to the immediacy of place and the connectedness that comes with it.[3] A feature most often obliterated or ignored by colonial technology and development are the magical qualities of space that reflect the legitimacy of native possession. *My Father's Wives* and *Sleepwalking Land* propose a re-imagining of space as a good beginning to displacing spatial relations created by the colonial map, census and museum. This future spatiality accepts its agency, its supernatural qualities and a phenomenological contract with the human subject. This re-legitimization is similar to what Slavoj Žižek proposes in his formulation of "the tautological gesture" that is at the basis of identity construction (25-27). For Žižek, naming an object is the result of a retroactive and arbitrary performative act that seeks to enclose a bundle of anxieties, a disorganized

[2] In *Aesthetics* (177) Foucault suggests that Bachelard and the phenomenologists are more concerned with internal space, while his focus is on the outside [*du dehors*]. He proposes utopias and heterotopias as the two main kinds of spaces that are on the outside.

[3] This is what Bachelard (46) seems to imply when he suggests this two-way transference: the heroic qualities of spaces are transferred to humans while spaces also acquire the physical and moral energy of humans. I share Foucault's emphasis on the outside but find very relevant to Mozambican and Angolan cosmologies the internal spatialization proposed by Bachelard, a "poetics" that transmutes external spaces into a spiritual—and the subsequent dialectical—transfer onto the human body.

field that is transformed into an ordered universe with an identifiable cause. The anxieties motivated by paternal filiation in both novels project their cause onto a disorganized field of spatial relations. Seen through the prism of Žižek's tautological gesture, the protagonists' travels retroactively uncover the cause of the anxieties produced by this disorganized field, pointing to the metropolis as the source of the spatial disruptions while suggesting the continuation of these same into the present. In the same vein, as this study will propose, the two novels imply that within this overall performative act, there is the lack of agency in the microspaces where change could be effected, where the power relations embedded in spatial hierarchization are susceptible to transformation.

The complex web of family relations obviously forms the main subject of *Sleepwalking Land* and *My Father's Wives*, with the subtext of a questioning of the notions of identity and belonging through the prisms of bloodlines, race and nation. My study will maintain that the spatial dimensions described place an equally important weight on the impact these have on both identity and belonging. As stated earlier, the two novels describe spatial landscapes as part of the search for familial relations in a quest to fill the empty paternal figure. The superposition of this search on the national geographies of the two countries establishes a parallel of national and individual identities, a rendering of the family as the basis for an imagined community. If there is a difference in the two novels, it can be seen in Agualusa's *My Father's Wives* as a more direct implication of colonialism in the description of the period prior to independence in the extension of the search to neighbouring countries Namibia, South Africa and Mozambique. The extensive range of physical topographies is replaced in *Sleepwalking Land* with the intensive nature of a constantly shifting Mozambican terrain that, while the result of a more recent conflict, is still redolent of colonial pasts. According to this reading, Portuguese colonialism is exceptional in its complicated gender and race relations, in addition to its diffuse connections created as a result of its dysfunctional colonial strategy and a grossly inefficient bureaucracy. These are the anxieties that a neo-colonial tracing of spaces attempts to deal with in *My Father's Wives*.

There is an exceptionalism in Portuguese colonialism, *sui generis* in its deployment and development in Lusophone African countries, from its inception to the independence struggle, and the civil war that breaks out after independence in Angola and Mozambique. Portugal's attempts at measuring, quantifying and dominating its colonial spaces has a patchy history spread over the American, African and Asian continents. The spatial dimensions of the Portuguese incursion into Africa are characterized

by this exceptionalism that is initiated in the metropolis proper and makes an impact on the colonies. Itself invaded by French and Spanish forces in 1807, the Portuguese Crown was transferred to Brazil with the help of the British, what essentially turned the country into both a British and Brazilian subject. The superposition of metropolitan space on colonial space blurred the distinction between the two and contributed to the myth of Lusotropicalism, the belief in a Portuguese affinity for tropical lands and peoples. Portugal effectively was a Brazilian colony until the South American country's independence some twenty-five years later. The geographical anomaly of a European power based in one of its colonies unsettled the notion of Portugueseness, a displacement that carried over into Africa.[4] It is this unusual situation of a European empire that was itself dependent on other powers that underscores the exceptional nature of Portuguese colonialism in Africa. Portugal's subordinate situation also explains why European powers, and Britain in particular, were able to impose the principle of "Effective Occupation" (also known as the British Ultimatum) on Portugal in order to force it to establish a direct and effective administration of its African colonies.

