INHERITING THE PAST'S FRACTURE: EMOTIONALITY IN THE BILINGUAL DISCOURSE OF *TERRA SONÂMBULA*

Herdando as fraturas do passado: Emocionalidade no discurso bilíngue de Terra Sonâmbula

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Lidiana de Moraes*

ABSTRACT: Language is a living corpus that shapes identities. Through language, we can communicate in a democratic manner that facilitates living in community, and it helps to express feelings in a deeper level of exchange. In plurilingual settings, the language used while telling a story communicates something deeper about the person's history (as an individual and as part of a collective construction). For this reason, I argue that in *Sleepwalking Land*, movie directed by Teresa Prata, based on Mia Couto's book, the language choices made by the characters carry an emotional load characteristic of identities impacted by the history of a country fractured by (post)colonialism. By contrasting language usage, it is possible to identify how the history of Mozambique interferes in the emotional reference of its people, especially in extreme traumatic conditions, such as the ones presented in *Sleepwalking Land*.

KEYWORDS: Sleepwalking Land. Mia Couto. Bilingualism. Emotionality. Teresa Prata.

RESUMO: A linguagem é um corpo vivo que molda identidades. Através dela, somos capazes de comunicar de maneira democrática, facilitando a convivência em comunidade, e ela ajuda a expressar sentimentos em um nível mais profundo de troca. Em ambientes plurilíngues, a linguagem usada ao contar uma história comunica algo mais profundo sobre a história da pessoa (como indivíduo e como parte de uma construção coletiva). Assim, apresenta-se uma abordagem que compreende que as escolhas de linguagem feitas pelos personagens de *Terra Sonâmbula*, filme dirigido por Teresa Prata, baseado no livro de Mia Couto, carregam uma carga emocional característica de identidades impactadas pela história de um país fraturado pelo (pós)colonialismo. Ao contrastar o uso da linguagem, é possível identificar como a história de Moçambique interfere na referência emocional de seu povo, especialmente em condições extremas e traumáticas, como as apresentadas em *Terra Sonâmbula*.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Terra Sonâmbula. Mia Couto. Bilinguismo. Emocionalidade. Teresa Prata.

^{*} Lidiana de Moraes é pós-doutora filiada ao *Center of Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies* (CLACX), da Vanderbilt University. Seu trabalho é focado em Estudos Literários e Culturais no mundo lusófono e nas Américas. Possui um Ph.D. em Estudos Literários, Culturais e Linguísticos pela University of Miami e mestrado em Teoria Literária pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS). ORCID: 0000-0002-6534-7545. E-mail: lidiana.demoraes(AT)vanderbilt.edu.

Language and emotions are vital parts of what makes us human. Considering bilingual settings, the language we choose to use when telling a story, for example, is already communicating something about the story itself and about our history. The language choices we make are a form of interaction between storylines. Antonio Gramsci (1971, p. 325) once said that "...every language contains the elements of a conception of the world and of a culture, [so] it could also be true that from anyone's language one can assess the greater or lesser complexity of his conception of the world." This Gramscian outtake on language determines the importance language has in providing others with a historical backdrop that adds meaning and complexity to the interpretation of the world of its speakers. Bearing this in mind, I argue that in *Terra Sonâmbula*, movie created by Brazilian director Teresa Prata¹, released in 2007 and based on the book written by Mozambican author Mia Couto², the code-switching between languages used by the main characters, Tuahir, Kindzu, and Muidinga, magnifies the emotional load of identities fragmented by the fractured history of their country. To construct such an argument, I analyze different film passages and text excerpts in which two languages are used: Portuguese (the colonizer's language) and Ronga (the Bantu language spoken south of Maputo) and argue that by contrasting the language choices made by the characters, it is possible to identify how the postcolonial history of Mozambique (represented symbolically by such languages) interferes in the emotional reference of its people, especially when facing extreme traumatic conditions, such as the civil war that ensued after the independence of Mozambique³, represented in Terra Sonâmbula.

The importance of language is not only about communication, but also a register of individual and collective history. On a postcolonial milieu, for example, bilingual settings represent the border between preservation and assimilation. In Mozambique, the variety of Bantu languages spoken around the country gives an idea of the cultural richness that survived the oppression of colonialism. Nonetheless, the status of a Lusophone country accepts the

¹ Both Couto and Prata are credited as screenwriters of the film adaptation.

² First published in 1992 in Portuguese and then in 2006 in English as *Sleepwalking Land*.

