

RECONFIGURING IDENTITIES IN THE PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING WORLD

'Year by year, Mia Couto has found increasing numbers of readers worldwide. Yet his subtle, paradoxical and often playful oeuvre remains insufficiently understood, especially in the dominant Anglophone field of literary criticism. *The Worlds of Mia Couto* makes in this context a crucial intervention: theoretically astute, wide-ranging and deeply knowledgeable, the essays in this volume make it clear why no one with an interest in world literature or African literature today can afford to ignore this Lusophone Mozambican writer.'

— Stefan Helgesson, Stockholm University

Mia Couto has been recognised internationally as one of the most important African authors of our times. His rapidly growing opus shifts fluidly between various modes of writing, mixing historical elements with poetic and autobiographic ones, in often unpredictable and intellectually challenging ways. With each new book, the writer multiplies various original worlds, creating new challenges for his readers. Each of Couto's texts opens up a rhizomic world which in turn contains (another world), inviting us to review and adjust our earlier interpretations of his oeuvre as a whole.

In *The Worlds of Mia Couto* a diverse group of literary experts sets out to explore Mia Couto's oeuvre in relation not only to the imaginary worlds created by the author but also to the complex geographical, cultural and literary contexts that are woven into the texture of his work. While Couto has increasingly received scholarly attention, the international connections and connectivities of his work have been largely neglected so far. This book endeavours to show that Couto's work can be read beyond its particular Mozambican and Lusophone context by paying attention to the broader African and global literary contexts, including Latin America, Asia and Europe. Mia Couto's work is, for instance, of particular interest for rethinking, from the margins, established concepts of 'World Literature', 'globalisation' and the 'postcolonial'. The various chapters of *The Worlds of Mia Couto* focus thus on some of the – often unexpected – international connections across his fictional and non-fictional work beyond the Lusophone literary space, crossing cultural, linguistic and gender boundaries.

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The Worlds of Mia Couto

ISBN 978-1-78074-001-3



II The Ghosts of Ngungunyane: Constructing an Ambivalent Hero¹

'A sua memória viverá nos sonhos dos que não têm escrita.
E viverá nos livros dos que perderam os sonhos.'²
['Its memory will live in the dreams of those who have no writing.
And it will live in the books of those who have lost their dreams'].

When countries construct their heroes, they are generally drawn to unanimously admired and coherent figures. The anti-colonialist people fighting for power in Mozambique began to revive the memory of Ngungunyane as an inspirational figure during the liberation struggle. Afterwards, FRELIMO (the Liberation Front of Mozambique) came to consider him a national hero, and a guide in the civil war that followed the country's independence. Ngungunyane was chosen as a figure of national unification and functioned as a 'symbol of love' for Mozambique. At the request of Samora Machel, Mozambique's first post-independence president, a handful of sand from the Azores cemetery was taken to Maputo in 1985 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Mozambican independence. This sand symbolised Ngungunyane's remains: he died on the Azorean island of Terceira in 1906. Coincidentally, several political figures in Mozambique hail from the Gaza province where Emperor Ngungunyane

- 1 This article was prepared partially for project MEMOIRS – Children of Empires and European Postmemories, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 648624).
- 2 Priest Rudolfo Fernandes in Mia Couto's *As Areias do Imperador: uma trilogia moçambicana. livro dois, A Espada e a Azagaia* (Alfragide, Portugal: Caminho, 2016), 283.

reigned: not only Machel but also Eduardo Mondlane, co-founder and first president of FRELIMO, and Joaquim Chissano, the second president of Mozambique.

Ngungunyane, the Emperor of Gaza, took power a few months before the Berlin conference (1884–1885), when European states divided portions of Africa among themselves. Threatened by British and German interest in the region, the Portuguese rapidly had to create a strategy to show their dominance over Mozambican territories. Ngungunyane became their principal enemy. Understanding the conflict of interests between Europeans, the Emperor sought to take advantage of the situation with diplomatic missions to Britain and Portugal. The Portuguese offensive occurred only ten years later in early 1895 – just at the moment when the Emperor lost the loyalty of his subjects and violent conflicts established themselves in his kingdom. Although he had spent years resisting foreign invasion, he was eventually captured and deported. He died in exile, but not before he was shown in a cage at the Belem botanical garden in Lisbon.

Over a century after the Portuguese defeated and imprisoned the Emperor, the Mozambican people still remembers the oppression and violence that characterised his reign and affected the life of his subjects. This memory was clear during the inauguration of his bust in Mandlakazi, Gaza province, in 1995, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the resistance put up by the Gaza empire.³ This commemoration was the then-president Joaquim Chissano's idea. It was badly received, and locals disfigured the statue. Their gesture rejected Chissano's attempt to continue to impose as national hero a figure whose memory was highly ambivalent. The political dimension of deconstructing the myths associated with Ngungunyane is also a critique of FRELIMO's unitary (and authoritarian) vision of Mozambique. If for some people Ngungunyane represents resistance to colonialism, for others he is associated with internal wars and destruction.

Young African states have followed different historical paths but demonstrate clear parallels. Each seeks to update and rewrite the multiple histories, which remain alive in the present. The colonial past, far from being

a past or dead experience, generates ghosts that we might understand as the products of an imperial legacy in these recently-constructed nations. In appealing to a figure as controversial as Ngungunyane, Mozambicans chose to narrate and reinvent the nation through an earlier symbol of resistance to colonialism. However, they have not been able to expunge all 'impurities' from his history because his deeds live on in the discourses that have been handed down by their contemporaries.