Hitherto, Portugal had started its exploration of the African continent in the early 1400s by establishing trading posts in North Africa and on the Atlantic and Indian Oceans to facilitate its commercial activities. According to Malyn Newitt (13-14), Portugal's expansion was a direct byproduct of its poverty, given the paucity of fertile agricultural land that made armed exploits and mercantilism a favored solution for the nobility. Trading posts eventually turned into territorial ownership to further assure protection of the Crown's interests.[5] These trading posts were fortified with time and became permanent, a situation that led to clashes with the established local chieftaincies and sultanates already existing in those areas, necessitating the use of force to overcome native resistance and to maintain control over peoples and trade networks (Newitt 98). However, unlike other colonial administrations, Portugal controlled its settlements

[4] It is noteworthy that a character in José Eduardo Agualusa's *Um Estranho em Goa* (A Stranger in Goa) posits Portugal's non-European nature, given its strategic historical position of being blocked from European contact by the ancient kingdom of Castile, leaving it the only alternative of looking outward to the oceans. Portugal, this character continues, consciously turned its back on Europe.

[5] According to MacGonagle (5-7), the Portuguese recognized and traded with the Karanga, the dominant aristocracy in the Northern Zimbabwe Plateau, for over two centuries after they first arrived in the 16th century. This recognition faded as the Portuguese began to challenge the Swahili influence in the Sofala coast and hinterland.

through granting territorial concessions to commercial enterprises. Plantations were established through violent expropriation of land, further compounded by forced recruitment of labour to work on these plantations and other commercial enterprises (Sheldon 51-55). These firms then acted like mini-states on cash crop plantations (coffee, cotton), diamond and iron ore mines, where black workers were described as living under "virtual state serfdom." Good examples of this scenario are the land rights granted by the king to Portuguese men with the hope of encouraging settling by Portuguese men. The Zambezi Valley *Prazos*, as they were known, were meant to be kept in the female lineage for three generations, after which the property would revert to the King of Portugal. In a twist of irony, this stipulated matrilineality subverted the intentions underlying their creation. What actually happened was that many Portuguese settlers married native women, thus making them the heirs after the death of their husbands. Called the *donas* of the Zambezi *Prazos*, these women exercised enormous power and privilege and often clashed with the Portuguese governor over the right to tax even fighting as they did with trading companies over the exploitation of economic resources (Sheldon 47-49).

The introduction of individual ownership of land sharply contrasted with the collective forms prior to colonialism, even under both patrilineal and matrilineal systems.[6] The institution of the *chibalo*, the system of forced labour on the plantations of settler farmers for six months that could only be avoided by payment of annual head tax (of 800 *reis* in 1886), complemented this expropriation. It should be noted that aside from the inadequacy of wages on these plantations that makes survival almost impossible, the colonial division of labour into productive and reproductive activities also lead to the breakup of the African family, thus upsetting of the hitherto flexible gender systems.[7] Put differently, Portuguese colonialism exploited both human and non-human spaces to a

[6] The capitalist distinction between productive and reproductive labour did not exist in traditional societies, as both men and women were involved in productive activities necessary for the survival of the household, kin group or community. In societies based on mixed economies, the sexual division of labour assigned women responsibility for agriculture, while pastoralism and control over cattle was the domain of men (Lovett 25).

[7] The *chibalo* initially excluded women from wage labour. This meant, however, that women had to work harder on their subsistence farms to enable their men pay the tax. This division of labour changed with the introduction of cotton and rice cultivation whereby women were obliged to participate, requiring a triple workload of housework, subsistence farming as well as plantation work.

greater degree than in other colonies. The disruption of social relations this produced included spatial displacements of entire groups, migration to work in South Africa and changes in family and gender relations. The itinerant musician Manso in *My Father's Wives* symbolically re-presents forced migration under colonialism and the family disruptions that resulted from spatial displacement. While the novel presents Manso's movement across southern Africa as motivated by his relationships with women, it is his profession as musician that facilitates this mobility and survival, thereby evading direct control of colonial authority over his body in a manner similar to migration to south African mines. Comparing the similarity of racial hierarchies in Angola, Mozambique and South Africa under colonialism Manso is clear about his preference: "between a racism that's ashamed and a racism that's proud, I choose the ashamed one. I'd rather suffer the little betrayals, a base comment in a hushed voice, than clear aggression, than explicit blows. Any insult hurts. But a blow hurts more (318).[8]