³ Mozambique became independent from Portugal in 1975, after the war for independence which started in 1964. From 1977 to 1992 the country was plagued with a Civil war motivated by the conflict between the party in power FRELIMO (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) and the opposition RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance).

colonial inheritance, affirming the possible success of assimilation, in which the colonial subjects are retained in a liminal space. For these people, it is not possible anymore to be only natives (and for that reason some of the ancestral values may be lost), but they are not original citizens of the colonizing country either, even though they are led to believe that by embracing the colonizer's inheritance, they are more likely to succeed in the postcolonial enterprise, since "language [was forged] into a hegemonic instrument to persuade the subject population about the desirability of its own subjection" (Guha, 1997, p. 174).

In "Emotion and emotion-laden words in the bilingual lexicon", linguist Aneta Pavlenko (2008, p. 155) talks about the value of emotionality in bilingual contexts affirming that "emotionality refers [...] to autonomic arousal elicited by particular languages or words and examined directly, through changes in skin conductance response, and indirectly, through speakers' verbal and non-verbal behaviors and self-perceptions." Within this framework, the interference of different Bantu languages in the Portuguese speech (the official language of Mozambique even though it is spoken by only about half of the population)⁴ marks a sentiment of nostalgia and utopian content that allows the characters to disconnect from the harsh reality they were living, offering them hope, yet setting a melancholic tone resulted from years of suffering under oppressive regimes.

The junction between the pre-colonial history of Mozambique that managed to last despite all colonialist attempts to erase it, plus the post-colonial changes that were promoted in the country under Portuguese ruling, afford Mozambicans with a fragmented identity that fluctuates from domestic to foreign. Mia Couto's ability to capture the changes which occurred within his homeland, makes it possible to read his literary work as if language was another character in the plot, after all, without representing the subtle switch from Portuguese to Ronga, and vice-versa, the writer would be omitting one of the most important emotional traces of his characters.

⁴ According to the data collected by the Mozambican National Institute of Statistics (INE) in the 2017 census, 47.37% of the population above five years-old declared to know how to speak Portuguese [...]. However, only 16.58% consider Portuguese their mother tongue (Table 22), and 16.80% claim it to be the most spoken language in their homes [...].

1 From Book to the Big Screen: Mia Couto's Terra Sonâmbula

Terra Sonâmbula follows two storylines. The first one stars Tuahir, an old man who does not seem to have anything left in life; and Muidinga, a young boy who almost lost his life and memory. They meet while living in a refugee camp, where Tuahir takes care of Muidinga⁵ – whose parents have disappeared – and helps him to recover from his illness. Once the boy is recovered, they start traveling together, but while they are on their journey, we are not exactly sure what they are after: it could be the boy's parents, it could be the desire for freedom, or it could be that they are simply trying to escape from their realities even though they have nowhere to go. Still, despite the uncertainties that follow them on their excursion, we know what they are running from and what they are hoping for: "They are fleeing the war, the war that has contaminated their whole country. They advance under the illusion that somewhere beyond there lies a quiet haven" (Couto, 2006, p. 02)⁶.

The protagonist of the second storyline is Kindzu⁷, a man young enough to be Tuahir's son and old enough to be Muidinga's father, who witnesses the fracture of a country that had recently become independent and saw the hope for peace being interrupted when transitioning to a civil war. The two plots become connected when Tuahir and Muidinga find a burned bus, filled with corpses. Among the remains, there are notebooks that had been written by Kindzu as he recorded not only his "present" experiences, but also the "present" events of their country⁸.

The way the narratives are weaved together gives an instant feeling that the pair is following Kindzu's footsteps. The characters seem to be in constant movement: geographically - as they travel - historically - as they remember the national events - and emotionally - as they switch between languages. That is how Terra Sonâmbula becomes not solely the private story of three men whose lives came together somehow, but also the story of an entire nation impacted by a colonial past and a present civil war, as it is possible to feel from the opening

⁵ In the film, Tuahir is interpreted by Aladino Jasse, and Nick Lauro Teresa is Muidinga.

⁶ "Fogem da guerra, dessa guerra que contaminara toda a sua terra. Vão na ilusão de, mais além, haver um refúgio tranquilo" (Couto, 1992, p. 2).

⁷ Kndzu is interpreted by Hélio Fumo.

