RESEARCH ARTICLE

The mirror of colonial trauma in Honwana's short stories: the 'eye' that accuses and incites

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This article looks at the various ways in which the Mozambican writer, Luís Bernardo Honwana, displays colonial trauma and oppression in his short story collection, *Nós Matámos o Cão-Tinhoso*, first published in 1964, and then in 1969 as an English translation with the title *We Killed Mangy-Dog and Other Mozambican Stories*. Due to the scope of this study my analysis will concentrate on three stories from this collection: 'Inventory of Furniture and Effects', 'The Old Woman', and 'Dina'. I show how the writer uses specific objects and actions to display the traumas and psychological fragmentation affecting colonial subjects and illustrate how those are directly linked to the brutality of the Portuguese colonial regime. Honwana's literature qualifies as 'literature of the eye'. The author is more interested in 'displaying' than overtly 'saying' or explaining. His writing becomes what can be described as the *acute optical surveillance* of a failed regime that dehumanizes both oppressed and oppressor: it functions as the *literal mirror* of oppression, self-oppression, unconsciousness, humiliation and trauma. By putting that *mirror* before our eyes the author is taking a firm stand against a highly inhumane regime, and informing the oppressed (and perhaps also the oppressor) about their own condition, and thus, one can argue, inciting them to take action against the regime responsible for such a condition. In the last two stories, special attention is given to self-oppression, internalized oppression, and the various coping mechanisms developed by the colonized subjects and how these constitute symptoms of an alienated society – a society where individuals lose their spiritual, emotional, psychological and rational integrative connections, becoming unconscious beings who cannot be, or have great difficulty being, 'whole' again, 'seeing' the full spectrum of their lives and envisaging a 'freer' state of being.

Keywords: Mozambique; colonial trauma; psychological fragmentation; repression; coping mechanisms; literature of the eye; optical surveillance

Introduction

The only possible commitment of the writer is literature. It is not reasonable henceforth, to claim in our novels to serve a political cause, even a cause which seems just to us, even if in our political life we advocate its victory. Political life ceaselessly obliges us to assume known significations: social, historical, moral. Art is more modest or more ambitious: in art, nothing is ever known in advance. Before the work of art, there is nothing – no certainty, no thesis, no message. To believe that the novelist has

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'something to say' and that he then looks for a way to say it represents the gravest of misconceptions. (Robbe-Grillet 1965, pp. 141–142)

This paper explores the various ways in which the Mozambican writer, Luís Bernardo Honwana, displays colonial trauma and oppression in his short story collection, *Nós Matámos o Cão-Tinhoso*, first published in 1964, and then, in 1969, as an English translation by Dorothy Guedes with the title *We Killed Mangy-Dog and Other Mozambican Stories*.¹ Due to the scope of this study, my analysis will concentrate on three stories from this collection: 'Inventory of Furniture and Effects', 'The Old Woman', and 'Dina', although occasionally other stories will be used to argue a certain point. I demonstrate how the writer uses specific objects and actions to display the traumas and psychological fragmentation affecting colonial subjects and illustrate how those are directly linked to the brutality of the Portuguese colonial regime.

In the last two stories, particular attention is given to self-oppression, internalized oppression, the various coping mechanisms developed by the colonized subjects and how these constitute symptoms of an alienated society where individuals lose their spiritual, emotional, psychological and rational integrative connections, becoming unconscious beings who cannot be, or have great difficulty being, 'whole' again, 'seeing' the full spectrum of their lives and envisaging a 'freer' state of being. In my analysis, and particularly when analysing the story 'Dina', I make use of certain psychoanalytical concepts known as *dissociation* and *displacement* to illustrate the dynamics of oppression, repression, and self-oppression, dynamics that tend to be fostered within the unequal context of colonizer/colonized societies. Moreover, and because Honwana admits having been influenced in some ways by Alain Robbe-Grillet's *nouveau roman* (Labin 1998), I discuss some of the similarities between the two writers, while at the same time demonstrating their sharp differences. For if Robbe-Grillet is, as he says, fundamentally apolitical, Honwana is fundamentally political: he does have 'something to say.'

Honwana's literature could be described as 'the literature of the eye', taking after Alain Robbe-Grillet (Labin 1998), who is considered the father of the *nouveau roman* (Robbe-Grillet 1965).² Yet Honwana's artistic concerns vary vastly from those of Robbe-Grillet, starting with the fact that the former has a clear political agenda, whereas the latter is clearly a fan of 'art for art's sake'. Like Robbe-Grillet, Honwana is more interested in 'displaying' than overtly 'saying' or explaining. Rather than 'saying' and explaining via the use of overt discursive techniques, the latter skilfully uses certain narrative methods such as metaphor or metonym, silence or ambiguous language to demonstrate the degree of trauma and oppression affecting the lives of colonized subjects in Mozambique. The author's ambivalent narrative techniques become themselves, in some ways, the reflection of the repression, trauma and unconsciousness experienced by the subjects of his stories. By only hinting at, but never overtly saying, what needs to be said or discovered, such techniques mimic the very problems faced by the subjects in question, for they also cannot say or see what needs to be said and seen and understood in order to attain what we can call the 'cure' or at least the beginning of the cure: in other words, the end of colonial oppression.

By physically and persistently displaying the oppression and trauma, Honwana's writing becomes a precise (almost obsessive) optical lens allowing us to view in great detail, and take consciousness of, the diseased dysfunctional society in question. His writing becomes what can be described as the *acute optical surveillance* (carrying a

strong accusatory connotation) of a failed regime that dehumanizes both oppressed and oppressor: it functions as the *literal mirror* of oppression, self-oppression, unconsciousness, humiliation and trauma. By putting that *mirror* before our eyes the author is taking a firm stand against a highly inhumane regime, and informing the oppressed (and perhaps also the oppressor) about their own condition. And thus, one can argue, inciting them to take action against the regime responsible for such a condition. Honwana's writing is indeed the 'eye' that accuses and incites. It is a writing clearly concerned with the political, in sharp contrast with Robbe-Grillet's literary thesis and agenda as stated in the introductory quotation herein. Unlike Robbe-Grillet's narratives, and more specifically *La jalousie*, which the critic Leo Bersani (1970) has described as 'narrative murder' because of its inherent contradiction, provisional character, fluidity and even absurdity, Honwana's story line is *alive and well*: it tells a very specific story that does not leave much room for the fluid, the contradictory or the absurd in the Grilletian sense.

In an interview conducted in 1994, Honwana tells us that when he wrote *We Killed Mangy-Dog and Other Mozambican Stories*, more than thirty years ago, he had been exposed to what he calls 'the literature of the eye' (Labin 1998, p. 659) and, more specifically, to writers such as Salinger, Reverdy and Robbe-Grillet, as well as to certain cinematographic artistic concepts in vogue during the 1960s such as the concept of the anti-hero. And as Patrick Chabal also suggests in *The Postcolonial Literature of Lusophone Africa*:

Of [...] immediate relevance to the Portuguese-speaking Africans were the neo-realist literatures to which they had most ready access – that is, Portuguese, Brazilian and North American. Of those the Brazilian was the closest source of inspiration, but not the only one. Portuguese neo-realists, which emerged as a counterpart of the stifling cultural atmosphere of the *Estado Novo* [New State/Salazar's Fascist regime], represented the most significant attempt in Portugal to deal with the main social and political problems of the time. There was thus a natural affinity between, on one hand, Portuguese neo-realist writers critical of a dictatorial and obscurantist regime suppressing free expression and presiding over massive social inequalities and, on the other, Africans seeking to write about the realities of colonial oppression and exploitation. (Chabal 1996, p. 27)

Even though Honwana admits that his work may have been influenced by Western literary and cinematographic techniques, themes and concerns, he considers his writings to be unique and not merely 'subservient and imitative' (Labin 1998, p. 659). And indeed Honwana's writing both possesses its own uniqueness and portrays a very specific Mozambican colonial context. As Honwana further states (Labin 1998, p. 659), his generation of writers was very much in contact with South African literature: both Mozambique and South Africa were fighting similar anti-colonial and racial battles and would thus recreate those concerns in their literature. Like many other African writers of his generation, Honwana's writing is concerned with specific local socio-political issues, and is not merely an 'irresponsible' and imitative playing with Western artistic paradigms. Nor it is a mere exercise for the reader's mind, as Robbe-Grillet often describes his own art and the very idea of the *nouveau roman*.

