



MEMORY AND RESPONSIVENESS IN JESUSALÉM, BY MIA COUTO MEMÓRIA E RESPONSIVIDADE EM JESUSALÉM DE MIA COUTO

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ABSTRACT

The romance *Jesusalém*, published in 2009 by Mia Couto, brings up the story of Mozambican Silvestre Vitalício, who will take refuge in an isolated land, taking with him his two sons and the military Zacaria Kalash. The undertaking takes place out of the patriarch's desire to rebuild his present by abdicating the past. Jesusalém, the name given to the place, is now inhabited by interdictions made by the father to his children, in relation to the construction of this past. In the new home, there will be no space for expressions of memory, always rejected by the patriarch who imposes silences in its place. In view of the above, we propose to carry out in this analysis a dialogical reading about the (suppression of) the memory in the narrative plot, realizing the responsive attitudes generated, especially in the face of the interdiction of the report. We also need to understand how this silencing that encompasses the family microcosm can be extended to that experienced by the Mozambican homeland. Despite the father's effort, the complete forgetting of these memories cannot be fully realized (GAGNEBIN, 2009) and in the face of his fanciful and fallacious speech, the children will constantly perform responsive attitudes (BAKHTIN, 1986) related to both Silvestre's speech, as to the speech of the other two adults to whom they have access, seeking to recover this lost past.

KEYWORDS: Dialogism; Responsiveness; Memory.

RESUMO

O romance *Jesusalém*, publicado em 2009, por Mia Couto, traz a baila a história do moçambicano Silvestre Vitalício que escolhe se refugiar em uma terra isolada levando consigo seus dois filhos e o militar Zacaria Kalash. A empreitada se dá, por desejo do patriarca de reconstruir o seu presente abdicando do passado. Jesusalém, nome dado ao local, passa a ser habitada por interdições efetuadas pelo pai aos seus filhos, em relação à construção deste passado. Na nova morada, não haverá espaço para expressões da memória, sempre rechaçada pelo patriarca que impõe em seu lugar, silêncios. Em face ao exposto, propomos realizar nesta análise uma leitura dialógica acerca da (supressão da) memória na trama narrativa, percebendo as atitudes responsivas geradas, principalmente frente à interdição do relato. Importa-nos perceber ainda, como este silenciamento que abrange o microcosmo familiar pode ser alargado ao vivenciado pela pátria moçambicana. Apesar do esforço do pai, o pleno esquecimento destas recordações não poderá ser efetivado por completo (GAGNEBIN, 2009) e diante do seu discurso fantasioso e falacioso, os filhos realizarão constantemente atitudes responsivas (BAKHTIN, 1986), relacionadas tanto ao discurso de Silvestre, quanto ao discurso dos outros dois adultos a quem possuem acesso, em busca de recompor este passado perdido.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dialogismo; Responsividade; Memória.

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The novel by Mia Couto, which received the Brazilian title of *Before the world was born*, has as its epigraph the text of Hermann Hesse in *Journey to the East*, that says: “The whole of world history often seems to me nothing more than a picture book which portrays humanity’s most powerful and a senseless desire - the desire to forget.”² In the novel’s microcosm, the search for the suppression of memory acts from a character who establishes a process of annihilation of his past. The silencing of memories in the particular context of this man can be understood as a mirroring and echoing of absconds held in Mozambican society during the period of civil war.

The plot is built from the adventure led by Silvestre Vitalício to take refuge in an isolated land, where he could recreate his present. Continuing in counterflow to the migration of war - from the city to the devastated countryside - the patriarch carries on this self-exile journey a soldier close to the family and his two children: Ntunzi and Mwanito.

The narrative plot strains a multiplicity of layers: the forbidden and previous history of the family, the time of utterance and the time of utterance, which can be read in parallel with the country’s political history. It is important to note that the narrator is Mwanito, the youngest son, who weaves in a time-apart perspective, stitching the relevant aspects from the selection of his memories.

The keynote of the work, the search for the patriarch of the family by the suppression of memories, presents a choice that is in line with internal motivations still unknown to the reader at the beginning of the narrative, being brought to light only with the development of the story. The book is presented in three parts in which the narrator develops the family history in this new inhabited space and the outcome of the unexpected return to Maputo, they are: *Humanity*, *The Visit and Revelations* and *Returns*.