Needless to say, Portugal never exercised direct control over these activities (or preferred to ignore them), depending on the rents and royalties it derived from this exploitation. As noted earlier (Newitt 14-15), the Portuguese Crown had developed the use of monopolies as early as the 15th century, as a way of supporting the high risk of investment in maritime expansion and as a means of financing its empire.[9] Territorial captaincies, such as that of Sofala, became major agents of royal monopoly that were charged with granting licenses, leading military expeditions, dealing with ship owners, territorial chiefs and dominant merchant families. In effect, the captains replaced the political and mercantile role of former sheiks in the period of their appointment as Crown agent. This arrangement, Newitt suggests (26), enabled the captains establish their own private trading network in competition with that of the Crown. This is one of the reasons that Patrick Chabal (43) characterized the legacy of Portuguese colonialism as extraordinarily antiquated and cumbersome in the administration of its territories, a copy of the bureaucratic metropolis itself until the 1970s. The net effect, Chabal

[8] Manso's defence of Portugal's "ashamed racism" and its origins in the discourse of Lusotropicalism is the result of his *assimilado* status and ambiguous skin colour that enable him navigate the socio-economic strata conditioning the lives of the majority.

[9] Newitt (17) also mentions the innovative methods Portugal used to raise funds, such as levying customs duties on all cargoes in the Indian Ocean, imposing protection fees for ships even plunder and tribute.

indicates, was a stifling of private initiative and the placement of obstacles to social, economic and political change.

This is the piecemeal colonialism that the Berlin Conference sought to regulate and regularize into "proper colonial administration," a good example of which was supposed to be Belgian Africa. Despite this external pressure on Portugal, it took the empire nearly four hundred years before it established the semblance of an administration. To give a contrasting example, whereas French and British governments were preparing to grant independence to their African colonies in the 1950s, Portugal declared its African colonies as provinces, a strategic move that effectively disowned its own status as a colonizer (and therefore of its colonies' spatial integrity). The Portuguese government's disavowal of its imperial status, claiming there was only one Portugal— one indivisible and pluricontinental state—can be traced back to its colonial origins, the displacement of national integrity provoked by the French invasion of Portugal. One direct consequence of this re-respatializing of empire was the increased flooding of settlers into both Angola and Mozambique.[10] For Jacopo Corrado (27), this "modern" economy was characterized by progressive appropriation of land, mobilisation of African labour, and administrative pressure, due to the dramatic lack of capital and technological know-how in comparison to other European colonizers. This situation, he says, led to the erasure of local commercial networks, the freezing of internal trade and overall recession and decay, particularly in Angola.

Portuguese colonialism's difference from other European powers is significant in terms of the extent to which Portugal held onto its territories. As mentioned earlier, most European nations had granted independence (or were in the process of negotiating this step) to their African territories in the mid-1950s. In the case of Angola and Mozambique, this step begins with armed liberation struggles in the colonies, but is effectively settled by the 1974 April Revolution in Portugal which ended the Salazar regime and its war of attrition against the liberation fighters. It goes without saying that the notion of Portugal undergoes another change as a result of this coup, an attendant effect being the facilitation of the independence process. Again, Portuguese bureaucratic and administrative disorganization impeded the creation of a coherent national space in both Angola and Mozambique.[11] This is, perhaps, one of the most important reasons civil

[10] In 1955, only 60,000 whites lived in Angola; by 1975 their numbers had grown to over 335,000, a four-fold increase in 20 years.

[11] At independence, Portuguese colonies in Africa had the lowest level of literacy and infrastructure development as compared to neighbouring European colonies.

wars start almost immediately in 1975 in Angola, the same year that independence from Portugal is declared, while Mozambique's conflict begins two years later, in 1977. As is well known, the two major opposition liberation groups (Renamo and UNITA respectively), while buttressed by substantial numbers disaffected with the ideological orientation of the major groups, represented Cold War—and Apartheid—inflected intromissions after the two countries achieved independence, a struggle that would continue for almost two decades.