In his book, *For a New Novel*, Robbe-Grillet writes:

The *New Novel* is interested only in man and his condition in the world. [...] Man is present on every page, in every line, in every word. Even if many objects are presented and are described with great care, there is always, and especially, the eye which sees

them, the thought which distorts them. The objects in our novels never have a presence outside human perception, real or imaginary. (1965, pp. 137–138)

Earlier on in the same book Robbe-Grillet also indicates that 'We speak to the world but the world does not speak back to us' (1965, p. 57). From these statements we can conclude that the Grilletian *New Novel* is engaged in exploring human inability to have direct access to the world as it really is. Robbe-Grillet's novelistic concerns seem to be more philosophical and epistemological in nature and less concerned with the socio-political. The French writer is more involved in conducting an investigation of human epistemological limitations, in other words, in exploring the idea that the true reality of things exists only outside human perception, than he is in exploring socio-political realities. In that sense he is shying away from the arrogance and anthropomorphic 'cannibalistic' tendencies of constant incorporation that tend to characterize our society, a society where humans see everything in relation to themselves, in other words, using a human-based paradigm of apprehension, which considers itself the epistemological model *par excellence*. The following excerpt clearly illustrates Robbe-Grillet's position in relation to (his) novel – what it is, what it is not, the impossibility of its authority (and accuracy) in relation to the world – in sum, its phenomenological and non-anthropomorphic aims:

The New Novel does not propose a ready-made signification. Which brings us to the question: does our life have a meaning? What is it? What is man's place on earth? We see at once why the Balzacian objects were so reassuring: they belonged to a world of which man was a master, such objects were chattels, properties, which it was merely a question of possessing, or retaining, or acquiring. There was a constant identity between these objects and their owner: a simple waistcoat was already a character and a social position at the same time. Man was the reason for all things, the key to the universe, and its natural master, by divine right [...]. Not very much of it is left today [...]. The significations around us are no more than partial, provisional, even contradictory and always contested. How could the work of art claim to illustrate a signification known in advance, whatever it might be? [...] Does reality have a meaning? The contemporary artist cannot answer this question: he knows nothing about it. [...] We no longer believe in fixed significations, the ready-made meanings which afforded man the old divine order and subsequently the rationalist order of the nineteenth century. (Robbe-Grillet 1965, pp. 140–141)

The Grilletian novelistic aspirations can be seen as admirable for they show the author's concern for things non-human and for their right to remain so. We can of course claim that such aspirations are only ideal (impossible) representations by invoking, for instance, language's inability to create an objective a-human world. Being a product of the human mind, language is saturated with human insights, and therefore incapable of 'pure' representation in the sense desired by Robbe-Grillet. Even when Robbe-Grillet tries to evade his anthropomorphic lens by using the most 'objective' type of language, something he tries to do in *La jalousie* (1957) and *Le voyeur* (1970) for example, by suppressing most adjectives and using expressions that seem devoid of the anthropomorphic, his success is limited and, inadvertently, he ends up offering human insights. Robbe-Grillet is of course acutely aware of the impossibility of representing such a non-anthropomorphic world, for he also says, 'Man is present on every page, in every line, in every word' and 'The objects in [the *New Novel*] never have a presence outside human perception, real or imaginary' (1965, p. 138).³

It seems then that both Honwana and Robbe-Grillet are concerned with the condition of humans in the world and how humans relate to that same world. They

both describe a world inhabited by people who are always relating to others and otherness: people, things and animals. But unlike Robbe-Grillet, Honwana's main concern is not philosophical and epistemological, in other words, not related to men's incapacity to see things and objects as they inherently are, because objects and people are part of a specific social and political network of established meanings – and so there is little room to doubt that an apple is an apple, or to use Robbe-Grillet's example, little room to doubt that 'a simple waistcoat [is] already a character and a social position at the same time'. Moreover, and also in contradiction to Robbe-Grillet, in Honwana's fiction (colonial) 'man' appears as the master of the universe, the master that classifies, imposes and commands, a master that has no doubt that things are what they are because he has decided so (or *knows* so). This master not only has no doubt that he can understand the world, that he is the subject in relation to the physical (object) world, but he also does not doubt his right to impose upon that same world. But he does more than that: he imposes upon the colonial subject, whom he sees as different and inferior. His paradigm of apprehension is therefore both anthropomorphic and racist: he 'others' both the physical world and the human (black) subject.

Honwana is primarily interested in social relationships and dynamics, in relationships between humans and other humans and how those dynamics reflect a certain repressive power structure. And when he focuses on the interaction between humans and things (as he does so intensely in 'Inventory of Furniture and Effects') he wants to show how those things reflect the social position or even the psychological framework of the character in question, rather than show that humans cannot see (know) what things really are, as is usually the case in Robbe-Grillet's novels. By carefully describing and focusing on specific objects, plants, people, external gestures, movements, characters' positions, and through the use of linguistic metaphors and metonyms, the narrator of these stories is indeed telling a very specific story – one of oppression, self-oppression, alienation, helplessness, humiliation and trauma. The mere object of focus of the narrating eye is always charged with psychological and socio-political meanings, often bringing on accusations against the colonial system and directing the reader to see a world of racialized oppression and self-repression and unconsciousness. Honwana's *sightsite* is thus always saturated with *insights*.

'Inventory of Furniture and Effects'

'Inventory of Furniture and Effects' is perhaps the story where Honwana becomes most phenomenological in the sense that the narrator's eye is intensely focused on all the things, objects and people of the house being described. The title of the story is not without cause but rather a preparation for what is to come. And what is to come is the complete listing and description of a young boy's inheritance: a small house, stuffed with too many people (and things) and lacking most basic conditions. Yet unlike in many of Robbe-Grillet's novels, Honwana's concentration on, and obsession with things, objects and people is not intended to point to the incapacity of the narrator to perceive reality as it really is or confuse the reader about what he is intending to say. The things under the narrator's gaze do not give a sense of the fluidity and absurdity that characterize Robbe-Grillet's novels, but point rather to a

particular socio-economic condition and tell a particular story: the story of an oppressed black Mozambican family living under Portuguese white colonial power.⁴

The detailed description and inventory of what is in the house serve not only to show the reader that many things are missing, but also the state of the existing things and their poor quality. The eye of the young narrator carefully moves from one compartment of the house to the other, carefully examining and describing its contents, their position, the material they are made of and their deteriorating state. The list is long and endless: the number of rooms, beds and people in each bed, the type of mattress (straw or kapok), the magazines, boxes with books, bookcases, the number and types of chairs (seven and all different), the walls, the *why* of the blackened walls of the dining room, corridor and bedrooms, the colour and type of material (thick and yellowish) the curtains are made of and so forth:

The dining room walls are all blackened because until now Mama used to have the stove in the corner. It's occupied by a nondescript, battered table, surrounded by seven chairs, all different [...] and several sacks in the corner behind the door. At meal times, as we all don't fit around the table, Gita and Nelita sit on the floor facing each other [...]. The aluminium is placed between them. When it's cold they sit on a straw mat. The plate invariably contains rice and peanut curry [...]. The sitting-room shares a wall with the room we are in, and another with Mama's room [...]. The curtains in Mama's room are made of the same cloth. Only in this room the curtains are different. They're made of a thick, yellowish material. Tina says the cloth is ugly, but when Papa was imprisoned she took down two curtains and made them into a skirt that didn't look like any other skirt I had ever seen [...]. The mattress makes a noise of crushing straw. All the mattresses of our beds are made of straw, except Mama's. Hers is of kapok [...]. Apart from the kapok mattress and the bed it rests on, Mama's room has a cot where Joãozinho and Carlinha sleep, a chest of drawers, a wardrobe, two bed-side tables, one on each side of the bed with the kapok mattress, and a camphor chest with various suitcases on it. [...] Underneath this bed my drawings and painting materials are kept, packed into two wooden boxes. (pp. 20–23)

This lengthy description of the entire house, its contents, and the family it shelters, which in fact extends from the beginning to the end of the story (the story is nothing but a description), illustrate the narrator's socio-economic condition and position. Such minute and salient descriptions become direct metonyms (parts which testify to the nature of the whole) of the colonial condition of Mozambican *assimilados*.⁵ Although the description does not, for the most part, directly focus on feelings, thoughts or people's actions, that which is under optical surveillance functions as the mirror of the social reality in question. Like Robbe-Grillet, the narrator of 'The Inventory of Furniture and Effects' is scarce in his use of adjectives, and yet we are able to come to socially charged conclusions because the things being described are saturated with social meanings. Given the fact that Honwana was writing during a period of high censorship (Portuguese fascism was then at its climax) one could also suggest that his writing style was a matter of precaution, that is, a way to avoid prosecution or even imprisonment. In this story Honwana never accuses the system directly, only pointing to the various external things and leaving it up to the reader to see into what he is really saying.⁶

The detailed physical description of the house clearly reveals to us that the story being told (shown) in 'The Inventory of Furniture and Effects' is one of poverty and oppression. We know that the house is poor and that the family is barely making ends meet. We read that the dining room walls and even some of the other rooms are blackened because until recently, the mother had to cook in the dining room (no

chimney or kitchen exist). We also learn that there are seven chairs but they are all different, in other words, the family cannot afford expensive and new furniture sets and probably buys pieces here and there. Moreover, not enough chairs (and plates) are available for the whole family: Gita and Nelita have to sit on the floor and eat from a common aluminium plate. There is only one kapok mattress: all the rest are of straw, forcing the kids to regularly sneak into their parents' bed to lie down in it because it is more comfortable. There are five (or six) people sleeping in one room; there are only two sleeping rooms for a very large family; Tina is forced to make a skirt out of the 'ugly' curtain material. The young boy, who has an acute sense of his family's social position, appears to have internalized the social codes that power his society and be highly aware of the fact that his family occupies the lower ranks of society. When the narrator tells us that his sisters' plate 'invariably contains rice and peanut curry' we get the sense that he knows that in other houses people do not eat that every day. In a similar manner, when he says his sister's skirt 'did not look like any other [he] had ever seen', we also know that he has been exposed to other types of skirts, probably more fashionable, not made of out of 'ugly' curtain material. From the descriptions the boy gives us we know he is using a model of comparison that comes from the outside society, a model that has informed him that wealthier and powerful families have bigger houses, nicer furniture and eat different types of food everyday. By focusing so intensely and with such infinitesimal precision on all the material details of the house, including the food and the clothes the family eats and wears, the boy informs us that he is bothered by the nature (quality and state) of his family's possessions – he knows other families have houses that are better furnished than his, houses that have enough rooms, plates, beds, chairs, and so forth.

In the story the description of the house is taking place not through direct eye contact but through the *eye of the memory*. We know that the boy and all his family are in bed, and so it is either night-time or early morning. Despite that, he is able to describe the entire house, all its contents and the position of such contents with astonishing detail – the house and its contents are deeply imprinted in the memory of the young boy. What might that tell us in terms of his condition as a colonized black youth? How can that illustrate the psychology of the oppressed? The house reflects the oppression, the poorness and the smallness of his world: there aren't enough rooms, beds, plates, chairs, or kapok mattresses, not enough air to breathe even. And the boy is acutely aware of that:

The air is heavy in the room, because apart from everything being closed, five people, including me, are sleeping here ... Papa is snoring. In the other bed Lolota and Nelita are snoring. Next to me here, under my arm, Nandito is also snoring. Yesterday, when I crept out quietly to open the door, after making sure that the others were fast asleep, I heard snoring in the other room. I don't know if it was Mama or Tina ... I wonder if I also snore when I sleep.... Nandito turned over and said something. He must be dreaming. (p. 20)

There is barely any escape from the many snoring sounds, the breathing and the bodies of the entire family. The boy narrator seems to have no possibility of any privacy or freedom because next to him, right under his arm, Nandito is snoring and dreaming unknown dreams. The physical prison that the house represents becomes the psychological prison of the boy, a prison that is everywhere and is imposed upon him by the condition of his own family which in turn is imposed by the colonial

system. The small stuffed house is the constant reminder of the boy's physical and psychological condition, the condition of an oppressed boy, from an oppressed family, from an oppressed people, from an oppressed country. The house in fact becomes the repressive system controlling the country, a system that keeps an 'eye' on those who want to undermine it, and the boy, the most aware of the family, who is awake at night reflecting upon his condition and that of his family, can only leave the 'house' when everyone is asleep. His dreams of freedom only come out in the darkness of the night: it is then that he creeps 'out quietly to open the door after making sure that the others are asleep'. This seems to mimic his father's situation, whose (interesting) books are kept under the bed in boxes, hidden from the censoring colonial 'eye'.

It should also be noted that in his description, the narrator emphasizes the family member's bodies, the noise they make through snoring, how they are almost on top of one another. The psychological (inner) life of the people under gaze, on the other hand, is left undisclosed and we are only told that Nandito murmurs something imperceptible as if he were dreaming. His imperceptible dream murmurs can symbolize unrealized but also unconscious dreams: unrealized because he cannot materialize them under the oppressive forces governing his life, and unconscious because he might not even be consciously aware of his dreams given the psychological oppression exerted upon him by the regime. Since the oppressed often accommodates to the oppression as a coping mechanism, he forgets that he is in fact being oppressed, and thus cannot truly know his dreams, which would be the first step to then realize them. Unawareness and unconsciousness are keeping him in the prison house of oppression and self-oppression. The very fact that the narrator focuses on the bodies and not on the inner life of his family members indicates that these people's minds are dormant: they cannot think clearly because they suffer from psychological internalized oppression. The snoring and imperceptible dream murmurs are only vague, confused manifestations of that oppression that does not know how to (or cannot) voice itself. All we have is the body in its inertia and apathy, a body punished, controlled by the regime, a body stuffed in a small house. And the mind follows the body, and it too becomes quiet and acquiescent.