In this escape process, the *locus* chosen to live in will be called by this exile-wandering subject of *Jesusalém*, a clear allusion to Jerusalem, the holy city and promised land of the biblical text. Following the example of this nomination, the character will continue to construct the surrounding reality in a discursive way, which abrades the choice of name for the city-country, since it will seek to establish a new cosmogony, because “that was the land where Jesus would uncrucify” (COUTO, 2009, p. 11)³. Therefore he intervenes at the same time in accessing the memory of the past and in the construction of the future memory of his children, through the choices he makes in the present, of which Mwanito now reports.

In the first part of the novel, *Humanity*, Mwanito tells us of Silvestre Vitalício’s evident effort to make his children believe that they would be the last survivors of the end of the world:

2 All translations of the work are our own. In Portuguese: “Toda a história do mundo não é mais que um livro de imagens refletindo o mais violento e mais cego dos desejos humanos: o desejo de esquecer”.

3 In Portuguese: “aquela era a terra onde Jesus haveria de descrucificar”.

“from now on, there is nowhere” (COUTO, 2009, p. 19)⁴, elaborating from these speeches another reality that immunized him from his children’s curiosity, exempted him from having what to say and having to return: “-For the case is simple, my children: the world has died, there is nothing left beyond Jerusalém” (COUTO, 2009, p. 33)⁵.

In *Before the world was born*, as the plot progresses, the children’s suspicious attitude towards the father’s speech intensifies and takes on more incisive contours. Sustaining these speeches required a continuous attitude of repetition and reworking of the existing reality, giving way to deception.

- But, dad, tell us. How did the world die?
 - Actually, I don’t remember.
 - But uncle Aproximado...
 - Your uncle tells too much stories...
 - So, dad, you tell us.
 - The case was this: the world ended even before the end of the world...
- (COUTO, 2009, p. 22)⁶.

Bakhtin’s circle establishes that every speech builds and is built by/in interaction, it is, therefore, dialogical, every speech responds to other speeches that precede it and will be answered by those who place themselves later. In this network of relationships, “sooner or later what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behaviour of the listener” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p. 69). Therefore, Silvestre Vitalício’s speech, although making use of his father authority, will not come out unscathed from reformulations and responses.

Mwanito at first believed his father’s words, “Ntunzi, however, considered all that a delusion.” (COUTO, 2009, p. 21)⁷. Even if they do not directly contradict it, the children act on the speech, as no listening is passive. Inconsistencies, disagreements with other speeches received will always be put into perspective.

- It’s the opposite, Mwanito. It was not the world that passed away. We are the ones who died. [...]
- Don’t say that, Ntunzi, it scares me.
- Well be aware: we did not leave the world, we were expatriates like a thorn that is expelled by the body (COUTO, 2009, p. 26)⁸.

The young age he had when he moved to the locality, three years old, puts Mwanito in a different condition to that of his brother, as he has no memory of the previous world,

4 In Portuguese: “a partir de agora deixou de haver aonde”.

5 In Portuguese: “-Pois, o caso é simples, meus filhos: o mundo morreu, não resta nada para lá de Jerusalém”.

6 In Portuguese: “- Mas, pai, nos conte. Como faleceu o mundo?/- Na verdade já não me lembro./- Mas o Tio aproximado.../- O tio conta muita história.../- Então, pai, nos conte o senhor./- O caso foi o seguinte: o mundo acabou mesmo antes do fim do mundo...”.

7 In Portuguese: “Ntunzi, porém, considerava tudo aquilo um delírio.”

8 In Portuguese: “- É o contrário, Mwanito. Não foi o mundo que faleceu. Nós é que morremos. [...]/ - Não diga isso, Ntunzi, que me dá um medo./ - Pois fique sabendo: nós não saímos do mundo, fomos expatriados como um espinho que é expulso pelo corpo”.

but he will not fail to carry out these questions little by little. As he grows up, the youngest son reconsiders such created universe and gradually stops uncritically accepting his father's narrative, concluding at the time of the utterance that:

All the stories that the father invented about the reasons for leaving the world, all those fanciful versions had only one purpose: to dust our judgment, removing us from the memories of the past. (COUTO, 2009, p. 23)⁹.

In the coexistence between the brothers, the possibility of the other world is always posed: “-Now, however, isn't it that my little brother wants to see the other side?/- What other side?/- The other side, you know: the world, the across!” (COUTO, 2009, p. 26)¹⁰. In the absence of the father, the children will perform an active attitude towards the discourse imposed by him, there will be a constant process of elaboration.

