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PERVERSIONS OF LOVE: IMPERIALISM, NATIONALISM AND POST-
NATIONALISM IN THE WORKS OF ANTÓNIO LOBO ANTUNES, PEPETELA
AND FERNANDO VALLEJO

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Perversions of Love: Imperialism, Nationalism and Post-nationalism in the narrative of

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In this dissertation I analyze the ways in which the narratives of António Lobo Antunes, Pepetela and Fernando Vallejo reveal the complicity between love and power. From their different socio-historical contexts, these writers disclose the contradictions besieging what Western culture has deemed to be the most positive of feelings. Regarded as an always-reciprocal and harmonious state where all contradictions between opposites are resolved in favor of a greater unity, love's sphere of influence oftentimes extends beyond the intimate relationship between lover and beloved. Indeed, love's ability to do away with discord has been repeatedly invoked in the political arena as a discursive means of resolving deeply entrenched social differences. Despite its discursive appeal, such an unequivocal approach to affect is not without its dangers, proving to be misleading when it comes to gauging the complex range of love's political uses. As the narratives of António Lobo Antunes, Pepetela and Fernando Vallejo stress, depending on the specificity of context, the same love narratives can be used to support different, and sometimes diverging, political discourses. While António Lobo Antunes exposes how

love was used both to justify and veil the violence the Portuguese State inflicted on colonial subjects from the second half of the twentieth century, Pepetela uses this same rhetoric as a way to cement the burgeoning Angolan nation and to counter Capitalism's perverse logic of exchange. In conflict-ridden Colombia of the twentieth century, Fernando Vallejo's vitriolic post-national discourse offers a stark contrast to the national romances of the nineteenth century. Rather than being an allegorical device that brings together all parties, for Vallejo the aggressiveness contained within love serves as a means of disrupting the Colombian elite's failed national project. By thinking through love's contradictions, these three writers debunk traditional love narratives. In so doing, they direct our attention to the concrete possibilities and pitfalls that love introduces into the political realm.

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Table of Contents

Dissertation Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction Perversions of Love	1
Chapter 1 The End of Love's Empire: António Lobo Antunes Deconstruction of Portuguese Colonialism	20
Chapter 2 Falling into and out of Love: Pepetela's Different Visions of the Angolan Nation	71
Chapter 3 Fernando Vallejo's Splendor: Building a Post-National Anti-Romance	121
Conclusion Love after Love	158
Bibliography	165

Introduction

Perversions of Love

The question of violence—its origins, its forms and its consequences—arises with particular poignancy in societies that are still enmeshed in or have suffered from an armed conflict. Violence becomes a priority in these societies as their members struggle both to tackle and cope with its polymorphous manifestations. Perspectives from the most diverse fields urgently seek a resolution to the ever-elusive and forever-pressing question of the causes of violence. Sociologists, historians and economists disinter the underlying social and economic interests and inequalities triggering confrontation, as well as debating the brutal consequences particular conflicts have on different socioeconomic strata of the affected societies. The social divide, extreme differences between rich and poor, corruption, racism, imperialism and privileges that distinguish between social actors are, more often than not, presented as the causes that eventually ignite open confrontation. Amid the increasing bibliography and critical studies scholars produce to disentangle the Gordian knot of causes and consequences, literature plays a key role in exposing the nuances of the multiple forms in which violence can manifest itself. Rather than staging in carefully crafted fiction the results of analysis social sciences perform, literature is a cultural work that, as Barbara Johnson points out, gives to read the contradictions that cannot yet be spoken (13).

Violence may be ubiquitous, but is far from being a homogeneous phenomenon. Besides the direct and more overt forms of violence society generally condemns lurk manifestations of equally oppressive violence, often unacknowledged as such. As Slavoj Žižek argues, in these cases violence stops being the exception to a “normal,” peaceful

state of things where harmony reigns, and becomes part of the everyday routine (Violence 2).¹ Violence becomes a given and instead of being fiercely denounced as an aberrant state, is embraced and celebrated as a standard for which it is worth striving. Hence the urgent need to uncover and denounce these hidden forms of violence. Under the façade of their “normality,” lie unexposed the most outrageous acts of aggression.

Following Žižek’s insights on violence, in this dissertation I will expose a discursive apparatus that simultaneously justifies and obscures the brutality of violence. Indeed, the novels of the Portuguese António Lobo Antunes, the Angolan Pepetela and the Colombian Fernando Vallejo, reveal a common discursive trope in which the effects of domination are veiled. From their different continents, these three authors point to the hidden violence lurking in love’s apparent “normality.” They put a new and perturbing spin on our understanding of love as their fiction sheds light on the connections between affect and politics. By denouncing love’s complicity with other forms of domination that range from imperial to nationalistic and post-national discourses, they bring blatant contradictions back to a field in which they were generally obscured in Western culture under Plato’s influence.

Western culture’s tendency to extricate love from the contradictions with which it is riddled can be traced to Plato’s *Symposium*. In this lively erotic dialogue, the participants’ interventions aim at rationally dismantling Phaedrus’s initial argument regarding the inseparable union between Aphrodite—sexual passion—and Love—Eros—(Plato 22). Beginning with Pausanias’s differentiation between the earthly and the

¹ Slavoj Žižek builds his analysis of violence around the distinction between subjective and objective violence. Indeed, while subjective violence is usually only perceived against the background of the non-violent zero level society considers its “normal,” peaceful state, objective violence, on the other hand, is “the violence inherent in this “normal” state of things” (Žižek, Violence 2).

heavenly Aphrodites—that is, between a Love that only aims at satisfying the body and a Love that has the soul and virtues as its only goal (Plato 24)—, the other characters involved in Agathon’s party rhetorically struggle to tear Love from its unwanted counterpart. Building on Pausanias’s distinction, Eryximachus praises heavenly or noble Love for its ability to bring harmony between opposites, while he disqualifies common or outrageous Love for causing injury and destruction (Plato 27). In a similar vein to Eryximachus, Agathon affirms that Necessity, rather than Love, was behind the initial “castrations, imprisonments, and many other violent acts,” characterizing the initial relations between the Olympian Gods (Plato 33). The agreement Love produces between opposites, Agathon further argues, completely excludes violence because “everyone serves Love willingly in everything and ... what is done in willing agreement is just” (Plato 34). Furthermore, as Aristophanes claims in the fable about the race of spherical men that used to inhabit the earth, love is what brings the torn halves back to their original wholeness and lost perfection (Plato 31). All the participants of *The Symposium* agree in endowing Love with the greatest of virtues. For them, nothing bad can come to subjects when they indulge in love, so long as they can differentiate between its two opposite forms.

After listening to the guests’ speeches, Socrates builds on their arguments in praise of love, describing Love as a daemon—that is, a demigod whose function is to mediate between humans and immortals, keeping the whole bound together (Plato 41). The son of Poverty and Resource, Love is “always wedded to need ... and a schemer after beautiful and good things” (Plato 41). Indeed, for Socrates, people can only love what is good (Plato 43). Guided by Love and in close proximity to beautiful things, any

subject can ascend from one particular body to all beautiful bodies for the sake of beauty, and from them, move from practical forms of beauty to beautiful “examples of understanding,” until he or she reaches a state of understanding of beauty itself, eternal and uniform (Plato 48). Love, then, according to Socrates, is necessary to attain a universal understanding of beauty. By the end of Socrates’ chain of beautiful things, Love has taken the subject beyond the material realms of sexual desire and into a transcendent domain of perfection from where an individual can neither expect harm from, nor inflict harm to, others.

In *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud builds his theory of instincts around a similarly dualistic approach as that expressed by Agathon’s guests the night of their symposium. However, Freud’s dual division between Eros—life-preserving instincts—and the death instincts responsible for the destruction of life is radically different from Plato’s take on love (74). In fact, Freud’s depiction of the sexual instinct as Eros—the preserver of all things—is far from the principles underpinning the attitudes toward Love Freud attributes to poets and philosophers alike (*Beyond The Pleasure* 60-1). Freud both reinscribes Eros into the sexual domain and points to love’s paradoxical relation to aggression Agathon’s guests endeavored so hard to deny (*Beyond the Pleasure* 65). Indeed, Freud acknowledges that the strict dual division between Eros and death instincts he first established is far from being absolute. In identifying the existence of traces of a sadistic instinct, whose aim is to injure the loved object, in the life-preserving sexual instincts, Freud is unable to neatly separate Eros from aggression (*Beyond The Pleasure* 65). As Freud goes on to point out, in these particular instances where erotic

mastery is tantamount to the destruction of the loved object, the paradoxical ambivalence of love and hate in erotic life becomes all the more evident.

Freud bases himself on his analysis of perversions to further develop his understanding of the contradictions besetting sexual life. According to Freud, perversions take place when sexual activity deviates from the “normal” sexual aim—that is, “the union of the genitals in the act known as copulation, which leads to a release of sexual tension and a temporary extinction of the sexual instinct” (*Three Essays* 15). Unlike neurotics—that is, those subjects who do not deviate from the sexual aim Freud defines as “normal”—the pervert’s deviations reveal more than any of the cases Freud describes the intricacies of desire, insofar as they break free from the constraints assailing neurotics in their dealings with their object of desire and expose the complex mesh of secret desires neurotics repress. Unhindered by the intense feelings of disgust, shame and pain that, as Freud affirms, oppose the neurotic’s libido, perverts are able remorselessly to perform the sexual acts neurotics can, literally, only imagine (*Three Essays* 25). “*Neuroses are, so to say, the negative of perversions,*” stresses Freud in his *Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality* and (31), as their positive and unrestrained counterpart, perversions reveal the repressed and unacknowledged element of aggressiveness contained within “normal” male sexuality (23). In this sense, perversions work as a mirror on which neurotics can gauge the extent of their repression and, simultaneously, the pervert’s degree of freedom to pursue and satisfy their fantasies. However, the aggression and subjugation underlying the pervert’s acts do not prevent the idealization of the sexual instinct so dear to Plato’s philosophy. Nowhere else is the omnipotence of love more blatant than in the case of perverts because, as Freud highlights, in the sphere of sexuality the highest and the lowest

are “always closest to each other” (*Three Essays* 27). The deepest and purest love can be bound to the most brutal and reckless acts of violence. Thus, the apparent peaceful and harmonious normality of sexual life is unmasked in its radical ambivalence.

Building on Freud’s theory of sexuality and his analysis of perversions, Jacques Lacan also distances himself from the harmonious conception of love Agathon’s guests propagate during their symposium. For Lacan, there is a radical difference between making love—a literary and philosophical fiction—and the acts of love desire structures (*Encore* 72). Resulting from the subject’s endeavors to approach the elusive object cause of his or her desire (object *a*)—that is, the object responsible for igniting and attracting the subject’s desire since its emergence—the subject’s acts of love are defined by utter non-reciprocity between their participants (Lacan, “Kant with Sade” 649). The relationship between the object cause of desire and the subject is forever marked by impossibility. No matter how hard the subject tries to attain the sensation of unity with his object cause of desire, the subject’s acts of love are always bound to miss their aim. Once he begins experiencing desire, the subject is trapped in its infinite displacement. Indeed, the subject cannot help but persist in a quest that, despite its necessity, never fails to fail (Lacan, *Encore* 59). Unlike Socrates’ conception of Love, Lacanian acts of love lead nowhere. The object cause of desire continually displaces itself without a definitive goal. Rather than take the subject on an upward ladder towards perfection, the path along which the object cause of desire takes the subject leads nowhere—that is, to dissatisfaction.

According to Lacan, the resolution of conflict and advent of harmony associated with Love’s capacity to make “one out of two,” are nothing more than a fiction with

which psychoanalysis should not bother (*Encore* 66-7). However, the fact that Eros is built as a fiction does not mean love is not necessary. As Lacan states, love makes up for the lack of a sexual relationship between the sexes—that is, for the lack of any possible reciprocity between each subject, regardless of its sex, and his object cause of desire (*Encore* 6). In this respect, the fusion of lovers the erotic climax promises tries to compensate for the impossibility every subject confronts in the face of its forever-elusive object. Rather than assuming the frustration produced by the insurmountable alienation of desire, love emerges as a narrative to counter the subject's radical solitude. In fact, as Lacan further stresses, love's sole aim is to make good this original weakness (Lacan, *The Other Side* 52).

Despite love's promise of harmony and reconciliation between opposite, yet complementary parts, its discourse of mutual reconciliation is not devoid of danger. In attempting to compensate for the lack of a sexual relationship, love narratives conceal the latent aggressiveness Freud uncovered in his analysis of sexual desire in perverts and neurotics. After all, as Lacan affirms, love's willful ignorance of desire does not prevent desire from retaining its "whole import" (Lacan, *Encore* 4).² Hidden beneath the lover's discourse of uninterrupted bliss on finding his or her perfect compliment, lie the same undercurrents of aggression perverts bring forth in their crude and perplexing light.

No matter how many kinds of love Agathon's guests endeavor to create in Plato's symposium, aggression will always remain a fundamental part of Eros. As Freud's observations on sexuality highlight, Plato's reliance of the discourse of reason to purify

² Jacques Lacan is keen on stressing the existence of other forms of love that defy the climactic fusion of opposites underlying Platonic love. In *Courtly Love*, Lacan finds an instance in which, rather than stressing the complementarity between lovers, all the emphasis is put on the lover's impossibility of attaining the loved object. For more on *Courtly Love* and its relevance on the lacanian interpretation of desire see Jacques Lacan Seventh Seminar, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

love is only rhetorical and there, precisely, resides its peril. Rather than preventing violence, Plato's zeal in disentangling love from contradictions only fosters further entanglement. In rendering love completely positive—that is, in blinding themselves to the ambivalence of erotic life—, Agathon's guests only succeed in neutralizing their ability to further analyze sexualities' paradoxes. In fact, there is no need for further reflection once love has been purified of all its contradictions. Nothing harmful can come out of a feeling that, according to Socrates, can only attach itself to what is good. By enthroning love as a non-contradictory and always-desirable feeling, Platonic love has turned a blind eye to love's potential for aggression. Hence the danger that comes from espousing such an unequivocal approach to love. Regardless of its goals, any cause can freely indulge in violence without troubling itself with contradictions in so far as it can wield this purified conception of love as its ally. Insofar as our ideas on love, much like Plato's, refuse to admit love's complicity with violence and endeavor to render it homogeneous, love's "normality," despite its potential for good, ends up justifying the most abject acts of domination as the unacknowledged elements of love's apparent status quo.³

Despite Freud and Lacan's claims, literature is not as naïve regarding the complicity between Eros and subjugation.⁴ The three writers I analyze in the following

³ Unlike reason— whose program of domination over difference twentieth-century philosophers unveiled—, love still maintains its prestige in the eyes of contemporary Christian society. Indeed and as popular beliefs have it, love is everything we need to resolve all our social and political differences.

⁴ From Greek and Roman mythology to Romantic and Contemporary works, as Roland Barthes foregrounds in *A Lover's Discourse*, literature has been a keen observer of the complex mesh of feelings the West has amalgamated under love's banner (3-4). In moving from Plato's homogeneous and good-inclined passion to the analysis of the multiple figures—or fragments—composing the lover's discourse, Barthes dissects the dynamic, fluid and more-often-than-not contradictory emotions and states of consciousness love encompasses. Love is as free flowing and unpredictable as the discourse we use to express it. Like an athlete, the lover moves lively from one figure to another, to the rhythm his own amorous feelings dictate him.

chapters are fully aware of the paradoxes that haunt both love and the discourse used to talk about it. From very different sociopolitical and historical contexts, the Portuguese writer António Lobo Antunes, the Angolan author Pepetela—the pen name of Artur Carlos Maurício Pestana dos Santos—, and the Colombian Fernando Vallejo, expose the connivance between love and violence in their respective countries. I will connect the Portuguese imperial project, the nation-building endeavors of the recently created Angolan state, and the bitter failure of Colombia's national project, by highlighting how these authors radically question and resist normative and traditional love narratives.