As demonstrated, the narrator's *eye* sees through a heightened lens of social consciousness, insights and worries. All that is being described is far from objective for it reflects specific kinds of historical, social and psychological conditions.

'The Old Woman'

The message of this story is not openly told, and the readers have to look for it amidst the vague and metaphoric language – a language that insinuates but does not say. The story opens with a description of a violent scene: the narrator has just been beaten, is lying on the floor and tells us how he feels and what he sees:

I swear I never lost consciousness, although just before falling down I experienced that slowing-down of sensations which, when it seizes us, restricts our capacity for self-defense to those purely instinctive and stupidly slow gestures we all recognize in a groggy boxer ... When I opened my eyes the buzzing started, and I was furious with myself for having fallen. The echo was affecting my sight so much that I wasn't at all sure what I saw, but afterwards when my eyes stopped trembling I became aware of the two darkly clad legs, stiff and tense, straddling my body, stretching way up, and converging onto the shining metal plaque of the belt. Above them, far above, close to

the lamp on the ceiling, the face stared at me attentively, smiling with satisfaction. (p. 24)

When reading this scene we might indeed think that we are watching a fight between two boxers, or at least the moment when the winner attains his victory. The narrator himself compares the way he feels to a groggy boxer. The narrator is 'straddled' by the legs of the person who appears to be his victorious opponent, who is described as having 'darkly clad legs, stiff and tense', a 'shining metal plaque' on his belt and is looking at his victim 'attentively, smiling with satisfaction'. The position of both men, the clothes of the aggressor and the way his legs are described are all reminiscent of a big and ferocious boxer who has just annihilated his opponent and is happy with his victory. But as the story proceeds, we discover that the narrator was not at a boxing-ring but rather at a bar where he had been beaten by someone. The motives of the beating are not clearly stated, but a close analysis seems to demonstrate that the attack was racially motivated since the narrator points to many other (similar) incidents that regularly happen to him:

Of course this was nothing compared with what happened in the bar just now, and in all the other bars, restaurants, cinema foyers and those places where everybody eyed me strangely, as if they repudiated something in me – something queer, ridiculous, exotic: Heaven knows what else. They *make* me sick! ... Even those who try to pretend that they are not like the others are only different on neutral ground, or only when they need me, because they too surround themselves with walls of taboos, and defend themselves with the same nauseous, nauseating stares against anyone who goes beyond those walls. And I should know! (p. 25)

The narrator is suggesting here that people dislike him because he crosses 'the walls of taboos' that guide, inform and organize their lives. He does something that provokes the rage of the others – those who dislike, abuse and beat him up. In other words, he transgresses the role his society has forged for him. The expression 'crossing of the walls of taboos' could indeed mean that the narrator enters places that have 'For Whites Only' signs.⁷ As he tells us, people are always 'eye[ing him] strangely in all the other bars, restaurants, cinema foyers' thus suggesting he is stubbornly penetrating the forbidden space, the space deemed reserved for a certain section of society.

Towards the end of the story, when the narrator is speaking to his mother, we are again confronted with comments which do not openly refer to racial issues:

Yes, this isn't everything, and it's not even anything. They made me small. Yes, that's it. That is everything. And why? They don't even have to say it out loud. And everything falls on me, not as a soft erosion, for this no one feels, but it falls, suddenly, with agonizing noises inside me, and falls, and falls, and falls ... (p. 30)

That which 'falls and falls and falls' and which does not need to be said out loud is likely referring to the racism and discrimination that the narrator has experienced throughout his life: it is the looks, the smiles on the others' faces, in sum, all the indirect ways that mock and devalue his difference, his way of being and make him the inferior 'other'. All these experiences are more hurtful than the physical beating at the bar, as he points out. The narrator further tells us that he does not want to tell his brothers and sisters about what happened at the bar because he does not want to destroy their 'monument of Youth and Faith':

No, I wouldn't tell them. It wasn't for this that I had come home. Anyway, I wouldn't be the one to destroy anything for them, whatever it was. All in good time someone

would be charged with telling them the truth about the lie, about all those lies. They themselves would feel the bitterness of having to destroy the monument of Youth and Faith, built on the lie of a hope. No, I would not tell them ... and even if I did, what would be the good? Yes, what good would it do, seeing that the filth, the damned filth of it all would come to these children in other circumstances, with other details, and with other names. (pp. 29–30)

This thing that 'falls, and falls and falls' affects not only the narrator but also affects (will affect) his entire family. His younger siblings will themselves face racist treatment in their future lives; they will experience that 'filth', the 'truth about the lie' and 'all those lies' when the time comes for them to be exposed to the discriminatory laws governing this colonial society. The narrator wants to delay their pain, and thus avoids telling them about the 'filth' because it is too soon to destroy their hopes and young innocence.

There are other signs of racial and colonial oppression present in 'The Old Woman' – sites that paint a very vivid picture, sites that tell a very specific story. We get to see that the family is poor and hardly has enough food to eat. The children fight for food and steal meat from each other's plates, the mother refuses to eat probably because she knows there is not enough food for all of them, and tea is used to camouflage hunger:

'That Quito's chewing the meat he stole from my plate while I wasn't looking. It's mine, Mama! Chi! Quito, you're a thief!'... 'This meat, Kati, this here? It's the meat Mama gave me, I'm telling you.' And to me, 'Didn't she brother?'... The Old Woman seemed to be upset. She gazed at the bottom of the pot and smiled at me apologetically. 'All that's left is *ucoco*'!... 'So why do you keep asking me if I want to eat – anyway, what are you going to eat?' 'I'm not hungry,' the old woman replied. 'But there's no more food, isn't that it?' 'I am not hungry, I'm not, really I'm not, but if you like I can make some tea in a second. Would you like some?' (pp. 27–28)

The narrator himself is very aware of the poverty that is awaiting him at home and that is why he often avoids going there:

They made me sick! And I having to restrain myself from exploding precisely for the sake of the old woman and the sniveling kids! ... I needed to go home. I would eat rice and peanut curry as *they* wanted me to, not to fill my stomach. I needed to go home to fill my ears with screams, my eyes with misery and my conscience with rice and peanut curry. (pp. 25–26, my emphasis)

The 'they' in this passage refers to the same people who beat him at the bar, those who constantly give him the 'nauseous, nauseating stares', in other words, those who have taken his country and imposed the so-called superiority of their race, and right to own and explore the land: the colonial power. 'They' are the ones who keep him hungry and angry, the ones whose children do not have to steal meat from each other's plates like his siblings, the ones whose voices and 'nauseating stares' have so deeply entered his psyche that he can no longer fight against them. As the narrator tells us, 'That in the bar just now was really what had been happening all along. I didn't manage to hit the fellow because he was all the others, and it was exactly as such that he hit me. Let's face it – they're all the same' (p. 25). Going back to the position of the narrator on the floor after being defeated by his aggressor, we are told that the aggressor's legs are 'straddling' the latter's body. It should be noted here that the original Portuguese expression is '*duas pernas, nascidas uma de cada lado*' ('two legs born out of each side'). The English verb 'straddling' does not quite catch the meaning of the original Portuguese verb '*nascer*'. The latter literally means 'to be

born' or 'to grow', implying that two legs have been allowed to grow, to be born there because the narrator has permitted so. In other words, the legs were not always there, they are something that has imposed itself gradually and slowly, until it gained roots, until it penetrated the narrator's mind. The description of the legs around the body symbolizes the psychology of the oppressed: he has allowed the oppressor's philosophy of self-proclaimed superiority to enter his psychic core, and that constitutes his ultimate failure and imprisonment, his incapacity to fight and defeat the enemy.⁸