This is the phenomenon of post-memory. Post-memory is more than just the handing down of memory; it becomes a claim to, and appropriation of, experiences lived by ancestors. When it is enunciated and transmitted, this memory becomes a sort of inheritance, no longer an individual but a collective responsibility.⁴ Transmitting memories always involves choices about what will be preserved and what will be forgotten. As time goes by, the more private memories are confronted with collective memories and institutional history. Ngungunyane's memory today remains caught up in these dynamics; the Emperor can be read as a national ghost that both haunts and inspires. He lives in the space between the silence that must be exorcised in the communities that suffered from his massacres and the demystification of those who took him as a hero. In this way, resorting to the metaphor of ghosts is a way of 'destabilising Manichean and dichotomous analyses, dismantling binaries such as present and past, memory and history, good and evil, life and death, upon which many of the narratives that make up the archive of imagination have relied'.⁵

Recognising the lacunae within past narratives and articulating these silences are first steps towards rebuilding history. The first novel written in Mozambique about Ngungunyane was *Ualalapi* (1987) by Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa. The author reconstructs the image of the last emperor of Gaza, Ngungunyane. This critical rereading of history promotes the desecration of the 'Lion of Gaza' using historical documents and proverbs from Mozambique. The polyphony of the narrative, mixing real documents and

4 Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

5 Inês Nascimento Rodrigues, *Espectros de Batepá: memórias e narrativas do «Massacre de 1953» em S. Tomé e Príncipe* (Porto: Afrontamento, 2018), 32.

3 Several important Mozambican figures come from the Gaza province: Eduardo Mondlane, co-founder and first president of FRELIMO, Samora Machel and Joaquim Chissano, first and second presidents of Mozambique.

fiction, allows the emergence of new interpretations and new identities linked to Ngungunyane.

In this chapter, I examine the presence and persistence of Ngungunyane's 'ghost' through a reading of the second volume of the trilogy *Sandi of the Emperor*, in which Mia Couto chronicles the last days of the so-called Great State, the second biggest empire ruled by an African. Notwithstanding all the scientific material already produced on the Emperor, Couto's trilogy takes on the task of constructing a dialogue with history. Couto starts with the mystification surrounding the figure of Ngungunyane. The Portuguese portrayed the Emperor as more powerful than he really was. Their narrative was intended to demonstrate to rival colonising powers that Portugal had the military power to annihilate this African empire.

Captain Mouzinho de Albuquerque's mission represented a restitution of national pride as well as a military victory. The Portuguese success was presented as epic – an historic victory – when in fact Ngungunyane's power had dissipated due to internal conflicts, which facilitated the Portuguese 'victory'. In Mozambique, the Ngungunyane empire had profound social implications, though only affected the southern half of the country for 60 years. Within this vast territory, some reacted with devotion and submission, others with rejection.

To illustrate the complexity that surrounds this ambivalent hero, Mia Couto alternates between two narrative voices: Imani, a teenager from the Vaxxopi tribe who was educated by Jesuits, and Germano de Melo, a Republican Portuguese sergeant who was deported after supporting revolts against the monarchy. In his literary representation of historical fact, Couto alternates between two ways of (re)evaluating the past: one poetic and the other bureaucratic. This mirrors his research into radically different historical sources and the process of transforming these sources into his writing. Firstly, Couto consulted hundreds of Portuguese documents about the so-called 'pacification campaigns in Mozambique'. These appear repeatedly as citations at the beginning of chapters. Secondly, Couto draws on oral sources from Mozambique – especially from the Zavala regions, home to the Vaxxopi people, most affected by the Emperor's massacres. These records are extremely rich sources from which to reconstruct the transmission of oral memories. Drawing on these disparate registers,

Couto chose to write his version of this history both from the perspective of the 'winners' of the official history, the Portuguese, illustrated by the figure of Sergeant Germano, and from the perspective of the Vaxxopi ethnic group, victims of the Emperor and allied to the Portuguese. Imani represents this perspective.

Stuart Hall argues that postcolonial work should bring an interest in the present and the future to bear on the question of how the past is recovered or (re)discovered.⁶ Thus, cultural practices and narratives about identity, when they give their own account of the past, as Couto's work does, become themselves sites where identity is produced.⁷ My goal here is to understand whether the ghost of Ngungunyane evolves from a fantasy of the past to become a part of a shared cultural present. The challenge is to cross the boundaries of reworked memory in Mia Couto's novel and to analyse how the author develops the discourses, silences and fantasies of the past to narrate history and address its ghosts.

Jo Labanyi's understanding of ghosts of history underpins this discussion. I understand post-memory in its broad sense, rather than just naming the transmission of memory, post-memory involves a claim, an appropriation of an ancestor's experience, that becomes not an individual but a collective responsibility.⁸ My argument is that Ngungunyane, as he is represented in artistic work, and especially in Couto's, is already part of a shared culture. I understand Couto to be interrogating the ghost of Ngungunyane to give him a 'good death', because his death in exile, after the humiliation he suffered, allowed him to become a ghost in the popular imagination. By reworking his legacy, his heritage can become a cultural fact where myths and conflicts in various versions of history can engage in dialogue – that is, without giving credit only to one side of the story – either to the heroism conveyed by FRELIMO or to the perversion and

6 Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Stuart Hall, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990) 222–237.