Five hundred years of Portuguese Empire came to an end amid a bloody Colonial War against the armed guerrilla groups that struggled for independence in three of Portugal's African colonies: Guiné-Bissau (1963-1974), Mozambique (1963-1974) and Angola (1961-1974). In a final effort to maintain a hold on its overseas territories, the New State—the repressive dictatorship that ruled Portugal from 1933 to 1974—sent over 100,000 soldiers each year to fight a war that found little support in the international sphere, due to the new political context in favor of ending colonialism after the Second World War (Saraiva 538). The New State refused to grant independence to territories it considered Portugal's legitimate possession since the glorious imperial expansion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Those colonies were the defining feature of Portuguese national identity. Indeed, rather than being legally defined as colonies, Portuguese overseas territories were considered an integral part of Portugal's sovereign national territory (Saraiva 540). The rhetoric of the New State conceived of Portugal as a country of dauntless, brave conquerors whose destiny was inextricably tied to its overseas provinces. To the New State, the loss of control in its colonies meant ceding one of the

dictatorship's claims to legitimacy. Yet, the New State's reluctance to relinquish its colonies proved decisive to its fall. Neither its nationalistic rhetoric nor its zealous defense of Portugal's historical rights could prevent the dictatorship from wearing itself out. The elevated death toll of the Colonial War—especially among young male conscripts from middle-class families—, the fatigue of key sectors within the military, and the expense of military campaigns on three fronts, were among the main causes of the dictatorship's demise (Saraiva 544).⁵ On April 25th 1974, the Carnation Revolution took place. A military coup with minimal bloodshed brought down the regime and decreed the final chapter of Portugal's presence in Africa. The fourteen-year Colonial War was finally over. A year after the Carnation Revolution, on November 11th, 1975, Portuguese troops left Angola definitively, putting an end to the imperial adventure that began five centuries earlier when Diogo Cão—one of the Portuguese explorers of the Age of Discoveries—reached the mouth of the Zaire River in 1483 (Tvedten 17).

The end of what Angolans termed their struggle for independence and the exit of the Portuguese army did not herald the arrival of peace in Angola. After a brief ten-month truce in 1975, a devastating civil war erupted between Angola's three main guerrilla groups: the MPLA—Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola—, the FNLA—Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola—and UNITA—União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (Tvedten 36).⁶ Instead of subsiding, the differences between the different

⁵The number of Portuguese soldiers killed and wounded is still the matter of debate. While according to José Hernano Saravia there were 6,340 killed and 27,919 wounded (541), to Inge Tvedten there were around 11,000 dead and 30,000 wounded as a result of the combined wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau (33).

⁶ During the Independence War each of the three guerrilla groups that fought against the Portuguese occupied discrete regions in the country and found support among different ethnic groups. Thus, while the MPLA based itself in the area surrounding Luanda and endorsed a multiracial, Marxist discourse of integration, both the FNLA—supported by the Kongo in the northern provinces—and UNITA—based mostly among the Ovimbundo of the southern provinces—espoused a more radical strand of Tribalism. For

guerrilla groups only heightened after the MPLA took control of Luanda, the capital, on November 11th 1975. Sponsored by foreign powers, the FNLA and UNITA fought to overthrow the Marxist-leaning MPLA government led by Agostinho Neto. While the Soviet Union and Cuba mobilized both military equipment and troops to support the MPLA, South Africa and the United States, respectively, backed UNITA and the FNLA in a joint effort to prevent the Communist menace from taking over one of the potentially richest African states (Birmingham 147). However, US and South African involvement was not enough to shift definitively the balance of power in Angola. By January 1976, and with the help of a contingent of more than 10,000 Cubans, the MPLA took control of most of the country and repelled the armies of UNITA and FNLA that, since the eve of independence, disputed control of the area surrounding Luanda.

Like the first War of Independence against the Portuguese, this Second War of independence—as it later was named by the MPLA—also failed to bring stability to Angola. From its beginnings, the MPLA proved itself unable to shrug off the Portuguese colonial legacy of racial and class privileges, and begin a truly inclusive and democratic reconstruction of the country. MPLA political, economic and administrative mismanagement only perpetuated the instability of postcolonial Angola (Birmingham 150). While the vast majority of Angolans, from both the cities and countryside, struggled every day for the most basic supplies, the MPLA elites lived off the oil revenues of the Cabinda enclave located to the north of Angola. The increasing gap between the city-based elites of the Luanda region and the coasts, and the excluded and marginalized groups of the southern and interior regions, fueled the destabilization war

more on the ethnic and regional allegiances of the different guerrilla groups of Angola please see Inge Tvedten's *Angola, Struggle for Peace and Reconstruction* (1997).

that ravaged the country during the 1980s. Foreign powers became increasingly interested in Angola as the situation “rapidly expanded into an East-West power struggle, an extension of the Cold War” (Tvedten 37). Under the pretext of fighting Communism, the Regan administration and the South African regime proved invaluable allies to UNITA’s efforts to overthrow the MPLA and its Cuban and Soviet allies. This destabilization war only diminished when UNITA lost most of its foreign support after the fall of both the Soviet Union and President Botha in South Africa (Birmingham 169). The change in the international scene after the fall of both Communism and Apartheid brought a respite to the Angolan internal conflict. In May 1991—and for the first time since 1975—UNITA and the MPLA signed a ceasefire in Bicesse, Portugal, and agreed to hold Angola’s first democratic election.

Angola’s hopes for peace were thwarted again after Jonas Savimbi—UNITA’s leader—refused to acknowledge his defeat by José Eduardo dos Santos—the MPLA leader since Agostinho Neto’s death in 1979—, in the September 1992 presidential elections. Savimbi and UNITA retreated to their headquarters in the highlands of the southern provinces and restarted guerrilla warfare against the government and civilian population. Violence escalated to unprecedented levels in the southern provinces as UNITA attacked both the cities that had voted against their leader and a government unwilling to redistribute the economic spoils of the post-war (Birmingham 173). However, unlike former civil conflicts in Angola, foreign powers did not generally support either of the clashing factions. To acquire their arsenal, the government and UNITA relied on the exploitation of Angola’s immense natural resources. While the government continued to rely on oil, UNITA took to digging and trafficking the

diamonds extracted from the rivers of the interior (Birmingham 173). Both factions advanced or pulled back in accordance with the international prices of oil and diamonds until Jonas Savimbi's assassination put an end to the twenty-eight-year Angolan civil war.

Savimbi's death marked the end of the armed struggle, but little else changed in Angola. The MPLA government led by dos Santos maintains the same clientelistic practices and corrupt dealings despite Angola's transformation into a democracy and the country's whole-hearted embrace of global markets. Few changes followed the arrival of independence with regard to the structure of privilege. The political actors may be different, but the social gap remains just as broad. Three hundred thousand Portuguese ex-pats were simply replaced by the same number of black Portuguese-speaking Angolans who "retain many of the old colonial attitudes of social and moral superiority and who worshiped in the same Catholic churches that had sustained Salazar's brand of authoritarianism" (Birmingham 184).

Despite their historical and geographical differences, both inequality and a prolonged internal conflict allow for a productive comparison between Angola and Colombia.⁷ Since its independence from Spain in the nineteenth century, Colombia's fragmentation proved a challenge to the state's legitimacy. For most of the nineteenth century, civil wars tested the Colombian state's ability to survive (Patiño Villa 1105). Too weak to exercise control over all its territory, the centralized state the elites endeavored to build was permanently opposed by the federalist interests of the different regions (Patiño Villa 1106). Rather than pledging allegiance to non-existent state

⁷According to the Human Development Report the UN published in 2011, Angola and Haiti's inequality indexes are the only ones that surpass Colombia's.

institutions, most country towns and cities adhered to the local and regional power structures inherited from colonial times (Palacios 36). Furthermore, the Colombian elite's project of integration and their ideas regarding the nature of the state were far from homogeneous. During the last part of the nineteenth century, Liberals and Conservatives—the two main political parties—waged four civil wars (1876-7, 1885-86, 1895 and 1899-1902) to determine the relation between the state and the individual, the church and Colombia's different provinces (Palacios 15).

Colombia experienced a period of relative peace between the political parties and general prosperity during the first decades of the twentieth century. However, in the mid 1940s, the partisan conflict between Liberals and Conservatives escalated to unprecedentedly brutal proportions and became known as La Violencia (1945-1964) (Palacios 189).⁸ This unacknowledged period of violence exposed once again the Colombian state's chronic deficiency and its incapacity to extend its control beyond the urban centers and into the country's ever-expanding agrarian frontier (Palacios 237). As the partisan conflict between Liberals and Conservatives subsided, new violent actors appeared on the political scene during the second half of the twentieth century. In an attempt to end the bloodshed and finish with the military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1953-1958, the Colombian elites from the Liberal and Conservative parties decided to alternate, every four years, the presidency. During sixteen years of shared power known as the National Front (1958-1974), the elite's efforts to bring legitimacy back to the state and solve the inequality problems still entrenched in Colombian society

⁸The number of people killed during La Violencia remains a matter of much debate in Colombia. Although 300,000 deaths was acknowledge as the most accurate toll, recent studies point to a total of 170,000 deaths distributed between an early Violencia (1945-1953) with approximately 159,000 deaths, and a late Violencia (1954-1966) in which approximately 35,000 people were killed (Palacios 190).

forcibly excluded many social actors. The first Marxist guerrillas emerged as left-wing alternatives to the National Front's hegemony and as a political platform for marginalized Colombian peasants (Palacios 264). Fueled by the Cold War and the Cuban Revolution, most of these groups originated in the 1970s and still remain active today.⁹

Throughout the rest of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, the Colombian state's search for legitimacy continued to be elusive. Apart from the emergence of the Marxist guerrillas in the 1970s, new disruptive forces have challenged the state's already frail stability. In 1984, the murder of the Secretary of Justice by drug lords ignited the crudest stage of the war on drugs (Palacios 281). Indeed, drug lords—among them Pablo Escobar—declared an indiscriminate offensive against the state and Colombian citizens to mount pressure against an extradition agreement with the United States. Since the eruption of the war on drugs in the 1984, drugs have been the main cause behind Colombia's new cycle of violence. Both the Marxist guerrillas and the paramilitary groups that arose as a right-wing response to the guerrillas' excesses, fight to control the immense resources of drug traffic. However, as Marco Palacios highlights, drugs and violence are only one of the multiple factors responsible for Colombia's collapse (325). The corruption of the elites, inequality and underdevelopment still haunt Colombia's society and furnish fertile ground for the continuation of what appears to be Colombia's endless spiral of violence.

From these three very different social and historical contexts, the narratives of Antônio Lobo Antunes, Pepetela and Fernando Vallejo—the main objects of my study—

⁹The two most famous and powerful guerrilla groups of Colombia, the FARC—Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—and the ELN—Ejército de Liberación Nacional—have to completely different origins. While the ELN emerged in the shadow of the Cuban revolution and was composed of university students and farmers, the FARC was a direct inheritor of the more radical Liberal guerrillas that still roamed the country in the aftermath of La Violencia (Palacios 266).

expose love's platitudes. In the case of Lobo Antunes, I will analyze how his narrative deconstructs the centuries-old lover's discourse the Portuguese employed to justify their right to indulge in colonial violence. I explore how Lobo Antunes's narrative reacts to the complicity between love and the colonial discourse the Portuguese used to justify their imperial claims, at least since the second half of the nineteenth century. By dwelling on the Western, violence-riddled lover's discourse Roland Barthes interrogates, my inquiry unveils the oppressive kernel behind the Portuguese claim to a milder, more human, colonialism. Behind the idea that the Portuguese loved and were loved by those they enslaved lies one of the subtlest means of maintaining the rigors of colonial exploitation while minimizing the harshness of their demands for domination. Starting with *Os Lusíadas*—Camões's sixteenth-century epic poem—, and extending to Gilberto Freyre's twentieth-century pseudoscientific Lusotropicalism, love as an alibi for oppression, as António Lobo Antunes's narrative intimates in *As naus* (1988), *O esplendor de Portugal* (1997) and *Boa tarde as coisas aqui em baixo* (2003), has been an all-pervasive trope in Portuguese literature, literary criticism and cultural politics.

In my chapter on Pepetela, I first highlight how the creation of the heterogeneous national space he envisions for the burgeoning Angolan nation is based on the exclusion of love. In this respect, I argue, *Mayombe* (1980) and *Yaka* (1985), two of Pepetela's first revolutionary novels are a reaction to the Portuguese colonial discourse. To protect the nation against the pernicious influence of love, his narrative proposes a rigorous rationality as the means to coalesce the new Angolan nation. However, in enthroning reason over love as the guiding nationalist principle, Pepetela's nation-building novels overlook rationality's tendency to obliterate difference, by way of assimilation. Once his

narrative forbids love's socialization in the Angolan community, there is nothing to stop rationality's enlightened trend toward identity. Tellingly, the rejection of love is accompanied by the fetishization of a fake nationalist discourse of integration that, in turn, perpetuates violence. Contrary to his earlier approach to the origins of violence, Pepetela's later novels are increasingly critical of the liberation, rationalistic discourse upheld during the struggle for Angolan independence. This loss of belief is accompanied, in novels like *Predadores* (2005) and *O planalto e a estepe* (2009) by a ferocious critique of predatory capitalism and, paradoxically, by a return to elements of the love discourse he initially rejected. As Pepetela's narrative evolution indicates, love and sexuality, despite all the risks and contradictions they pose to society, are necessary to check the perverse mechanization to which capitalism's irrational rationality subjects the contemporary, war-wrecked, Angolan nation.

Finally, I explore how Fernando Vallejo's fictional autobiographies put a spin on the allegorical relation between love and polis Doris Sommers describes in her book on foundational fictions in Latin America. Indeed, Vallejo's perverse emphasis on transgression denies love all of its conflict-resolving qualities and endows its pursuit with an unforeseen political edge. As I highlight in my third chapter, Vallejo's radical understanding of love as a non-reciprocal and violence-ridden passion, radically contradicts love's logic of reconciliation. Rather than using love narratives' rhetorical ability to transform blatant acts of domination into a mutual agreement between conflicting factions, as was the case with Latin America's nineteenth-century novels, Vallejo wields love to challenge traditional forms of authority. Against the backdrop of the violent collapse of the Colombian state in its vain efforts to claim an always-elusive

legitimacy in its territory, Vallejo's radical stance toward affect emerges as an effort to do away with Colombia's insanity. His conception of love, then, is deeply related to his rebellious and anti-establishment prose. The transgressive ethical principles informing his more overt attacks on Colombia's national symbols, the Catholic Church and the Colombian state's perverse bureaucratic apparatus, are the same that encourage Vallejo's cruel and ruthless take on love.

Despite the different ways and socio-political contexts in which António Lobo Antunes, Pepetela and Fernando Vallejo denude love's contradictory facets, the three chapters that compose this book dialogue constantly between themselves. The theoretical analysis undertaken in all of them carry a resonance along the subsequent pages and through the three different countries this dissertation encompasses. Although most of the theoretical grounding on love is developed in "The End of Love's Empire: António Lobo Antunes Deconstruction of Portuguese Colonialism," the concepts and insights I bring to the fore enrich and complement the discussion of the two remaining chapters. While the second chapter, "Falling In and Out of Love: Pepetela's Different Visions of the Angolan Nation," is conceived as a direct continuation of the analysis of the consequences of the colonial discourse of the Portuguese in the emerging Angolan nation, the third chapter, "Fernando Vallejo's Splendor: Building a Post-National Anti-Romance," borrows both from the theoretical discussion of love raised on the first chapter and from the discussion on nationalism advanced in the second chapter. Regardless of the reader's field of specialization, it is my hope that reading all three chapters will enrich the reader's understanding of how the rhetoric of love has served and continues to serve violence. After all, one of my main objectives in this dissertation is to build a theoretical

framework broad and deep enough to hold together three worlds that have more in common than would at first appear.

Chapter 1

The End of Love's Empire: António Lobo Antunes Deconstruction of Portuguese Colonialism

Love has played a central role in Portuguese literature and politics. Unlike other colonial empires, the Portuguese had to make up for their lack of organization and actual presence in the colonies with an all-inclusive rhetoric based on love. The origins of this rhetoric, however, are not limited to the Lusotropicalism discourse deployed by the Estado Novo starting from the 1950's. This particular trope in which love is used to justify violence is pervasive through western literature since Greek mythology. In the case of Portuguese literature this connection has been made explicit, at least, since the great Portuguese epic *Os lusíadas*, although it is still present in contemporary criticism and literature alike. In the following chapter I discuss how António Lobo Antunes's narrative exposes the complicity of amorous narratives in Portuguese imperial and colonial narratives in three of his novels: *As naus*, *O esplendor de Portugal* and *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo*. In the context of Portuguese colonialism, Lobo Antunes's constant refusal to render any kind of love relation possible in these three novels, I argue, is both a way of resisting the paradoxes of love, and a form of denouncing the Portuguese fetishization of their long lost empire.

From *Os lusíadas* to *As naus*

As naus, published by António Lobo Antunes in 1988, is both the story of the end of the imperial adventure the Portuguese started in the Renaissance and the story of a return.