That psychology of the oppressed is illustrated in other ways in the story. For example, the narrator states: 'the blows I was receiving produced no corresponding physical sensation, because I was aware of them only through a fading echo slowly reverberating *in my head. This cursed echo, and it alone, was responsible for my fall ...' (p. 24). What exactly is this 'cursed echo'? At first we might think the 'cursed echo' is only the reaction one experiences in the process of losing consciousness, that stage when one can no longer fully feel the physical pain. But we must take a closer look at the way this paragraph opens: 'I swear that I never really lost consciousness, although just before falling down I experienced that slowing down of sensations which, when it seizes us, restricts our capacity for self-defense to those purely instinctive and stupidly slow gestures we all recognize in a groggy boxer ...' (p. 2). The narrator 'swears' that he never lost consciousness, and at the end of paragraph he actually states, 'I fell slowly, fully conscious that I was falling', which again seems to suggest that the echo was indeed the one responsible for his fall and beating. It is this 'cursed echo' that keeps the narrator impotent and incapable of fighting or of voicing his anger openly towards the aggressor. The 'echo' then symbolizes two things: the voices of those who continuously insult him and which he hears everywhere, voices that never leave him for they are ingrained in his consciousness, and the psychology of the oppressed person who after constantly experiencing abuse (directly or indirectly) starts to believe he/she is in fact inferior and reaches a state of apathy, thus becoming incapable of fighting for liberation, which is precisely what happens at the bar. The narrator cannot fight because of the 'cursed echo' that slows down his physical movements, making him like a groggy boxer who cannot stand firm and fight the aggressor. It is not that the narrator is physically unfit to fight or that he is in fact weaker than his aggressor, but rather that he psychologically believes he is weaker (loses his mental strength) and thus gives up the fight and lets himself be beaten. The 'echo' is 'cursed' precisely because it comes from inside of the narrator's mind, it has entered his psychic core, constantly whispering to him and reminding him that he is weaker and inferior to the aggressors (the white, colonial power). Thus, the narrator becomes his own worst enemy: it is his 'I' against his 'I' and not just 'them' against 'him'. The narrator knows that he is being humiliated, oppressed and subjugated, for he says, 'I fell slowly, fully conscious that I was falling', and yet is incapable of hitting back at his enemy and because of that he feels angry at himself. He knows it is all a 'lie' but is unable to combat that same 'lie'.

Honwana himself agrees that his stories display a 'consciousness of subjugation'⁹ (Labin 1998, p. 657). Many of his characters (and notably the narrator-characters) are aware of their state of subjugation and yet do little to change their lives. Honwana further comments that by displaying the submission and humiliation of black Mozambicans in his stories, he intends to make it 'evident and shocking' (Labin 1998, p. 657) to the reader, which in turn might incite him/her to take the

initiative to fight such annihilating subjugation. In fact, when asked why the call to revolution is not made in a direct manner in his stories, the author answers:

The appeal to revolution, the appeal to violence, can, I suppose, also be done this way: it does not need to be explicit. I even think that such an appeal is more profound, more permanent precisely because it is unexpressed. If these stories were to end with chest punches and words of command, perhaps we would not be here today discussing it, 30 years after. (Labin 1998, pp. 657–658)

We can now understand how and why the concept of the anti-hero, borrowed from 1960s Western cinematography, serves a very specific purpose in Honwana's writing. The use of such concept allows him to display and criticize the psychology of the oppressed, to display internalized oppression, which might serve to incite the oppressed to revolution, to action. We could even suggest that such a technique can touch the oppressor, allow him to *see* the *poor* human being that he has engendered by putting in place a system that is inherently flawed and inhumane.

'Dina'

In the story 'Dina'¹⁰ we also find the display of oppression at many levels, along with the display of trauma, self-repression and even a certain 'conscience of subjugation'. The story begins with the minute description of all the movements made by Madala,¹¹ the old man who is working in the cornfields, his job being the extraction (by hand) of unwanted weeds, which grow among the corn:

Bent from the waist, with his hands hanging towards the ground, Madala heard the last of the twelve strokes of mid-day. [...] The sun was shining directly onto his bare back, but it was better to endure it for a while longer. [...] When the muscles of his head began to hurt him, because of the strain imposed on them in keeping his head raised, he let his arms fall until they touched the fleshy, slippery leaves of the weeds he had to pull out. He fingered mechanically until he felt the firm resistance of the slender stem, inserted his fingers between the branches, and stiffened his body. Although the plant did not withstand the wrench with any strength, the tendons behind his knee joints throbbed painfully. Then he lifted up the plant to revive himself with the strong fragrance of the black soil which clung to its white roots. [...] He again stiffened his body and allowed himself to lean over backwards until the plant he held in his hand resisted no longer. This was how he saved himself all but the indispensable movements. Thus the effort in pulling up a plant actually involved the *application of part of his own body's weight,* and not the flexion of his arm muscles, which only bent from time to time to imbibe strength from the clumps of earth which clung to their roots. (pp. 1–2)

The narrator's eye follows all the movements performed by Madala as if it were a precise camera displaying to us the *problem* at hand. From these excerpts, the reader knows that the job performed by the old man is a painful and difficult, and one that Madala has been doing for a very long time. The old man has developed an efficient technique of extracting the weeds, one which requires minimal physical effort as he uses only part of his body weight to do the job rather the arm muscles, which he only uses occasionally. Because he is very sick, such a technique allows him to continue working despite the atrocious attacks of pain which frequently assail him. The concentration of the narrator's eye on Madala's movements is important because it allows us to understand how an old and sick man, who has spent his entire life working under very difficult conditions, has been forced to find a survival solution.

The opening paragraphs of the story are full of expressions, descriptions and actions related to sight. First, the narrator's eye is very attentive of all the

movements performed by the story's main characters, including their facial expressions and change of positions. Second, the characters are themselves also very watchful of each other. At the beginning of the story, we have Madala working in the cornfields, hidden under the corn. Not only are all his movements described by the narrator in great detail, but he himself is carefully and vigilantly watching the movement of the Overseer's legs through the stalks of corn, as well as the movements of his co-worker Filimone, who is himself watching the Overseer and Madala:

Raising his head he *sighted* the greenish white trousers of the Overseer between the stalks of corn two paces away. [...] the Overseer must be very hungry. He *looked again* at the legs ten paces away, *and saw* that they were in the same position. *Casting his eyes beyond them, he saw* a dark patch which was Filimone's body, also doubled over the top of the tallest corn stalks, waiting for the order to stop working. [...] Madala *looked through* the corn stalks again, wondering whether he had not heard the Overseer's voice [...]. He did not get up right away. It would not be a good thing for *the Overseer* to notice that he was in a hurry to stop work. [...] Filimone, who only had his head sticking out, *sank down to his eyes* when he heard the yells of the Overseer, *but seeing* Madala, he gained courage, and straightened up with a somewhat *challenging look*. Gradually Tandane, Djimo and Muthambi emerged from the field, *with their eyes fixed* on the Overseer. (pp. 1–6, my emphasis)

Everyone is keeping a close eye on everyone else, everyone is spying on and is distrusting of each other. This constant *eyeing* of one another almost seems like an obsession, a certain paranoia, only in this case the root of the paranoia cannot be attributed to a chemical physiological imbalance (as in the case of paranoid schizophrenia, for example) but rather to a specific social dynamics, that is, the dynamics of oppression that characterize colonial societies. It is not a *genetic* malady but rather a *social* one. The narrator makes a point of showing us that the *sites* he is fixated on are indeed full of insights (meanings): they serve to demonstrate the way the workers are and have been treated by the colonial power, how they are exploited and obliged to work long hours and under very difficult conditions, and also how the workers have managed to find survival mechanisms within such an oppressive system. The *sites* under narrative surveillance further show us that the workers have acquired a deep fear of the Overseer, and that they are very careful in all their actions in order to avoid enraging him. They have developed all sorts of coping mechanisms to deal with their oppressive situation, as the constant eyeing demonstrates.