All true understanding is active and already represents the embryo of an answer. [...] To understand another person's utterance means to orient oneself with respect to it, to find proper place for it in its corresponding context. For each word of the utterance that we are in the process of understanding, we lay down a set of our own answering words. (VOLOSHINOV, 1973, p. 122).

Once understood, these utterances will produce echoes with other utterances, contributed by Zacaria Kalash and uncle Aproximado. The patriarch places himself before his children in the position of the one who experienced the perishing of the world, as the witness of a catastrophe, but who recounts invented memories. For Seligmann Silva (2008, p. 66) the testimony is “a condition of survival” and “narrating the trauma therefore means, first of all, this primary sense of desire to be reborn.”¹¹. The protagonist seeks this rebirth by weaving improbable narratives, seeking to ignore the traumatic experience of his past, which imbues both personal and collective experience in the period of Mozambican civil war.

The homeland he gestates in *Jesusalém*, in addition to being utopian, presupposed the annulment of the existing one, the denial of Mozambique. This is evident in the refusal to receive news from the country, let us see the moment when the death of Samora Machel is announced by the brother-in-law:

- Brother-in-law, come down. I have news.
- The news is long over.
- I beg you to come down, Silvestre Vitalício.
- I will go down when it is time to go down.

9 In Portuguese: “Todas as histórias que o pai inventava sobre os motivos de abandonar o mundo, todas aquelas fantasiosas versões tinham um único propósito: empoeirar-nos o juízo, afastando-nos das memórias do passado”.

10 In Portuguese: “-Agora, porém, não será que meu irmãozinho quer ver o outro lado?/- Que outro lado?/- O outro lado, você sabe: o mundo, o Lado-de-Lá!”.

11 Our translation. In Portuguese: “uma condição de sobrevivência” and “narrar o trauma, portanto, tem em primeiro lugar este sentido primário de desejo de renascer”.

- The president is dead!

At the top of the steps, the whole gesture was suspended. However, there were few, scarce seconds [...]

- I hope it stops raining inside.

- Did you hear what I said? That the president has died?

- He had died before. (COUTO, 2009, p. 76)¹²

In line with his desire to leave one world behind to gestate the birth of another, one of his first actions when he arrived in that place was to (re)name it and “demotify” everyone, in a ritualistic way. That was how Mateus Ventura became Silvestre Vitalício, reneging on the previous subject to assume a new identity. Mwanito reflects on this aspect:

When we moved to Jesusalém, my father gave us other names. Once rebaptized, we had another birth. And we were more exempt from the past [...] I was the only one to keep the same name: Mwanito.

- This one is still being born - my father justified the permanence of my name (COUTO, 2009, p. 37-38)¹³.

The desire to become apart from cultural and historical insertion is declared in the act of disowning ancestors during the ceremony. Orlando Macara, henceforth uncle Aproximado, intercedes for using the names of his grandparents, and Silvestre replies: “If there is no past, there is no ancestor” (COUTO, 2009, p. 39)¹⁴. The ancestors are strictly linked to the Bantu culture and the Mozambican tradition, which means that at this moment Vitalício renounces to be a participant in this same tradition¹⁵.

The brief dispute between the two in choosing the baptism names can be extended during the reading and considered as similar to what occurred in the tension existing between the two main political forces operating in the post-independence country, one with the discourse of maintaining tradition and the other accused by the former of neglecting it, the Mozambican

12 In Portuguese: “- Me cunhado, desça. Tenho as novidades./- As novidades acabaram há muito./- Peço-lhe que desça, Silvestre Vitalício./- Desço quando for o tempo de descer./- Morreu o presidente!/No topo dos degraus, todo o gesto ficou suspenso. Foram, contudo, escassos segundos [...]/- Espero que deixe de chover lá dentro./- Escutou o que lhe disse? Que morreu o presidente?/-Já tinha morrido antes”.

13 In Portuguese: “Quando nos mudámos para Jesusalém, meu pai nos conferiu outros nomes. Rebaptizados, nós tínhamos outro nascimento. E ficávamos mais isentos do passado [...] Só eu guardei o mesmo nome: Mwanito. –Este ainda está nascendo – justificou assim meu pai a permanência do meu nome”.