The end of the colonial wars and the independence of the Portuguese African territories in 1975, also marked the arrival in Portugal of colonial officers and colonizers who had made their living in the overseas colonies of the empire. *As naus* narrates the vicissitudes of these returnees during their first years in Lisbon after the April revolution, a group which, in Lobo Antunes's characterization, is far from ordinary. This group includes the same conquerors, kings, poets and explorers that were responsible for expanding the geographical and cultural limits of the empire from its inception. In *As naus*, Vasco da Gama, Diogo Cão, Camões, Garcia da Horta, Francisco Xavier, Pedro Álvares Cabral, among others, lend their voices to a profound interrogation of the narrative of a glorious empire Portugal built around their image.

As naus superimposes the historical lives of Portugal's glorious conquerors onto refracted and broken doppelgänger returnees' bleak and ruinous present. Manuel de Sousa de Sepúlveda—a sixteenth-century Portuguese nobleman famously shipwrecked off the coast of South Africa—now traffics in diamonds and peeps at young girls in Malanje before Angola's independence; Luis de Camões—the nation's greatest bard and poet of the discoveries—now carries his father's bones around Lisbon in a box; and Francisco Xavier—one of the first Jesuit missionaries in the Portuguese Eastern empire—now runs a decrepit brothel in Martim Moniz where Pedro Álvares Cabral—Brazil's "discoverer"—and Diogo Cão—the explorer of the West African coastline—lodge unemployed. Their contemporary misery is not gratuitous: it is against the background of their present decay that their old imperial fantasies are gauged. Diogo Cão cannot stop talking about maps and yet-to-be-discovered islands. Similarly, the owner of the only bar Manuel de Sousa Sepúlveda has not been able to buy, Nuno Álvares Pereira—the

historical hero of the fourteenth-century Battle of Aljubarrota in which the imperial Aviz dynasty defeated a Castilian threat and secured the Portuguese throne—cannot stop listening to the tinkling of the Spanish invaders’ armor. The returnees bear the names of the heroes of the discoveries, and bring with them fragments of their illustrious past embedded in monotonous lives.

One of the points of the novel is that time has stood still for these agents of History and for Lisbon. The capital of the great Portuguese empire is formed by an anachronic patchwork where scenes from the Renaissance coexist alongside images of contemporary Lisbon. Thus, in Belém, the image of a barren “*orla de areia*” (*As naus* 12), contrasts with the figure of a young Pedro Álvares Cabral waiting for the ship that will take him to fight the (1960s) colonial war in Africa. The narrative depicts Belém, the epicenter of imperial grandeur, as an amalgam where “centenas de pessoas e pares de bois que transportavam blocos de pedra para uma construção enorme dirigidos por escudeiros de saia de escarlata” (*As naus* 12), share the scenery with cars, trains, tourists, sailors and immigrants who do not seem to notice anything awry in their environment. Despite the characters’ lack of awareness, past and present co-exist in a tense harmony that mines the imperial image the Portuguese forged of themselves. The sharp opposition between former glory and present decay deprives Belém of the fatuous pomp embedded in its multiple monuments that celebrate the empire and the age of discoveries.

The overlap between past and present is a strong theme of the narrative. As a result, most literary criticism about *As naus* dwells on the disrupting effects its structure produces. According to Maria Alzira Seixo, the clash of times creates an acute sense of difference and hybridity that allows for a questioning of the Portuguese imperial past

(Rewriting 78). Difference, though, also produces a feeling of displacement that confounds the identity of imperial subjects. Imperial identity can be challenged either by alienating the returnees from the imperial image the Estado Novo imposed on them, as Adriana Martins stresses (120), or, as Leela Gandhi asserts, by allowing the returnees to recognize the difference that exists between them and their fellow countrymen (208). *As naus*'s temporal disorder, Gandhi further argues, imposes alterity where identity is expected in the Western historical narrative (208). In this sense, History loses its homogeneous texture as António Lobo Antunes, as Bernard Martocq affirms, turns History into a carnival where the burlesque plays a predominant role (82). The historical narrative—once believed to be imperative and all-encompassing—is now reduced to one among several competing fictions.

Instead of revising the historiography surrounding the Portuguese discoveries, *As naus* revises the image of the Portuguese empire constructed during the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Eduardo Lourenço, this image was the result of several traumas that marked the history of Portugal and had its climax in the nineteenth century (20-7). Besides the twelfth-century trauma produced by its emergence as a kingdom, and the sixteenth-century traumatic loss of sovereignty for sixty years under Spanish rule, the nineteenth century was, more than previous centuries, “um século de existência nacional traumatizada” (Lourenço 27). Starting with the independence of Brazil in 1822, and ending with the British Ultimatum in 1890,¹⁰ the nineteenth century was one of the most distressing periods of Portuguese History. In the same century, the Portuguese lost their

¹⁰ The British Ultimatum was the final demand the British, after the Serpa-Pinto incident in lake Niassa, made to the Portuguese to relinquish their claim to the territories between Angola and Mozambique. The Portuguese pretention to these territories—pretentions that found their expression in the pink colored-map—clashed with the British project to possess an uninterrupted corridor of land from South Africa to Egypt.

imperial crown jewel and saw their dream of a transcontinental African colony, embodied in the famous pink-colored map, completely gutted. It is no coincidence, then, that Portuguese imperial consciousness was reorganized, through a mystical nationalism, around the heroic period of the Portuguese discoveries (Lourenço 45). The Portuguese, in their moment of greatest imperial anxiety, swapped their frustrated imperial desires for a fetish.

A fetish is, first and foremost, a replacement. It takes the place of the phallus—in Lacanianism, the signifier of the Other's desire or, in more Freudian terms, a symbol of power and independence—allowing the fetishist to deny castration at the same time that it invests the fetishist with the feeling of invulnerability (Freud, *Fetishism* 154). The fetish, however, can also make up for the sexual object. Indeed, fetishism, like all other perversions, usually makes its appearance when, for one reason or another, the normative sexual object cannot be attained (Freud, *Three Essays* 36). Although Freud initially defined fetishism as a deviation from the sexual object, fetishism can appear whenever an obstacle thwarts the fulfillment of any desire, regardless of its sexual nature. In other words, after any traumatic experience that involves the dissatisfaction of a desire, the fetishization of the desired object, concept or discourse, may ensue. Just as the concept of the nation was, according to Theodor Adorno, fetishized by the Germans after so many traumatic experiences related to its formation (*History and Freedom* 111-2), so, too, the Portuguese empire became a fetish after the disastrous nineteenth century. Faced with the loss of the overseas empire they claimed as theirs by historical right, the Portuguese fetishized the imperial image of the discoveries furnished by the literary accounts of their nautical exploits.

The fetish, then, covers a lack that might have different origins. In the Portuguese case, this lack may either be produced by the fragility of an empire that never actually existed, as Lourenço affirms (29), or by an absence of thorough historical analysis of the causes that triggered Portuguese imperial expansion. Indeed, once the past is fetishized, there is no reason to pay close attention to historical facts. Flawed political and economic reasons, cloaked in religious rhetoric, drove the Portuguese discoveries. Fused with their interest in controlling the trans-Saharan gold trade was the mystical quest for Prester John. Around the mythical figure of this rich and powerful Christian priest-king coalesced many European legends and a large dose of wishful thinking. According to Charles Boxer, the search for the priest-king, an invaluable ally in the crusade against the Moors in Africa, was paramount in the retroactive rhetoric about Portugal's decision to cross the Cape of Good Hope and reach India (19-20). For Boxer, the image of a Renaissance Portugal replete with heroes and navigators eager to set sail carried by the winds of adventure, was based, at best, on shaky historical ground. The fetishized "Age of Discoveries" forged in the nineteenth century paid little heed to the fact that Portugal was a kingdom composed mostly of peasants, and the Portuguese usually had trouble finding qualified sailors to man their fleets to Africa and Brazil (Boxer 213). Yet, there was no room in the narrative of the nineteenth century either for poor peasants or for a historical interrogation of the folly underpinning the glorious image of Portugal's past.

The fetish replaces this historical lack and imposes, instead, a fake sense of glory. However, this replacement is not perfect since traces of its inadequacy are undeniable, as we witness in *As naus*. The fetishized image of the empire does not completely conform to the lack it tries to fill in reality, as the image of the time of the discoveries fails to

cover entirely the decadent reality which greets the returnees as they arrive in Lisbon. As Maria Alzira Seixo highlights, the novel brings to the fore, by way of discursive perversion, the loose connection between an inherited patrimonial plenitude and a contemporary lack (*Os romances* 184). This perverse narrative, Seixo further argues, uses discursive inversions and diversions to question the founding historical narrative of the Portuguese empire (*Os romances* 173). In this sense, the discursive perversion the narrative employs is a critique of the fetishization of the imperial past that has haunted the Portuguese imaginary since the second half of the nineteenth century.

Fetishism is the cause of the clash of the different historical times that characterize the novel's structure. The fetishization of the Portuguese empire is behind the entwinement in the collective memory of past and present that, as Eunice Cabral affirms, produces the disruption of the time of enunciation ("Tempo e espaço" 279). Indeed, the imperial fetish imposed on reality is what "the man named Luis"—Camões's echo in the novel—confronts upon his arrival in Lisbon, the great capital of the kingdom. After his father is shot dead during the colonial war (*As naus* 19), the man named Luis leaves the smell that was so familiar to him and a countryside full of "padrões, de destroços de caravela e armaduras de conquistadores finados" (*As naus* 25), only to arrive in an even more decadent place. After two weeks at the customs office with his father's coffin, the man named Luis calmly walks through a city that does not resemble the city he imagined from the periphery: "palavra que imaginava obeliscos, padrões, mártires de pedra, largos percorridos pela brisa sem destino da aventura, em vez de travessas gotosas, de becos de reformados e de armazéns nauseabundos, palavra que imaginava uma enseada repleta de naus aparelhadas que recendiam a noz-moscada e a canela" (*As naus*

73). Instead, Lisbon is a city of chimneys and dilapidated buildings whose streets are filled with coffee shops and bars. Its inhabitants are a baroque mix of vagrants, rabbis, famished swordsmen, prostitutes, businessmen, Moorish shoe shiners and smugglers (*As naus* 74). The space he encounters is not very different from the landscapes the man named Luis saw in Africa. In both places, fragments of the imperial image lay spread against the background of contemporary misery.

In *As naus*, the Portuguese are both trapped and liberated by the imperial image they repeatedly created since the nineteenth century. The fetish offers the Portuguese a way to escape the decadent decline of their empire—to deny castration and the lack that constitutes them—but also confines them to a single perspective. Whether the returnees, as Vanessa Castagna affirms, embrace the imperial fetish due to their own rejection upon their arrival in Lisbon (88), or whether the fetish, as both Martins (120) and Gandhi (208) argue, is taken as an opportunity to foreground difference, the fact remains that there is no other image to which the Portuguese can resort to escape reality.

The man named Luis, as Castagna suggests, is the only character that is somewhat aware of the sham of imperial imagery (88), but his disappointment does not prevent him from embracing imperial fetishism. It is no coincidence that after witnessing the decadence of Lisbon on his first night out, the man named Luis starts writing, before the lights are turned off at Santa Apolónia train station, “a primeira oitava heróica do poema” (*As naus* 77). Indeed, Camões’s panegyric glorification of the past—the epic poem, *Os lusíadas*—feels forced and misplaced when compared to the man named Luis’s surroundings. The images of Lisbon and its inhabitants he encounters are at odds with the first lines of praise for the exploits of “os Barões assinalados” and “as memórias gloriosas

/ daqueles reis que foram dilatando / a Fe, [e] o Império” (Camões I: 2). Like the other characters, the man named Luis produces, through *Os lusíadas*, a fetishized image of the imperial past to fill a hole in reality. Despite his awareness of the contradictions this image entails, he refuses to see the impossibility of the imperial image the Portuguese created.

As naus may be seen as a rewriting of *Os lusíadas*. As Seixo highlights, *As naus* is an intertextual palimpsest that questions the deeds its sixteenth century model celebrates (“Rewriting” 76). To this effect, the novel takes its structure from the epic poem and inverts the tale of the first discoveries that marked the beginning of the Portuguese empire. Thus, instead of a departure, *As naus* depicts a return. Rather than the “Barões assinalados” *Os lusíadas* so earnestly praises, Lobo Antunes offers a cast of beaten and maladjusted returnees. In fact, *As naus* goes even further in its deconstruction of the imperial imagery that supported Portuguese imperialism. Its narrative performs an inversion that extends to one of the most common tropes of Western literature from Greek mythology to the present, namely, the complicity of love with oppression, as discussed by Roland Barthes. This “lover’s discourse,” which we will discuss more shortly, shuts down dialogue and allies itself with the mechanisms of domination. Indeed, *As naus* is one of the first of a series of António Lobo Antunes’s novels (including *Os cus de Judas*, *O manual dos inquisidores*, *O esplendor de Portugal* and *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo*) that unveils the close association between Eros and repressive power structures.

The lover’s discourse that *Os lusíadas* celebrates and glorifies forms part of a larger Western tradition, including some of the obvious models on which Camões drew as

he wrote his epic. As well as copying parts of its structure from Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Os lusíadas* also shares with the Latin epic a similar take on the lover's discourse, that is, a discourse in which love and violence are deeply imbricated with each other. From the earliest examples of epic poetry, love has been closely connected with war.¹¹ Venus—the goddess of beauty and love, and mother of Cupid, the god of erotic love—repeatedly plays a fundamental and conflict-ridden part in the plot development of the great epic poems of antiquity. For example, the love of Paris—Venus's protégé—and Helen—Menelaus's wife—triggers the war between Greeks and Trojans. Venus is the protector of Aeneas during his long voyage from a ravaged Troy to the soon-to-be devastated Lazio, where his descendants, in line with the goddess's wishes, will found the capital of the all-conquering Roman empire. In Greek and Roman epics, love is repeatedly bound up with war and domination, but it was Camões, taking his cue from the specific part the Portuguese played in European expansion, who was the first to integrate a narrative of love into a description of the colonial encounter.

Os lusíadas integrates and amplifies the effects of the lover's discourse of its predecessors. Compared to the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, love occupies a much more preeminent role in *Os lusíadas*. Indeed, in the Portuguese epic, love has passed from being a secondary element that simply triggers the action, to being one of the main themes. Whether through Adamastor's laments in the Cape of Good Hope, or through Venus's protection and intercession on behalf of the Portuguese in the council of the gods, love is present in *Os lusíadas*'s description of the discoveries from beginning to end. Love conflates itself with the colonial enterprise to such a degree that the Portuguese

¹¹ In Roman (and Greek) mythology, Venus (Aphrodite)—the goddess of beauty—is usually depicted as the lover of Mars (Ares)—the god of war.

led by Vasco da Gama discover, apart from a new sea route to India to trade spices, the Island of Love. In the ninth canto of the epic, Venus rewards the Portuguese with an island full of nymphs and lesser goddesses. The Portuguese find a place to indulge and comfort themselves after their mishap in India, where they failed to proclaim themselves as conquerors. This island is for the Portuguese a well deserved prize after their discoveries, a place where they can satisfy their hunger, their thirst and their sexual appetite. However, the Island of Love is also the place where the age-old love discourse meets and pledges allegiance to the Portuguese imperial discourse.

Unlike *Os lusíadas*, in António Lobo Antunes's narrative, there is no Island of Love to celebrate the end of the conqueror's journey. The heroes return empty-handed to Lisbon where no nymphs or Nereids accompany them as the caravels reach the port. A mulatto woman and an old lady replace the group of "eternas esposas e formosas, / que coroas vos tecem gloriosas" (Camões X: 142), that will forever stay by the side of the Portuguese to share and praise their glory. Moreover, the only two women to come back alongside the conquerors soon find an excuse to leave them behind. The mulatto woman who lives with Pedro Álvares Cabral in the Residência Apóstolo das Índias leaves him to become Manuel Souza Sepúlveda's glamorous mistress (*As naus* 135). Likewise, the old couple from Guinea-Bissau separates soon after their arrival. The old man, unemployed, stays in a small room in Cruz Quebrada, while his wife, lost in her childhood dreams of becoming a famous artist, boards a fishing boat to reach Broadway (*As naus* 112-3). No eternal bonds link the heroes to the women they met in the colonies as *As naus* denies the existence of love in the whole Portuguese imperial project.

As naus's critique of the Island of Love goes beyond the text of *Os Lusíadas* and extends to an assault on the humanist literary critical tradition that casts Camões's epic poem as ultimately a rather benign love story. According to this critical perspective, Camões employs the historical setting of the discoveries to convey a message altogether unrelated to the violence unleashed during the imperial expansion. As Jorge de Sena highlights, the Island of Love portrayed in the ninth canto is the decisive moment of the epic adventure. Rather than being a mere deviation from the heroes' journey back to Lisbon: "A ilha é ... o restabelecimento da Harmonia, de modo que a consagração e a transfiguração mítica dos Heróis, que na ilha e pela ilha se opera, são, *também e sobretudo*, a recolocação do Amor, do verdadeiro Amor, como centro da Harmonia do Mundo" (Sena 67). The celebration of the Portuguese discoveries is of secondary importance when compared to the role played by love. For Sena, Cupid's endeavors to set things right in the world is the main theme of the poem. In a world where everybody loves what was meant to be used, not loved (Camões IX: 25), lost harmony can only come by way of the "true love" depicted on the Island of Love. *Os lusíadas*, then, in Sena's reading, deploys the violence associated with the imperial enterprise as the background of the quest for a higher, and supposedly more transcendent, kind of love.