The *sites* (the *eyeing*) exposed by the narrator and the *sites* (the *eyeing*) of the characters beautifully and expertly display the dynamics of the oppressed, and in certain ways, also the dynamics of the oppressor in colonial Mozambique. The oppressed adjusts to the oppressor due to fear of punishment: non-compliance with the colonial rule will result in severe punishment – physical, psychological or economical. The dynamic of relations between oppressed and oppressor is a forceful one, marked by an intensely abusive behaviour that has become the norm for both. The psychology of the oppressed (and oppressor too) is minutely and critically exposed in the story: the workers are very submissive and silenced. They have incorporated the colonial rule to such an extent that, despite the fact that some of them may be conscious that they are being exploited, their fear seems to paralyze them. That very fear makes them incapable of fighting the aggressor; they choose instead not to provoke his rage. Except for one of the young workers, referred to as the Youth, who tries to incite revolt by saying to Madala and others that the Overseer is indeed a 'bad' person who makes them work long hours and forces Maria

to have sex with him, all the other workers choose to be silent and keep working under very difficult conditions:

'The sun is very hot in the field [...]. Yes, the sun is very hot in the fields ...' [...]. 'And the Overseer is on top of you the whole time ...' [...]. 'The Overseer is bad,' continued the boy. 'He takes a long time to let you knock off ... I saw this when I worked in the fields ... Also he doesn't let people stand up for a bit to rest their backs ... I saw this once ...' Suddenly inspired, the youth turned towards the other members of this gang. [...]. '... It was very hot in the fields ...' The youth continued his narrative, more and more carried away by his enthusiasm, gradually directing his words away from Madala towards his companions. [...]. The youth who had spoken to him a while ago now eyed him with a deliberately ironic expression: 'Madala, your daughter is at the back there, talking to the Overseer' [...]. '... Madala ... the sun is very hot...where you work ...' '...Madala ...' the voice of the youth continued with difficulty. 'Madala ...tell us what we must do! ... Speak and we'll finish with all this now ...' '... Madala, we all saw what he did to Maria ... Say something Madala! ... The supplicating eyes of the youth searched avidly for a trace of revolt in Madala's eyes. (pp. 7-16)

Being the oldest man of the working crew, Madala is the one who can help the others by giving them a sign that he has endured enough exploitation and thus is ready to fight the 'bad' Overseer, and implicitly the colonial system. Instead, Madala chooses to accept the ultimate humiliation by remaining silent and accepting the bottle of wine from the Overseer, which the latter gives to him as an *excuse* for forcing his daughter Maria to have sex with him, right there in the cornfield, before her father's eyes. Madala has suffered so much oppression, exploitation and humiliation that he no longer has the energy or the health to fight: life has taught him that silence and endurance are the only solutions offered to him:

Madala did not reply at once because before pronouncing any opinion he had to repeat the question to himself, and listen to the reply from his inner self. [...]. (Madala had not yet thought of the reply). [...]. Madala gazed at the young face of his interrogator, and tried to think up something he could say to make him understand that it was not necessary to go on showing an interest in the work of the fields. He pondered inwardly to find it. (p. 7)

Madala regretted that he could not hear what they were saying, and for this reason he asked his inner self what a man would say to a woman when he wanted to sleep with her. His inner self was dormant. (p. 11)

Madala's inner voice is dormant because of the many times he has had to 'swallow' insults and accept injustices committed against him by the colonial rule. His survival has depended on accepting those injustices and those insults. Had he decided to fight back, he might have lost his job and perhaps even his life. As Ginho's father says in 'Papa, Snake and I': 'Our son believes that people don't mount wild horses, and that they only make use of the hungry, docile ones. Yet, when a horse goes wild it gets shot down, and it's all finished. But tame horses die every day. Every day, d'you hear? Day after day, after day - as long as they can stand on their feet' (pp. 47-48). Like Ginho's father, Madala does not become a 'wild horse' for fear of being shot. Both men suffer continuously, and so they die slowly, little by little everyday - a much more humiliating and painful death. Yet being a 'tame horse' does not seem to be such a great choice after all, as the life of both Madala and Ginho's father bear witness. The question the narrator seems to be begging the oppressed reader to ask him/herself is: 'Should I remain a tame horse or become a wild one?' Honwana wants

oppressive state, a state that is killing them day by day, little by little, like drops of arsenic entering one's system, and then take the initiative to fight that very system in a more overt and aggressive way. As an old man, Madala has had the chance to witness colonial exploitation for a long time. We are told that he has to hear his inner answer before responding to anyone who asks him a question, yet he is unable to find the answers because his 'inner self is dormant'. Madala's inner self is dormant because he cannot find the strength in himself to turn against the oppressor. Like the narrator of 'The Old Woman', Madala seems to have allowed himself to think he is inferior and weaker than the white aggressor: his failure is psychological in nature rather than physical. For, even though he is probably unfit to fight physically due to his age and weak health, he has the support of young people (represented by the Youth) who could literally offer their bodies to the revolution. Yet he refuses to accept the command of such a revolution; he refuses to see himself as an agent who can take action.

If we take into account the importance of the sea metaphor throughout the entire story, Madala's behaviour (and that of other workers) can be interpreted in another fashion. Madala literally compares the cornfields (and in capitalized letters) to the sea on two different occasions: "CORNFIELDS ARE LIKE THE SEA". [...] MULUNGO'S¹² CORN FIELDS ARE LIKE THE SEA" (p. 6). Throughout the rest of the story we find many other (albeit indirect) comparisons between the sea and the cornfields. The cornfields cease to be referred to as 'the cornfields' to literally become 'the sea'. As the following excerpts demonstrate, words like 'sea', 'wave', 'tide', 'liquid', 'water', 'fish', 'shells', 'submerged' and others, are used to describe them:

He listened attentively for a while, but only heard the *muted murmur of the wave* [...]. Half *submerged* in the thick greenness of the field, walking slowly as if they were really pushing through a *liquid* ... Madala's gaze traveled along a *wave* which broke far away in the distance ... [...] The man *sank* into the field. [...] At the place where they had *submerged* the leaves of corn stirred for a while, but soon *the waves* subsided. [...] Maria's capulana came loose after a short struggle, and the *cold sensation of water* became more vivid to her. She shivered and shrank away. [...] The Overseer was the first to appear above the surface of the *green sea*. He thrust with his arms against the sweep of the *tide*, and advanced towards the path of the camp. When Maria rose to the surface she was at once surrounded by the prolonged *sighing cry of the sea*. She shook some lumps of the soil from her capulana and returned to the camp. Along the path she had to raise her hands now and again to defend herself from the *waves* that the Overseer's passage provoked. [...] Above its *strange fish*, the surface of the *green sea* was swept by a soft breeze. The *gentle waves* it stirred up broke, ebbed and flowed and broke again, murmuring the secret of the *shells*. (pp. 2-6, my emphasis)