14 In Portuguese: “Se não há passado, não há antepassado”.

15 Ironically, the justification for the name of the uncle is given by the fact that he is adopted and has no family ancestors: “The new designation handled how he was not Dordalma’s blood brother. He was, as Silvestre said, a second-degree brother-in-law. He had been born adopted and his whole life would remain in that condition of a strange and foreign creature. Approximate could talk to relatives, but he never had a conversation with the family’s ancestors.” In Portuguese: “A nova designação dava conta de como ele não era irmão de sangue de Dordalma. Era, como dizia Silvestre, um cunhado em segundo grau. Nascera adoptado e toda a vida se manteria nessa condição de criatura estranha e estrangeira. Aproximado podia falar com os parentes, mas nunca teve conversa com os antepassados da família.” (COUTO, 2009, p. 71).

National Resistance (Renamo) and the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo), respectively.

When changing the name of the occupied space and debaptizing everyone, Vitalício does not realize that by denying these previous narratives he puts himself in constant dialogue with the circulating speeches in this society, responding to them responsively. In other words, the speech that rejects tradition and precedes it, to some extent responds to it:

Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere [...]: Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account. (BAKHTIN, 1986, p. 91)

In addition, Burke (1997) points out that name is important as a maintainer of memory. Breaking with them is, therefore, significant of the desired fracture, which we can verify in the specific case of Mozambique as a search to overcome the colonial condition. This is the case of the capital that once honoured Portuguese explorer Lourenço Marques and since 1976 has become Maputo.

Many revolutionary and counter-revolutionary regimes like to symbolize their break with the past by changing the names of streets, especially when these names refer to dates of significant events. (BURKE, 1997, p. 57)

In addition to the debaptism ceremony, the patriarch instills in this new home a series of rituals, precepts and rules that will be at the service of his ideal of forgetfulness: one should not feel homesick nor talk about it, it is reference to their mother, the city and women, expressions such as music, prayer, crying, dreaming, writing are prohibited. Any of these actions would foster memories of that non-existent “across” and, for this reason, Silvestre does not worship them.

In Jesusalém there was no book, no notebook, or anything related to writing. Gradually, I understood Silvestre’s interdictions: writing was a bridge between past and future times, times that never existed in me (COUTO, 2009, p. 41)¹⁶.

The separation that is made in the narrative is, therefore, not just geographic, not just physical, but acts very much on these subjectivities. The isolation is evidenced in the plot by several situations such as: Mwanito’s lack of knowledge about women, “The first time I saw a woman I was eleven years old and I was suddenly surprised, so unarmed that I burst into tears” (COUTO, 2009, p. 11)¹⁷ or by the lack of knowledge about his place of birth:

16 In Portuguese: “Em Jesusalém não entrava livro, nem caderno, nem nada que fosse parente da escrita. Aos poucos, eu entendia as interdições de Silvestre: a escrita era uma ponte entre tempos passados e futuros, tempos que, em mim, nunca chegaram a existir.”

17 In Portuguese: “A primeira vez que vi uma mulher tinha onze anos e me surpreendi subitamente tão desarmado que desabei em lágrimas”.

Actually, I was not born in Jesusalém. I am, let's say, an emigrant from another place with no name, no geography, no history. As soon as my mother died, I was three years old, my father took me and my older brother and left the city (COUTO, 2009, p. 19).¹⁸

Because of the denial of creative attitude, childhood will also be obliterated. In Jesusalém, more than the annulment of memories, it was abolished with the imaginative faculty proper to child development. At a certain point Mwanito remembers that the vehicle that had taken them to that place and remained there, fainted and abandoned, had never been a playful object for the children's imaginary trips, because "whoever lived nailed to one single floor does not know how to dream of other places" (COUTO, 2009, p. 24)¹⁹. The first time they will enter another uninhabited space of forbidden access by the father since they arrived in Jesusalém, it will also cause these reflections to emerge: "[...] how is it that in so many years of childhood I was never curious about exploring this forbidden place? The reason is that I had never exercised my own childhood, my father had aged me since birth" (COUTO, 2009, p. 123)²⁰.

Ironically, Vitalício testifies to this time in a lively way. Against the impossibility of narrating, which comes from the traumatic event of the war and the loss of his wife, emerges the fiction that lends itself to the separation he wants. Almost always his discursive actions generate what they refute, since not taking back the past, silencing it, is also witnessing it and not accepting any expression of the imaginative faculty, it goes against the grain of the fantasy universe it creates. In short, the desire expressed by Silvestre Vitalício passes through the authoritarian need for control: while the father encircles the children from the entire creative universe, preventing them from accessing a recent past, he seeks to immerse them in the only acceptable creative attitude, the one controlled by him.