Undoubtedly influenced by Jorge de Sena, Helder Macedo agrees love is central to the interpretation of Camões's poetry, particularly his lyric verses. But unlike Jorge de Sena, Macedo rejects any transcendental ideal behind Camões's understanding of love. Indeed, for Macedo, Camões breaks away from the previous neoplatonic tradition when he decides to acknowledge sexuality and erotism as a fundamental part of love (*Camões e a viagem* 17). Camões tries to reconcile through his poems what were, at the time he

wrote them, considered opposites: flesh and mind, reason and sexuality. Harmony, then, is again the main goal of Camões' lyric poetry, but the sense of harmony is different from the one Sena attributes to *Os lusíadas*. For Macedo, Camões strives to bring about a new conception of humanity in accordance with the new vision of man upheld during the Renaissance. This is a vision of man in which both his carnal appetite and his reason complement each other in a quest for new forms of knowledge: "A lírica de Camões tinha tentado transformar o apetite em razão e a experiência em conhecimento, como um projecto pessoal de autodescoberta, uma viagem para uma nova concepção da humanidade" (*Camões e a viagem* 32). Body and desire stop being conceived as mere barriers to the complete fulfillment of a purely ideal, and thus, rational, end.¹²

The consequences of the love rhetoric deployed by Helder Macedo go beyond the search for lost harmony. The same rhetoric Macedo employs to assert the claims of sensual knowledge in Camões lyric poetry, has the opposite effect when he applies it to an analysis of *Os lusíadas*. The quest to end the unreason of the world liberates its oppressive kernel once it is transposed to a civic or historical context. Macedo interprets the Portuguese discoveries as a symbolic voyage guided by love—Venus—into the unknown (*Camões e a viagem* 40). During this voyage the Portuguese must strive to separate themselves from the "baixo amor"—a love informed only by the sexual appetite—impersonated by Bacchus and Adamastor. In marked contrast to the love associated with these two characters, the Island of Love represents, according to Macedo, the harmony that arrives when sexual appetite transform into reason: "Nesse 'locus

¹² Love recognizes the validity of the knowledge derived from sensual experience, as Macedo affirms, and also prevents the mechanization of pleasure proper to the Enlightenment. Indeed, love is neither restricted to sexuality nor is it something entirely metaphysical. Love is, as Horkheimer and Adorno stress, something that is always socialized and thus, always different from nature or mechanical sexual satisfaction (85).

amoenus' da imaginação, todos os opostos se tornam complementares, porque todas as impossibilidades são anuladas" (*Camões e a viagem* 48). However, the much longed-for harmony depicted in this island is only superficial. What Macedo fails to acknowledge is that the submission of women to the wishes of Portuguese men is the essential precondition of complementarity and reciprocity in the epic. In this representation of a paradise on earth only the Portuguese men find the ideal form of their love. There is no room for women's desires in the narrative.¹³ Women ply themselves to the conqueror's wishes leaving no room at all for their subjectivity in the poem. Women, in fact, are as passive as the other objects Venus offers to the Portuguese:

Ali, com mil frescos manjares
com vinhos odoríferos e rosas,
com cristalinos paços singulares,
fermosos leitos, e elas mais fermosas:
Enfim, com mil deleites não vulgares,
os esperam as Ninfas amorosas
de amor feridas pera lhe entregarem
quanto delas os olhos cobiçarem" (*Camões IX: 41*).

In fact, there is no real difference between the "baixo amor" that Bacchus and Adamastor represent and the more "reasonable or intellectual love" the Portuguese encounter on the Island of Love. Women are as much of a merchandise as the other material goods Venus offers the Portuguese on their arrival, and the integration of appetite and reason is ultimately only illusory.

Helder Macedo's reading of *Os lusíadas* bisects the relation Western culture establishes between love and violence. To him, love is unrelated to the violence that

¹³ Not even Venus escapes the pressure of the Portuguese's wishes. Like the nymphs that appear in the epic poem Venus only does what the Portuguese want. She takes the side of the Portuguese on their voyage to India and offers them, after many months at sea, a place where they can satisfy their sexual appetite. She plays a main role in the narrative insofar as she remains allied to the Portuguese imperial goals. In contrast to Venus—who openly supports the imperial enterprise—Bacchus—who opposes the Portuguese and identifies with the Moors—eventually disappears instead of reconciling himself into the dubious Catholic harmony dominated by Portuguese imperial desire (Gil 52).

accompanies the Portuguese empire's expansion. Drawing on Sena's "amor verdadeiro," Macedo emphasizes love as something immediate and entirely positive. Nothing bad can come out of this improved version of love that can abolish contradictions—a kind of love that has been purified by its contact with reason. Likewise, and despite coming from the different theoretical perspective of a philosopher rather than literary critic, Fernando Gil's reading echoes the position taken by Macedo and Sena. Gil stresses the necessity of separating the historic, identity and foundational rhetoric from the poetic discourse associated with difference, love and journeys: "O contraste subsiste entre o estilo leve e fluido, enternecido e compadecido—animado pelo desejo—, do narrador da viagem e do amor... e o fastio laborioso dos retratos das batalhas ou a ladainha dos nomes de reis e heróis" (Gil 60). According to Gil, these discourses collide at some points in the narrative, but their syntactical differences always remain. Indeed, for Gil, foundation never manages to co-opt love, since love's narrative subverts foundational discourses (65). Thus, violence, domination and aggression are, in Camões's epic, completely unrelated to love. In this sense, both Gil and Macedo's approaches follow the same logic. They both try to salvage love from the spoils of a violent conquest. To these critics, true love is the answer to the chaos and disorder of the world. Once obtained, a harmony that respects difference will somehow dawn upon the earth.

Despite the positions of Sena, Gil and Macedo, the connection between love and violence cannot be dismantled since love's discourse is, in itself, riddled with aggression. Pain, despair, wounds and anxiety are inextricably linked to the imagery used to represent the pangs of love. It is no coincidence that, in Greek and Roman mythology, Venus and Mars are the parents of Cupid. Nor is it irrelevant that he uses arrows to wound his

targets. The fact that Cupid's arrows soften the "duros corações da plebe ruda" (Camões IX: 32) does not negate the fact that Cupid must, first and foremost, wound them. To conceive of love as totally positive and unidimensional eliminates most of its complexities and contradictions. Love, after all, is far from the state of absolute bliss and harmony the commentators of *Os lusíadas* have depicted. To love someone is also to feel hate, angst, sadness, loss and other less pleasant feelings. In this respect, Roland Barthes highlights how language has always treated love and war as equivalents (188), although the nature of this equivalence has not always been the same. As Barthes suggests, while in the modern myth of love-as-passion, the subject is ravished (captured, enchanted) by the loved object, in antiquity, in contrast, it is the loved object who is ravished by the subject (188). From being an active conqueror and ravisher of the women he preys upon (antiquity), the object now conquers and defeats the subject who falls in love (modernity). Despite the exchange of roles, both discourses still share a common root. Tellingly, they are joined by the presence of a wound: "Such is the nature of love's wound: a radical chasm (at the 'roots' of being), which cannot be closed, and out of which the subject drains, constituting himself as a subject in this very draining. It would suffice to imagine our Sabine Woman wounded to make her into the subject of a love story" (Barthes 189). The presence of this wound and the suffering it produces, are at the core, or heart, of the lover's discourse. Love's violence merely changes its recipient, but its discursive effects remain, literally, the same.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, love is as much an equivalent of authority as it is of violence. The overvaluation of the sexual object is at the root of the lover's enthrallment or—to play on a nuance—enslavement. Indeed, for Freud: "the subject

becomes, as it were, intellectually infatuated (that is, his powers of judgement are weakened) by the mental achievements and perfections of the sexual object and he submits to the latter's judgement with credulity. Thus, the credulity of love becomes an important, if not the most fundamental, source of *authority*" (*Three Essays* 16). Love, then, through one of its many effects, is inseparable from power since it permits the lover both to enslave and wound the object of his love. However, unlike other forms of oppression, the authority that springs from love is all-the-more dangerous because most of the time it disguises itself as something entirely positive. In this sense, behind the much praised love-induced harmony of the Island of Love lies—at least for the nymphs wounded by Cupid's arrows—the most fundamental source of oppression.

The authority produced by the credulity of love is also a source of deception. Apart from being inextricable from violence and domination, the lover's discourse dupes both, the lover and his loved object, into believing what is not true. Love works as a façade that prevents the lover from coming to terms with his own desire. As Lacan intimates, deception is not a mere obstacle to the establishment of love. On the contrary, deception is—as authority was for Freud—one of the fundamental facets of love. No other discourse is apter for deception than love's discourse insofar as there is no "better way of assuring one self, on the point on which one is mistaken, than to persuade the other of the truth of what one says" (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 133). Indeed, the lover can continue to misunderstand what he really lacks by convincing the other that he is his complement or long lost half (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 133). Love, then, is the perfect alibi for domination since it tricks both, the lover and the loved object, into a dubious state of harmony. It fools us into believing that opposites can coexist

peacefully as it allows the wielder of its discourse to inflict violence and exercise authority on the other. It is no coincidence that Camões associated love with the Portuguese empire's expansion. Love is its perfect, and most refined, compliment.¹⁴

Love is the perfect alibi for Portugal's imperial fetishism since both aim at filling the lack produced by the failure of the Portuguese empire. In this sense—behind the excuse of a passionate impulse towards their lost half—the Portuguese can equate their imperial obsession with a quest for harmony. Love boosts the effects of imperial fetishism and, simultaneously, fosters the Portuguese misunderstanding of the historical causes of their fixation with the image of the “Age of Discoveries.” Furthermore, the lover's discourse gives the Portuguese other advantages. Love can deceive the Portuguese and their colonized subjects into believing that power and authority have nothing to do with their imperial power. In presenting all the violence associated with the imperial enterprise as an act of the purest love, the Portuguese can easily justify their claim to their glorious empire.

The emphasis on Camões's conception of love appears during the second half of the traumatic nineteenth century in Teófilo Braga's analysis of Camões's poetry. Braga, a member of the distinguished “Geração de 70” alongside Antero de Quental, Eça de Queirós and Oliveira Martins, offers a reading of love in Camões's lyric poetry that, according to Eduardo Lourenço, has subsequently impacted Camões's exegesis (158). Braga's conception of love in Camões's poetry is the same that informs Jorge de Sena's

¹⁴ Given the violent rhetoric of love narratives, Helder Macedo's reading of the Island of Love as a typical pastoral allegory raises even more pressing issues. Indeed, if the Island of Love depicts the long-lost, always-longed-for golden age of universal harmony as something possible in historical time (*Viagens do olhar* 133), we must question the real extent of the peaceful and idyllic past the Western imaginary has constructed around the idea of a golden age. After all, a golden age constructed around the illusion of a love-induced harmony would be no less violent or oppressing than the present state of affairs.

reading—that is, a conception that stresses love’s capacity to serve as “o meio por onde a intelligencia [sic] se eleva à compreensão da unidade universal” (Braga 5). Despite Braga’s emphasis on the much-praised love-induced harmony, love is far from being the abstract feeling twentieth-century criticism has taken it to be. Indeed, for Braga, Camões’s lyric poetry is the product of “o genio [sic] amoroso” of the Portuguese because love—“esse sentimento característico d’este povo”—has always been the main cause underpinning all Portuguese deeds (6). Tellingly, in Braga’s *História de Camões*, this “vocaçãõ amorosa ingénita” of the Portuguese, as Lourenço calls it (156), appears side-by-side with a reading of *Os lusíadas* in which patriotism is inseparable from the image the epic poem depicts of the past (Lourenço 161). Although the connection is not made explicitly, both the harmony that comes through love and the patriotic image of the past associated with a specific reading of Camões emerge at the same time in Portuguese history. After “o eclipse mortal da nacionalidade” that took place during the nineteenth century (Lourenço 161), love and the Portuguese fetishization of the glorious image of their imperial past became indissolubly linked.

António Lobo Antunes’s rewriting of *Os lusíadas* distances itself from Teófilo Braga’s tradition of exegesis and aligns itself more with Voltaire’s reading of Canto IX. Similarly to Voltaire’s comparison of the Island of Love to a “musico d’Amsterdam” (228),¹⁵ *As naus* identifies the nymphs, Nereids and “tágides” that Diogo Cão endlessly chases around the world with prostitutes from Amsterdam. Indeed, after the “longínqua tágide holandesa” he first sees in a shop window in the Dutch capital abandons him before he is shipped back to Portugal (*As naus* 117), Diogo Cão starts a search

¹⁵ A musico was a kind of public establishment in Holland where the customers could drink, smoke, listen to music and, obviously, be with prostitutes.

comparable to the quest for all the undiscovered islands Prince Henry the Navigator demands from his conquerors (*As naus* 55). Back in Lisbon, Diogo Cão begins “a buscar sem sucesso...uma montra de puta capaz de o transportar aos canais de Amsterdão” throughout the city (*As naus* 118), until the government sends him to work in Angola as an inspector for the water and sewer company. Despite the distance, he never relinquishes his search for the nymphs during the twelve years he stays in Luanda. He looks for them “nos cabarés à noite e na praia de manhã” (120) only to end up lying in one of the shacks of a mulatto prostitute where, even by her side, he cannot stop hallucinating about Dutch tágides. Likewise, when Independence arrives, Diogo Cão returns to Lisbon alone condemned to continue searching, from the Residência Apóstolo das Índias, for the sylphs floating amid the hulls of the returning caravels. No nymphs accompany him on his miserable return to the capital of the dying empire as the eternal love Venus promised the Portuguese is nothing more than another imperial illusion.

Bucking the trend of the secondary criticism of *Os lusíadas*, *As naus* refuses to give love a mere symbolic or allegoric meaning. In this respect, the encounter between the mulatto prostitute and Diogo Cão in Lisbon sets the scene for the rewriting of Canto IX and, simultaneously, inverts the role love plays in Camões’s epic. Instead of adding the mythical Island of love to the Portuguese narrative of imperial expansion—as *Os lusíadas* does—, *As naus* takes the imperial imagery to a small bedroom in Lisbon. In this short passage, both the third person narrator and the woman deploy the Portuguese imperial imagery to describe the sexual encounter that Sena’s critical trend rendered, through its reading of the events of the Island of love, harmless. Their narratives turn on its head the images associated with “a Ilha dos Amores” to show how love is inextricable

from the imperial project. Tellingly, it is during the only erotic scene of the novel that the decrepit and haggard Diogo Cão transforms momentarily into one of the Portuguese heroes celebrated by Camões. His change of appearance is all the more drastic since the great conqueror the mulatto woman finds—with his “furúnculos,” “grandes peladas na beça” and his “dois únicos dentes na gengiva inferior” (*As naus* 162)—is nothing more than a delirious drunkard trapped in the past roaming the streets of Lisbon in search of mermaids.

Rather than liberating Diogo Cão from the imperial obsession that assails most of the characters in *As naus*, love reinforces his fixation. Diogo Cão’s slow and painstaking transformation is as much the result of his love for the Nereids as it is of his refusal to acknowledge the lack the Portuguese imperial fetish tries to conceal. He is neither willing to confront his miserable life during the last years of the Estado Novo, nor does he want to relinquish his divine right to love and be loved by Thetis (*As naus* 171). After all, love and the fetish work in similar ways. They both make up for what, actually, never really existed.¹⁶ Similarly to the myth the Portuguese built to compensate for their failed empire, Diogo Cão’s delirious love for the nymphs strives to make up for the lack of a more profound form of love. The fact that the narrative uses the same imperial metaphors to describe both Diogo Cão’s search for those “seres de vastos seios orvalhados de escamas metálicas e cauda de bacalhau de Groenlândia” (171), and his erotic encounter with “uma criatura sem formas que lhe sorria sob exagero do baton o riso das meninas” (172), only highlights the connection between the imperial project and love. The woman

¹⁶ For Lacanian psychoanalysis, love makes up for the inexistent sexual relationship. There is no reciprocity in a sexual relationship since, contrary to what is commonly believed, each subject does not relate directly to his other, complementary, half. For Lacan, each subject relates both to his own ego by way of narcissistic identification and to his object *a*—the object cause of desire—in accordance with his own particular fantasy (S \diamond a) (*Encore* 6).

explores a body composed of “baías e enseadas e vilas piscatórias” (172) over a bed that, by its increasing turmoil and dimensions, resembles the always-expanding Portuguese sea. Moreover, her voyage of discovery of the decayed body of the sailor suddenly stops when she runs aground, “no imenso, inesperado mastro orgulhoso do navegante” (173), of a rejuvenated Diogo Cão. Once Diogo Cão transforms into the great captain he once was, the images that compose the lover’s discourse change as well. After the conqueror’s revival, his sex organ—“uma enxárcia descomunal” decked with “dezenas de estandartes reais de caravela” (173)—becomes a weapon with which he stabs the woman until their erotic encounter turns into “uma terna batalha de navalhadas ardentes” (173).