⁸ While in the film, viewers might have a harder time to connect the two storylines, in the novel, it is easier to understand the sequence of events as the chapters are interspersed, i.e "First Chapter" focused on Muidinga and Tuahir, followed by "Kindzu's First Notebook," and so on.

paragraph of the book which situates the reader on the geographical, historical, and emotional setting:

War had killed the road thereabouts. Hyenas slunk along the tracks, snuffling among ashes and dust. The landscape had blended sadness the likes of which had never been seen before, in colours that clung to the inside of the mouth. They were dirty colors, so dirty that they had lost all their freshness, no longer daring to rise into the blue on the wing. Here the sky had become unimaginable. And creatures had got used to the ground, in resigned apprenticeship of death. (Couto, 2006, p. 2)⁹

The portrayal of a piece of land that was killed – as if it had a soul – also reflects the characters' feelings. Geography, as described in the novel and seen in the film¹⁰, functions as the mirrored image of the internal existence of men. So, by exploring the landscape as a fourth character in both media, we see what is left of Mozambique after many years of violent confrontation over the ownership of the country and its indigenous peoples. At the same time, the title Couto chose for his novel represents the friction between the different ways of understanding the country: in a realistic sense, it highlights that Mozambique, despite being free from Portugal, continued in a state of unconsciousness because the population was still deprived of the rights associated with freedom; after all, if before Mozambique was divided because of the colonial imposition of the Portuguese values versus the Indigenous ones, after independence a new threat was imposed over the population – what Fanon (1963, p. 152) calls "the mask of neocolonialism" – and internal power struggles steered the civil war, making the fracture existent in the country's history grow deeper. On the other hand, a sleepwalking land also refers to a popular belief from the people of Matimati¹¹, presented as one of the epigraphs of the novel (2006): "It was said that place was a sleepwalking land. For while men slept, it moved yonder across space and time. When they woke up, the inhabitants would gaze once more at the

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⁹ Naquele lugar, a guerra tinha morto a estrada. Pelos caminhos só as hienas se arrastavam, focinhando entre cinzas e poeiras. A paisagem se mestiçara de tristezas nunca vistas, em cores que se pegavam à boca. Eram cores sujas, tão sujas que tinham perdido toda a leveza, esquecidas da ousadia de levantar asas pelo azul. Aqui, o céu se tornara impossível. E os viventes se acostumaram ao chão, em resignada aprendizagem da morte. (Couto, 1992, p. 02)

¹⁰ The film is a co-production between Portugal and Mozambique, but it was filmed in Mozambican soil. ¹¹ A region near the coast of Mozambique. It reappears in the novel on Kindzu's third and sixth notebooks – "Matimati, the land of water" and "The return to Matimati"- where the landscape marked by water (the word *mati*, means *water* in the Tsonga derived language Xichangana) poses a daring contrast to the bareness of war depicted in the other chapters.

landscape's complexion and they knew that they had been visited by the fantasy of dreams during the night"12.

2 Tuahir. Kindzu, and Muidinga in-between languages

In the film adaptation, Teresa Prata manages to capture Mia Couto's literary mastery portraying the abundance of emotions conveyed during such a painful historical period, when the fragmentation of the country's identity shattered the lives of its population by using a poetic language, evoking the magical realism of the narrative, and magnifying the bilingual setting, as code-switching becomes an aide-mémoire of the colonial past that is merged with the postcolonial present, offering a possible glimpse into a decolonized future for a nation constantly affected by the violence of its own narrative.

The result from the confluence of such timelines and characters prompts the public's awareness of the still eminent subaltern condition of the members of former colonies because the independence has proven not to equal freedom as there are many ways to perpetuate politics of assimilation and oppression. One of the most poignant sentences from Kindzu's notebooks adds to the notion of how language is a central component to defining the smithereens of the Mozambican identity due to its post-colonial condition: "These ghosts spoke to us in our Indigenous languages. But we already only knew how to dream in Portuguese" (Prata 2007)¹³. Here, when Kindzu refers to his ancestors as ghosts, he awakes a sensation of being haunted by an earlier history that does not belong to him anymore, yet continues to make its presence noticeable, not in a frightening ailment, but in a nostalgic feeling of loss, which intends a problem of communication and understanding between different generations. Then, by addressing the previous existence of a plurilingual environment – "our indigenous languages" – he is also criticizing the erasure of linguistic variety from his roots, representing the former cultural wealth of his people, before it was supplanted by the Portuguese. Henceforth, the act of dreaming "only in Portuguese" shows the limitations imposed on native

¹² "Se dizia daquela terra que era sonâmbula. Porque enquanto os homens dormiam, a terra se movia espaços e tempos afora. Quando despertavam, os habitantes olhavam o novo rosto da paisagem e sabiam que, naquela noite, eles tinham sido visitados pela fantasia do sonho." (1992)

¹³ "Esses fantasmas nos falavam em nossas línguas indígenas. Mas nós já só sabíamos sonhar em português" (Prata, 2007).