The entire construction of *Jesusalém* is, therefore, based on the speech. According to Bakhtin, every "utterance is constructed while taking into account possible responsive reactions, for whose sake, in essence, it is actually created." (1986, p. 94), the responsive attitude that Silvestre Vitalício craves from his interlocutor goes through the non-propagation of memory, since he generates a network of interdicts. It would be a responsive attitude that anticipates the speech, prevents it and limits it in favour of a conceived idealization.

Among the mechanisms used to remove his children from the memory of a time, silence will be the most effective. The silencing of memories becomes law in *Jesusalém*, so that the mother's memory is never accessed. There is a net of silences woven that, while comforting, defies Vitalício. It is with silence that he seeks to remove himself and others around him from

18 In Portuguese: "Na verdade, não nasci em Jesusalém. Sou, digamos, emigrante de um outro lugar sem nome, sem geografia, sem história. Assim que minha mãe morreu tinha três anos, meu pai pegou em mim e no meu irmão mais velho e abandonou a cidade".

19 In Portuguese: "quem viveu pregado a um só chão não sabe sonhar com outros lugares".

20 In Portuguese: "[...] como é que, em tantos anos de infância, nunca tive curiosidade de explorar este lugar interdito? A razão é que eu nunca tinha exercido a minha própria infância, meu pai me envelhecera desde nascença".

memories and it is in the silence that the memories, guilt and feelings of a remote time overflow in his mind.

The children refute the official and fictional speech made by Silvestre Vitalício looking for other fictions about the past. In the absence of his father, Ntunzi, the older brother, narrates aspects, features and traits of women to Mwanito, which he did not really remember. He stages the female walk, talks about the city and in the small space available in a card game, teaches him how to write.

On the edge of the bedroom or on the riverbank, far from the eyes of the father, they are engaged in the imaginative universe that is not legitimized in such homeland, ironically managed under the same process: “The river made me see the other side of the world. Writing gave back to me my mother’s lost face.” (COUTO, 2009, p. 42)²¹.

In the second part of the novel, the presence of a visitor will destabilize the silence and apparent peace of Jesusalém, due to the doubly foreign condition that she bears: a Portuguese woman who travels in search of her husband and to recover the path of her betrayal in Africa. For the creator of a home away from humanity, “the presence of the Portuguese alone was an unbearable intrusion. One single person - a woman on top - collapsed the entire nation of Jesusalém” (COUTO, 2009, p. 128)²². Marta is a denouncer of that other world, a representative of the other side and a denudator of the perception that as much as Vitalício wanted to “close the world out of him,” “there was no door for him to lock himself from the inside” (COUTO, 2009, p 129)²³.

Marta will break the laws of Jesusalém and disallow Silvestre Vitalício’s speech, breaking silences through writing, singing, and imagination and exposing Silvestre’s children to these experiences. She will be the first person Mwanito will hear sing. The photographic camera she carries is exemplary of her relationship with memory, her records being threatened under Silvestre’s requirement that she must leave her film roll when she leaves those lands, thus refusing also a memory of her present.

The recurring silence alluded to in the narrative and institutionalized by Silvestre Vitalício reminds us of the silences that are maintained in the post-independence Mozambican society, especially regarding the memories of the clashes of so many years of war. In this sense, the silence in Jesusalém can be seen as metaphorical of the one that echoed in the national space, of which the microcosm of that warren is part, although it is not wanted. The same strategy of obliteration, which generates conflicts between Silvestre Vitalício and his children, is exercised

21 In Portuguese: “O rio me fazia ver o outro lado do mundo. A escrita me devolvia o rosto perdido de minha mãe”.

22 In Portuguese: “a presença da portuguesa, só por si, era uma insuportável intrusão. Uma única pessoa – ainda por cima uma mulher – desmorojava a inteira nação de Jesusalém”.

23 In Portuguese: “fechar o mundo fora dele”, “não havia porta para ele se trancar por dentro”.

in the present of the nation.