Significantly, the scenes and descriptions of a violent conquest follow the first metaphors of exploration. The sexual encounter between Diogo Cão and the woman replicates to the utmost detail imperial expansion.¹⁷

Diogo Cão’s renunciation of the imperial image the Portuguese fetishize also includes love. His rejection of the imperial illusions does not entail his reconciliation, as Mark Sabine suggests, with reality or with the Angolan prostitute (quoted in Arnaut 172). In order to start a new life with the woman, Diogo Cão must throw in the bin the bundle of continents, groups of islands, rivers, animals and plants that constituted the imperial geography he never relinquished after returning from the colonies (*As naus* 180). However, neither harmony nor love lie behind the imperial imagery of the Portuguese he refused. In this respect, just before going to bed for the first time in his new home, Diogo

¹⁷ The violence inherent to the lover’s discourse supports the connection between the African landscape and women’s anatomy that Luis Madureira foregrounds in his analysis of *Os Cus de Judas*, António Lobo Antunes second novel. If, as Madureira suggests, European colonial narratives treat women’s body and African geography as unoccupied territories that only acquire meaning insofar as they are “written, troped, penetrated” (“The Discreet Seductiveness” 22), it is because the colonial narrative partakes of the tropes and images Western love narratives employ.

Cão finds himself facing, with an increasing feeling of anxiety, the void left behind by the imperial fetish. While he floats restlessly “numa espécie de limbo deserto de afluentes e bacias por achar” (180), Diogo Cão cannot stop looking at the nothingness his neighbor observes with a pair of binoculars. The presence of the void is the only thing he sees, its silence is the only thing he hears, and not even love can make up for its presence:

“Acabou por jogar no copo da mesinha de cabeceira, por apagar a luz do quarto, por recusar as carícias preocupadas da mulher, e por continuar fitando, até a madrugada, roendo a pedra-pomes das mandíbulas, a Terra que se transformara num deserto seco de ondas e tágides, onde mesmo o vento dos búzios tinha por fim desaparecido” (180).

Restlessness, not love, assails Diogo Cão at the end of his imperial illusions.¹⁸ Love cannot compensate for the loss of an empire that, like itself, relies heavily on aggression, domination and deceit.

The effects of violence in *As naus* go beyond the merely discursive or rhetorical and extend to the concrete violence of the Portuguese colonization in Africa. The novel denounces colonial violence through the experience of the old couple during the colonial war in Guinea, through the loss of the man named Luis’s father in Angola and, in a more subtle perspective, through Garcia Orta’s plants. Luis Garcia Orta—one of the first and most renowned exponents of lusotropical science according to Gilberto Freyre (Freyre 116)¹⁹—lives trapped in his own personal jungle. Scenes from the colonial war haunt Garcia Orta in the tropical forest he created in an apartment just a couple of blocks away

¹⁸ For Luis Madureira, António Lobo Antunes narrative highlights a death wish, that is, a death drive towards the end of History (“A Supplement” 232). In *As naus*, as in *Os Cus de Judas* and *Fado Alexandrino*, his narrative refuses to replace the myths that compose Portuguese History, thus making present the void over which the Portuguese have built their History (Madureira, “A Supplement” 242).

¹⁹ Lusotropicalism stresses the exceptional character of Portuguese colonization of tropical areas. According to this ideology, the Portuguese have an intrinsic tendency to assimilate both the nature and the inhabitants of the tropics, forming a new, hybrid civilization.

from the Largo Camões, one of the most emblematic places in Lisbon. However, in this tropical enclave full of aromatic and medicinal plants, a peaceful assimilation of the environment—the cornerstone of all lusotropical science according to Freyre (Freyre 107)—never takes place. Garcia Orta cannot adjust completely to the environment he created because of his war memories. Nor can his carnivorous plants stop eating his food and his children (*As naus* 128). In fact, the only assimilation the novel describes is the plants slow and painful digestion of Garcia Orta's life. Similarly to the impossibility of Diogo Cão finding harmony through love, Garcia Orta's predicament shows just how much violence lies behind the productive synthesis between the Portuguese and the tropical environment Lusotropicalism preaches.

Although only briefly alluded to in *As naus*, António Lobo Antunes's narrative further dwells on the multiple connections between Camões' Island of Love and Lusotropicalism in *O esplendor de Portugal*. After all, if Camões, as Helder Macedo suggests, wrote *Os lusíadas* to transmit to the Portuguese his message of initiation through love in the voyage of knowledge (*Camões e a viagem* 38), no one interpreted this allegorical message better than Gilberto Freyre, the greatest exponent of Lusotropicalism.

From Lusotropicalism to *O Esplendor de Portugal*

O esplendor de Portugal (1997) is part, along with *O manual dos inquisidores* (1996), *Exortação aos crocodilos* (1999) and *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo* (2003), of what Ana Paula Arnaut terms the cycle of power in António Lobo Antunes's novelistic production (42). According to Arnaut, in this group of novels António Lobo Antunes

dissects “alguns dos variados modos de exercer a força e a repressão individual e colectiva” (45). In the specific case of *O esplendor de Portugal*, the narrative explores Portuguese colonialism in Africa. Through the fragmented tale of their lives in Angola, a family of Portuguese landowners reconstructs and exposes the hidden horrors of the colonial experience. The voices of Isilda and her sons—Carlos, Rui and Clarisse—blend in a polyphonic narrative that, as Maria Manuela Duarte Chagas foregrounds, alternates their voices in a way very similar to a musical counterpoint (172). The novel is divided into three parts in which each of the three sons recalls, in a fragmentary and discontinuous manner that constantly superimposes different temporal planes, their life in Angola and in Lisbon on Christmas eve, 1995. Counterpointing each of her sons’ perspectives of the events, the voice of Isilda runs through all the parts of the book serving as a guiding thread spanning a period of seventeen years, from the moment their sons left Angola after independence, until she dies in Luanda the same day her sons remember their past.

The narration of the characters is as fragmented as their world. From Lisbon or Angola, their memories gravitate around the loss of their family and the colonial society that fostered it. Eunice Cabral points out how, in *O esplendor de Portugal*, a dysfunctional family reflects the fragmentation and loss of Portugal’s social and political present (“Experiência de alteridade” 363), since both the family and colonial society are part of the same order. The fragmentation of this family, however, goes beyond the separation of all its members after Angola’s independence. As the discordant narrative of each of the characters shows, the traces of its disaggregation extend to all their memories. The chaos and instability that followed the colonial war were just an

excuse for the fracture of a social order that was already rotten. When Isilda, fearing the worst, decides to stay behind to take care of the property in a Baixa de Cassanje and send her sons to live in a small apartment in Ajuda, a poor neighborhood in Lisbon, they carry within themselves the scars of their failure. Indeed, the siblings' separation from each other as well as their reluctance to answer their mother's letters, result from a hatred incubated during their life in the colonies.

The family *O esplendor de Portugal* depicts partakes of all the elements of the Portuguese colonial discourse. Its members replicate between themselves, without exception, the racism, classism and violence that structures colonial society. While Carlos—the mulatto—and Clarisse—the libertine—suffer respectively from the racism and sexist disapproval of their family, Rui—the mentally disabled son—indulges in wanton acts of violence that mimic the violence of the Portuguese system of forced labor. The siblings, however, are both victims and victimizers of the ideology they endorse. Rather than supporting each other against the society that oppresses them, they end up acting as pawns that replicate its discourse. The fact that Carlos is a victim of racism neither discourages him from calling Clarisse a prostitute, nor does it deter Clarisse from cursing him for being a mulatto. The family members are so entangled in the colonial discourse that none of them, despite leaving Angola, can break free. As Margarida Calafate Ribeiro affirms, in *O esplendor de Portugal*, at the heart of the quaint Portuguese home—the cornerstone of the dictatorship's social and religious indoctrination—the same system of exploitation that sustains the colonial society reigns (“As ruínas” 59). No part of society is exempt from the corrupting influence of the colonial discourse. As Daniel Zubía Fernández suggests, the regime's attempt to use the

family to regenerate a shattered Portuguese empire proved useless (201). The small family of colonizers is as wrecked as its larger version, the glorious Portuguese nation.

The corrupting influence of the imperial ideology that supported colonization extends to the identity of all the characters. Instead of affirming the identity of the individuals, the oppression of both the colonial society and the dictatorship disrupt the characters' self-image. In this context, the image of the great Portuguese explorers is of no avail. Faced with violence, as Graça Abreu stresses, António Lobo Antunes's characters lose their subjectivity, that is, any of the typical marks that define an individual (262). The loss of a clear-cut self-image undermines the fundamental duality underpinning the colonial discourse. Indeed, no chasm can separate the colonized other from the colonizers, and thus, justify their alleged superiority, if the limits of the latter's identity are blurred.²⁰

O esplendor de Portugal's narrative undermines the fixed binary categories on which Western colonization rests. Characteristic of other António Lobo Antunes's novels, *O esplendor de Portugal* abounds with portrayals of displacement and hybridity, two fundamental concepts postcolonial theory deploys to disrupt any entrenched sense of identity (Seixo, *Os romances* 502). Independence forces Isilda and her offspring to leave their plantation house, the symbol of their status as colonizers, and revise the purity of their lineage. This movement through space and time brings forth both the horror of the colonial environment and the arbitrary origin of their privileged position in the class

²⁰ As Ania Loomba affirms, the colonial discourse is based on a dialectic between self and other that is fundamental for European self-conceptualization (45). Thus, "if colonized people are irrational, Europeans are rational; if the former are barbaric, sensual and lazy, Europe is civilization itself, with its sexual appetites under control and its dominant ethic that of hard work" (Loomba 45). It little matters if the knowledge about the other the colonial discourse produces is artificial or dubious as long as it perpetuates the coordinates that allow Europeans to situate themselves as opposite to the other (Loomba 55).

system (Seixo, *Os romances* 326). The memories of Isilda's idyllic past in her parents' colonial house clash with the ruins of the Portuguese present and with a history that, until then, she refused to acknowledge: "a erva das campas contava uma história muito antiga de gente e bichos e assassinios e guerra ... segredando sem parar a nossa culpa, acusando-nos de termos chegado como gatunos, inclusive os missionários, os cultivadores os enfermeiros que curavam a lepra, a erva das campas repetindo mentiras que o meu pai aconselhava tapando-me as orelhas —Não escutes" (*O esplendor* 85). The massacres of both colonizers and colonized, the classism and discrimination between the colonizers and the affair between her father and a French prostitute, emerge during her voyage from her ruined plantation in the Baixa do Cassanje to Luanda, destabilizing the fetishized image of their present life in the colonies. Indeed, the voices of family members oppose the artificial aristocratic and pastoral image of Portuguese colonization, providing a demythologized view of their past.

Similarly to *As naus*'s chaotic image of Lisbon, the image of Angola Isilda renders in her narrative is an amalgam of past and present events. Like the returning Portuguese captains, Isilda refuses to acknowledge that the Angola she once knew never really existed. For Isilda, the Luanda she encounters in 1995 is just a farce staged over the luxurious and exotic capital of the former colony. The soldiers, the wounded and the corpses she finds spread over the city are simply actors performing a role, while the real Luanda—with its real castles, its real fortress and its real people—lies hidden below the shanty town and the jungle (*O esplendor* 356). Despite her vehement affirmations to the contrary, the Angola she once knew did not end after she witnessed the mutilated bodies of the poor colonizer family when she was a child, or when, in retaliation, the colonizers

decided to kill a young Bailundo who happened to be around carrying a bag of beans (212-3). Angola begins to be over for her the moment she can no longer invent a present that, in reality, stopped existing many years before (87), because that loss of inventive power means she can no longer deny the existence of the void—a void she tried to fill with an image that never corresponded to reality, even before independence.

O esplendor de Portugal's adamant critique of colonialism also deals with the particularities of the Portuguese presence in Africa and the ideology that endorsed it. Following Boaventura de Sousa Santos, many postcolonial readings of *O esplendor de Portugal* emphasize the “porosity of the Portuguese identity regime” (Sousa Santos 27). Unlike other European forms of colonialism based on a strict opposition between Prospero—the civilized colonizer—and Caliban—the barbarous colonized, Portuguese colonialism is always already ambivalent: “Since they are the union of opposites (i.e. Prospero and Caliban), at given moments or contexts the Portuguese may be either predominantly Prospero or Caliban” (Sousa Santos 30). Hybridity then, at least in the case of Portuguese colonization, is not as destabilizing as it is to the identity of the other European colonizers. It cannot upturn the Portuguese colonizer’s image because their image is, in itself, already contradictory.²¹ Thus, ambivalence is not enough to prevent the oppression the colonial discourse causes in the Portuguese case. As Isabel A. Ferreira Gould points out, violence and repression continue despite the Portuguese assimilation of the other’s traits (153). Tellingly, the subaltern Portuguese colonizer Ana Maria Fonseca describes is not so different from other European colonizers (284). When it comes to the effects of colonialism, the calibanized Prospero is no better than, or significantly different

²¹ Similarly, in her analysis of *O esplendor de Portugal* Paula Gândara foregrounds the hybrid construction of identity of most characters in the novel: “Trata-se de uma representação que desmascara o processo de construção do *eu* mas que também demonstra o papel do Outro na mediação do sentido do *eu*” (182).

from, the other unambiguous versions of Prospero. In this respect, Isilda's father cannot be more explicit when he points to the reasons behind the Portuguese colonization of Africa:

há alturas em que julgo que devia, podia, era fácil ter tido uma vida diferente mesmo em África onde tínhamos vindo procurar ... não dinheiro nem poder mas pretos sem dinheiro e sem poder algum que nos dessem a ilusão do dinheiro e do poder que de facto ainda que o tivéssemos não tínhamos por não sermos mais que tolerados em Portugal, olhados como olhávamos os que trabalhavam para nós e portanto, de certo modo, éramos os pretos dos outros da mesma forma que os pretos possuíam os seus pretos e estes os seus pretos ainda em sucessivos degraus que desciam ao fundo da doença e da miséria. (*O esplendor* 388)

The fact that the other's identity permeates the Portuguese image of themselves only serves as an excuse to try, by all means possible, to rectify the old binary system that legitimizes oppression. Thus, rather than putting a stop to exploitation, consciousness of a hybrid identity merely extends its chain to include other members. Needless to say, there is nothing exceptional in the chain of violence that Lobo Antunes's narrative describes. After all, hybridity and ambivalence, as soon as they are conceptualized as something entirely positive and immediate, can easily be wielded as an excuse for domination or, as Paulo de Medeiros says, as a way of covering the material and cultural exploitation and expropriation of the colonized the Lusotropicalist doctrine justified (Medeiros 346-7).²²

The characteristics of Portuguese colonialism go beyond the ambivalent figure of the Portuguese colonizer Sousa Santos describes. A thorough deconstruction of Portuguese colonial discourse would have to include love and the discursive practices associated with it, as well as a critique of the binary discourse on which colonialism rests.

²² According to Miguel Vale de Almeida, Boaventura de Sousa Santos's approach to Portuguese colonialism is part of the same tradition of Portuguese ideological exceptionalism to which Lusotropicalism belongs. Sousa Santos's thesis, Almeida argues, with its emphasis on Portugal being characterized by "mimesis, syncretism and translocalism, with a deficit of differentiation and identification" (62), is nothing more than a sociological reification of the thesis of previous Portuguese Lusotropicalists .

Love is neither independent from Portuguese imperial practices nor is its absence a simple collateral effect of colonial discourse. In this respect, it is not enough simply to point, as Maria Alzira Seixo does, to the refraction of hybrid colonial identities as the cause behind the solitude and affective failure of *O esplendor de Portugal's* characters (Seixo, *Os romances* 324). By refusing to foreground the affinities between love and colonial discourses, postcolonial readings of *O esplendor de Portugal* deploy the same strategies the critics of *Os lusíadas* use to salvage love from the imperial discourse.²³ It makes no difference whether the colonial narrative affects love's possibilities—as in the case of *O esplendor de Portugal*—or whether this narrative is a mere allegory for a truer form of love—as in the case of *Os lusíadas*. The fact remains that both these approaches deny the complicity of love's discourse in the Portuguese imperial project.