Set within the context of post-independence conflict, Mia Couto's *Sleepwalking Land* reflects this socio-political division in Mozambique. The novel takes equal aim at the destruction and displacement caused by government forces, the communist-inflected policies of the post-independence government and its fight against traditional beliefs and practices. The ostensible distinction between *bandits* and government forces belies the almost identical blame for the destruction attributed to both sides, resulting in a Bachelardian poetics of spatial disruption that undoes the sense of home, dispersing it over unusual spaces. The novel literally traverses the landscapes of a Mozambique recently torn by civil war in the search for Muidinga's family. Accompanied on his journey by old Tuahir, the movement of the two through space unfolds in tandem with a movement of space itself, where the landscape changes each day in a magical revelation of the country's different topographies. Starting from a burnt bus abandoned in the middle of the highway, Muidinga and Tuahir venture out each day to a surrounding countryside that mutates from thick bush, through desert-like vegetation and finally ends at a seashore. Home becomes a series of dislocations. Further confounding the temporal dimension of spaces, the protagonists encounter the notebook (and dead body) of Kindzu in which he recounts his origins, his flight from a village and a dysfunctional traditional family partly caused by the civil war conflict, in search of a place to call home. Intertwined with the first narrative, Kindzu's journeys also take him across several Mozambican landscapes where the natural intermingles with the supernatural.[12]

Using the backdrop of Mozambique's civil war, the journeys of the protagonists in Couto's *Sleepwalking Land* present attempts to dialogue with nature, that is, to configure a new space that restores spatial agency. To stress the point, the civil war that breaks out after independence is one of the consequences of Portugal's ineffective colonial strategy of forced labour, exploitative plantations and racial segregations. This fact is not

[12] The supernatural, as Williams (468) notes in her study of *Vinte cinco*, is always present in Couto's texts in the dissolution of the barriers between life and death.

expressly stated in the novel but comes through in the juxtaposition of narratives of the two protagonists. Muidinga's story opens the book, tracing the effects of the civil war on the landscape, of the protagonist's near-death in a displaced people's camp and his search for his lost parents. This is the quest that, located in the present, leads to the discovery of Kindzu's notebooks and to his narrative of the period preceding the civil war. At the time of Muidinga's narrative, Kindzu is already dead and his story serves as a repository for memory, an archive that ties the past to the present. Muidinga's memory loss is thus compensated for by this resource, a way of creating community in the absence of biological and physical ties. The incorporation of Kindzu's records into the ongoing narrative brings colonial time/space and the disruptions it entails into the present. More importantly, it also enables a dialogue between the two periods as a way of re-imagining national identity.

The conflation of human and non-human (present and past) underscores a continuity in the perception of time and space that is not restricted by material changes. Ancestors play a vital role in the life of the living notwithstanding their physical absence, in much the same way sacred trees not only produce physical sustenance but also affect space. The ease of transfer between the material and spiritual worlds simultaneously stress the connection and disconnection between the two realms. The text suggests that this divide is a result of non-compliance with traditional practices, what explains the reason behind Kindzu's interpretation of the apparitions as punishment sent by the gods and ancestors (40). Perhaps a clear example of the rift with spatial practices occurs at the death of old Taímo, Kindzu's father, when the sea dries up completely and the plain that magically appears becomes covered by palm trees brimming with shiny tasty-looking fruit. The mad rush by the men of the village to harvest this bounty is stopped by a loud voice that seems to be coming from each of the palm trees, begging them to respect the sacred fruit. When the men disobey this plea, the first fruit cut lets out a huge jet of water that refills the sea and swallows up everyone and everything. Two interesting features underscoring the transmutability of human and material realms should be noted here. Kindzu recognizes in the plea uttered by the trees his own father's voice, while one of the villagers accuses the palm tree of being "inhuman." More importantly, however, Kindzu's memory of this event blurs the line between the real and the surreal, suggesting that reality is equally present in dreams: "I only remember the flood while I'm asleep. Like so many other recollections that only come to me in dreams. It is as if I and my past sleep in alternate times, one at a standstill while the other continues its journey" (13).