According to anthropologist Victor Igreja, there is an official and institutionalized silence in Mozambique that divides opinions: “In this ‘era of the witness’, debates over the adoption of official silence in post-conflict countries have shifted between two perspectives: pragmatic arguments for, and moral condemnation of this type of strategy.” (2008, p. 539). The silences maintained by the Mozambican people and the characters in the narrative are pregnant with conflicts to come, in this sense, the duality of silence can be thought of as a potentializer of both peace and tensions. Let us borrow Mwanito’s poetic construction “There is not a single silence. And all the silence is music in a state of pregnancy.” (COUTO, 2009, p. 13)²⁴.

It is evident that in that small family nucleus the patriarch acts in the plot as the holder of memories and also the manager of them, following the same *modus operandi* of the political sphere: the manipulation of information about this recent past. The past for Silvestre’s children even reaches a mythical status due to the lack of possible records of remembrance.

- I will say one thing and I will never repeat: you must not remember nor dream anything, my children. [...]

- It’s all a lie. What you dream of is what I created in your minds. Do you understand? [...]

- And what you remember is what I enkindle in your minds (COUTO, 2009, p. 17)²⁵.

Throughout the novel, the responsive attitude can be perceived by the speech created by Silvestre and often emerges with a late response from the children to the father’s speech, but there is still a responsive attitude from the father towards his own speech which in many measures imprisons him to that created reality. Therefore, we can choose in the narrative some moments in which the conflict experienced by Silvestre can be perceived, some moments in which the memories devastate and escape his control, the past according to Gagnebin (2009, p. 185), “insists on enduring in a way that is not reconciled in the present, in the form of pain and torment. A past that does not pass”²⁶.

From the beginning of the romance the father resorts to the youngest son to be silent “It was in my silence that my father used to make a cathedral” (COUTO, 2009, p. 19)²⁷. And the scenes of this silence on the porch are clearly denouncing moments when reflections about the deceased wife jump in his mind:

24 In Portuguese: “não há um único silêncio. E todo o silêncio é música em estado de gravidez”.

25 In Portuguese: “- Vou dizer uma coisa, nunca mais vou repetir: vocês não podem lembrar nem sonhar nada, meus filhos. [...] /- É tudo mentira. O que vocês sonham fui eu que criei nas vossas cabeças. Entendem? [...] /- E o que vocês lembram sou eu que acendo nas vossas cabeças”.

26 Our translation: “insiste em perdurar de maneira não reconciliada no presente, sob a forma de dor e tormento. Um passado que não passa”.

27 In Portuguese: “Era no meu silêncio que meu pai fazia catedral”.

I kept myself still, peeking out on the balcony. From there I saw my old man returning to occupy the old chair, sighing loudly and uttering the most unexpected words: - It's not long, Alminha. It's not long (COUTO, 2009, p. 185).²⁸

Other examples of moments in which the remembrances of memory lead him to break with the laws of Jesusalém can be seen in the baptism of the river over the name of Mwanito's grandfather, in a clear return to his ancestors (COUTO, 2009, p. 108), in the song that difficultly jumps into his throat after eleven years, instead of the tears that threatened to burst into his eyes (COUTO, 2009, p. 181) and in the emotion to stare at the black wall where Ntunzi used to mark with little stars the passing of days, to which he responds in fury by destroying it.

Such episodes mark the difficulty of obliterating these reflective memories and flashes that may contain re-evaluations about the imagery created by the fantasy speech that instills in his experience and that of his children. For Voloshinov (1973, p. 105) every statement is an "evaluative orientation" and any change in meaning is always a "*re-evaluation*; the transportation of some particular word from one evaluative context to another."

The hoax generated by Silvestre Vitalício for himself and his family consists in the fact that, just as memory cannot be fully recovered, total forgetfulness cannot be achieved either, since the movements of memory and forgetting are part of the same process: "memory lives this tension between presence and absence" (GAGNEBIN, 1998, p. 218)²⁹.

Marta, who arrives in Jesusalém knowing the story of Silvestre Vitalício, tries to confront him with her memories so that, in fact, there will be closure, in the same way that the Mozambican people seem to need confrontations and to experience the mourning of their dead in wars for that there is indeed a fortified peace relationship: "You didn't say goodbye to the deceased. That is what torments you, this lack of mourning does not bring you peace./ - I do not authorize you to talk about these matters, I am the president of Jesusalém, I do not need advice from Europe." (COUTO, 2009, p. 194)³⁰.

