

THE CHARACTER IS SPACE: METAPHOR, PERSONIFICATION, AND OBJECTIFICATION IN THE LITERATURE OF MIA COUTO

A PERSONAGEM É ESPAÇO:
METÁFORA, PERSONIFICAÇÃO E COISIFICAÇÃO NA LITERATURA DE MIA COUTO

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Abstract: Character and space are categories of the narrative that stand out in the literature of Mia Couto, there being a recurrent interrelationship between them. There are characteristics that are reflected between characters and components of space, transformations/metamorphoses occur, so that metaphor becomes constant in these works, especially in the terms of personification and objectification. Based mainly on the statement of Osman Lins that the character is space, this article exposes and analyzes some excerpts from narrative works of Mia Couto, in which this profound interrelationship between the two categories stands out. From the internal to the external aspects pertaining to the literary production of the author, thus, the possible reasons for the recurrence of this interrelation and predominance of the metaphor may be pointed out. Among the aspects of the social milieu there is colonialism, the post-Independence war of Mozambique, poverty and hunger, which leads, as the works imply, to dehumanization and, consequently, to the urgency of rehumanization.

Keywords: space; character; metaphor; Mia Couto

Resumo: Personagem e espaço são categorias da narrativa que sobressaem na literatura de Mia Couto, sendo recorrente uma inter-relação entre elas. Há características que se refletem entre personagens e componentes do espaço, ocorrem transformações/metamorfoses, de modo que a metáfora torna-se constante nas obras, em especial nas formas da personificação e da coisificação. Com base, principalmente, na afirmação de Osman Lins de que a personagem é espaço este artigo expõe e analisa alguns excertos de obras narrativas de Mia Couto em que se destaca essa profunda inter-relação entre as duas categorias. Dos aspectos internos aos externos da produção literária do autor, assim, podem ser apontadas as possíveis razões para a recorrência dessa inter-relação e predominância da metáfora. Entre os aspectos do meio social, há o colonialismo, a guerra posterior à Independência de Moçambique, a miséria e a fome, o que leva, como se subentende das obras, à desumanização e, por conseguinte, à urgência da reumanização.

Palavras-chave: espaço; personagem; metáfora; Mia Couto

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INTRODUCTION

The constant interrelation between character and space often composes the central theme of Mia Couto's¹ poems, short stories, chronicles and novels. Acquiring a certain degree of complexity, as it is sought to demonstrate, this interrelation occurs in several ways, recurring projections and reflexes between characters and spatial components, transferences of attributes, transformations and metamorphoses. Many characters are spatially characterized, their feelings come from spatial components or they themselves symbolize something from space. In this way metaphor predominates as the main resource of narrative construction, as well as other related figures, such as personification and objectification.

Couto explores as much as possible the figurative potentialities of this both in form and in subject matter. Firstly, it is important to emphasize the author's use of polysemy, so that the same spatial component can appear with different meanings in a work, establishing a kind of game and generating strangeness and surprising the readers.² On the extra-textual aspects, there is a varied set of sources and references, highlighting, on one hand, the traditions and religiosity of several peoples that form Mozambique and, on the other hand, the historical issues and the problems of the social environment. One of the reasons for such a deep interrelationship between character and space lies in the tragic Mozambican reality, in which a process of dehumanization and the urgency of seeking forms of rehumanization are identified.

The interrelation as a characteristic of Couto's works leads, therefore, to other approaches of these categories of narrative, moving away from the assumption that space is only where the action of the characters develops or simple "background." It refers, therefore, to what Osman Lins asserts in his analysis of the space in Lima Barreto's works: separating the two categories presents difficulty because "the

¹ In poems the relationship is often established between space and the lyrical self, as in the verses: "I am a grain of rock/I am the wind that wears it out/I am pollen without an insect/I am sand supporting the sex of the trees" (COUTO, 2014a, p.13). It resembles what happens to the characters in the short stories and novels.

² As pointed out by several authors, the exploration of the various meanings of the motives and components of the works is one of the characteristics of Couto's literature, in which the "polysemies... illustrate situations ranging from the most unusual magical, mythical and symbolic to the mundane and everyday" (CAVACAS, 1999, p.16). About the "game", Moraes explains in his analysis of the novel *Terra sonâmbula* that there are "repetitions of motives, similarities that invite the reader to rethink the simple relationship of alternation", often occurring a "suspension" of the senses, so that the reader is invited "to participate in a game of approximations, to pursue the stitches widely armed in the novel" (MORAES, 2009, p. 34-35).

character *is space*" (LINS, 1976, p. 69, author's emphasis). In this way, some readings and analyses of short stories and novels of Couto are carried out, in order to raise the possible meanings of this strong interrelation between character and space. First, in works that have the same spatial component, the tree; then in works that present other components of space.