Mozambicans because their development becomes restricted to the opportunities offered by the "owners of the land," suggesting the existence of "ambivalent borders," as suggested by Phillip Rothwell (1998, p. 59):

Couto's use of the Portuguese language may be read as reflecting the ambivalent borders which permeate Mozambique at so many levels. The literary generation before him conceptualized the world in terms of borders which separated the good from the bad. Categories were well defined. Couto's world is one in which such clarity has been revealed as a source of obfuscation. As the relative simplicity of structuralism's concept of the boundary ceded its authority to the complexities of the limit in deconstruction and the ambiguity of post-colonialism's interstices, so Couto moves Mozambican literature from the binaries of the colonial era to the inbetweenness of the present day.

The notion of ambivalence pointed by Rothwell can also be understood through the concept of inbetweenness. The "in-between" (as well as "othering", which is extremely important to explain post-colonial societies) is found in Homi Bhabha's pivotal text *The Location of Culture* (1994, p. 141), in which he states that it is not possible to fully interpret society through a horizontal point of view which does not embrace the "metaphoricity" of the imagined communities, and consequently the "metaphoric movement requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic." Thus, the sense of dislocation (othering) present in the ambivalent status of Mozambique and its citizens (in-between) is indispensable to understand how these characters' emotional voyage is portrayed as a reflection of the events that are unfolding in their country.

The spatiality of the in-between designs an unsteady existence in which certainties are rare. Just as Tuahir and Muidinga have survived so far, there is nothing in their trajectory that can keep them safe from death, the same way it happened to Kindzu. The sensation of uncertainty that inhabits their souls stops them from dreaming (or even looking) too far ahead, but it is the same feeling that keeps them moving, walking on the land that is marked by the identical doubts of its natives. Thus, if the emotionality of the characters is the same as the nation's, we can extend the web of feelings to the writers recreating Mozambique's history in a post-colonial colonial. Being so, the role of authors such as Mia Couto is to pinpoint where

the individual stories and expressions of emotions are intersected with the Mozambican collective history, after all:

For these authors, writing about their emotional experiences entails reflecting on states of feeling often not perceived by others, and thus experienced as interior, rather than located in the social domain. However, their writings also reveal how their feelings are shaped by concepts specific to a particular language, a medium they share with other speakers. Outside of that language, it becomes harder to talk about these feelings, to have them recognized. Emotions as seen by these authors, then, are both culturally shaped and individually experienced. (Besemeres, 2006, p. 36)

Consequently, the capacity to capture the metaphorical effects of the inbetweeness and the borderline existence of the collective and individual emotions turns literature into a unique form of interpreting the world. Writing achieves the status of a cathartic enterprise, which allows writers to explain public and private domains, not only through external experiences (dates, facts, events...), but also through the internal environments (feelings, ideas, dreams...) that usually cannot be easily uttered outside fiction.

Therefore, looking into the events described by Couto through Bhabha's perspective, logic cannot be applied to talk about the emotionality of people whose stories are constantly suffering interference from others. For this reason, Mia Couto embraced two literary artifacts into his narration: magical realism and *mise en abyme*¹⁴ as the use of these two tropes allows the reader to travel through history while rethinking the limitations of the Mozambican memoire from a logical perspective or commitment that is often demanded from the historical records, and the "'in-between' space of the present world, as Bhabha calls it, forces us to rethink and reformulate borders and the pre-established limits (Krakowska, 2014, p. 173).

3 (Un)Conscious Language Choices

In *Terra Sonâmbula*, the borders that could limit understanding of the story (fictional and real) actually add meaning to the interpretation. By imposing limits to the human condition through language, Couto is reformulating the edgings, as proposed by Bhabha, and using fantastical elements and a narrative within the narrative formula to communicate the confusing

¹⁴ Literal meaning translated from French into English: placed into abyss. Term coined by French author André Gide to describe the narrative trope of telling a story within a story.

disintegration of society. Hence, "Couto's first novel seems like a superimposition of several *contos*¹⁵ based on the daily experiences, folklore, beliefs and traditions of the Mozambican peoples" (Hughes, 2012, p. 121) in which bilingualism is a key element to represent the emotional configuration of the characters.