However, there is a complexity in the character that embodies this unwanted visitor in the work that cannot fail to be perceived, although it is not the focus of the analysis that we intend here³¹. It is possible to establish a parallel between the seduction that Marta exercises in

28 In Portuguese: "Eu me conservei, imóvel a espreitar a varanda. Dali enxerguei meu velho voltando a ocupar a velha poltrona, suspirando ruidosamente e proferindo as mais inesperadas palavras: — Já falta pouco, Alminha. Já falta pouco."

29 Our translation. In Portuguese: "a memória vive essa tensão entre a presença e a ausência".

30 In Portuguese: "Você não se despediu da falecida. É isso que lhe traz tormentos, essa falta de luto não lhe traz sossego./ - Não autorizo que fale desses assuntos, sou o presidente de Jesusalém, não preciso de conselhos vindos da Europa".

31 An inattentive reader can develop an empathy for the salvific character, a clear and evident metaphor for the colonizer's presumption to impose their culture, disregarding the aegis under which the locals live in. The speech is, once again, determinant for these constructions, since a large part of this empathy arises due to the male chauvinist, sexist treatment received from Silvestre Vitalício, always so intransigent to the prerogatives exposed by her, "My father says that all women are whores" (COUTO, 2009, p. 146) and "A woman should not go looking for a husband. A woman should wait around." (COUTO, 2009, p. 150). In the dynamics of the clash the reader may

children with the colonial process experienced by Mozambique, or even as a denouncer of a certain fascination remaining in minds that still need to go through a process of decolonization (FANON, 2006).

Thus, despite the confrontation it exerts to remove subjects from that isolation, the speech is problematized in view of the identity condition of the subject who enunciates it (BAKHTIN, 1986, p. 71). It becomes salutary that the reason that determines the departure of these characters from Jesusalém is the snake bite that Silvestre Vitalício suffers and not, effectively, the interference of Marta.

In the last part of the book, *Revelations and Returns*, it is not the physical return of those characters to Maputo that will actually be configured as a resumption, but the reconciliation they will have with their past. In the episode that precedes the reason for the return, the snake transits between reality, dream and hallucination, and, just as the presence of the animal occupies this multiplicity of planes, the past seems to impose itself: “while the eyes of the viper were fixed on yours, the whole past came to his mouth” (COUTO, 2009, p. 212)³².

In view of Ntunzi’s paternity revealed, Mateus Ventura, henceforth Silvestre Vitalício, will be, alongside Mwanito, the only ones to remain in the house. He hoped to make Jesusalém his last home and to become a lifelong countryman, departing from the city, but he returns to it. But for him there would be no possible return. That house where he had lived with his wife, guilt, fear, in all of this there was no possibility of remaining life because “for Silvestre the past was a disease and memories were a punishment. He wanted to live in oblivion. He wanted to live away from guilt.” (COUTO, 2009, p. 13)³³.

In addition to the resumption of physical space, the writing will act as the main bridge for rescuing this past and reconciling with the present. A letter sent by Marta, who at the moment of the narrative is in Portugal, tells Mwanito the stories she discovered about his mother, Dordalma, seeking to fill in some gaps in his existence: “I spoke with Aproximado, with Zacaria, with Noci, with the neighbours. Everyone told me pieces of a story. It is my duty to return to you that past that was stolen from you” (COUTO, 2009, p. 242)³⁴.

It is in this third part of the novel that Silvestre Vitalício’s discursive action in Jesusalém

forget the absurdities uttered about the African continent during the course of their journey, a series of stereotypes and prejudices that are current in the social imagination, such as: “Traitor, I want you to die of AIDS and lice” (COUTO, 2009, p. 138) and “my husband had disappeared forever, victim of an act of cannibalism” (COUTO, 2009, p. 139). In Portuguese: “Meu pai diz que todas as mulheres são putas”, “Uma mulher não sai à procura de marido. Uma mulher fica à espera.”, “Traidor, quero que morras com SIDA e com piolhos” e “o meu marido desaparecera para sempre, vítima de um ato de canibalismo”, respectively.

32 In Portuguese: “enquanto os olhos da víbora se cravaram nos seus, todo o passado lhe veio à boca”.

33 In Portuguese: “para Silvestre o passado era uma doença e as lembranças um castigo. Ele queria morar no esquecimento. Ele queria viver longe da culpa.”.