The significance of the relation between colonialism and love becomes more pressing since Lusotropicalism—the discourse the Portuguese employed to justify their presence in the colonies—is grafted onto love. Love is the connecting thread that ties together all the criteria Gilberto Freyre uses to structure his theory: hybrid Portuguese ethnic origins—both Moorish and European—; the Portuguese tendency to miscegenate and assimilate other races and cultures; and the supposed practice of a fraternal form of Christianity (Castelo 33). Indeed, the tropical “sentimento amoroso” that, for Freyre, sustains the Portuguese assimilation of other cultures (Freyre 34), goes beyond a fleeting infatuation. The love the Portuguese feel in their relation with the tropics is claimed as

²³ By categorizing into discreet thematic units António Lobo Antunes's narrative, Isabel A. Ferreira Gould (2011) partakes of the same logic of separation that is behind Fernando Gil's splitting between foundational and travel narrative in *Os lusíadas* (Gil 18). Indeed, in recognizing recurrent themes in Lobo Antunes narrative such as: “a desconstrução das mitologias da pátria e da família; a África, a anti-epopeia que foi a guerra colonial e as ruínas do império, a memória e a re-escrita revisionista do passado; a (des)ordem e a degradação na/da família; o desencontro e o confronto nas relações de género; a ausência do amor”, Gould breaks, unwittingly perhaps, the subtle connexions that exist between love and violence.

something intrinsic to their character, that is, an undeniable trait of their identity that has its origin in a constant contact with the Moorish culture (Freyre 50). Thus, by making the love the Portuguese experience in their relation with the tropics into a unique and innate quality, Freyre can distinguish between the Portuguese and northern Europeans. Rather than the profit other Europeans look for in their colonial encounters, the Portuguese relation with the tropics thus is deemed to offer a new version of the colonial exchange: “a da conveniência completada pelo amor” (Freyre 50). This, however, is not a minor difference. As long as love remains the driving force behind Portuguese union with the tropics, the drama, the conflict, the pain, the suffering and the anguish that characterize the colonial encounter (Freyre 50), by way of the effects of love’s discourse, fade unnoticed into the background.

Christianity, with its apologetic discourse on the virtues of love, is the perfect complement of Lusotropicalism. To this effect, the Christian principle of love among men works in exactly the same way as the Lusotropicalist vindication of love. Both doctrines have taken advantage of the ambivalence of the lover’s discourse as they both implicitly acknowledge that, veiled behind the command to love one’s neighbor, lies a secret plea for domination. There is no contradiction in the Crusades, the Inquisition or in the multiple massacres and pogroms the Church initiated and instigated with its discourse of brotherly love. Nothing is more natural to love than these displays of violence because its effects are ingrained in the very fabric of the lover’s discourse. It is no coincidence that, in praising the Portuguese version of Christianity for its tolerance of foreign elements (Freyre 229), Freyre acknowledges, following the Jesuit Portuguese priest A.S.P.’s manuscript entitled “*Pátria Morena*,” the importance of “a arma do amor cristão” that

beautiful maids can wield to help the Portuguese in the conquest of the powerful Moorish kings (A.S.P. quoted in Freyre 234). In fact, love is both the subtlest and most trenchant weapon of all. It can inflict the same damage as any other blade, subdue the same number of kings and enslave large populations without blunting its allegorical edge. With love by their side, as Portuguese imperialism and Christianity quickly realized, any kind of aggression can be justified as an act of the purest and deepest passion.²⁴

The Portuguese significantly increased their use of the lover's discourse to justify their supposedly kinder form of colonialism in the 1950's, as international pressure mounted on Portugal to leave its colonies in Africa. The Estado Novo adopted Lusotropicalism as an official ideology in order to defend what the dictatorship considered a Portuguese innate and historical right (Castelo 89). However, the presence in the Portuguese imaginary of the ideas underpinning Lusotropical ideology predates Salazar's endorsement of Freyre, as Claudia Castelo affirms, and even predates the second half of the nineteenth century, Miguel Vale de Almeida suggest (Almeida 51). Lusotropicalism, according to Anna Klobucka, has its origins on Camões's Island of love (Klobucka 124).²⁵ Indeed, Freyre's *Pax Lusitana*—where harmony, despite the initial painful clash between opposites, will end up reigning (Freyre 56)—is very similar to Camões's idyllic nymph-filled island. As Klobucka highlights, on this island, Camões, precursoring Freyre's idealized account of colonization, makes love thrive amidst “servitude and imperial domination,” thus reconciling “incompatible claims” (133).

²⁴ The effects of love's discourse are patent in the legal system. Indeed, the legal figure of the passional crime follows the same principle of defense. In declaring a passional or emotional motive as the cause of an aggression, the accused can eliminate the element of premeditation and thus, reduce the gravity of the charges imputed against him/her.

²⁵ According to Klobucka, love is only an excuse for imperial expansion. The common set of national identity discourses that link the pseudoscientific Lusotropicalist doctrine and the fictional sixteenth-century conquest narrative of *Os Lusíadas*, base themselves, to construct and preserve the empire, rather than on love, on the “innate tendency of Portuguese men toward sexual *hybris*” (124).

However, if we understand love in the ambivalent (Barthesian psychoanalysis-inspired) sense explored in this chapter, it really is not incompatible with servitude and imperial domination since the rhetoric that composes them is already part of the lover's discourse. In this sense, it comes as no surprise that Helder Macedo, basing himself on a Renaissance conception of love as a satisfying union of mind and body, far from the pseudo-scientific phylogenetics of Freyre, arrives at a reading of the Island of Love where the harmony between opposites prevails, and unwittingly mirrors a lusotropical *Pax Lusitana*: “Nesse ‘locus amoenus’ da imaginação, todos os opostos se tornam complementares, porque todas as impossibilidades são anuladas” (*Camões e a viagem* 48). Excluding all the ethnic and exceptional elements of Teófilo Braga's reading of Camões's lyric poetry is not enough to escape the dubious harmony love narratives unconsciously construct at their climax. While the unstable equilibrium lover's discourse achieves can only be, literally, riddled with aggression; the reconciliation it preaches can only be, paradoxically enough, allegorical.

The absence of love in António Lobo Antunes's narrative is related to his critique of the Portuguese fetishistic obsession with their imperial and colonial past. However, rather than denouncing in a direct way the complicity of love with the imperial project—as is the case of *As naus*—, *O esplendor de Portugal* focuses on the allegorical, and thus always positive meaning, of love. The lack of love in *O esplendor de Portugal* is a subtle way of dismantling the array of excuses and justifications that always accompany the aggression behind the much-acclaimed love-induced harmony love narratives construct.²⁶ In this respect, this positive understanding of love is completely absent from *O esplendor*

²⁶ In this sense, Sebastián Patrón Saade highlights how *O manual dos inquisidores*, another of António Lobo Antunes's novels in the cycle of power, uses the absence of love to unveil the secret complicity of love with patriarchal authority (150).

de Portugal because the narrative acknowledges its scheme as an accomplice of authoritarian narratives.²⁷

By questioning the capacity of love to bring harmony, *O esplendor de Portugal* disrupts the allegorical image of love on which both Lusotropicalism and Camões's epic poem depend. None of the main characters in the novel finds the reciprocity and mutual understanding that love is expected to offer. All their relationships fail to provide them with the peaceful bliss love promised. Thus, love has nothing to do with Isilda's refusal to divorce after discovering Amadeu had a child with a waitress. She denies to divorce Amadeu—whom she married defying her family's wishes (57)—just because she is too tired to go through the effort of a separation:

não por amor, por essa espécie de egoísmo conformado a que se chama amor, não por gostar do meu marido, necessitar dele, sentir a falta dele mas por indiferença, inércia, não suportar naquele momento o roldão das partidas, a mala aberta, os paços para cá e para lá impacientes, um sujeito de gatas a espreitar sob a cómoda procurando uma gravata perdida, a arredar cadeiras, reposteiros (*O esplendor* 86)

For Isilda, love is not the harmonious coexistence of opposites or complementary halves, but rather a form of satisfied selfishness that has managed to invest in itself a positive meaning. Even her relationship with Malanje's police commander, the only man who—unlike her father and husband—gave her something akin to hope and happiness, is not devoid of a ruthless display of authority (115). From its origins, humiliation and revenge permeate the feelings they foster for each other. Their relationship begins out of Isilda's desire to avenge all the opportunities she wasted after marrying her husband, Amadeu, a good-for-nothing alcoholic who leaves the responsibility for running the plantation to

²⁷ The interpretations for the absence of love in António Lobo Antunes's novels usually foreground the effects of the colonial experience in its disruption. Like Maria Alzira Seixo's reading of *O esplendor de Portugal*, Phyllis Peres's analysis of love in *Os cus de Judas* follows the same rationale. Thus, for Peres, fascist Portugal reduces the protagonist to sexual impotence and a "self-referential masturbation" that has nothing to do with love (196-7).

her—“uma mulher educada para ser dona de casa e ter um homem que se ocupasse dos negócios” (58). Isilda uses her privileged social position in the colonies both to humiliate and force the young, peasant commander, to comply with her wishes. Afterwards, however, it is the commander who, upon realizing their common peasant origins, humiliates Isilda and all the pretensions of the plantation owners: “tão importantes aqui onde não existia ninguém senão nós e os africanos e tão nada em Lisboa onde existia tudo menos nós” (314). He parades her in front of Malanje’s upper class and has sex with her in her own house, in plain daylight, just to show his contempt for her husband and colonial society. Without love to veil the aggression behind their relationship he cannot, as Diogo Cão did, confuse her with a sylph. Indeed, to the police commander, Isilda is no better than a prostitute.

Similarly to Isilda, Clarisse hides the impossibility of love behind her disdain for men. She compares them to vultures on her arrival in Lisbon and, like her mother, has no qualms about using them as mere objects to satisfy her material needs. She never shows affection for them and affirms that all the men she dated, at least back in Angola, were convinced they meant something to her (295). However, Clarisse never mentions in her account the reason why most plantation employees always did her bidding. From her perspective, these men complied with her wishes out of fear of being fired. From Rui’s viewpoint, though, they did it out of fear of being killed. Clarisse omits from her narration how her mother, with the help of the police commander, murdered one of Clarisse’s first boyfriends, “o contabilista são-tomense,” just because he was a mulatto (153). Tellingly, Clarisse excludes from her narration the only person she loved back in Angola. In contrast to the contempt she feels for her subsequent lovers, as soon as “o são-

tomense” disappears, Clarisse shows all the signs of, actually, being in love—“começou a afligir-se, a impacientar-se, a não almoçar, a embirrar com todos ... a fazer perguntas aos funcionários de Correios, a interrogar os intermediários” (153). The need for love disappears from her life the moment the accountant is murdered. Clarisse represses from her account the accountant’s death since, by suppressing this event from her narration, she can feign she never really required affection.

Despite Clarisse’s reluctance to accept it, her need for love reappears accidentally, many years later, when a bug jumps on top of her lover’s necktie, Luís Filipe. Until then, she realizes, Luís Filipe had never told her he loved her: “em época alguma lhe tinha ouvido a palavra amor, querida sim, bebezinho, jóia sim mas amor está quieto no receio que lhe pedisse para viver comigo e se divorciar” (319). Luís Filipe refuses to give love to Clarisse and reduces their relationship to a mere sexual transaction. Instead of taking her out to dinner, going on vacation with her and keeping her company when she is sick, he confines her to an apartment in Estoril with a giant mirror on the ceiling. Clarisse knows she is his whore—or “amante de senzala”—and, as such, she has no right to demand real affection as she is paid to be kind and caring (344). Despite her dissatisfaction, she does not hold any illusions about the happiness of marriage. In acknowledging that “o casamento é um homem que a gente se vira de costas a afastar o cabelo, nos sobe o fecho éclair, aperta o colchete e se afasta a pensar noutra coisa” (374), she also attests to the pretense behind love’s all-too-enchanting ideal. She is well aware that the reconciliation love promises is only possible when lies cease to exist because there are no more truths to tell (299).

The lack of love spans all the events in the novel denying the characters a refuge against present dissatisfaction. No nook of the characters' memory is freed from the bitterness the absence of love's possibility of reciprocity causes. In this novel about the "malogro da conjugalidade," as Seixo refers to it (*Os romances* 345), marriage is just an extension of a familial hypocrisy that extends as far back as Isilda's parents (Gould 166). Isilda clearly remembers the affair her father, Eduardo, had with a French woman and the suffering it caused her mother, Eunice. Isilda relates how her mother put on her best dress and covered herself with make-up only to be avoided by her father (156). Eunice persistently assails him with the same pathetic question—"Diz lá se não continuo interessante Eduardo, diz lá se não continuas a gostar de mim?" (156)—in spite of Eduardo's overt rejection. While he refuses to sleep with her in the same room to avoid having sex with her and denies her the smallest gestures of attention, Eduardo, as Eunice confesses, lavishes all his affection on the prostitutes from the nearby brothels as well as on their neighbors in the plantation houses (262). Despite being "pateta, ridícula, teatral" (156), Eunice never gets back the love she demands. In her life, reciprocity is only a vague longing since, like Isilda, her marriage is just an empty space where love is nowhere to be found.

The narrative also removes love from the Lusotropicalist claim to a peaceful integration and assimilation as it shows how, in reality, racism permeated the colonial system. In this sense, the case of Carlos—the mestizo member of the family—is a paradigmatic example of the contradictions of the Portuguese colonial discourse (Fonseca 271). According to Seixo, Carlos suffers a double racial segregation since his foster mother—Isilda—and his wife—Lena—reject him due to his mixed racial origins (*Os*

romances 336). Both refuse to give him love, although they do it in completely different ways. Throughout her narrative Isilda strives to treat Carlos as a member of the family. She reminds herself to include him as one of her own children, she gives him the apartment in Lisbon and he is the only addressee of her letters from Angola. However, as Clarisse significantly perceives, all the tokens of affection she bestows on him are nothing more than a façade. The love Isilda restlessly bestows on Carlos is just a contrived deception to hide from the family's view her visceral hatred for him—a hatred that is even worse than her mother's overt racism (378). Her love for Carlos is nothing but a gift of hate. No wonder, then, that for Carlos, Isilda's forced attention is just a sham.

Racial segregation goes beyond family relations and extends to Carlos's love life. There is as little love behind Isilda's multiple attentions as there is in his barren sex life with Lena, his wife. Despite their eighteen years of marriage, Lena—a white girl from the shanty towns of Luanda who, as Clarisse affirms, only marries Carlos because of his money (324)—constantly refuses to have sex with him due the intense disgust and repulsion he inspires in her (95).²⁸ Unlike Isilda, however, Lena does not display the same profusion of affection toward Carlos. She is not willing to comply with the slightest gesture to hide the disgust she feels: “nojo, nojo de branca obrigada a dormir com um feitor, um contratado, um cipaio, nem una festa, um arrepio, um sopro, um beijo” (100). Neither can Lena give to Carlos what she does have nor can she, like Isilda, pretend she loves what she despises. Indeed, his relation with Lena lacks what his relationship with

²⁸ The absence of love in their relationships makes all the women in *O esplendor de Portugal* identify, either directly or indirectly, as prostitutes. Just like Isilda's loveless relation with her husband and the police commander, Clarisse and Lena's relationships with Luís Filipe and Carlos have nothing to do with love. Indeed, to Clarisse—who self-identifies as Luís Filipe's personal prostitute (344)—Lena is as much of a prostitute as she is: “aceitaste o Carlos como aceitei o Luís Filipe” (324). By denying love as the motive of their actions, the women in the novel disclose the pornotopia Anna Klobucka denounces as part of and support for both Camões's Island of Love and the hybris, or sexual excess, of the Portuguese conceptualized by Freyre (Klobucka 129).

her mother gave him in excess, but their cause is basically the same, that is, a radical absence of the reciprocity and harmony love is believed to offer.