Bilingualism is present in the movie in a more organic setting than it is in the book. While in the written work, indigenous languages are used as vocabulary (as interspaced interferences in the author's Portuguese), in Prata's adaptation complete sentences (and even entire scenes) are performed in Ronga. One of the first code-switches we witness is made by Tuahir. The old man and Muidinga are already living inside the *machimbombo*, ¹⁶ having left aside the negative feelings stemming from the presence of the burnt bodies they found inside in favor of their own survival. So, as they start looking for ways of assuring their subsistence, they find the suitcase near the body of a man outside containing Kindzu's notebooks – the *mise en abyme* – emphasizing the link to the second narrative¹⁷:

- You try, Muidinga.
- Look, they are notebooks!
- And do I want to know of notebooks... I want to know of food!
- A hall
- Leave the notebooks, boy! The feast is waiting!
- Aren't you going to eat?
- Yes...
- There you go again, thinking about your parents! Let me tell you something. Your parents don't want to know you're alive!
- Why do you tell me such thing?
- In time of war, a child is a burden that *really* gets in the way.
- This conversation is over! Eat, slowly, to feel the flavor of each color.

(Prata, 2007)¹⁸

Tuahir and Muidinga's different responses to what they find in the suitcase also highlights their different personalities, how they see the world and their own human condition, and their status

^{15 &}quot;Short-stories"

¹⁶ Ronga word for "bus".

¹⁷ The use of italics emphasizes the usage of Ronga.

¹⁸ "— Tenta você, Muidinga. / — Veja são cadernos! / — Quero lá saber dos cadernos, quero saber da comida! / — Uma bola! / — Deixa os cadernos, miúdo! O banquete está à espera! / — *Você não vai comer*? / — *Sim, vou*! / — Lá estás tu a pensar outra vez em teus pais. Te digo uma coisa, teus pais não vão querer vê-lo nem vivo. / — Por que me dizes isso? / — Em tempo de guerra, criança é um peso que trapalha *maningue*. / — Acabou-se a conversa! Coma, devagar, para sentir o sabor de cada cor" (Prata, 2007).

of in-betweeness. The old man usually behaves as a bitter person, someone who has seen the horrors of at least two wars and probably lost everyone who was once part of his family, being predestined to a lonely existence, at least until he meets Muidinga, turning them into kindred lonely spirits. The trauma of losing others, yet surviving, can explain why Tuahir is constantly depriving Muidinga of affection. The boy tries to build a warm relationship with the man who saved his life by calling him uncle, for example, but Tuahir stops him with harsh words emphasizing that they are not related. The estrangement which Tuahir tries to impose can be felt in this scene. While Muidinga examines the content of the suitcase with admiration and curiosity, Tuahir ignores the value of the personal objects and sets a more practical goal (finding food). Food and water are essential elements for survival, so, from his overly rational state, Tuahir sees it as the only thing that matters, leading him to pretend to ignore the boy's emotionality when he sees the ludic objects. Nevertheless, Tuahir is the one who uses Ronga in complete sentences, which brings him closer to a pre-colonial state, where the indigenous language comes more naturally, as if it had been practiced for longer (and probably more people).

Muidinga, on the other hand, as a young child probably has not experienced (consciously) the war of independence and the scars left by the civil war are still too recent for him to understand how deeply they will affect him. As he seems less comfortable in maintaining a conversation entirely in Ronga, it is possible to determine that he is already used to the postcolonial imposition of the Portuguese language 19. Also because of his young age, loneliness does not have the same effect over him either. His parents' absence is softened by Tuahir's company and by the still existent hope of reuniting with them. He sees the notebooks (a possible symbolism for the opportunities of a better life associated to education) and the ball (a reminder of childhood's innocence through the untroubled activities associated with a healthy upbringing) as souvenirs of the perfect life he dreams to have (prompting us to remember that this may be one of the fundamental purposes of his journey).

¹⁹ Language hierarchy, as a legacy of colonialism, can also be seen when researching about film production. In the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), for example, the film language is credited as Portuguese and Aboriginal.