7 Ibid., 224.

8 Jo Labanyi, 'O reconhecimento dos fantasmas do passado: história, ética e representação', in Ana Paula Ferreira and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, eds., *Fantasmas e fantasias imperiais no imaginário português contemporâneo* (Porto: Campo das Letras, 2003).

inhumanity described by those who suffered his massacres. Last but not least, Ngungunyane remains a ghost in popular Vatsopi imagery and re-working his legacy can solidify into a cultural fact.

Transmission of memories and writing of hi/story

'El olvido es una de las formas de la memoria'
[Forgetfulness is one of the forms of memory]

– Jorge Luis Borges

When invited to give a lecture on the theme of 'Literature, Identity and Memory' in Pernambuco in 2012, Mia Couto spoke about forgetfulness. His lecture drew on the events of the Mozambican Civil War, which lasted 16 years and left more than a million people dead. For the author, forgetfulness offered a way out of the traumas of the war: 'Isso foi uma estratégia para a paz. Para continuarmos a nossa caminhada sem mais Guerra' ['This was a strategy for peace. To continue our path without further war']. Though he notes the role of forgetting in the establishment of peace, Couto argued that 'a memória é um modo de ganharmos soberania sobre a nossa vida e de ser coprodutores do mundo' ['memory is a way to gain sovereignty over our lives and to be coproducers of the world']. As studies of the Shoah have shown, this apparent forgetting really registers the impossibility of articulating the trauma. Moreover, despite the apparent silence, trauma does get passed on to future generations. As the epigraph to this section puts it, forgetting is a form of memory.

We can say that the historical trauma of colonisation in Africa produced narratives full of ghosts. Official history is full of vacancies, omissions and disappearances, it is artificially continuous and often distorted. Underneath the thin layer of official history, there are stories that have been erased or silenced, leaving only their ghostly marks, and therefore destined to re-haunt the present.

For Mia Couto, people invent their constructions of the past. In his study of collective memories, the sociologist Maurice Halbwach privileges memories' social dimension. For Halbwach, as for Mia Couto, memory is a social construction, and the memory of the past is reconstructed in the present, not recovered from the past.⁹ As such, when we talk about collective memory, we are talking about a present collective consciousness of the past, rather than just personal memories. But as Mia Couto explains, talking about the need to elaborate a single history for a single nation, forgetfulness is as important as memory:

A verdade é a seguinte: esquecer não é um lapso, não é uma passiva ausência que tomba naturalmente como uma folha seca e morta. O esquecimento é, como a memória, uma fabricação, uma narrativa construída e partilhada. O que nos faz ser nação não é apenas o que juntos lembramos. Mas é sobretudo o que esquecemos e como esquecemos juntos. A literatura pode colocar a nu esse processo sem que intente exatamente denunciar ou proclamar verdades. O ficcionista sugere o seguinte: eis a minha obra, é uma ficção, uma mentira que diz que mente.¹⁰

[The truth is this: forgetting is not a lapse, it is not a passive absence that falls naturally like a dry, dead leaf. Forgetfulness is, like memory, a fabrication, a built and shared narrative. What makes us a nation is not just what we remember together. It is above all what we forget and how we forget together. Literature can uncover this process without attempting to accurately denounce or proclaim truths. The fiction writer proposes the following: here is my work, it is a fiction, a lie that says it lies].

The study of memory and, more recently, of its transmission as post-memory, is directly related to investigations of collective identity. It is today one of the most active and interdisciplinary theoretical fields. Pierre Nora's study *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Realms of Memory), has strengthened this connection between memory studies and literary studies.¹¹ For Nora, the predominance of mass cultures in global society makes the role of memory

9 Maurice Halbwachs and Gérard Namer, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris, France: Albin Michel, 1994).

10 Leonardo Cazes, 'Eu sou da fronteira entre culturas', *Jornal O Globo* (16 November 2013), accessed on 18 August 2018, <<https://oglobo.globo.com/cultura/livros/eu-sou-da-fronteira-entre-culturas-diz-mia-couto-18058055#ixzz5I81aWPG8>>

11 Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Bibliothèque Illustrée Des Histoires (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

less important today, in part because memory has been replaced by history. However, Nora points out that memory reincarnates in places where there is a sense of historical continuity.¹² In writing about Ngungunyane, Couto questions the ways a polysemic past has been crystallised into a single official version. The author is aware that school history syllabuses affect the histories told in families. Thus memory, which is produced in the present and for the present, is often endowed with a simplistic and Manichean view of history, where there are only great heroes and great traitors, and ordinary people are overlooked. In fact, ordinary people produce the past, but they have no rights to collective memory. 'Literature can bring humanity back to these infinite weavers of time,'¹³ says Mia Couto. In this way, the author writes a book in which historical fact matters less than the possibilities of understanding the past:

Os fatos históricos estão ali como rochedos que dão sustento ao resto da paisagem. Os grandes momentos, as batalhas, as negociações, os chefes dos vários exércitos, esses são inspirados na história oficial. Todo o resto é invenção. E todo o resto é o mais importante, pois eu quero fazer uma história sobre os modos de invenção do passado.¹⁴

[The historical facts are there like cliffs that bolster the rest of the landscape. The great moments, the battles, the negotiations, the heads of the various armies, these are inspired by the official history. Everything else is invention. And all the rest is the most important, because I want to make a story about ways of inventing the past.]

In addition to the war between the Portuguese and the people of Gaza, *Sands of the Emperor* treats identity and its constructions through time. The trilogy is composed of *Woman of the Ashes* (2015), *The Sword and the Spear* (2016) and *The Horizon Drinker* (2017), which ends the epic with the capture of Emperor Ngungunyane by the Portuguese. In this chapter

¹² Ibid., 7.