TREE – SPACE AND CHARACTER

Among the components of space that are part of the interrelationship, the tree stands out. In the story "A palmeira de Nguézi", for example, the metamorphosis of the character occurs in a component of space, presenting the mythical-religious perspective of the inhabitants of the place. The protagonist, Tónico Canhoto, abandoned by his wife, Razia, gradually becomes a tree, a process that is concluded when a bird appears:

O passarito piou, rodopiou e, por fim, meteu o bico nos lábios secos do velho. Lhe dava, se imagine, um naco de água, qualquerzita migalha. O bico beijou o lábio, o lábio bicou o pássaro: dúzias de vezes, repetidas. O velho perguntou, lábios rasos de silêncio:

– *É você, Razia?*

A ave toda a noite debicou o pescoço do Canhoto. Dizem que, desse mesmo pescoço, ascendeu a matéria do colmo, dos cabelos brotou a folhagem, dos olhos nasceu a florescência. Tudo em jeito de árvore, palmeira e sagrada. (COUTO, 2014a, p. 247)³

It is an explanation for the existence of the sacred palm tree in Nguézi, told as a legend about a case of love disillusionment. The story is restricted to the mythical-religious aspect, characterizing the social environment, but without a greater historical problematization. In other narratives, the conflicts, the violence, the tensions represented by the interrelation between character and space arise. In the story "O embondeiro que sonhava pássaros", there is also a metamorphosis involving a tree, but it arises from an extreme case of violence of the colonial period in Mozambique. Tiago, the white boy who leads the story, becomes a tree at the end when it is burned down:

³ The little bird tweeted, whirled, and finally thrust its beak into the old man's dry lips. Gave him, imagine, a chunk of water, some crumb. The beak kissed the lip, the lip pecked the bird: dozens of times, repeated. The old man asked, shallow lips of silence: " – Is that you, Razia?" The bird all night picked on Canhoto's neck. It is said that from this same neck, the matter of the stem, the foliage grew from the hair, the flowers grew from the eyes. All just like a tree, palm tree and sacred. (COUTO, 2014a, p. 247)

As tochas se chegaram ao tronco, o fogo namorou as velhas cascas. Dentro, o menino desatara um sonho: seus cabelos se figuravam pequenitas folhas, pernas e braços se madeiravam. Os dedos, lenhosos, minhocavam a terra. O menino transitava de reino: arvorejado, em estado de consentida impossibilidade. E do sonâmbulo embondeiro subiam as mãos do passarinho. Tocavam flores, as corolas se envolucravam: nasciam espantosos pássaros e soltavam-se, petalados, sobre a crista das chamas. As chamas? De onde chegavam elas, excedendo a lonjura do sonho? Foi quando Tiago sentiu a ferida das labaredas, a sedução da cinza. Então, o menino, aprendiz da seiva, se emigrou inteiro para suas recentes raízes. (COUTO, 2013, p. 71)⁴

A group of settlers set fire to the tree believing that there was the "birdman", the black bird seller who had been pursued and with whom the boy had befriended. The transformation of the white boy into a tree symbolizes a part of the process of formation of the Mozambican people, even if through violence and the consequent tragedy. The character becomes the space, the two categories merge into one, and in this case, among the reasons for this "fusion", is the historical situation of Mozambique.

Similarly, there is the short story "O cachimbo de Felizbento" which takes place in the period of war after independence. The protagonist resists leaving his house when the government orders arrive saying that the entire population moves to another place. As part of the resistance, the old Felizbento says he's only going to leave if he takes the trees with him, trying to get the "sacred tree" out of his yard. One day, he wears one of his best clothes and disappears in the hole he made after throwing his pipe away, so the outcome occurs:

Os que voltaram ao lugar dizem que, sob a árvore sagrada, cresce agora uma planta fervorosa de verde, trepando em invisível suporte. E asseguram que tal arvorezinha pegou de estaca, brotando de um qualquer cachimbo remoto e esquecido. E, na hora dos poentes, quando as sombras já não se esforçam, a pequena árvore esfumaça, igual uma chaminé. Para a esposa, não existe dúvida: em baixo de Moçambique, Felizbento vai fumando em paz o seu velho cachimbo. Enquanto espera a maiúscula Paz. (COUTO, 2012, p. 51)⁵

⁴ The torches reached the trunk, the fire flirted with the old shells. Inside, the boy had unleashed a dream: his hair was like tiny leaves, legs and arms were becoming wood. His fingers, woody, were pricking the earth. The boy transited kingdom: groved, in a state of consented impossibility. And from the sleepwalking baobab the hands of the birdman rose. They touched flowers, the corollas were enveloped: astonishing birds were born and released, petaled, on the crest of the flames. The flames? Where were they from, beyond the distance of the dream? That was when Tiago felt the wound of the flames, the seduction of the ash. Then the boy, apprentice of the sap, completely emigrated to his recent roots. (COUTO, 2013, p.71)