While Tuahir lives from memories (the past), Muidinga exhales hope (the future). Tuahir tells him, in an austere tone, to forget about the notebooks and focus on the "banquet" (a metaphor of the importance of little victories during war time, a period when food is scarce, for instance). After not hearing any response from the boy, Tuahir switches to Ronga and asks him if he is not going to eat. The way the old man speaks to the child, and how he looks at him, are completely different now. There is an almost nostalgic tenderness present in the simple sentence uttered in the indigenous language that suits the melancholic tone in Muidinga's voice when he replies in the same language, "Yes..." (Prata, 2007), as if he remembered a familiar figure he used to know, emphasizing the still current notion that Mozambicans tend to speak indigenous languages at home, and using Portuguese in public settings. Immediately the child's eyes are turned to the bus window as if he is looking for something or someone. Tuahir interrupts the reflective moment by going back to his jagged attitude (also marked by the return to the Portuguese language: "There you go again, thinking about your parents! Let me tell you something. Your parents don't want to know you're alive!" (Prata 2007)²⁰. The change in language and tone of voice seems to wake Muidinga up from a dream. Startled by the accusation of Tuahir, he wants to know why he is saying those things, making the man conclude that children are a burden during wartime, a statement he makes mixing Portuguese and Ronga²¹.

As Tuahir marks the distance between emotionality and rationality by switching from L1 (Ronga) to L2 (Portuguese), we see an example of Pavlenko's (2008, p. 160) theory explaining emotional code-switching in bilingual contexts: "The choice of L1 is commonly justified by the speaker's desire for internal satisfaction derived from the use of a language that feels most emotional and 'natural'. The choice of the L2 is explained through the emotional distance afforded by the language, and, in some cases, by the emotionality the language acquired in intimate relationships with its speakers." Such a distinction between the use of L1 and L2 takes me back to Kindzu's sentence about dreaming only in Portuguese. Even though Portuguese is

²⁰ "Lá está tu outra vez a pensar nos teus pais! Lhe digo uma coisa. Teus pais não vão querer te ver nem vivo!" (Prata 2007)

²¹ "Em tempo de guerra, criança é um peso que atrapalha *maningue*" (Prata, 2007). In the film, the Ronga word does not appear in the subtitles, despite being used in the dialogue. Maningue means "too much," "overly," thus emphasizing the problematic role of children in a war.

used more often than Bantu – giving a wrong first impression that it is the L1, a mistake also influenced by the postcolonial hierarchy of the languages in question – there is an emotional distance in its practice, reflected in the more formal structure used by the characters, granting it the L2 position. Subsequently, the categorization of L1 and L2 becomes a matter of meaning rather than frequency of employment or sociopolitical power given to each one. Indigenous languages, on the other hand, hold the L1 emotional power by making it possible for individuals to dream to a greater distance, including the space of impossibilities (in Muidinga's case finding his parents), thus elevating "the emotional and psychological lives of migrants between languages and cultures" to a place of translingual memoir (Besemeres, 2006, p. 34).

4 Language and domination: valuing orality versus literacy

The control of emotions in public situations of conflict, especially in highly masculine settings, such as the one depicted in *Terra Sonâmbula*, is often seen as a mechanism capable of separating winners (the strong ones) from losers (the weak ones). Tuahir's austerity as he constantly tries to stop Muidinga from being distracted by his feelings and dreams, as if he feels responsible for keeping the boy alive and turning him into a man capable of surviving the warfare, contrasts with the metaphors Kindzu employs in his writing, which cannot be controlled in its solitary nature. As it often happens to authors trying to capture the depth of human emotions, Kindzu writes searching for the catharsis necessary not to go insane during the distressing period of war:

I start to write these writings to scare away the fear of going mad. The memories I have seem difficult to order, as if they wanted to run away from my head. Time passed with gentle slowness when war arrived. At first, it was only possible to hear the vague news happening far away. Then, the shootings were getting closer and blood filled our fear. (Prata)²²

This passage from the Prata's adaptation brings forth an important alteration made to the narration of Kindzu's notebooks from book to film. While in the book the narrator changes according to the chapter – a third-person narrator in the chapters focused on Muidinga and

²² "Começo a escrever estes escritos para espantar o medo de enlouquecer. As lembranças que tenho parecem difíceis de ordenar como se quisessem fugir da minha cabeça. O tempo passava com mansa lentidão quando chegou a guerra. No princípio só escutava as vagas novidades acontecidas lá longe. Depois os tiroteios foram chegando mais perto e o sangue foi enchendo o nosso medo." (Prata 2007)

Tuahir and Kindzu as the first-person writing his notebooks – this division changes as we hear Muidinga's voice reading the notebooks. Such a modification changes the rhythm of the narrative, as we go from the voice of a writer (Kindzu) to the interpretation of a reader (Muidinga). Subsequently, the utilization of Ronga becomes more frequent, as it is through Kindzu's memories, and we see a fragmentation between what the boy reads and what the audience sees as a flashback to Kindzu's life.