¹³ Ubiratan Brasil, 'Mia Couto inicia trilogia em que reflete sobre a memória – cultura – estado,' 18 November 2015, <<https://cultura.estadao.com.br/noticias/literatura,mia-couto-inicia-trilogia-em-que-reflete-sobre-a-memoria-10000002234>>.

¹⁴ Leonardo Cazes, 'Eu sou da fronteira entre culturas,' *Jornal O Globo* (16 November 2015), accessed on 18 August 2018, <<https://oglobo.globo.com/cultura/livros/eu-sou-da-fronteira-entre-culturas-diz-mia-couto-18058055#ixzz5181aWPGb>>.

I deal with the second volume of the trilogy, *The Sword and the Spear*, which dramatises the end of the war. In this second book, Ngungunyane is not only talked about; he appears physically as a character. Mia Couto's mobilisation of characters that really existed through a double strategy of drawing on the extant writings and also reinventing what happened allows us to better understand both the Emperor of Gaza and the Portuguese, and to reach a more complex view than would be provided by a single perception described in a document written by a European or recorded by Mozambican oral transmission. This strategy enables Couto not only to see the Portuguese as colonisers and murderers, but also to consider all the questions surrounding their choices when invading Mozambique. Mia Couto shows how they could be perceived if more versions of the story existed.

How ghosts populate history

According to Jo Labanyi 'ghosts are, by definition, the vanquished of history ... [and] always contain a sense of tragically interrupted potential ... that constitutes a "bad death"'.¹⁵ At the time of the independence struggle, Ngungunyane represented a ghost of the anticolonial fight, someone who had their life tragically interrupted by the powers of the future colonial occupation. However, he survives as a ghost in the various reappropriations of his life history – and especially by the epic narrative built by the Portuguese to ennoble their victory. Since the independence period, the memory of his 'bad death' in the Azores (following his exhibition in a human zoo, designed to humiliate a vanquished colonial 'Other') has increasingly faded. It has been replaced by the figure of an important man who illustrates a historical moment. He was re-remembered

¹⁵ Jo Labanyi, 'O reconhecimento dos fantasmas do passado: história, ética e representação,' in Ana Paula Ferreira and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, eds., *Fantasmas e fantasias imperiais no imaginário português contemporâneo*, (Porto, Portugal: Campo das Letras, 2003), 61.

as an Emperor who resisted the colonial attacks at the end of the nineteenth century and whose defeat allowed Portuguese sovereignty in the territory that is now Mozambique.

In the post-independence period, Ngungunyane became the 'symbol of forgotten potential whose achievement was frustrated.'¹⁶ He enters the history of Mozambique as a ghost, insofar as 'the losers of history only have a place in the national narrative as ghosts or revenants.'¹⁷ Couto revealed in an interview with the newspaper *Le Point Afrique* that people refused to talk to him when he started working with the Vaxxopi tribe, out of a belief that ghosts should be left alone. The author responds: 'Mais quand les gens cherchent à oublier, ne vaut-il pas mieux réveiller les fantômes que de les laisser vous réveiller?'¹⁸ [When people seek to forget, isn't it better to wake up the ghosts yourself rather than let them wake you up?]. Couto wasn't trying to be controversial, but showing that nation-building is forged through violent processes. The author negotiated several different pasts and built a plural history of Mozambique and Ngungunyane before writing his work.

In the literary representations of Ngungunyane, however, memory is not at stake, since ghosts are not memories. Moreover, 'memory' presupposes a narrative and, according to Labanyi, 'ghosts represent a failure in the narrative.'¹⁹ When Ngungunyane appears in literary representations he is figured as that which 'could have been', an alternative reality embodied by art. As Derrida explains 'we do not summon the ghosts, but they insist on appearing to summon us to action.'²⁰ Thus, the ghost of Ngungunyane functions to mark a series of disappearances. Official history is full of gaps, omissions and disappearances; it is only artificially linear, and is often

¹⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁷ Ibid., 62.

¹⁸ Valérie Marin La Meslée, 'L'Histoire est pleine de mensonges et d'oublis', *Le Point Afrique*, last modified 18 June 2017, accessed 18 August 2018, <http://afrique.lepoint.fr/culture/mozambique-mia-couto-l-histoire-est-pleine-de-mensonges-et-d-oublis-18-06-2017-2136177_2256.php>.

¹⁹ Ferreira and Ribeiro, *Fantasmas e fantasias imperiais no imaginário português contemporâneo*, 64.

²⁰ Ibid., 67.

distorted. Underneath the thin layer of official history, there are stories that have been erased or silenced, leaving only their ghostly marks, purposefully reactivated for political purposes. The return of independence leaders' ghosts such as Patrice Lumumba, Ruben Um Nyobe, Amílcar Cabral, Thomas Sankara, Nkwame Nkrumah or Sékou Touré, many of whom were murdered between 1960 and the beginning of 1990, allows us to move beyond silenced histories of the past and towards shared cultures of the present. It is part of a postcolonial narrative, which used fabricated heroes as a tool for national unification, and as tropes to construct singular histories in order to create a sense of belonging for the people.

Mia Couto recalls, in an initial note, that some believe that the bones Portugal returned to Mozambique in 1985 are actually just sand. It is this sand that gives the trilogy its name because, as Couto affirms, sand is a metaphor for empire. 'É nela, como na terra, que se guarda a memória do que fomos e do que somos'²¹ [It is on it [the sand], as on earth, that we keep the memory of what we were and what we are].