On one of their forays outside the burnt bus that is their temporary abode, Muidinga and Tuahir fall into a trap set by old Skellington. When he drags them out of the trap, Skellington tells them he plans to sow them for company, a belief in the transmutability of human and plant life. He is the only one left in his village, which has been abandoned because of the pillaging and destruction by *bandits*. However, when he later sees Muidinga scrawl his name on the ground with a stick, he changes his original plan and leads him to a huge tree. There, he orders Muidinga to write his (Skellington's) name so that the tree will "deliver other Skellingtons to life, who will fertilize themselves and multiply" (67). He reasons that, with his name on the tree, his blood will pass into the tree and assure him of survival and reproduction. Skellington's belief in the interchangeability of human and inanimate objects places both on the same ontological level. It suggests a reversibility that equates the human and non-human whereby recognition of one necessarily implies the other. This equivalency is at work when Skellington compares himself to a tree, thereby transferring to himself the plant's capacity for yearly regeneration. Humans for their part are also enabled to transmit their blood into trees. It is a quality he hopes to achieve with his final gesture of a direct insertion into nature, of carving his name into the tree. This performative act, reminiscent of Žižek's tautological gesture, calls attention to traditional ecological beliefs in its disavowal of spatial hierarchies and the colonial epistemologies of violence (Woodward 294).

Skellington's original plan to sow his captives is a backhanded reference to the war's disruption of natural agricultural cycles. It is also a recognition of the severing of an intimate human connection with the land. Thus, cut off from this vital link—this life force—the war's disastrous effect on people and their livelihoods is directly attributable to this loss, the equivalent of the splitting of the corporeal body and its phenomenological self. While escapist in nature, Skellington's belief in the transmutation of human into plant life (or its ontological approximation to inanimate objects) is a way of highlighting the primordiality of space. It is space without duration, timeless space, a primordial space before the split between the body as space in space, to become a space that perceives itself and others. Through this performative act of repossession, Skellington reclaims a legitimacy based on a commonality with nature in both its regenerative and destructive properties. Immediately after the deed is done, Skellington sticks his finger deep into his eardrum and shrivels to the size of a seed in the fountain of blood that erupts (*Sleepwalking Land* 67).

The co-protagonist of *Sleepwalking Land*, Kindzu, comes to life through Muidinga's nightly reading of his notebook. Inserted in the novel as chapters paralleling Muidinga's adventures, the notebook functions as a re-presenting of an absence, a claim to a similar ontological significance as that of the main text.[13] Kindzu's narrative tells the story of displacements inherited from colonial times. Set in a period prior to the "conflict," the conflation of the temporal plane serves to subsume both the independence and civil war conflicts as one and the same, albeit on a more devastating scale. Kindzu describes the chaos of the current struggle as unlike any other, "not even the old battles in which slaves were stolen to be sold on the coast" (24). This specific recalling of the colonial past, placed in the mouth of the old men Kindzu consults, while a way of putting into perspective the current upheaval, also points to the slave trade and its earlier displacements as harbingers of present-day anxieties. Although Kindzu claims to have had a happy childhood, the description of his dysfunctional family undercuts the appearance of harmony. His father's frequent trances from which he proffers dire warnings, coupled with his almost constant state of drunkenness and abandonment of his work as a fisherman, suggest the effect of disrupted traditional practices even before the conflict narrated by the text. This situation is highlighted by the division caused by Kindzu's friendship with the teacher Pastor Afonso and the Indian storeowner Surendra Valá. Representing two points of colonial contact—educational/religious and economic—that impact traditional patterns, Kindzu's family disapproves and deems dangerous his attachment to foreigners. Kindzu is thus out of place even before the death of his father, one of the principal factors that motivate his journeys across Mozambican landscapes. As he confesses about his dilemma, "Whatever I might choose to do, one thing was certain: I had to get out of there, for that world was killing me" (23).

Similar to Muidinga's narrative, Kindzu's journey highlights the disjunction between the two worlds, between real and imagined spaces, and the need to bridge this gap in order to construct meaningful spaces. Unlike *My Father's Wives*, Couto's novel only tangentially delves into the colonial period, linking instead the on-going destruction to the abandonment of a coherent epistemological understanding of spatial practices with the advent of the colony. Both Muidinga's and Kindzu's journeys end on a shore, a literal land's end that points to the impossibility of further forward movement in the search for meaning, the suggestion

[13] For a more detailed study of this topic, see Hughes's "Absence and Presence: The Here and There of Identity in Mia Couto's *Terra Sonâmbula*."

that the solution lies in a falling back on both a physical and internal interior to constitute the tautological performative that makes sense for the disorganized field of spatial and human relations. Bachelard's poetics of space becomes very relevant in this context in the transference of human attributes to space as well as the corresponding adoption by humans of spatial (and natural) qualities. This notion is represented metaphorically at the end of the novel when the two narratives merge, where Kindzu enters a trance in which he sees the burnt bus on which he was killed, and a boy he recognizes reading pages from his notebook. This boy appears to be a conflation of his long-lost brother Juney and of Gaspar, the estranged son of the fugitive Farida Kindzu meets on his journeys. The amalgamation of different spaces, times and people in this final scene points to the need for unmeasurable and unquantifiable space, an undoing of the fragmentation and hierarchization imposed by an empirical world view.