⁵ Those who returned to the place say that, under the sacred tree, a fervent green plant is now growing, climbing in invisible support. And assure that such a little tree picked up from a stake, sprouting from

The old Felizbento becomes part of the space, symbolizing the resistance of the Africans in the middle of a difficult historical situation. It is understood as resistance mainly because of the value of the tree for most of the African peoples, considered sacred because it contains the life force and is the receptacle of the dead. For various societies and eras, according to Eliade, the tree is the source of life for its periodic regeneration: "all that is, all that is *living and creator*, in a state of continuous regeneration, is expressed in vegetable symbols" (2010, p.251, author's emphasis).⁶ This aspect is the subject of the novel *A varanda do frangipani*, in which a group of elderly people lives isolated in a place of difficult access and, in the end, their death is represented as an "entering" in the tree:

No último esfumar de meu corpo, ainda notei que os velhos desciam connosco, rumando pelas profundezas da frangipaneira. [...] Aos poucos, vou perdendo a língua dos homens, tomado pelo sotaque do chão. Na luminosa varanda deixo meu último sonho, a árvore do frangipani. Vou ficando do som das pedras. Me deito mais antigo que a terra. Daqui em diante, vou dormir mais quieto que a morte. (COUTO, 2008, p. 143-144)⁷

The novel has as narrator a dead person, which is involved with the events of that place, where there is the neglect with the elderly, valued before in the diverse African societies, and the weapons trafficking of the administrators of the government. After intervening in this problem, the narrator and the other elderly characters go to the tree, becoming part of space, so that the myth-religious perspective becomes a resource for the representation of historical problems, as well as others social environment. It is not, however, a "return to the purity of origins", but rather a subversion, in which myth is valued "in the possibility of adding new meanings to it" (FONSECA and CURY, 2008, p. 83).

any remote and forgotten pipe. And at sunset time, when the shadows no longer strain, the little tree smokes, like a chimney. For his wife, there is no doubt: beneath Mozambique, Felizbento is smoking his old pipe in peace. While waiting for the major Peace. (COUTO, 2012, p. 51)

⁶ The life force, for most African peoples, refers to the energy inherent to the beings, encompassing the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, which structures reality, consubstantiating itself in the "preexisting figure, which is taken as the source the most primordial of this energy, using it to engender the total natural order within situations specifically linked to each society" (LEITE, 1997, p. 104).

⁷ In the last blur of my body, I still noticed that the elderly came down with us, heading down the depths of the frangipaneira. [...] Gradually I lose the tongue of men, taken by the accent of the floor. On the bright balcony I leave my last dream, the tree of the frangipani. I become the sound of the stones. I lie down older than the earth. From now on, I'm going to sleep quieter than death. (COUTO, 2008, p. 143-144)

In the story "As flores de Novidade", plants also prevail as components of space in the interrelationship with the character, representing the difficult situation faced by a family. The girl who leads the narrative, named Novidade and who calls attention to being black and having blue eyes, has a strong bond with the father, a mine worker. When he returned from work, the young woman presented as gifts "bizarre flowers, the color of no other blue that was not found in her eyes" (COUTO, 2012, p. 17). After an explosion in the mine, resulting in the death of the father, the girl has to leave with the mother. Novelty, however, gives up such an attempt by passing in front of the place where his father worked, as narrated at the end:

Sobre um monte de areias tiradas da mina, Novidadinha se debruçou para colher flores silvestres, dessas que espreitam nas bermas. Escolhia com o vagar de cemitério. E parou frente a umas azulzinhas, de igual cor de seus olhos. [...] Lá, entre a poeira, o que sucedia era as flores, aquelas de olhar azul, se encherem de tamanho. E, num gesto, colherem a menina. Pegaram Novidadinha por suas pétalas e a puxaram terra-abaixo. A moça parecia esperar esse gesto. Pois ela, sempre sorrindo, se susplantou, afundada no mesmo ventre em que via seu pai se extinguir, para além das vistas, para além do tempo. (COUTO, 2012, p. 19)⁸

The representation of the girl's pain for the loss of the father is made by means of a plant, of a vegetal component of the space, suggesting that the girl also would have died. The characteristics of the young woman and the flowers are reflected, "co-incide" and transfer between them, because the flowers start to have the "blue look." There is, therefore, an inversion, the girl who harvested the flowers is, by these, harvested at the end. The personification and the metaphor or even the "personifying metaphor" stand out, since the "harvest" of the girl refers - indirectly - to her death. As part of this metaphorical construction, there is also the antithesis between the violence of work and death in the mine and the delicacy of the flowers and their petals, just as there is the euphemism in the representation of death.