Ngungunyane

Imperador eterno me sonhei. Mas terei o destino dos escravos [...] Os meus ossos irão morar para além do mar. E de mim ninguém mais terá lembrança. O esquecimento é o único modo de morrer para sempre. E será ainda pior: os que de mim mais se lembrarem serão os que nunca me quiseram bem.²²

[I dreamed of myself as an eternal Emperor. But I will suffer the fate of the slaves [...] My bones will live beyond the sea. And no one will remember me any more. Forgetting is the only way to die forever. And it will be even worse: those who remember me the most will be those who never loved me].

²¹ Marcos Borga, 'Visão Mia Couto, novo romance, novos desafios', *Jornal Visão* (10 October 2015), <<http://visao.sapo.pt/jornaldeletras/letras/2015-10-21-Mia-Couto-novo-romance-novos-desafios>>.

²² Mia Couto, *As Arcas do Imperador*, 331.

There are several theories to explain the presence of recurrent ghosts in contemporary narratives of the past. Many critics assert they represent a questioning of the official narrative and represent spectral histories full of discontinuities and absences. Ghosts arise as a response to the need to create new versions of the past, where the omissions of official histories are not repeated, and where the victims of modernity do not disappear from the historical record.

From the example of Ngungunyane we can note how useful the trope of ghosts of history is in analysing the generational transmissions of colonisation and decolonisation in Africa. In the sentence that Mia Couto attributes to Ngungunyane, which appears in the opening of this section, we see the Emperor's clear-sightedness about himself and his future. In the book, Couto represents Ngungunyane as aware of his own fragility and of the ways he was losing territories and the war to the Portuguese. The foresightedness of his words – Couto's construction – brings into view the Emperor's lucidity with regards to his destiny.

Mia Couto's interest in the Emperor of Gaza is based on questions of reconstructing the past and in constructing collective memories. According to the author, 'we are faced with two historical lies invented in the service of political interests'. As in Ngungunyane's prophecy, Couto uses the perspectives of the Emperor's opponents, the Vaxopi and the Portuguese. In Couto's story, Ngungunyane's allies already appear as 'traitors'. They use their closeness to the Emperor to scare rather than to support him and they celebrate his capture. Stuart Hall argues that in order to understand cultural identity one must focus on 'becoming rather than being' to avoid falling into a notion of accepted or pre-constructed identity.²³ In Mia Couto's book, it is precisely the becoming of the Emperor's image that is in question: between official documents and creative fiction, Mia Couto reanimates ghosts in order to construct a collective identity in relation (or not) to a collective memory of Ngungunyane. This is post-memorial work, which, as Marianne Hirsch states, 'strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures

by reinvesting them with individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression.²⁴

Ghosts, as the incarnation of the past in the present, destabilise accepted notions of history, of individual reality, as well as the limits that define them. Ghosts remind us that we need to face our past if we are to advance and build a better future. The reappearance of ghosts in the history of several African countries is closely related to the way in which colonialism erased countries' pasts as though their history began with colonialism. The return of ghosts in current narratives is a symptom of a collective longing to address this past, but at the same time offers the possibility of rectification, recognition, and reparation. In this way Ngungunyane represents the shadows of a continental history that still waits to be recovered, resolved and repaired.

In the first book of Couto's trilogy, we hear about the Emperor only via the actions of his armies. It is only in the last third of the second volume that we are confronted with the character in the flesh. Here, I focus on the second book to better understand how his image is perceived and how his reputation circulates. Then, I will analyse Couto's strategies for developing the character when he physically appears as a character.

Mia Couto mixes historical writings with the oral histories he has collected. As in many of his novels, each chapter is preceded by a quotation. In *Sands of the Emperor*, historical texts are mixed with proverbial sayings, either real or inspired by the philosophy of each character or village. In this article I will focus on Portuguese written sources and perspectives rather than on African historical (oral) sources, since in the novel there are more elements to contest the European historical point of view than the African.

The first mention of Emperor Ngungunyane in the second book of the trilogy comes as early as Chapter 6, in the second letter of Lieutenant Ayres de Ornelas. Thanks to a report written by Colonel José Justino Teixeira Botelho, in the 1921 *Historia Militar e Política dos Portugueses em Moçambique de 1883 aos Nossos Dias* [*Military History and Politics of the Portuguese in Mozambique from 1883 to The Present Day*], we know that the Portuguese considered themselves superior to the African army, the latter's

23 Stuart Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs "Identity"?' in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 4.

24 Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 11.

audacity notwithstanding.²⁵ When someone from the Gungunhane kraal comes to say that he has witnessed 'uma parada de quinze mil guerreiros de aspeto imponente'²⁶ [a parade of fifteen thousand warriors of imposing appearance], the Colonel dismisses this army as an armed mob and judges the Africans mere 'savages'. This account shows the disdain in which the military commanders held Ngungunyane's army.

In his 1934 book *Colectânea das suas principais obras militares e coloniais*, vol 1 [*Collection of principal military and colonial works*, vol 1], Lieutenant Aires de Ornelas (who also appears in Couto's fiction), reveals that no one spoke of the colonial campaigns in the military school – whether of strategies or opponents.²⁷ Ayres' account inspires Couto to choose him as a narrative informant of the Portuguese mission. In the novel, his letters show the apparent lack of interest that both he and General Germano de Almeida have in the colonial campaign in Mozambique.