As Soja (120) points out, spatiality cannot be completely separated from physical and psychological spaces. "Nature" itself is a product of politics, ideology, the relations of production and the possibility of being (121). The disruptions in the spiritual world that occur after the death of his father is another reason Kindzu decides to leave his village. After he resolves to join the *napamaras*—warriors of justice armed with amulets, ribbons and necklaces—his father comes to him in a dream and warns him against leaving, threatening that deserting his home space would make Kindzu his father's enemy, for which reason he would suffer spiritual apparitions the rest of his life. Kindzu attributes to this paternal curse the many instances of dream-conversations with his father and the accompanying apparitions on his journeys: the oars of the boat in which he starts his quest leave holes in the sea, out of which spring sea gulls. At Tandissico, he is haunted by *xipocos*—ghosts that take joy in our suffering—while hands that look like skewers of flesh come out of the ground to grab at his legs (36-37).[14]

Similar to Couto's *Sleepwalking Land*, the protagonists of José Eduardo Agualusa's *My Father's Wives* navigate their nation's geography in search of family relations. Unlike the former, the familial connections in *My Father's Wives* are more specifically detailed; they principally have to do with the deceased Faustino Manso, the itinerant musician alleged to have fathered eighteen children with different wives and rumored to be the father of the protagonist Laurentina. The disruption of spatial and human

[14] Commenting on the presence of *xipocos* in Couto's *A varanda do frangipani*, D'Angelo (196) notes that Couto's use of the living-dead as a medium to narrate the past, leads to a conflation of identities and memories, establishes the role of the author as historiographer.

relations that started during the colonial period continues into the present, represented in both *My Father's Wives* and *Sleepwalking Land*. Earlier referred to as a neo-colonial retracing, the journeys attempt a reintegration of the space into the protagonists' imaginary, a way of re-making the fragmented spaces of the colonial period. Given that these boundaries were arbitrarily set in colonial times, a re-examination of space contests the ideological imaginings that created these national territories. As Anderson (163-164) notes, the census, the map and the museum were at the root of a colonial imagining that not only produced the colony but also the nature of the human beings ruled there, as well as the legitimacy of its power. Space—and the attempts to map, measure and quantify it—have implications for how humans live this space and the relations that govern them. Native travels through colonially-produced spaces present an opportunity to re-examine the three discourses underpinning identity; the legitimacy of native possession, the nature and interrelations of humans within this territory and the shaping of power paradigms within the nation's boundaries. In particular, it is the nature of interrelations of humans within a specific space that impinge, to a large extent, on the other two; the legitimacy of native possession; and the power hierarchies within their spatial boundaries.

The discursive nature of spatial (and bodily) boundaries are thus elements that can be arranged and rearranged to produce contested spaces. Part of this rearrangement can be found in the magical qualities with which space is endowed in both *My Father's Wives* and *Sleepwalking Land*. These supernatural attributes of space are usually portrayed as parallel to the modern world's affirmation of Newtonian physics and empiricism.[15] Born in the colonial era in Luanda, Manso's musical abilities take him to several southern African countries, residing a few years in each country where he is purported to have started families with local women. Interviews with these women and their children, as well as letters by Manso, reveal a lifestyle that is both enabled and complicated by the colonial demarcations of spatial frontiers. The presence of the South African characters (Brand and Johan) points not only to the extensive geographical border between Namibia and Angola, but also to South African control of Namibia and the extension of its business and military activities into Namibia's northern neighbour. Fishing and diamond prospecting hint at this exploitation by South Africa in a sign of the

[15] See Rothwell's (455) discussion of Couto's rejection of empiricism in his article "Between Politics and Truth: Time to Think through the Other in Couto's *Pensatempos*." For this author, imperial knowledge, as with empiricism, is the source of tyrannical ideologies that falsely claim to have an answer to everything.

continuation of the commercial relations between Portuguese and Boer colonialisms. From a military perspective, the protagonists encounter a South African bar owner whose narration of his experience in the army reveals his direct role in the death of one of the novel's protagonists' father during the civil war. This controlled but porous border is what allows the Russian Nicolau Alicereces Peshkov to settle in Luanda after marrying a Namibian woman of German descent. In a similar vein, these permeable borders enable Manso to set up families in different countries, leaving behind a trail of embittered "wives" and purported daughters. In a sense, geographical space translates into bodily spaces, their contours tracing and re-configuring territorial boundaries. The spatial displacements and the ensuing family connections Manso leaves behind become the motive for the quest described in *My Father's Wives*.