34 In Portuguese: “Falei com Aproximado, com Zacaria, com Noci, com os vizinhos. Todos me contaram pedaços de uma história. É meu dever devolver-te esse passado que te foi roubado”.

gains yet more outlines. The silencing he performs with his children is also a resonance of a discursive charge that is suspended with the death of his wife. Guilt emerges on what is said and what is not said. Dordalma's silence at home spoke of the neglected suffering in his past: "At home, Dordalma was never more than grey, dull and cold. The years of loneliness and disbelief enabled her to be nobody, simply a native of silence" (COUTO, 2009, p. 257)³⁵.

The memory that Marta gives back to Silvestre Vitalício's children and especially to Mwanito is a memory that goes through countless rearrangements, not only in her selection in the writing of the letter, but by all those who narrated these fragments of history: "The material present in the form of traces being subjected from time to time to a *rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances - to a *retranscription*" (FREUD, 1985, p. 207). In equal measure, what we read is also material reorganized by the narrator subject.

Silvestre Vitalício chooses to inhabit silences. With the muteness he incorporates at the end of the narrative, we can recall what Schmidt (2009, p. 139) considered as the identity problem of the post-colonial subject, which becomes multiple depending on a network of relationships and the historicity of life that accompanies it. Upon trying to build his identity in the face of civil war and fear, Silvestre found in the silence of Jesusalém a possibility to resist, a possibility now denied in that house, with memories embodied in walls. His only way of survival will be to keep Jesusalém's silence in Maputo, alienating himself from the city.

There would be no regress. At that moment, I realized: Silvestre Vitalício had just lost all contact with the world. Before, he almost didn't speak. Now, he had stopped seeing people. Just shadows. And he never spoke again. My old man was blind to himself. Not even in his body now he had a home (COUTO, 2009, p. 272)³⁶.

The maintenance of the aegis of silence in the capital city is symptomatic: in fact, Jesusalém could only exist as another facet of Mozambique, another country in which silences echo in a similar way. The silence imposed by the population in Mozambique is to a certain extent a defence system. For Meneses (2009, p. 26) any traces of regionalism manifested were dangerous, due to the hunt for internal enemies. There was a system of coercion and censorship, a way of creating an ethical code and of ethicizing everyone under this aegis.

In this sense, the attitude of alienation promoted by Silvestre in the lives of his children dialogues and responds with/to the alienating silence experienced by an entire nation after conceiving the liberation war and coming across, during the civil conflict for power, a space that is not yet capable of bringing the desired freedom and peace. The nation experiences the frustration of a project, just as Silvestre is frustrated with the potential to promote a parallel reality.

35 In Portuguese: "Em casa, Dordalma nunca era mais do que cinza, apagada e fria. Os anos de solidão e descrença a habilitaram a ser ninguém, simples indígena do silêncio".

36 In Portuguese: "Não haveria regresso. Naquele momento, percebi: Silvestre Vitalício acabara de perder todo o contacto com o mundo. Antes, já quase não falava. Agora, deixara de ver as pessoas. Apenas sombras. E nunca mais falou. Meu velho estava cego para si mesmo. Nem no seu corpo, agora, ele tinha casa".

- Sing!
- but dad, sing what?
- sing the national anthem!
- Sorry dad, but... which nation's anthem? [...]

My only nation had been the one that was far away, in the house where I was born. And that nation's flag was blind, deaf and mute (COUTO, 2009, p. 204)³⁷.

The intersection between the family project and that of the nation is still strained when we symptomatically realize that Mwanito is eleven years old at the death of President Samora Machel in 86, therefore having being born on 75, and being also the only and true son of Jesusalém, for not having a memory of the city. Mwanito represents those born after the country's independence and just as the promising independence project raised utopian hopes, in the family universe the youngest son brought the hope of a restoration of the couple's relationship.

With the help of the assumptions of the Bakhtinian circle about the responsiveness of the speech we realize that the silences brought in the civil or family sphere by the authorities of the State or of the father will always be subject to responses, even if late. The search for oblivion that conceals the necessary confrontation of the past places itself as seen in the Ventura family and in Mozambique, as an instituted fragile bond of peace, which threatens to break free at all times.

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37 In Portuguese: “- Cante!/- mas pai, cantar o quê?/- pois cante o hino nacional!/-Desculpe pai, mas...hino de que nação? [...]/A minha única nação tinha sido essa que ficara longe, na casa onde eu nascera. E a bandeira dessa nação era cega, surda e muda.

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