By contrast, commander Mouzinho de Albuquerque (who also appears in both the real story and the fiction) is fully engaged in the fight against Ngungunyane: 'percebi que Gungunhane ainda era muito temido e respeitado, devido em parte às mortes que todos os dias mandava fazer, e, por isso, fiz o possível por inspirar um terror igual ao que espalhava em torno de si o régulo Vátua'.²⁸ ['I realised that Gungunhane was still very much feared and respected, due in part to the deaths he ordered every day and so I did what I could to inspire a terror equal to what the little Vátuan chief sprinkled around him']. This passage from a real piece of writing appears as a quotation in one of Lieutenant Ayres' letters. In this letter he justifies the Portuguese military's new *modus operandi*: though victory had been part of their strategy, it hadn't been recognised by their African opponents. They, he says, only accept the end of the battle with fire and destruction. Ngungunyane inspired respect through his dictatorship of

25 José Justino Teixeira Botelho, *História militar e política dos portugueses em Moçambique: de 1833 aos nossos dias* (Lisbon: Centro Tip. Colonial, 1936).

26 Couto, *As Areias do Imperador*, 37.

27 Aires de Ornelas, *Colectânea das suas principais obras militares e coloniais*, vol 1 (Lisbon: Divisão de Publicações e Biblioteca, Agência Geral das Colónias, 1934–1936).

28 Couto, *As areias do imperador*, 92.

fear and death – and the Portuguese too began to fight in that way. But the lieutenant does not agree with Mouzinho's orders, because the destruction left after a victory is not a good outcome.

In that same letter, in Chapter 30, Ayres explains that General Germano de Almeida's disobedience to his orders made him 'perceber melhor as minhas próprias funções' [better aware of my own functions].²⁹ It gives rise to several issues that call into question what the Portuguese really know about the Africans and about the war in which they are involved: 'ninguém senão nós chamamos Vátuas aos Vanguni. Ninguém mais usa o termo "Estado de Gaza". Como lhe chamam os próprios cafres?'³⁰ [No one else but us calls the Vanguni Vátuas. No one else uses the term 'Gaza State'. What do the kaffirs themselves call it?].

Crucially, Lieutenant Ayres readopts the etymology used by the Vanguni to identify Ngungunyane, *nkossi*: 'Com a mesma palavra designam Deus'³¹ [the same word they use to designate God]. Ayres demonstrates that a people's understanding of what an Emperor is shapes their reaction to Ngungunyane, who is understood as a figure with divine authority to punish and reward. Ayres concludes, 'A nossa guerra não tem apenas uma dimensão militar. É uma guerra religiosa'³² [Our war is not just military. It's a religious war]. As General Germano de Almeida insisted in his earlier letters: 'se queremos derrotar os africanos teremos que os conhecer melhor, teremos que penetrar no seu mundo e viver entre esses outros povos'³³ [if we want to defeat the Africans we will have to know them better, we will have to penetrate their world and live among these other peoples]. Ayres emphasises that this is precisely the Africans' strategy, who already speak Portuguese and understand how Europeans live and organise themselves. Ayres sees how unprepared the Portuguese were when they arrived in Africa to deal with an enemy in a foreign territory, and that the Africans 'espalharam pelo sertão africano as notícias do nosso poder, mas sobretudo a das nossas

29 Ibid., 295.

30 Ibid., 296.

31 Ibid., 296.

32 Ibid., 296.

33 Ibid., 297.

fraquezas³⁴ [spread the news of our power in the African backlands, but especially of our weaknesses].

In that sense, Father Rudolfo Fernandes confirms the Africans' strategy when he reveals that 'Gungunhane é o homem mais cosmopolita que conheço: fala diversas línguas, negoceia com várias nações'³⁵ [Gungunhane is the most cosmopolitan man I know: he speaks several languages, he deals with several nations]. The Portuguese understand the political impact of the *nkossi*, as revealed in the Marques Gerald's Report of 1888: 'Sente-se ao chegar próximo de Gungunhane uma simpatia inexplicável ... encontra-se nele um conjunto de atrativos que nos predispõem logo a seu favor' [You feel an inexplicable sympathy when you get close to Gungunhane ... you feel a set of attractive qualities that predispose us to him]³⁶ At the end of this account Gerald's points out that despite his charms, Ngungunyane 'tem uma vontade de ferro, que não se dobra por coisa alguma'³⁷ [has an iron will, which does not bend for anything]. This is a political advantage: knowing how to please everyone at the same time as getting your way.

In a second key moment in the book, perhaps a gloss on the official story, Ngungunyane's mother appears. She reminds the Portuguese leaders that part of the Portuguese promises were never fulfilled. She notes that the same was true on the African side and concludes that 'temos memória é para esquecer as nossas culpas'³⁸ [we remember in order to forget our faults]. She presents a plan to save Portuguese honour and Ngungunyane's life. Through Impibekezane's action, Couto shows us how the situation was perceived: Ngungunyane's days were numbered; he was militarily weakened and losing support. Doing a deal was the best option. At the same time, to avoid further war and destruction, and perhaps also to avoid dishonouring the Portuguese army, she proposes a deal which would allow the Portuguese to appear as the sole victors in the eyes of the world: 'Os únicos que não reconheceriam nunca essa vitória seriam os vencidos. E assim ao

34 Ibid., 297.

35 Ibid., 283.

36 Ibid., 293.

37 Ibid., 293.

38 Ibid., 115.

longo dos séculos festejariam, de outro modo, seu triunfo'³⁹ [The only ones who would never recognise this victory were the losers. And so over the centuries they celebrated their triumph]. This sentence from Germano de Almeida's letter to Lieutenant Ayres summarises what would enter into history – the Portuguese victory; and what would be forgotten – the fact that this was an agreement between Impibekezane and the Portuguese military – which was hardly a warlike strategy.