The question as to whether love is ever possible is all the more pressing in *O esplendor de Portugal* since none of the characters can answer it. Like Eunice, Carlos does not stop asking Lena every night why she never wants to have sex with him without ever obtaining an answer—“porque é que não queres Lena explica-me porque nunca queres?” (271). Likewise, Isilda, who is so critical of her mother’s pitiful pleas for love, cannot refrain from asking, as a child, the same question her mother asked of her father (392). To a timid “Gostas de mim?” that only seeks to find reassurance of her mother’s feelings, Isilda only obtains an ambiguous “Que pergunta” that does not dissipate her doubts. Indeed, the doubts that assail Isilda as a child are the same doubts that afflict her daughter. Clarisse asks the same question and receives the same answer that Isilda, in turn, also asked and received. The lack of a clear and definitive answer about the possibility of something vague and indefinite, however, still haunts Clarisse as an adult (343). She is still uncertain as to whether she likes her family or anybody in particular. She is not even sure if she likes herself (341). Clarisse—like all the other characters—cannot receive love since she, like them, cannot give it back. She never responded to her father’s plea for affection, despite the fact that he, as she later recognizes, was the only man who actually gave her what no one else would (352). The happiness both Clarisse and Amadeu experience together is something that never becomes the real thing. It is merely a feeling that, as Rui suggests, only resembles love (154).

Unlike the other protagonists of *O esplendor de Portugal*, Rui does not require or demand any affection. It is significant that he is the most violent of all the characters.

There is no allegorical reading based on love that can cover or diminish the effects of aggression in his narrative. Violence, thus, is rendered in all its crudity as it is associated with a feeling of unrelenting happiness that, as Daniel Zubía Fernández highlights, is a clear example of colonial egoism (200). Rui does not have love to trick himself about of what he wants. He detests being touched or touching since he realized his mother was the police commander's lover (222). Moreover, Rui is only willing to touch people with “chumbinhos, um cabo de vassoura, um tição,” that is, with things capable of doing harm to others (222). Indeed, Rui cannot dissociate any gesture of affection from its violent counterpart. To him, the destruction of toys, the torturing of animals, and the violence and catastrophes against his own family members are equivalent to acts of love. He does not delude himself into looking for a love he cannot find in any of the other characters. Rui is aware that if none of the characters of *O esplendor de Portugal* can give love, it is simply because, actually, there is no love to give.

António Lobo Antunes's narrative acknowledges the contradictions that riddle the lover's discourse. Besides denouncing the complicity of love's narratives with the Portuguese imperial obsession, his novel, by refusing to solace characters through love's harmony, also prevents them from justifying or veiling any form of colonial violence. Love as a romantic fulfillment is rarely present in António Lobo Antunes novels to avoid the strong positive and allegorical sense that is always attached to it. However, when a feeling akin to love finally appears, as it does in *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo*—a novel that also exposes the violence of postcolonial Angola—the lover's discourse divests itself of the structural climax the love narratives employ to foreground the arrival of harmony.

An Alternative to the lover's discourse: *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo*

Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo narrates, against the violent background of the Angolan civil war, the stories of Seabra, Miguéis and Morais, three agents sent to recover, for a secret organization of the Portuguese government, some missing diamonds from an unknown target. Although the organization first sends them to Angola assuring them it is a simple job and promising them an easy retirement, each of them, in turn, becomes the target of the organization. Thus, Seabra—first to arrive with the mission to intercept, eliminate and retrieve the diamonds from the first target—becomes Miguéis's target when he decides to keep the diamonds for himself and hide in an abandoned plantation in Marimbanguengo. Likewise, Miguéis becomes Morais's target when he, like Seabra before him, chooses to stay in the plantation with the diamonds. Despite recovering the diamonds, Morais does not make it back to Lisbon alive. He is, without ever realizing it, the fourth and final target of the organization. The men that accompany him on his mission to recover the diamonds from Miguéis and intercept a patrol of mercenaries who are also chasing the diamonds, kill him as soon as the job is done. Indeed, after having to wait for more than five years for the diamonds, the members of the organization decide to leave no uncertain loose ends. Once their role is fulfilled, as Seabra quickly finds out, there is no room for any of them: “porque diabo não compreendi desde o início que...uma vez terminado o trabalho não poderia haver eu” (*Boa tarde* 78). They are just replaceable pawns in a bigger international game whose ultimate players escape them.

In a manner similar to the Portuguese agents, the war-stricken Angola *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo* depicts is far from being an independent and sovereign nation with effective control over its own internal affairs. As Ana Paula Arnaut highlights, its narrative shows the power of the neocolonial practices that weave the destiny of the new Angolan state (Arnaut 46). International economic and political interests set in motion the events that take place in the novel and unite the characters that appear in it. Sampaio, one of the members of the group of five mercenaries Morais must eliminate, could not be more clear when he sums up the different interests that have fought for control over Angola since the Portuguese left the country. To him, it all began with the Americans everyone claimed to see and their interest in building petroleum platforms in Cabinda and, afterwards—when they realized they could make more money out of other activities—in coffee, copper, cotton and, especially, in the weapons with which to propagate the civil war:

as armas com que os pretos se iam matando uns aos outros e por intermédio das armas chegaram os diamantes, não directamente claro, uns holandeses, uns russos depois de certa altura sobretudo russos, portugueses e russos escritórios em Amsterdão ou na Alemanha e a partir do momento em que deram fé dos diamantes a guerra aumentou, passava-se numa sanzala que ainda ontem milho, cabritos magros mas vivos e não se achava a sanzala, achavam-se marcas de pneus, torresmos, por vezes a cabeça do soba a olhar-nos de um pau, apoiavam o Governo e quem combatia o Governo, subiam para norte, alargavam-se a leste e as cidades do interior destruídas uma a uma. (*Boa tarde* 487)

Weapons, then, brought diamonds, and diamonds, in turn, intensified the internal conflict. Angola is torn apart in the vicious cycle of violence that started with the colonial war against the Portuguese and intensified in the subsequent civil war. The country, as Seabra puts it, is nothing but a huge stretch of land covered with “destroços e torresmos e minas”

(*Boa tarde* 183) over which the former colonial powers exert control in order to increase their profit.

Despite their intentions, control of the Angolan landscape by foreign powers is only partial. The fragmented narrative of the characters in *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo* disrupts the binary coordinates that structure the colonial discourse. As Ana Mafalda Leite stresses, the distorted and often contradictory temporal and spacial categories of the narrative, foreground the impossibility of completely subduing and naming “the unknown” that colonial narratives always try to map and pin down (Leite 219). Neocolonial interests unleash a violence that hinders their complete control of Angola, as well as the characters’ control over their narration. Indeed, to a greater degree than in *O esplendor de Portugal*, *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo* takes to the extreme the formal innovations Ana Paula Arnaut identifies in this cycle of António Lobo Antunes’s writing (41-2). The abundant transliterations, polyphony, semantical interruptions and graphical and lexical ellipsis force the reader to look for a truth or ultimate version of the events that always proves elusive, if not impossible to attain.

Similarly to *O esplendor de Portugal*, the crudeness of violence and an absence of love’s reciprocity are also linked in *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo*. None of the characters has a stable or satisfactory relationship with their partners. While Seabra goes to Angola after breaking up with Cláudia—a woman who rejects him due to his poverty, his bad taste and his untidiness (*Boa tarde* 148)—Miguéis and Morais arrive in Angola to flee their crumbling marriages. Moreover, and as in *O esplendor de Portugal*, love does not have the idyllic meaning often associated with it. Love can either be an equivocal combination of “fúria e piedade e desgosto” (*Boa tarde* 136), as it is the case for Seabra,

or, as it is for Tavares—another member of the five-man squadron Morais has to hunt—“um desejo / não bem um desejo, menos forte / de agradar-me” (*Boa tarde* 531). In fact, words like love and passion have no meaning for Tavares. They are only a collection of exaggerated trifles in which his wife, Guiomar, tries to condense all her fantasies. No wonder, then, that instead of words, Tavares prefers the silence his lover, Aldina, offers him. Compared to the love Guiomar constantly utters, Aldina’s silence is much more sincere. After all, her silence does not try to abstract into a crude and incomplete sketch all the contradictions and aggressions that most positive ideas of love exclude.

Love’s promise of reciprocity and reconciliation is also absent as Marina and Seabra unravel Marina’s past in a small room in a boarding-house in Mutamba. Marina—an Angolan mestizo woman—is the only lead Seabra has in Angola to find his target, Marina’s uncle. After leading him around different parts of Angola, Marina finally makes Seabra catch up with her in Mutamba, very close to the place where her uncle has his hideout. During their conversation, Seabra slowly reconstructs Marina’s life and the reasons that propelled her to betray her uncle, the person who took care of her after the murder of her parents—a white prostitute from Lisbon and a mestizo from Angola. While he lies in bed with Marina, he realizes the effects of racism on both Marina and her uncle’s lives and the affair between them. Furthermore, as Seabra starts putting the pieces of Marina’s life in place he finally understands that, apart from working, just like him, for “o Serviço em Angola” (*Boa tarde* 134), Marina’s only desire is to avenge herself on her uncle, the father of her son and possibly, her own father as well (*Boa tarde* 110). Despite the love scene and their exchange of memories in Mutamba, there is no such thing as a blissful communion between Seabra and Marina. Sexual intercourse is just an excuse for

an exchange of information between them. Indeed, soon after their meeting, Seabra kills both Marina and her uncle to erase any leads that might allow the Service to track him down in Angola (186).

Although there is no communion based on love that completely abolishes the differences between Seabra and Marina, several excerpts that echo the tropes of the lover's discourse appear briefly in Seabra's reconstruction of Marina's life. Unlike the traditional forms of love deployed by Camões's critics and in Freyre's Lusotropicalism, this discourse does not promise any climax. Lobo Antunes copiously cites from the biblical text, *The Song of Songs*—or Song of Solomon—, one of the Wisdom books of the Old Testament. Scattered verses from Solomon's text punctuate Seabra's discovery of the love affair between Marina and her uncle, but this reference to *The Song of Songs*, a text famous for its multiple but ambiguous allusions to love, does not hide the horror of Marina's life behind this biblical and thus allegorical veil. Indeed, rather than hiding violence behind the harmony the lover's discourse desperately seeks, the already shattered citations from *The Song of Songs*, further enhance the fragmentation of Seabra's narration.

a gente em Luanda Marina e você a expulsar-me, um dos paquistaneses no corredor à
escuta, o meu padrasto, com receio da minha mãe, a sumir-se passeio fora
escondendo o cigarro, eu
— O pai do seu filho o alvo?
(até agora nem uma gripe mãe)
*busquei de noite na cama o amado da minha alma; busquei e não o achei; disse para
mim mesma: vou levantar-me e rondar pela cidade, vou procurar nas ruas e nas
praças o amado da minha alma; busquei e não o achei: acharam-me os guardas que
rondam a cidade e disse-lhes: vistes porventura aquele que a minha alma ama?*²⁹
os seus músculos Marina, o seu cheiro, o seu peso, o musseque onde o seu tio ou o
órfão escondidos, a sua aflição que eu
*mal me adiantara deles poucos passos achei o amado da minha alma: segurei-o e
não mais o larguei até que o fiz entrar na casa da minha mãe e o levei para o quarto*

²⁹ *Song of Songs* 3.1-3

*de quem me concebeu; eu vos conjuro, filhas de Jerusalém, pela fêmea da gazela e pela corça do campo, que não tenteis despertar o meu amor até que se desperte por si*³⁰

desse com o seu tio Marina (*Boa tarde* 105, emphasis in the original)

In fact, this chapter of *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo*, is replete with fragments from *The Song of Songs*.

The Song of Songs has produced multiple interpretations that, as Marvin H. Pope suggests, range from allegorical to literal interpretations (89). While for the Jewish tradition the two main characters of Salomon's song depict the relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people, Israel, for the Christian tradition the relationship between the lover and his beloved is interpreted as the relation between Christ and the Church or, between Christ to the individual believer. The interpretations do not limit themselves to the view the official religious tradition upholds. As Pope highlights, the relation of the two lovers has also been subjected to readings that include a cultist or pagan interpretation, several historical allegories, some more intricate mystic readings pertaining to both Jewish and Christian traditions and, in the second half of the twentieth century, a current of interpretation that regards *The Song of Songs* as human, rather than divine, love poetry (192).

The Song of Songs can also be considered a love song and, as such, shares some tropes and images with other forms of love narratives. However, it radically breaks from Western love narratives because of its structure, not because of its theme or plot. According to Marvin H. Pope, despite the many efforts to account for the literary and structural integrity of *The Song of Songs*, the "charming confusion in the Canticles" has not been deciphered by any of the attempts "to demonstrate or restore order or logical

³⁰ *Song of Songs* 3.4-5

sequence and progression” (54). In this respect, a double fragmentation is behind the disruption of the narrative thread between the eight parts of this charming structural confusion. *The Song of Songs* is both a fortuitous compilation of love poems whose origin critics still debate (Pope 48), and the product of a different poetics. According to Luce López-Baralt, the broken structure of *The Song of Songs* can also be attributed to its origins in the Semitic (Arabic and Hebraic) poetic tradition (40). She claims that unlike Western tradition, *The Song of Songs* has neither a climax nor a true ending because the Semitic tradition usually disregards the coherence of the poem as a whole, in favor of its independent units. Each of the verses or fragments that compose it can be enjoyed on its own, “a despecho del conjunto” (López-Baralt 40). Hence, the anticlimactic ending of *The Song of Songs* does not require “order or logical sequence and progression” to produce its effects, as any reference to a plot that encompasses its units can only be superfluous. What really matters to this particular aesthetic is the beauty that each isolated part, taken one by one, can afford its reader.

Logical sequence and progression are behind Camões’s epic poem. There is consequently much validity to Helder Macedo’s argument that the Island of Love is the real climax or ending of Gama’s voyage of discovery. The love epic reaches its goal when the sailors arrive on the island and all differences are cancelled out in a greater, noncontradictory, unity. Harmony is the natural climax of the lover’s discourse, the same harmony that awaits the Portuguese when Freyre’s *Pax Lusitana* arrives at the end of its teleological, and allegorical, progression towards redemption. Yet, there is nothing more radical to burst love’s teleology than to disrupt its structure. Once the possibility of

building a whole is dismissed, the fragmented non-totality that remains can circumvent the perils of the all-too-enchanted love-induced harmony.

For Lacanian psychoanalysis, the love narratives of harmony and communion between contraries only help to make up for the lack of the sexual relationship. Indeed, there is no perfect complement or other half to complete the lost totality in the Lacanian fantasy ($S \diamond a$). The relationship of the subject with its particular object cause of desire (object a) is based on an identity that is absolutely non-reciprocal (Lacan, “Kant with Sade” 653). Non-reciprocity, then, traces the coordinates of phallic jouissance, that is, the jouissance that emerges when the phallus—the signifier of the Other’s desire—takes its position in the symbolic order.³¹ In this sense, phallic jouissance conjugates necessity and impossibility (Lacan, *Encore* 59). The Subject always seeks object a despite the fact that, from the beginning, it is destined fail in its quest. The Subject can never assimilate its object a as it always slips its grasp. Like the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, the Subject can never catch up with the limits the phallus, that is, language, imposes on him: “Now in so far as the battery of signifiers is, it is complete, and this signifier [the phallus] can only be a line that is drawn from its circle without being able to be counted in it” (“Subversion of the Subject” 694). The phallus, then, animates the whole circuit of signification of the symbolic chain, but it does not directly participate in the metonymic displacement of signifiers that accounts for the emergence of desire. Because it marks the limits of the battery of signifiers, the phallus is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Every time a proper name is pronounced it bears the mark of the phallus, despite the

³¹ The appearance of the phallus as a signifier has, according to Lacan, a direct correspondence with the emergence of the fantasy. Indeed, despite not taking part directly in the dialectic of desire, the phallus is the prototype for object a and all the relations it mediates in the world of objects (Lacan, “Subversion of the Subject” 697).

fact that the signifier of the phallus as such can never be pronounced (“Subversion of the Subject” 694). Phallic jouissance is whole insofar as it has limits—the limits the phallus imposes. However, within its domain, no matter how much the Subject tries, he can never reach a blissful climax with its object cause of desire. No matter what he does, the Subject can only dream of the reciprocity it forever fails to obtain.³²

Similarly to the lover’s discourse, fetishism seeks to make up for the lack castration produces. Both the fetishist and the lover aspire to a deceptive wholeness that can never come to fruition.³³ It comes as little surprise, then, that the Portuguese imperial fetish found in the lover’s discourse its perfect counterpart. Love reinforces, with its harmonious climax, the Portuguese fetishization or mythical image of their imperial past. Thus, to break away from amorous Portuguese imperial discourse António Lobo Antunes’s narrative introduces a change in the structure of love discursive practices. Instead of offering the reciprocity and mutual encounter of opposites love rhetoric encourages, the insertion of *The Song of Songs* points to a different way of loving, that is—a way of conceiving a form of love that is not a mere reaction to the limits phallic jouissance imposes. Like *The Song of Songs*, the Lacanian feminine also has an approach to jouissance that pays no attention at all to the whole—if there is such thing as the One, as Lacan affirms, it is only to the extent that “there is One all alone” (*Encore* 67). For the Lacanian Woman, each signifier can be taken one by one, since she is not confined to the

³² In order to stress the difference between love and fantasy, Lacan makes the distinction between making love and an act of love. According to Lacan, while “to make love, as the very expression indicates, is poetry,” an act of love is the approach of the Subject to the object cause of desire (object *a*) (*Encore* 72).