Similarly, there is another short story, "O poente da bandeira," in which the depiction of violence involves a tree. A boy is beaten to death by a soldier because he

⁸ On a mound of sands taken from the mine, Novidadinha bent over to pick wild flowers, those which lurk on the mist. She would choose with the roam of the graveyard. And stopped in front of some small blue ones, the same color of her eyes. [...] There, among the dust, what happened was the flowers, those with the blue look, were filled with size. And, in a gesture, pick up the girl. They took Novidadinha by her petals and pulled her down. The girl seemed to expect this gesture. For her, always smiling, sank into the same womb in which she saw her father extinguish, beyond sight, beyond time. (COUTO, 2012, p.19)

would not have respected the flag stuck in a coconut tree, which falls, then killing the soldier. In the end, the boy's absence "co-incides" on the absence of the tree:

A palmeira sumiu mas para sempre ficara a sua ausência. Quem passe por aquele lugar escuta ainda o murmúrio das suas folhagens. A palmeira que não está conforta a sombra de um menino, sombra que persiste no sol de qualquer hora. (COUTO, 2012, p. 55-56)⁹

The character and the tree, absent in space, represent the losses and tragedies of the historical situation of Mozambique. As a way of approaching the reality of his country, Couto is based on the ancestral African traditions, but is not restricted to them in his process of literary creation. The author explores the various features of language, tending, in many narratives, to a strong interrelationship between character and space. Thus, in his works, an intensification of the use of metaphor and personification is identified, probably because suffering is due in Mozambique to the experiences of space, to the tragedies in the space of the nation. And, in addition to the tree, there are other spatial components that are part of this process.

SPACE, CHARACTERS AND THINGS

In other works, the interrelation between character and space remains with the prevalence of the metaphor and the representation of problems of the social environment. In the short story "O não desaparecimento de Maria Sombrinha", this aspect is part of the theme of the death of children because of hunger. The name of the protagonist "Sombrinha" (little shadow) is related to the situation of misery that leads to weight loss and consequent decrease in size:

A família deu conta, então, do que o pai antes anunciara: Sombrinha, afinal das contas, sempre se confirmava regredindo. De dia para dia ela ia ficando sempre menorzita. Não havia que iludir – as roupas iam sobrando, o leito ia crescendo. [...] Os parentes acreditaram que ela já chegara ao mínimo mas, afinal, ainda continuava a reduzir-se. Até que ficou do tamanho de uma unha negra. A mãe, as primas, as tias a procuravam, agulha em capinzal. [...] Até que, um dia, a menina se

⁹ The palm tree disappeared but its absence will forever stay. Whoever goes through that place still hears the murmur of its foliage. The palm tree that isn't there comforts the shadow of a boy, a shadow that persists in the sun of any time. (COUTO, 2012, p. 55-56)

extinguiu, em idimensão. Sombrinha era incontestável a vistas nuas. (COUTO, 2014a, p. 13-14)¹⁰

Another character in this story, the "little girl" Maria Brisa (Breeze), gets this name because "she not even reminded wind, simple plowing" (COUTO, 2014a, 13). Shadow and breeze are spatial components that, together with a "game" of unusual proportions and sizes ("the bed was growing"), constitute the problem of hunger, generating what can be understood as contrary to personification, an "objectification": humans who look more like breeze and shadow.¹¹ Thus, reflections and/or transfers of characteristics between people and things occur, having as main effect social criticism.

This aspect is part of the general theme of the novel *Mulheres de cinzas*, the first in the trilogy *As areias do imperador*. With the narrative that retakes the period of the Empire of Gaza, under the leadership of Ngungunyane, the author presents and problematizes the situation of the women during the periods of war. As the exploration of polysemy is also characteristic of Couto's literature, ashes are related to women according to various meanings.

First, there is an idea of "erasure" for what they impose on them, prevented from participating in the decision-making of the society in conflict, being "abandoned" when men go to war. In contrast, there is something inner to the characters when, through pain and suffering, they want to become ashes, as can be seen in the following passage:

Sempre que desabava uma tempestade, a nossa mãe saía a correr pelos campos e ali permanecia, braços erguidos, a imitar uma árvore seca. Esperava a descarga fatal. Cinzas, poeiras e fuligem: era o que ela sonhava vir a ser. Era esse o desejado destino: tornar-se indistinta poalha, leve, tão leve que o vento a faria viajar pelo mundo. (COUTO, 2015, p. 27)¹²

¹⁰ The family then realized what the father had said before: Sombrinha, after all, was always confirmed as waning. From day to day she was always growing smaller. There was nothing to be deceived - the clothes were loose, the bed grew. [...] The relatives believed that she had already reached the minimum, but, after all, she was still reducing. Until she was the size of a black nail. The mother, the cousins, the aunts were looking for her, a needle in the grass. [...] Until, one day, the girl became extinct in undimension. Sombrinha was not contemplated to bare views. (COUTO, 2014a, p. 13-14)

¹¹ The term "objectification" is used here in a more general sense as a denomination of the process of dehumanization characterized by the reduction of people to things, and not in a specific sense according to the concept of Marx, although the latter may be somehow, implied.