The Swiss missionaries, who have a hospital in Sana Benene, are also significant figures. Hospitals and doctors represent neutral territory in the battle. Several confessions pass through doctors, such as Ngungunyane's, who explains intimate episodes of his past. The doctor, a specialist in hypnosis, wonders: 'como hipnotizar alguém que não só fala uma outra língua como para quem voar e sonhar são um mesmo verbo' [how can I hypnotise someone who not only speaks another language but also for whom 'fly' and 'dream' are one and the same verb?]. Ngungunyane says that he only thinks when he dreams, 'e não sei quem sou quando sonho'⁴⁰ [and I do not know who I am when I dream]. Here Mia Couto introduces Ngungunyane's part in the murder of his brother, the heir to the throne. Ngungunyane reveals his guilt when he says he only obeyed orders 'e esse foi o meu maior erro'⁴¹ [and that was my biggest mistake]. He suggests it is no longer he who dreams when he sleeps: 'eu durmo e o meu irmão sonha dentro de mim'⁴² [I sleep and my brother dreams inside me]. To appease his pain, the doctor reassures him that his act was to protect Zixaxa, an Emperor who escaped from the Portuguese, and that this gesture of loyalty counterbalances his sins. Ngungunyane replies that Zixaxa is not actually protected, but imprisoned, in Ngungunyane's realm: he is his future adversary. Mia Couto uses the neutral territory of the hospital and the trope of a passive listener to inform readers about Ngungunyane's choices and actions. Imani hears and reports the consultation, concluding that 'o grande mendigo era o imperador' [the great beggar was the Emperor], because he was always

39 Ibid., 116.

40 Ibid., 326.

41 Ibid., 327.

42 Ibid., 327.

asking for things and needing people.⁴³ Couto, then, uses this moment to show the fragility of the empire of Gaza.

Imani subsequently introduces herself to Ngungunyane as a messenger sent by Vuiaze, the forbidden lover of the Gazan king, for 'um amor tão ardente poderia distrair o futuro governante' [such ardent love could distract the future ruler].⁴⁴ The king had a son with Vuiaze, Godido, but one day Vuiaze died, and her body disappeared. Therefore, the king asserts that 'confio mais no álcool que me é oferecido pelo meu inimigo do que nas bebidas que me servem os familiares'⁴⁵ [I trust more in the alcohol my enemies offer me than in the drinks my relatives serve]. Ngungunyane is preoccupied by the notion of being surrounded by disloyal people with their own interests. When Imani offers herself as a new wife, he takes the request with suspicion, asking his counsellors' opinion. In fact, Imani marrying the king is part of an assassination plot drawn up by her father: 'Não a mando para ser esposa. Vai lá para ser viúva'⁴⁶ [I'm not sending her there to be a wife. I'm sending her there to be a widow].

The undoing of the Emperor comes in Chapter 44, in the form of a letter from Germano de Melo.⁴⁷ In it we learn that the Portuguese, for fear of losing the glory of earlier battles won, ask that the army call off their mission to capture Ngungunyane. But Germano is late to the scene. The Emperor is already in the hands of his opponents, and everything happens surprisingly easily. Mia Couto opens the chapter with actual documents from Mouzinho de Albuquerque's report. 'Obriguei-o então à força a sentar-se no chão (cousa que elle nunca fazia), dizendo que ele já não era régulo dos Manguins mas um matonga como qualquer outro'⁴⁸ [I forced him to sit on the floor (which he never did), saying that he was no longer a manguins ruler but a matonga like all the rest]. When a group of women walks past Germano, they comment: 'Gugunhane sentou no chão! Os portugueses já o têm amarrado'⁴⁹ [Gungunhane sat on the floor! The Portuguese have tied

43 Ibid., 328.

44 Ibid., 346.

45 Ibid., 347.

46 Ibid., 349.

47 Ibid., 441.

48 Ibid., 442.

49 Ibid., 444.

him already]. Another group of people sing 'Abutre, abutre, vai-te embora, abutre. Nunca mais assaltarás nossas galinhas'⁵⁰ [Vulture, vulture, go away, vulture. You shall no more assail our hens].

In his book *Memories* (1985), the Mozambican writer Raúl Bernardo Honwana (1905–1994) says: 'Nunca se conseguiu perceber bem o verdadeiro sentimento dos nguni em relação ao Gugunhane ... aquela multidão gritou o seguinte: Vai-te embora, seu abutre, que dizimas as galinhas'⁵¹ [The true feeling of the Nguni in relation to Gungunhane was never well understood ... That multitude shouted: Be gone, you vulture, you who slaughter the chickens]. Mia Couto describes the moment of departure as 'uma tempestade de insultos (...) dirigida a Ngungunyane, esse mesmo rei que durante anos tinham idolatrado'⁵² [a storm of insults (...) directed at Ngungunyane, the same king who had been idolised for years].

Imani, in spite of trying to assassinate the king on the way to the sea, ends up falling into her father's trap: she is sent into exile along with her husband the Emperor, his opponent Zixaxa, and his several wives: 'naquele barco viajavam não apenas pessoas diversas mas mundos em colisão'⁵³ [not just different people but colliding worlds travelled in that boat]. The Portuguese treated all Africans the same, ignoring internal conflicts or 'colliding worlds'. This concludes the second volume of the trilogy.