In the following scene, Muidinga reads from the notebook, revealing to the audience what Kindzu had written: "Little by little I felt our family breaking like a jar thrown on the ground. I saw how we had changed. That was when my mother threw my youngest brother out of the house" (Prata 2007)²³ After, this Muidinga becomes silent, and the director transports us into a flashback, presenting us to new characters, such as a woman carrying a toddler to a henhouse. The closeness established to a distant memory of Kindzu's family brings back the indigenous language to the forefront:

- From now on, Junhito, my son, you will live in the henhouse. You will change soul and body to a chicken's appearance. The brigands, when they arrive, won't take you away.
- Mom, what are you doing? [...] Mom, you can't do this to Junhito.
- Junhito, my son, now we'll teach you how to cock-a-doodle-doo. I will make you a chicken outfit so you can go unnoticed. (Prata 2007)²⁴

The emotionality of despair evoked by the entire scene of the mother resorting to ancestral beliefs (in which nature has protective powers and humans are capable of metamorphosing into animals to shield themselves from harm) accomplishes a strong symbolic realm associated to the L1. The presence of Ronga, however, is not present in the book, and consequently the mystic element that honors the Mozambican traditions trying to resist the postcolonial

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²³ "Aos poucos eu sentia a nossa família quebrar-se como um pote lançado no chão. Eu vi como tínhamos mudado. Foi quando minha mãe mandou meu irmão mais novo para fora de casa." (Prata 2007)

²⁴ "De hoje em diante, Junhito, meu filho, vais viver no galinheiro. Vais mudar alma e corpo na aparência de galinha. Os bandos, quando chegarem, não vão levar-te. / — Mãe, que estás a fazer? [...] Mãe, não podes fazer isso ao Junhito. / — Junhito, meu filho, agora vamos ensinar-te maneiras de fazer cócórocócó. Vou fazer-te uma roupa de galinha para passares mais despercebido." (Prata 2007)

interference is substituted for deeper explanations about Junhito's destiny.²⁵ Despite Couto's extraordinary writing skills, the level of emotionality seen on the screen surpasses the original, and it also brings up the matter of access to literature. Although it is not possible to indicate the level of fluency Muidinga has of Ronga, he managed to read Kindzu's notebooks as they were written in Portuguese. The same can be said about the novel, which is accessible to more readers as it was written in Portuguese. If Couto had written full passages in any indigenous language, he would have created a footnote problem, making the reading process more mechanical, losing the enriching aspects of orality present in the film and weakening the emotionality of the speech, which Prata manages to do as we can hear and see the actors performing in the L1, but we still have immediate translation in the captions.

The performativity (Austin, 1962; Derrida, 1972; Bauman, 1975) of orality in L1 as it is used in *Terra Sonâmbula* brings the audience closer to the characters and their personal drama. Nonetheless, the tricky and inventive language used by Mia Couto is often too complicated to be transposed to the silver screen. In an interview, Teresa Prata described the challenge of adapting Couto's narrative without losing its metaphorical potency, nor making it inaccessible to movie-goers. The greatest task for the scriptwriter was to consider that to write "...a film script you need to think about different things such as tension, [and] what is needed to create a climax because this is what attracts the public to the film" (Vieira, 2013, p. 96). In the previous scene, the tension and climax are seen in the presence of the mother trying to spare her child from the sad (and likely) destiny of death in a way that the book cannot transmit. The use of Ronga as an emotional language which floods the audience with the characters' feelings (despair, hopelessness, desolation...) grants its presence as L1 over the "political" use of the L2, while pointing "[...] towards questions to do with the national literary system in which it is inserted and, at the same time, brings with it the marks of an African expressivity that goes beyond the borders of the nation" (Macedo, 2014, p. 236).