What are some of the implications of such a comparison (association) between the sea and the cornfields? What can it tell us about Madala's own psychology, and furthermore, how does it relate to the psychosocial, and politico-revolutionary, side of the entire story? Is the surface of the sea different from its bottom? How can one identify the sea with the psychology of the oppressed person (and with his unconscious)? The above excerpts tell us that the surface of the cornfield is usually very calm. That same calm surface can be compared to the way most of the workers, and particularly Madala, react to the abuse of the Overseer. As previously mentioned, with the exception of the Youth, who tries to incite revolution, the workers do not do anything to combat the injustices committed against them by the Overseer, and implicitly by the colonial power. Even if some workers seem to be

they are like the calm surface of the cornfield (sea) that moves only gently with the breeze, without creating big or violent waves; they in fact become the 'muted' murmur of the waves, or the 'prolonged sighing cry of the sea'; they can only 'murmur the secret of the shells'. Put differently, their true self is only a murmur; it hides in their unconscious, becoming almost unreachable. All these expressions suggest the passive and submissive behaviour of the cornfield workers and symbolize their repressed self.

The passive and submissive behaviour of the workers is directly contrasted with the violent and aggressive nature of the Overseer. In fact, the latter is the only one creating violent and dangerous waves when coming out of the fields, thus forcing Maria to 'raise her hands now and again to defend herself against' it (p. 6). This indicates that the Overseer, and by extension, the colonial power, is using violent methods to get what he wants from Maria and the workers. Violence is used as a means to oppress and inflict terror upon the oppressed. The oppressed, on the other hand, keep silent and do not resort to violence: they accept their state of oppression and maintain an apparent calm of submission. By choosing to display the violent side of the Overseer and by opposing it to the passivity of the workers, the narrator is again trying to incite the oppressed readers to take a deeper look at their situation, and that alone can be seen as the planting of the revolutionary grain. Furthermore, it is inside the fields (underneath their calm surface) that the oppressed is kept prisoner by the oppressor: it is *there* that Madala and the other workers have to work long hours without being allowed to kneel down or take any breaks to rest their backs; it is *there* that dangerous animals like scorpions and snakes hide and attack men, as the death of Pitarossi from a snake bite indicates; it is also *there* that Maria is forced to have sex with (raped by) the Overseer. The bottom of the sea (cornfields) is thus a symbol of evil, exploitation, danger and agony, a place where dangerous monsters hide – a place that one needs to confront, fight and destroy. Precisely because the bottom of the cornfields/sea is the place that *hides* something, we can easily equate it with Madala's unconscious, repressed oppression and psychological defence mechanisms. Before exploring this connection, it is important that we give a general definition of such psychoanalytical concepts:

The **unconscious** is the complex of mental activities within an individual that proceed without his awareness. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, stated that such unconscious processes may affect a person's behavior even though he cannot report on them. (*Encyclopedia Britannica* [online] 2001a)

Defense mechanism in psychoanalytic theory, is any of a group of mental processes that enables the mind to reach compromise solutions to problems that it is unable to resolve. The process is usually unconscious and the compromise generally involves concealing from oneself internal drives or feelings that threaten to lower self-esteem or provoke anxiety. The concept derives from the psychoanalytic hypothesis that there are forces in the mind that oppose and battle against each other [...] and **repression** [is a defence mechanism involving] the withdrawal from consciousness of an unwanted idea, affect, or desire by pushing it down, or repressing it, into the unconscious part of the mind. An example may be found in a case of hysterical amnesia, in which the victim has performed or witnessed some disturbing act and then completely forgotten the act itself and the circumstances surrounding it. (*Encyclopedia Britannica* [online] 2001b)

As an oppressed, colonized person, Madala has had to develop certain psychological mechanisms of survival. He has had to hide, repress and send painful experiences to

his unconscious in order to be able to go on living. We can then suggest that even though Madala continues to be exploited by the Overseer and by the colonial system in general, he no longer seems to *feel* or *see* that exploitation. He might then be suffering from what psychology designates as 'blind-sight paradox' (Natsoulas 1982, p. 79), also known as *dissociation*. Madala endures the painful work in the cornfields and accepts the ways the Overseer treats and talks to him (and his co-workers) or forces his daughter to have sex, as if he were unable to make the connection between all these 'visual stimuli' and his present condition as an oppressed person. Madala also seems to make use of another defence mechanism, commonly referred to as *displacement* in psychoanalysis. For example, when Madala is told by the youth that his daughter is talking with the Overseer, he reaches for a plant and then pulls it out of the ground. Moreover, when he sees her going away into the cornfields with the Overseer, he tries to reach for another plant and, not finding one, he makes the same physical movements with his hands, as if he were indeed pulling one out of the ground:

The silence became oppressive, and Madala groped with his hand for the plant he had felt next to his left foot. Grasping the branches in his fingers, he wound a good portion of the flexible stem around his wrist, and pulled with determination. The bush broke free from the soil with a dull explosion. [...] Madala followed the pair with his eyes. He searched on the ground for something he could not find. His fingers closed around an imaginary plant. (pp. 12–13)

The Overseer is going to have sex with Madala's daughter right there in the cornfields, a fact too painful for Madala to face psychologically, and so he reaches for the plant and directs his anger towards it by pulling it out, either literally (the first time) or symbolically (the second time). The 'dull explosion' of the plant when freeing itself from the soil, is equivalent, one could suggest, to Madala's inability to direct his anger to the appropriate subject, the Overseer and the colonial power. A 'real' explosion would equate to Madala's acknowledgment of his oppression, followed by action against the 'real' agent responsible for that same oppression, an assertive direct action that could bring about real change. Such action would have to entail a violent confrontation between the two agents involved (the colonized and the colonizer), as the colonial armed struggle later demonstrates since the colonial power fails to diplomatically give independence to Mozambique. Madala's behaviour can then be equated with the defence mechanism known as 'displacement': his body reacts a certain way in order to avoid the psychological pain involved with facing the situation, and he seems to do so unconsciously for his body is not in sync with his mind. Madala refuses to *see* (accept and understand) his oppression and that of his people, because that would be too painful. He keeps his inner self dormant, in other words, dissociated from the reality that is in front of him.

Madala seems to be experiencing hysterical amnesia: he is someone who has witnessed and experienced many disturbing acts and then completely forgets those very acts and the circumstances surrounding it. As referred above, before responding to a question Madala always needs to hear the answer in his head, yet is not able to answer (or talk back) to the Youth who tries to incite him to confront the Overseer. Since the remarks made (and questions asked) by the Youth require a direct confrontation with the oppression taking place, and a direct analysis of the colonial situation, and since the Youth is in fact inciting Madala to confront the Overseer, who directly represents the colonial power and is thus the cause of the many *pains* Madala has had to hide in his unconscious as a coping mechanism, he refuses (or is

unable) to give the answer. The answer does not come out because Madala's access to his inner-self (unconscious) is barred, and without that he cannot fight the colonial cause, for one needs consciousness if action and change are to occur. As psychoanalysis suggests, the healthy resolution of any internal conflict requires the facing up to hidden pains or conflicts; it requires a dialogue between conscious and unconscious forces, and the integration (the bringing together) of the many sides of the human psyche. Put differently, for humans to achieve a state of psychological equilibrium and become healthier individuals, they must be able to confront the pains hiding in their unconscious. In the case of Madala, the inability to confront those pains by connecting conscious with unconscious forces seems to be presented as the main cause of his oppression. It is such inability that precludes him from realizing his full human potential of free subject.