¹² Whenever there was a storm, our mother ran out into the fields and stood there, arms raised, imitating a dry tree. She expected the fatal discharge. Ashes, dust, and soot: it was what she dreamed of becoming. This was the desired destination: to become indistinct powder, lightweight, so light that the wind would make her travel the world. (COUTO, 2015, p. 27)

So there is a game between characters and space, between people and things, between the "ashes" of space taken by war and women, resulting in dehumanization. It is as if they, "condemned to walk their whole lives among ashes" (COUTO, 2015, p. 257), had their humanity reduced, "objectifying themselves", becoming the "ashes" themselves. But there is also the subversion of the "erasure", since the protagonist, Imani, called "Ash", when working for a Portuguese sergeant, has access to letters and makes use of information about the war. Therefore, there is a historical review on the participation of women in the social environment, a possibility of rehumanization is suggested.

Regarding the historical situation of women, attention is drawn to the character Farida from the novel *Terra sonâmbula*, whose title already refers to the interrelationship between space and character, to an impersonating metaphor. The narrative takes place during the post-independence war in Mozambique, Farida is found by Kindzu in a ship stranded in the sea, where she isolated herself after facing the hostile space on the land. Several times, Farida observes in the distance what would be an island with a beacon, as she explains:

– *Vês aquelas sombras lá? É um pequenita ilha. Nessa ilhinha está um farol. Já não trabalha, se cansou. Quando esse farol voltar a iluminar a noite, os donos deste barco vão poder encontrar o caminho de volta. A luz desse farol é a minha esperança, apagando e acendendo tal igual a minha vontade de viver.* (COUTO, 2007, p. 83)¹³

As in this work there is a game between dream and reality, concerning the reason for sleepwalking, there are doubts about the existence of the beacon. In this way, dreamed or real, the beacon can be understood as a projection or "concretization" of hope in space. According to etymological studies on the Indo-European, "space" and "hope" have the same origin¹⁴, just as Durand, when dealing with the anthropological structures of the imaginary, states that the imagination has the function of the hope that is made in space against deterioration of time (DURAND, 2001, p.

¹³ – Do you see those shadows there? It's a little island. On this little island is a beacon. It does not work anymore, it's tired. When this beacon lights up again at night, the owners of this boat will be able to find their way back. The light of this lighthouse is my hope, turning off and on just as my will to live. (COUTO, 2007, p. 83)

¹⁴ The words "space" and "hope" are considered to derive from the same Indo-European root: "sp (h) ē (i) -³, spī-" and "sphē-: sphē-", which had the general meaning of "to thrive, to fatten," and to terms with the senses of "dense," "full," "great," "broad," "strong," and "blooming." In its derivations, there is the Latin "spatium" with the sense of "stretch", "interval", while "spēs" brought the idea of "expectation", "hope". (INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION, 2007, p. 2875).

408-434). Farida's name comes from "beacon" (farol), the space is so important that characterizes her. So, after the difficult experience on land, Farida isolated herself on the ship and focused her gaze on the beacon as if she, herself, were the off light, with the hope of flaring up.

In his study of space, Lins asks where "the *character* ends and its space *begins?*", answering that "separation begins to present difficulties when it occurs to us that even the character is *space*", that "its memories and even the visions of a happy future, victory, fortune, float in something that, symmetrically to *psychological time*, would be designated as a *psychological space*" (LINS, 1976, p. 69, author's emphasis). Farida has her life as that space, between the immobility of the ship and the possible movement to the lighthouse, between the impediment and the will to leave.

On land, Farida suffers because of the traditions of her people, punished for being a twin daughter. Violated by a Portuguese, she becomes pregnant and ends up abandoning her son. She is persecuted, still, by the administrators of the government. Thus, having nowhere to go, she only has the ship, vehicle that "materializes" what lives – wants to leave but cannot, because she wants to find the son. At the same time, therefore, in that she has no place on earth, she has the name that refers to the beacon, which shows that the great issue of Farida is the space, to live between the land that repelled her and the sea as hope. This is the case of, what Lins affirms, that "space in the novel has been... everything that, intentionally arranged, fits the character and that, inventoried, can be both absorbed as added by the character," not just being "background, that is, *static, outside the characters*, described as a *universe of inanimate and opaque beings*" (LINS, 1976, p. 72, author's emphasis). The feeling of hope, something of its interiority, materializes in the lighthouse, in external space.