Thinking further on the importance of the *mise en abyme*, through the usage of a narrative within a narrative, Mia Couto (and Teresa Prata) offer two ways of interpreting the

²⁵ Junhito's father dreams that the boy will die, so in an attempt to stop his fate, the father orders him to live in henhouse hoping that once the brigands arrive, they will spare his son as "a hen wasn't a creature that inspired acts of brutality and cruelty" (Couto, 2006, p. 11) / "Galinha era bicho que não despertava brutais crueldades" (Couto, *Terra Sonâmbula* 8).

Mozambican identities and seeing "how Terra Sonâmbula is composed as an implied dialogue between the increasingly entangled stories of, on the one hand, Muidinga and Tuahir, and, on the other, the story that Kindzu tells in his notebooks." (Helgesson, 2014, p. 492). Tuahir and Muidinga represent the importance of the oral account which signifies the "knowledge, values, and norms [...] passed down from generation to generation" (Gee, 2008, p. 53), and therefore included in the African portion of the characters' identities (as part of the haunting of their ancestors). From an emotional stand, orality comes into play to voice the sentiments of angst, homesickness, abandonment, melancholy, and longing that permeates the existence of the colonial subjects. On the other hand, once Muidinga starts reading of Kindzu's notebooks, he encounters the possibility of changing his own narrative because "Kindzu's story gradually enables them to move away from this degree zero of existence to retrieve a measure of selfawareness. The intimacy of Kindzu's notebooks is transformed, within the fiction, into a literary experience." (Helgesson, 2014, p. 492). Even though Helgesson argues that reading enables them to move away from their state of non-existence (just like the land sleeps, the citizens are also lethargic), I believe that from the possibility of reading and expressing his emotions, Muidinga is the only one capable of moving forward and reaching a complete transformation.

The access to Kindzu's notebooks is restricted to Muidinga because Tuahir does not know how to read. Although he can speak Portuguese, he was not alphabetized in the language like Muidinga was, thus representing an anticolonial attitude going against assimilation. At the same time, looking from a postcolonial lens, the old man cannot engage with the transforming literary experience because he continues to be a victim of the colonial restriction of opportunities based on language and education. Literacy in this context is imposed and limited as an apparatus of domination, perpetuating the assumption that literacy can be used as a form of oppression, ²⁶ only considered "successful [when it worked] in favour of the ruling class" (Teubert, 2010, p. 157). So, despite opening doors to a new world to Muidinga available through Kindzu's notebooks, literacy in *Terra Sonâmbula* continues to emphasize the inbetweeness of the characters because as it represents a form of escape (from reality) providing the continuity Muidinga's dreams and hopes, it also epitomizes the colonial heritage

²⁶ Concept explored by educator Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968).

in which "literacy did not correlate with increased equality and democracy nor with better conditions for the working class, but in fact with continuing social stratification" (Gee, 2008, p. 81).

As the characters of *Terra Sonámbula* are constantly facing their in-between status, they continue on a journey that seems to always end up in a crossroad, reflecting their internal conflicts. Nevertheless, for Muidinga the choice between assimilation and freedom results in him abandoning Kindzu's notebooks as he envisions the proximity of his family. In Kindzu's last words, seeing his pages becoming part of the land, we see the native man taking ownership not only of the land again, but also of his own narrative, an image that can only be conveyed through an emotional endeavor of artists who "are stretched between their personal attachments and experiences and the literary arenas in which they emerge" to create a cultural product which is grounded on their proximity to the national history they are recounting through the invention of "a poetics of difference and linguistic estrangement, in order to mark a boundary (in the text) between what is perceived as a norm and transgressions of the norm" (Helgesson, 2014, p. 494).

Consequently, the emotional pattern constructed from the code-switch from Portuguese to Ronga adds layers of interpretation to the personal stories of Tuahir, Muidinga, and Kindzu, as well as to the history of Mozambique. Through the examples used in this article, we see that the presence of both languages is necessary to confront the postcolonial condition of the country and its citizens while also exploring (and criticizing) the inefficiency of decolonization. Such a confrontation is central to Mia Couto's work, as the use of bilingualism, orality, and literacy "reveals a philosophy in the use of language to express a new cultural and social reality" (Mata, 1998, p. 262). In the film adaptation, Teresa Prata magnifies this linguistic philosophy, and the audience benefits from the multidimensional performance of orality, which vividly portrays how the characters' language choices reflect the impact of Mozambique's fractured history on their identities. Therefore, Prata's film not only faithfully adapts Couto's narrative but also enhances the emotional depth through visual and oral storytelling, highlighting the complex interplay of language and identity in a postcolonial context.

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