The principal protagonists of this tale are the Portuguese couple Laurentina and her fiancé Mandume. Laurentina's unease with her identity contrasts with her fiancé Mandume's staunch Portugueseness despite his black ancestry (his parents are black Angolans). At her mother's death bed Laurentina finds out that she was adopted at birth and that her biological parents are the itinerant black/mulatto musician Manso and the Goan/Mozambican Alima. She decides to travel to Angola to search for this hitherto unknown father and other family connections with the hope of filling a gap in an identity with which she had always been uneasy. For his part, Mandume's only motive for the trip is to be there for his fiancée, given his complete lack of interest in Africa and all things African. The journeys of the two take them across diverse landscapes in southern Africa, spaces that mark Angola's history throughout both the colonial and recent periods and the remarkable people affected by these geographies. Laurentina ends her search in Mozambique where she meets with her biological mother, finds proof of Manso's infertility and realizes that her white Portuguese father Dário is in fact her biological father. The result of Dário's secret affair with Alima, Laurentina's biological mother, attributes paternity to Manso, well-known for his multiple sexual dalliances, in a bid to protect Dário's identity and marriage.

If *Sleepwalking Land* highlights the interaction between humans and inanimate objects, *My Father's Wives* turns the focus to human bodies and the power of interpreting and hierarchizing them. While the supernatural is frequently mentioned in relation to many places and characters, their scattered presence contrasts with the individual chapters in *Sleepwalking Land* dedicated to characters such as old Siqueleto. *My Father's Wives* also reveals the magical qualities of nature and their implication for the legitimacy of native possession. The text's chapters are sprinkled with

mentions of mermaids and dugongs, and the ease with which the latter can be mistaken for the former. Dugongs are mammals with a fish tail and a snout that is almost human. An extra-diegetic filmmaker character, Karen Boswell, speculates in the novel that the origin of the mermaid myth may owe to some fishermen haven taken pity on or fallen in love with a dugong and thrown it back into the sea pregnant. Laws against sex with dugongs, states this character, exist to this day, what could be taken as an instance of the demarcation and legitimizing of bodies and spaces. Underscoring this uneasy distinction between the mythical and the empirical worlds, the narrator of the text recalls meeting a retired mathematician professor who shows him drawings of mythological-looking creatures that he insists live in the lagoon near the plaza of Largo de Quinaxixe. One of these is the minutely detailed sketch of a mermaid, seemingly dead, and on another page an impressive watercolour painting showing the same creature dissected that demonstrated how the mermaid's tail fit with perfect logic into the human muscular system (294). Located right in the center of the city, the Largo de Quinaxixe plaza ambiguously signals the parallel world of the supernatural that refuses to release the imaginary of locals in spite of the lagoon's surroundings of concrete apartments. Behind this plaza is a lagoon supposed to house a powerful mermaid to whom the locals left gift offerings of food and cash in the fifties. That same night he is shown the drawings of the mermaid, the narrator sees a woman dancing in the middle of the lagoon and recognizes her gestures and silhouette as the Dancer, a strange woman he had encountered several times in Luanda. The strange tale of the Dancer narrated by the extra-diegetic character who is presumably the author, acquires credence by virtue of its parallel with the fictional narrative.

Within this fictional narrative, Mandume's encounter with Alfonsina, a thirty-year old prostitute in the body of a teenager, is probably the most resonant and extended narration of the supernatural in *My Father's Wives*. This encounter can be classified as the effect of the magical body and the changes it produces in human interconnectedness. As Alfonsina narrates it, her pregnant mother stepped on a "witchcraft" mine that affected Alfonsina in the womb but otherwise left her mother intact. Orphaned early, Alfonsina is forced to fend for herself working in households or selling in the market. When her physiological development ceases at age eleven, neighbourhood suspicions of being a sorceress (and the attendant violence) force her to flee from one place to another. She finally ends up in Luanda where she sleeps on the beach with her pet bird Pintada. Incidentally, Pintada is another example of the extraordinary events the text describes. Hatched and raised by a dog named Maria Rita, Pintada