Other characters from *Terra sonâmbula* maintain a strong relationship with space. Kindzu, one of the protagonists, has his name coming from a palm tree, which shows his bond with that land. His mother is related to the nation, because she is also the mother of Junhito, mother of the Independence¹⁵, symbolically. There is often a process of metaphorical construction that approaches the allegory, as one notes with another character, Jotinha. In addition to being a beautiful teenager with whom Kindzu gets involved, she also has characteristics that allow her to be related to space, according to the following section:

¹⁵ The nickname Junhito [Little June] comes from the name given by the father in honor of the Independence of Mozambique, conquered on June 25, 1975 (COUTO, 2007, p. 16-17).

Encontrei Jotinha junto dos arbustos espinhosos que fronteiravam a aldeia. Me segurou com força as mãos e me chamou a lembrar não o passado mas o porvir. [...] De repente, Jotinha começou a rodopiar, ao mesmo tempo que gritava. Lhe doía um fantasioso arame farpado em que se ia enrolando. Assim, se convertia em interdito território, onde ninguém mais teria acesso. Desatada em prantos me mostrava bem reais feridas. Sua pele sangrava, de encontro a invisíveis espinhos. Eu queria aliviar seu sofrimento. Então ela estendeu seus braços em torno do meu corpo. Mas já não eram doces tatuagens que me tocariam. Sentia sim que arames pontudos me espetavam, confusas farpas me cercavam. Me soltei do abraço dela, escapei em correrias. [...] Jotinha se versava em dimensão de mais ninguém. Ela queria me levar para outros aléns. Quem mandara eu lhe tocar em jeito de ser mãe? Porque esse desesperado suspiro dos corpos se amando é que faz uma mulher se transcender, aceitar em si a semente de um infinito ser. (COUTO, 2007, p. 191)¹⁶

Jotinha has the tattoos according to the traditions of many people of that region of the African continent, is young as the newly independent Mozambican nation, has "real wounds" as the country at war, the character contains characteristics that refer to the space. Before, the relationship of the two had occurred in a grain warehouse, as he narrates, ending as follows: "Maize grains spread everywhere, and I felt as if they were coming out of me, as if I were the plant that broke down and dropped its seeds" (COUTO, 2007, p. 188). This episode illustrates Kindzu's action throughout the narrative, which, being a tree, aims at the end of the war and leaves his notebooks for another character, Muidinga/Gaspar, as seeds, opening a perspective of hope for the nation.

There are other cases of the strong interrelation between character and space in *Terra sonâmbula*, such as that of the elders Siqueleto (attached to the tree and seed) and Nhamataca (river-maker, son of the waters), besides Tuahir and Muidinga in relation to the road, the changes in the landscape, and the farewell in the sea. These various spatial experiences are taken together as experiences with the nation, space of tensions and tragedies during the centuries of colonialism, and with the difficulties

¹⁶ I found Jotinha by the thorny bushes that bordered the village. She held my hands tightly and called me to remember not the past but the future. [...] Suddenly, Jotinha began to whirl as she shouted. She ached with a fanciful barbed wire. Thus, it became an interdicted territory, where no one else would have access. Unweashed in tears, she showed me real wounds. Her skin was bleeding against invisible thorns. I wanted to ease his suffering. Then she spread her arms around my body. But it was no longer sweet tattoos that would touch me. I did feel that pointed wires stung me, confused barbs surrounded me. I let go of her embrace, ran away. [...] Jotinha versed the dimension of no one else. She wanted to take me to other beyonds. Who told me to touch her in a way of being a mother? Because that desperate sigh of loving bodies is what causes a woman to transcend herself, to accept in herself the seed of an infinite being. (COUTO, 2007, p.191)

of establishing unity after Independence. This is how one has the nation by the personifying metaphor of "terra sonâmbula" (sleepwalking land) the faced situation is so terrible that not only do the characters live as sleepwalkers, the land itself has this characteristic.

For this metaphorical construction, Couto brings together a set of aspects, such as African traditions in which one understands that reality and dream do not separate completely, and one can interfere in the other, with or without the intervention of the ancestors¹⁷. The reversibility of the narrated facts occurs, for example, when what was being narrated as reality can be understood as a dream, or the opposite, often becoming indefinite, so that one has the fantastic or marvelous.¹⁸ There is also the dream understood as an objective or hope that reality may change with the end of war. From the micro to the narrative macrostructure, this set characterizes the nation in many ways, from culture and traditions to the historical context. In this way, Couto finds in the metaphor the resource of mediation between the literary doing and the questions of the social environment, mainly by the human aspect.