Final remarks

My goal here has been to analyse how Mia Couto crosses the boundaries of how memory is re-elaborated, especially when contesting European written sources. I do so to understand how he develops the discourses, silences and fantasies of the past in order to narrate history by confronting

50 Ibid., 445.

51 Raúl Honwana, *Memórias* (Maputo, Mozambique: Edições Asa, 1989), 449.

52 Couto, *As Areias do Imperador*, 458.

53 Ibid., 460.

history's ghosts and the mythologising of the Gazan king. In this sense, as Avery Gordon argues,

writing ghost stories ... not only repair[s] representational mistakes, but also strive[s] to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter memory, for the future.⁵⁴

Mia Couto uses Ngungunyane and his stories as an instrument of mediation. He shows how ghosts are ambiguous and hard to pin down, which complicates the ways that past fantasies can evolve into shared cultures in the present. In confronting the Vatsopi people with memories that are, given their fear of waking ghosts, 'unthinkable', Couto shows that the best way forward is to give the ghost a good death so that it can no longer cause terror. This is a storyteller's logic. In his version of the story, Mia Couto brings out the humanity of the Emperor of Gaza, a character feared for his massacres against the Vatsopi; purposefully portrayed by the Portuguese as a bloodthirsty and powerful adversary; and remembered by the Mozambican leaders and liberation movements as a true resister of colonisation.

Using the voices of Ngungunyane's enemies, the Portuguese and the Vatsopi, Couto presents the Emperor as an imposing presence in the territory but one who, despite instilling fear and terror, was also a very cosmopolitan figure. The Emperor appears as a passionate person, who fell in love, suffered for love and who liked to drink port wine.

More than on the myths constructed (and under construction) around Ngungunyane, Couto builds his accounts on several small stories. As we have seen, the fragments that illustrate each chapter develop our impression of the Emperor, make us question what war is, evaluate the fragility of empires, become aware of the way language shapes us. The fictional military letters show that there is a great semantic gap between an 'emperor' and a 'nkossi.' Indeed, we also see a gap in the double spelling of the Emperor's name throughout the book: in Portuguese official documents, his name is written according to Portuguese norms and pronunciation, while in

⁵⁴ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 22.

the rest of the story, African norms dominate. I have followed that logic in this chapter.

The third volume presents avenues for further investigating the image of the Emperor after he is dethroned and exiled. If in that book Ngungunyane becomes a trophy and dies in exile, in the first two books, Ngungunyane's late entrance into the narrative make him a spectral character as well, even when he is alive. It is in the second book that Couto centrally develops Ngungunyane's dichotomies that shed light on the conflicting position he evokes in the popular imagination. The characters' experiences in relation to Ngungunyane, along with the historical documents that underpin the text, allow us to explore the many layers of this mythical figure.

Though it was initially the Mozambican leaders who, for political reasons, turned Ngungunyane into a national hero, the later vandalism of his statue was a reaction to the reappearance of a ghost – and even to the perceived legitimacy of FRELIMO. This ambivalence around the figure of Ngungunyane persists in contestations of the Mozambican narrative. Waking this ghost up enables Couto to approach the historical dimension of the character from a bi-national perspective, as well as to assess his political value as a national hero. More than just telling his version of the story, Couto illustrates how various versions of history can overlap or complement each other and be adapted to serve political discourses. Finally, in his trilogy, Mia Couto reveals that history is living and that it is built in consonance with the present.

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PART III

Mixing Wor(l)ds

RECONFIGURING IDENTITIES IN THE PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING WORLD

'Year by year, Mia Couto has found increasing numbers of readers worldwide. Yet his subtle, paradoxical and often playful oeuvre remains insufficiently understood, especially in the dominant Anglophone field of literary criticism. *The Worlds of Mia Couto* makes in this context a crucial intervention: theoretically astute, wide-ranging and deeply knowledgeable, the essays in this volume make it clear why no one with an interest in world literature or African literature today can afford to ignore this Lusophone Mozambican writer.'

— Stefan Helgesson, Stockholm University

Mia Couto has been recognised internationally as one of the most important African authors of our times. His rapidly growing opus shifts fluidly between various modes of writing, mixing historical elements with poetic and autobiographic ones, in often unpredictable and intellectually challenging ways. With each new book, the writer multiplies various original worlds, creating new challenges for his readers. Each of Couto's texts opens up a rhizomic world which in turn contains (another world), inviting us to review and adjust our earlier interpretations of his oeuvre as a whole.

In *The Worlds of Mia Couto* a diverse group of literary experts sets out to explore the Couto's oeuvre in relation not only to the imaginary worlds created by the author but also to the complex geographical, cultural and literary contexts that are woven into the texture of his work. While Couto has increasingly received scholarly attention, the international connections and connectivities of his work have been largely neglected so far. This book endeavours to show that Couto's work can be read beyond its particular Mozambican and Lusophone context by paying attention to the broader African and global literary contexts, including Latin America, Asia and Europe. Mia Couto's work is, for instance, of particular interest for rethinking, from the margins, established concepts of 'World Literature', 'globalisation' and the 'postcolonial'. The various chapters of *The Worlds of Mia Couto* focus thus on some of the – often unexpected – international connections across his fictional and non-fictional work beyond the Lusophone literary space, crossing cultural, linguistic and gender boundaries.

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The Worlds of Mia Couto

ISBN 978-1-78074-001-3