In conclusion, the sea (cornfield) image in this story is one of great importance. It not only serves to display the many facets of the oppression affecting the Mozambican colonial subject, but it also offers a way out of that oppression. By inviting the oppressed readers to reflect upon their situation, the story incites them to go beyond the calm surface of the waters; it incites them to *create waves and swim to the bottom of the sea to bravely fight the monsters* that have kept them prisoners for centuries. In other words, it incites them to gain consciousness of their state and fight, violently if necessary, to change the current (the) state of affairs. In order for Madala and the other workers to exit their state of oppression, exploitation and humiliation, it is essential that they find a way to reestablish communication with their *bottom*, that is, with their unconscious. Since it is in the unconscious that the pains inflicted upon the colonial subject by the colonial system are residing, it is of prime importance that they are brought to the conscious realm and confronted. The integration of unconscious and unconscious forces will allow the oppressed to find the strength and self-worth he possessed before the colonial power, that strength that told him he was fully human and deserving of respect; it will permit the oppressed subjects to clearly see and evaluate their oppression and then be ready to start the fight that will hopefully end it. Perhaps then we would be able to witness the death of the subjugated colonial anti-hero and the birth of a freer post-colonial hero. As I heard recently on a television programme (*My Footprint of Africa* 2007), just as the whites need to unlearn their superiority, so the blacks need to unlearn their inferiority. And then the young black Mozambican in his late thirties now living in Canada, whom I personally know, might no longer need to tell his child (whose mother is white) to find a girlfriend with blond hair and blue eyes when he grows up.¹³

As a final thought, and to pick up Robbe-Grillet's own words, it is clear that Honwana does have 'something to say'. It is also clear that he 'looks for a way to say it' and to think otherwise would be 'the gravest of misconceptions'.

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Notes

1. All quotations used in this paper are from Guedes' translation. Occasionally I modify her translation slightly, as indicated by *.

2. For in-depth discussions of the *nouveau roman* see Robbe-Grillet's *For A New Novel: Essays On Fiction* and Paul West's article 'A phenomenologist bares his heart'. In general terms, the *nouveau roman* tends to disregard sequential plots, organized and coherent spatio-temporal realities and inner psychological landscapes of the characters, concentrating instead on objective and external registering of events, things and people. It strives to use a language that is devoid of emotion and uses the least adjectives possible: it strives to see the world outside the prism of the human lens, leaving it to be what it *really* is. It is a novel that is philosophically phenomenological, essentially questioning (and refuting) traditional epistemologies that tend to put the human being at the centre, as the only entity capable of knowing what the world is and how it works.
3. See Paul West's article, 'A phenomenologist bares his heart' for a debate on the issue of Robbe-Grillet's language and novelistic intentions and their failure to provide objective, non-anthropomorphic and detached insights.
4. Of course we can also say that when the narrating eye in Robbe-Grillet's novels focuses constantly on an object or person it also often intends to be social: it wants the reader to *see* and question the society that has given *rise* to the 'thing' or person being pointed to. The focus on the movements of the black workers in *La Jalousie* and on the banana plantation, for example, could be a good example of the social in Robbe-Grillet and perhaps even his critique of the colonial enterprise. But still, in general Robbe-Grillet's novels offer fluid meanings and aim at making the reader doubt his/her perception of reality. The philosophical and phenomenological concern surpasses any other concern.
5. The Portuguese term used to designate the legal status achieved by black Africans, who under Portuguese colonial rule showed general adherence to the white regime i.e., knew how to read, speak and write Portuguese, often acting as intermediaries between colonizers and colonized in the form of local minor administrators or bureaucrats, thus facilitating the colonial enterprise. There are of course many similar figures in other colonial systems – the so called 'go-betweens' that aid the colonizer to establish and solidify his position in the colony, a necessary figure for the success of colonial enterprise in fact (and perhaps also the ultimate failure since they are the ones that often initiate revolt against the colonizer). Amílcar Cabral and Agostinho Neto are just two examples of such figures in Lusophone Africa.
6. We are also told in the story that the father of the boy, who had been in prison, likely for political reasons, keeps some books under his bed, hidden in boxes, whereas the magazines (i.e., *Cruzeiro*, *Life*, *Time*), which the father calls 'rubbish', are kept on top of the table in the sitting room. The hidden books could very well be books deemed dangerous for the colonial system (communist books perhaps). And the 'rubbish' magazines are just there to show the ruling system that the family *are* living the life of *assimilados* and are thus on the side of the colonial system, when in reality the father despises this system as is shown in a more direct way in the story 'Papa, Snake and I'.
7. Being a close neighbour to and ally of South Africa, colonial Mozambique was influenced by the former's racial apartheid policies and practised some of them, albeit not in the same institutionalized manner.
8. For a good discussion on the psychology of the oppressed, see for example, Frantz Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* and *Peau noire masques blancs*.
9. All translations pertaining to this source are my own.
10. The term 'Dina' is the adaptation of the English word 'dinner' by returning migrant labourers from South Africa. The very title of the story points to the fact that the workers have to wait until the Overseer gives them the signal (says the word perhaps) to stop working and have a short break for the meal. The Overseer watches every movement they make; their time is closely controlled. The fact that the story is entitled 'Dina' is ironic too since the time spent eating is very short and the meal offered is poor, constituting simply of cornmeal porridge with groundnut gravy.

11. Madala means 'old man'.
12. Mulungo means 'white man'.
13. The behaviour of this young black Mozambican seems to fall under what Fanon describes as the complex of inferiority often experienced by black (colonized) subjects, who then need to be attached to a white subject to feel good enough (see *Peau noire masques blancs*). As he also told me once, the father of one of his former (white Portuguese) girlfriends had been after him with a gun just because he, a black man, had the 'audacity' to date his daughter.

Notes on contributors

Irene Marques holds a PhD in Comparative Literature (2005), a Masters in French Literature and another in Comparative Literature, all from the University of Toronto, and a Bachelor of Social Work from Ryerson University (Canada). Her doctoral dissertation entitled 'Four writers being political on their own terms: class, feminist and cultural identity discourses across continents' dealt with the works of the Mozambican Mia Couto, the South African J.M. Coetzee, the Brazilian Clarice Lispector and the Portuguese José Saramago and focused on class, feminist and cultural identity discourses. She has worked in various social service fields for the past ten years and is currently on a Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at the University of Witwatersrand (South Africa) investigating issues of scientific racism, race and gender representations in South African and Mozambican colonial and postcolonial literature and looking at how the different European colonial powers 'colonized' Africa, specifically in terms of miscegenation 'politics', religion, patriarchy, socio-economic and cultural 'position' of the colonizing country, and racial oppression/classification. Her teaching and research interests include African literatures, intersections between Buddhist philosophies, African epistemologies and Jungian psychology, mystical, spiritual and creative writings and their power to heal and integrate the 'whole person', feminist literature and theory and postcolonial literature and theory. She has various academic articles, short stories and poems published in Canadian and international journals, is an editor and contributor for the *International Confederacy of African Literature and Culture*, and recently edited a full critical volume on the work of the Nigerian poet and novelist Chin Ce. Her first collection of poetry, *Wearing Glasses of Water*, was recently published in Canada by Tsar Publications. She has also written two novels in Portuguese and one in English, which are awaiting publication.

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