SPACE, CHARACTER AND HOPE – "FINAL" CONSIDERATIONS

Couto has as sources and references, as may be seen, the various literary and cultural repertoires, both the "universal" and – and especially – the local, (re)configuring a "spatial imaginary".¹⁹ Concerned with the tragic reality of his country, the author uses the traditions of the peoples that make up Mozambique, especially regarding the mythical-religious perspectives, recreating them as a way of representing the issues and the difficult situations of the social environment. One reason for the constant interrelationship between character and space can therefore be seen in animism, in the way in which in many African societies a "vital force" ("anima", "soul")

¹⁷ The relation between dream and reality, with the intervention of premonitory dreams, predictions and other phenomena of the genre, is quite common in several African societies, as Hampâté Bâ explains: "In the old days, it was not uncommon to see a man arrive on foot from a distant village only to bring to someone a warning or instruction about this person that he had received in dreams" (2003, p. 15).

¹⁸ "Fantastic" and "marvelous", understood in general lines, from the differentiation of Todorov, in which the first consists in the doubt that the unusual generates to the character, causing a hesitation between the real and the dreamed or supernatural, whereas the wonderful tend not to question the character, to have the unusual or the supernatural as part of the world (TODOROV, 2006, p. 147-157).

¹⁹ According to Brandão, there is a set of discourses – literary, scientific, philosophical – in which "in addition to a conceptual and operational system, a framework of symbolic references and a set of values of a cultural nature that generalized is called the spatial imaginary is achieved" (2005, p. 127).

or even a "conscience" to objects, nonhuman animals, elements of matter, natural phenomena, among others, having or not relation with the ancestors.

In this sense, Couto's literature approaches the "animist realism" proposed by Garuba, an author who claims to be an "animist unconscious", an "animistic mode of thought" prevalent in some societies, especially in African societies that is incorporated to the "processes of material, economic activities and... reproduces itself within the sphere of culture and social life" (GARUBA, 2003, 269). Moving away from the evolutionist perspective on animism, in which it would be primitive or strictly religious, Garuba argues that the animist unconscious "is a form of collective subjectivity that structures being and consciousness" in these societies (GARUBA, 2003, p. 269). It thus replaces animism as a human characteristic of relation to the world and, therefore, to reality, in counterpoint to science:

What may be much closer to reality is that animistic logic subverts this binarism [of opposing conceptions of the world and of social life] and destabilizes the hierarchy of science over magic and the secularist narrative of modernity through the reabsorbing historical time into the matrices of myth and magic. For the mass of ordinary people, animism cushions the movement into modernity, providing cultural certainties, which create the 'illusion' of a continuum rather than a chasm, thus giving an imposed subjective order to the chaos of history. (GARUBA, 2003, p. 270-271)

In the case of African literatures, when reality is permeated by animism, Garuba proposes to call it "animist realism" instead of resorting to other terms and approaches on the fantastic and the wonderful, such as Latin American "magical realism".²⁰ In fact, animistic forms and manifestations can be identified in Couto's works, linked to the tensions of reality in Mozambique. However, the interrelation between character and space is not restricted to animism, and can acquire other forms and nuances, culminating, often, in a greater issue: that of dehumanization and, therefore, the need for a rehumanization.

The tree, recurrent in Couto's narratives, despite being an ambivalent motif, may present negative characteristics, such as the "demon tree" that Kindzu encounters in *Terra sonâmbula* (COUTO, 2007, p. 181), appears more often senses and positive

²⁰ The "magical realism" to Garuba, is considered less comprehensive than "animist realism": "the representational and linguistic practices underwritten by an animist conception of the world are much larger in scope and dimension than the concept of magical realism could possibly describe", there being differences: "magical realism [...] possesses an urban, cosmopolitan aspect (from the perspective of the writers) and an ironizing attitude, which are not necessarily elements of the animistic narrative or its writers" (GARUBA, 2003, p. 274).

values.²¹ Often considered as having a vital force that enables regeneration, the tree can indicate, in view of the context of tragedies, the urgency of the recovery of society and, in the case of personification, of the human. According to the religious perspective, as Eliade affirms, the human being, when dying, "returns" in the state of "seed" or "spirit" - to the tree -, returns "to the source of universal life" (Eliade, 2010, p. 245). The death of the elders in *A varanda do frangipani* (COUTO, 2008, 9. 143-144), for example, abandoned as they were, as a walk to the tree, presents the need and, at the same time, the hope to recover society. In this way, the traditional perspective that the dead return to the tree becomes a metaphor for the historical situation of Mozambique.

The same sense of hope can be deduced from the outcome of the old Siqueleto's participation in *Terra sonâmbula*, a character who, being sure that society could recover when it has its name written on a tree, dies "languishing, until he becomes the size of a seed" (COUTO, 2007, p. 69). Metaphorically, this case represents the changes through which the country passes, from old to new, from orality to writing, but with possibilities of minimizing ruptures and seeking ways to reconcile the old and the new (tree and writing), which a more positive future can be envisaged despite the tragedies. According to Bosi, "the feeling and the perception of the tragic have a progressive face", mainly because it removes "a superficial and illusory optimism" (BOSI, 2001, p. 387). Far from this form of optimism, in Couto's works there is the tragic element that approaches the disenchantment, but – and above all – by the metaphor, there is still some manifestation of hope, as the author himself explained:

[...] não fomos apenas nós, nações periféricas, que falhámos. Algo maior falhou. E o que está desmoronando é todo um sistema que nos disse que se propunha tornamo-nos mais humanos e mais felizes. Na luta pelas nossas independências era preciso esperança para ter coragem. Agora é preciso coragem para ter esperança. Antes nós sonhámos uma pátria porque éramos sonhados por essa mesma pátria. Agora, queremos pedir a essa grande mãe que nos devolva a esperança. Mas não há resposta, a mãe está calada, ausente. A única coisa que ela nos diz é que ela teve voz enquanto nós fomos essa voz. Enquanto nos calarmos, ela permanecerá no silêncio. O que significa

²¹ In his set of works on the four fundamental elements of nature, Bachelard emphasizes ambivalence, for example, the land in which one lives "dialectically seductions of the universe and certainties of intimacy" (2001, p. 07) "Adam's tree" that "reaches hell by its roots and heaven by its branches" (1990, 225), etc.

que precisamos de recomeçar sempre e sempre. (COUTO, 2011, p. 129)²²

Character and space are two categories that stand out in much of Couto's works, as in the excerpts analyzed here, because the most urgent issue, among so many that affect Mozambique, is the difficult human situation due to the spatial experience of colonialism, war and of misery. The metaphor prevails as a resource for the representation of problems in the social environment by bringing into its core the relationship with space, for its power to configure the human experience in its spatiality, noting the value and intensity of this experience when having, in the words of Couto, the homeland as "great mother".

The character is space, also, in accord with what Lins declares, because things and people "co-fuse" in a tragic process of dehumanization, like Farida and the beacon. Character and object are reflected, both isolated in the sea, Farida's hope (to find the son and to go to another place) "is" the light of the lighthouse.²³ Not escaping the tragic, character and space, in the end, are destroyed together, Farida arrives at the beacon that is set on fire. Although this event brings to the setting the feeling of disenchantment, there still remains in the novel the hope that Kindzu will find her son, as she had requested.

Thus, in an ambivalent way, if in space the tragic experiences are lived, it is in the space that one can glimpse hope, as already stated by Durand (2001, p. 408-434). In *Terra sonâmbula*, of all the terrible situations of a social environment in ruins, at the end the possibility of a positive future appears. The writings of Kindzu become earth, a matter that together with the vegetation (Kindzu/palm tree) becomes a producer of life, after "enlightening" Muidinga as Gaspar, the son of Farida. Representative of the new Mozambican generation, the young man finishes between the road/land and the sea, a space where he reflects on his experiences and where he can start again. It is

²² [...] it was not just us, peripheral nations, that failed. Something bigger failed. And what is falling apart is a whole system that told us that it was meant to become more human and happier. In the struggle for our independence we needed hope to have courage. Now it takes courage to have hope. Before we dreamed a homeland because we were dreamed by that same homeland. Now we want to ask this great mother to give us back hope. But there is no answer, the mother is silent, absent. The only thing she tells us is that she had voice while we were that voice. As long as we remain silent, she will remain silent. Which means we need to start again and again. (COUTO, 2011, p. 129)

²³ One of the characteristics of the metaphor, according to Ricoeur, is the tension between the "being metaphorical" and "not being literal", between identity and difference; this tension is considered essential for what the author understands as a "living metaphor," which differs, for example, from catharsis, from the metaphor that shows no more tension and is therefore considered "dead" (RICOEUR, 2005, p. 304-327).

not any space, it is where Mozambique was made, from the Indian, it is understood that the resumption is also for the nation. The son of an African woman raped by a Portuguese man, Gaspar represents, according to Vieira, "the fusion between Africa and Europe, which is the reality of the territory" (VIEIRA, 2003, p. 90). Character and space "co-fuse", via metaphor, into an "open end" that shapes itself as hope.

There is, in Couto's literature, as noted, an ethical and aesthetic concern. At the same time that his works present violence and suffering in a hostile and dehumanizing social environment, of which many metaphoric personifying and objectifying are examples, they tend to present, even if sometimes discreetly, the urgency, the possibility and the hope of a rehumanization.

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