³³ According to Lacan, love and phallic jouissance share a similar impasse since, for the subject, they both “unite the position of having with the refusal inscribed in their being” (“Metaphor” 758). Indeed, both the possession of the phallus and of the loved object bring forth to the Subject the predicament of not being able to be any of them. The phallus, like the loved object, is “the only object the having of which necessitates the failure to be it” (Lacan, “Metaphor” 758). Hence the emphasis put by the lover’s discourse of reaching, regardless of the means, a climax that effaces any contradiction between having and being.

infinite limit the phallus traces around the battery of signifiers. The anticlimax of *The Song of Songs* results from the fact that its fragmented “charming confusion” is, as Slavoj Žižek affirms, both finite and limitless (47). In forgoing the phallic function, the lover’s discourse deployed in the isolated verses of *the Songs of Songs* rejects any alliance to the Portuguese imperial discourse. Indeed, no fetish can be created if jouissance bypasses the phallic function, since the Portuguese no longer need to deny any imperial historical lack to achieve their imperial wholeness.

The non-totalizing love *The Song of Songs* structure foregrounds refuses to pledge allegiance to the Portuguese empire. Its confusing and blurry argument, along with its ending in anticlimax, deviate from the idyllic harmonious wholeness at the end of the erotic climax so often used as an alibi for authority. As we have seen, the Portuguese wielded love as weapon to justify their hold of the colonies in the twentieth century, just like critical readings of *Os lusíadas* hide the sexual aggressiveness of the Island of Love behind the allegorical veil of true love. In this sense, the consequences of António Lobo Antunes’s fragmented narrative go beyond the obvious temporal games of memory and the disruption of identity, and extend to the love’s positive platitudes regarding harmony and reciprocity. In so doing, these three novels—*As naus*, *O esplendor de Portugal* and *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo*—highlight the pitfalls behind the all-too-enchanted obsession with love that have haunted Portuguese imperial discourse from its inception.

Chapter 2

Falling Into and Out of Love: Pepetela's Different Visions of the Angolan Nation

Pepetela's nation-building narrative has evolved alongside Angola. From his first novels written during the struggle for independence and published after Angola's decolonization, to his later cycle of novels inaugurated with the publication of *A Geração da Utopia* (1992), the Benguela-born author has portrayed the different and often-contradictory stages of Angola's first turbulent years as a sovereign nation. His novels reflect the enthusiasm of a young generation of revolutionary freedom fighters as they strive to bring socialism to the burgeoning African nation, and their subsequent disillusionment as the corruption of the ruling elites erodes their belief in the social utopia they ardently supported. In this chapter, I explore how Pepetela revises the exclusively heterogeneous and hybrid national space he built as a reaction against the Portuguese colonial discourse. His revision occurred as independence failed to resolve the social inequalities the colonial system imposed on the vast majority of Angolans. Confronted with a society structurally similar to the one he fought against during his years as a member of the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola), Pepetela moves away from a fake discourse of social inclusion in *Mayombe* (1980) and *Yaka* (1985), to a diverse, more comprehensive depiction of Angolan society once he decides to integrate love and sexuality back into the social fabric in two of his later novels, *Predadores* (2005) and *O planalto e a estepe* (2009).

From the Island of Love to the Island of Mayombe.

Pepetela's narrative has attempted to represent all the heterogeneous ethnic groups within Angola's borders in an effort to explore the challenges, possibilities and contradictions of the Angolan nation even before its independence. However, Pepetela's representation of Angolan society is not devoid of a certain bias. Elaborated as both a response to and reaction against the Portuguese colonial discourse Lusotropicalism embodied from 1950s until the end of the colonial war, Pepetela's first revolutionary novels exclude from their representation of Angolan society all elements echoing the amorous overtones Luís de Camões—Portugal's national poet— and Gilberto Freyre—the creator of Lusotropicalism—attributed to the Portuguese. In the first part of this chapter, I explore how in *Mayombe*—a novel written during the author's active involvement in the independence struggle—Pepetela creates a national myth of origin based on the exclusion of sexuality from the social realm and thus, on a rationally perverse understanding of freedom not unlike the Marquis de Sade's own treatises on sexual liberation.

Set in the northern enclave of Cabinda during the war of independence against the Portuguese (1961-1974), *Mayombe* tells the story of a cohort of guerrilla fighters from the MPLA.³⁴ Over a short period of time, the plot describes their struggles to open a new

³⁴ The reluctance of the Estado Novo to relinquish its hold on the colonies after the second world war triggered a bloody and prolonged liberation struggle in all three continental Portuguese colonies in Africa: Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. In Angola there were three guerrilla groups that struggled to take control of the government when independence was finally declared on November 11th 1975. Each of these groups was circumscribed to a discrete region of the country and two were associated with a particular ethnic group. While the FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola), led by Holden Roberto, was mostly based in the north of the country and had a firm foothold in the Bakongo group, UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) was based in the highlands of the south and found most of its support among the Ovimbundu. Unlike these two groups, the MPLA did not espouse an explicitly ethnic

front of combat and political activity in a region where their presence is scarce, and their popular support practically nonexistent. Besides the overt menace the Portuguese army poses to the guerrillas, *Mayombe* dissects the internal fractures threatening to hijack MPLA unity. As Marina Ploæ Hanganu points out, this antagonism between the individual, personal interest, and the social fact of war, gives *Mayombe* its structural framework (119). The first and last chapters narrate combat scenes between the guerrillas and the Portuguese army, while the three middle chapters painstakingly dwell both on the conflicts between the different characters at their base camp and in Brazzaville—the nearest city in the Congo where the MPLA headquarters is located—, and on the possibilities and challenges for the burgeoning Angolan nation after its independence.

Mayombe uses a wide range of narrative voices to reflect the internal tensions between the different elements of the guerrilla group. The main narrative voice outlines the plot while following the actions and thoughts of the group's commander, Sem Medo (Fearless), a relativist who ill-fits the rigid discipline the revolutionary group favors among its members. This narrator focuses on Sem Medo's past and his paternal relationship with João—the political commissary and his philosophical pupil—as well as on long dialogues in which Sem Medo exposes to his revolutionary colleagues the dangers of any form of political absolutism. Besides the main narrative voice, alternative narrators appear several times during the novel exposing, in short monologues, their views regarding issues such as race, tribalism, politics as well as their feelings toward the commander. Beyond adding psychological depth to the characters, as Phyllis A. Reisman

or racial discourse. Although it was mostly based in the Mbundu speaking region of the lowlands surrounding Luanda, the MPLA always officially spouted an all-inclusive, unification discourse that looked to integrating the different ethnics groups of the Angolan territory in their struggle against Portuguese domination. For more details on the history of Angolan independence see Chabal et. al. (*A History of Postcolonial*1998).

affirms (409), these monologues produce, as Inocência Mata argues, an enunciative decentralization (*Ficção e História* 354). They allow the reader to confront and juxtapose the different elements that compose the Angolan cultural landscape, in the controlled environment of *Mayombe*. As Phyllis Peres suggests, the result is a mosaic of voices that, by reflecting the complex cultural nuances the MPLA tried to bring together under its banner, debunks any monolithic and homogeneous conception of the Angolan nation (*Transculturation* 15).

Mayombe's narrative weaves a heterogeneous picture of the components of the Angolan nation. In this respect, *Mayombe*, following Rita Chaves's characterization, is one of several Angolan novels that endeavor to articulate an inclusive national project—that is, a project that represents all the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of the Angolan territory (*A Formação* 48).³⁵ However, in *Mayombe* not every means is valid in achieving this heterogeneous national project. Revolutionary action, as Laura Cavalcante Padilha foregrounds, is the first step toward the creation of an imagined community capable of embracing all its members throughout its territory (“Ficção angolana pos-75” 32). Only through organized action against a common enemy can Teoria—a mulatto teacher obsessed with his mixed-race origins who fights for the possibility of a third option between extremes—, Milagre—a Kimbundo who suffered the horrors of colonialism and is convinced of the legitimacy of tribalism—, Mundo Novo—a hardline Marxist intellectual educated in Europe who criticizes Sem Medo's lack of commitment

³⁵ Similarly to Rita Chaves, Phyllis Peres and Inocência Mata read Pepetela's writing as an effort to inscribe heterogeneity into a closed national totality. While Peres conceives of Pepetela's narratives as an effort to “both imagine the hybrid spaces of liminality forged through revolutionary praxis as well as narrating the counterspaces of a divided community where the notion of nation itself is no more than a forgery” (*Transculturation* 68), for Mata, Pepetela's work “insiste na busca do (re)conhecimento da pluralidade de uma entidade heteróclita mas total, marcada pela contradição interna” (*Ficção e História* 385).

to the cause— and Muatiânvua—a detribalized sailor who grew up in the creole shanty towns of Benguela—join forces to build the much longed-for independent nation (*Mayombe* 247). Revolutionary praxis enacts the change all the characters require to shrug off their common colonial inheritance of tribal mistrust and to give way to a new sense of solidarity.

Mayombe's criticism goes beyond the ethnic problems besieging the revolutionary struggle and extends to the political system the MPLA upholds. Most members of the guerrilla group experienced the evils of colonialism and are confident of the change their victory will bring to Angolan society. Marxism, they argue, is an infallible guarantee against the oppression to which the colonial system subjected Angolans. To Sem Medo, however, there is little difference between religious thought and the socialist project the MPLA wishes to bring about. A political party, Sem Medo affirms, behaves in exactly the same way as a chapel (*Mayombe* 111). Their content or meaning might be different but their underlying form is the same as political and religious organizations that replicate the same strategies to maintain their hold on power. As Phillip Rothwell stresses, in Sem Medo's long dissertations at the base camp he unmasks the similarities between the power structures in the liberation movement and the power structures the guerrilla warriors are fighting against ("Unmasking Structures" 124). As the only character aware of this contradiction, Sem Medo knows that colonial oppression is not so different from political cleansings at the interior of any hegemonic political party.

Despite their common commitment against Portuguese colonialism, Sem Medo and his comrades share completely different views about the future. Like his fellow

guerillas, Sem Medo is both conscious of the indefensibility of colonial oppression and a firm believer in the need to bring independence and justice to contemporary Africa (*Mayombe* 117). However, contrary to the most politically radicalized members of the party, he knows there is neither a perfect-fix formula against oppression nor a single, inevitable, future. A fierce defender of autonomy, Sem Medo is unwilling to surrender his independence to the organization's dogmatic political apparatus. He is aware he will be outcast from the government once it assumes power and demands his unflinching fidelity to the cause (*Mayombe* 112). The surrender of his subjectivity in favor of the supposedly objective reason the movement adduces, Sem Medo intimates, is a sacrifice that should never be taken for granted. The moment a person starts depending on others, he explains to his comrades, this person immediately loses his freedom (*Mayombe* 77). He knows the much sought-after freedom for which he fights depends on his capacity to think, reason and judge on his own.³⁶

Sem Medo proposes rationality as an antidote against the political bigotry afflicting most members of the movement. Reason allows the liberation fighter, or dominator, to remain always in control of his personal emotions (*Mayombe* 215). As Sem Medo argues, only by remaining “raivosamente lúcido,” can action lead him to a “ódio frio e calculado, implacável,” that is, a hate that spares from the dominator's actions and gestures any offense, effort, and paradoxically, hate itself (*Mayombe* 215-6). Reason becomes a fundamental part of the revolutionary struggle insofar as it helps the fighters

³⁶ Similarly to Theodor Adorno, Sem Medo refuses to ascribe freedom exclusively to the collective consciousness, the historical trend or the world spirit. Indeed, for both, freedom is always tied to the individual's capacity to have access to objectivity, while remaining itself a thinking monad, that is, an individual as such (Adorno, *History and Freedom* 64). In other words, the idea of freedom is strictly tied to the fact that the individual, despite social or political context, retains his individuality (Adorno, *History and Freedom* 84).

purify their feelings to the point of making them innocuous. These aseptic feelings are the only ones a free guerrilla warrior can indulge because they neither hinder action nor threaten the individual's judgment. All other feelings—feelings that have not been properly cleansed of affect—prevent action and, for that reason, threaten the emergence of the national unity revolutionary praxis brings (*Mayombe* 148).

Mayombe is both a reflection on the future challenges of Angola and an attempt to create a national myth of origin upon which to ground the national imaginary. As Ana Mafalda Leite highlights, *Mayombe*'s narration reaches heroic and epic proportions in its recounting of the origins of the fatherland ("The Post-colonial Literature" 119). Indeed, to recreate this epic and heroic clash of titans between the Portuguese colonizers and the new national heroes, *Mayombe*'s narrative explicitly plays on the theme of Ogun—the African Prometheus—who dared to defy the gods (*Mayombe* 70). Like Prometheus's revolutionary gift to humanity, Sem Medo gives to his men both the capacity to conquer Mayombe—the jungle—and the rational determination to fight united against the established order. Endowed with Sem Medo's gifts, the MPLA members develop a new collective consciousness capable of overcoming the separation between the different factions of the movement. His sacrifice, as Phyllis Peres argues, fosters the transformation of all contentious voices into the voices of the new Angolan nation ("Revolutionary Utopias" 212).

Despite this all-inclusive national discourse, some of the voices that compose the nation are excluded from *Mayombe*'s formation myth. Sem Medo's final sacrifice only mends one of the two fissures that, according to Stephen Henighan, run through the guerrilla group menacing its still frail social fabric (170). The feeling of solidarity that

emerges after Sem Medo's death may neutralize the animosity between the different tribal groups of the MPLA, but it leaves unresolved the bigger threat passions pose to the utopian project. Rather than integrating these passions into the new Angolan society the MPLA wishes to create, Sem Medo affirms his men must exclude them to reach national unity (*Mayombe* 148). However, this exclusion is neither casual nor secondary because it is around the axis the narrative draws between the dyad of love and reason that *Mayombe's* most perplexing response to the Portuguese colonial discourse revolves.

The myth of origins *Mayombe* elaborates is a direct reaction against the national myth that, according to Eduardo Lourenço, the Portuguese produced after the British Ultimatum in 1890 (45). Contrary to the Portuguese, who reinvented their origins through the heroic image displayed in Camões's epic poem and grounded their colonial discourse on love, the Angolan myth of origins *Mayombe* devises strives to keep love away from its realm at all costs. In this respect, the "ilha que se chama Mayombe" (*Mayombe* 20), is the exact opposite of Camões's Island of Love. Due to Venus and Love's overt support for and complicity with the Portuguese colonial enterprise, Mayombe emerges as an enclave where Bacchus—the god respectful of difference who openly opposed the Portuguese in their imperial adventure (Gil 52)—has his chance of forming an island where love plays no part in the resolution of contradictions and, thus, in the advent of peace.³⁷

Isolation is one of the main tropes of *Mayombe's* narrative. Confined to the Cabinda enclave, the base camp floats, like an island, in the middle of the forest. However, as Rita Chaves highlights, in the Mayombe forest nature loses the exoticness

³⁷ *Mayombe* is also a direct reaction to Lusotropicalism's integration discourse. Instead of the painful reconciliation of contraries through love Gilberto Freyre posits at the end of Portuguese colonialism (56), *Mayombe's* rebels take a more expedited route to national integration rational revolutionary praxis affords them. For more on the relation between the love and Lusotropicalism see Chapter 1.

and hostility that characterized colonial descriptions and becomes, as a metonymy of the city, one more part of the emerging Angolan society (“Um Romance” 158). By transforming and adapting itself to the forest’s environment, the guerrilla group assimilates all the anxiety the unknown space produces on the colonizers and breaks colonialism’s need to conquer and control the untamable landscape. However, this transformation of the environment is not enough to contain colonialism’s desire for absolute mastery. As Phyllis Peres stresses, colonial practices go beyond the control of the landscape and extend to any space of sexual conquest and exploitation (“Colonial Representations” 254). To create an alternative niche to the colonial space—that is, a true space of freedom (Guimarães 66)—*Mayombe* expels from the basecamp’s isolated, protected environment, any element that might arouse a colonial desire to dominate among the members of its community. Indeed, while the forest, “the uterine begetter of heroes,” is the only feminine presence the guerrilla warriors tolerate in their base camp (Leite, “The Post-colonial Literature” 118),³⁸ any woman is excluded from the island’s territory. Due to the colonial hazards their supposed unreliability poses both to the outcome of the liberation war and the development of the relations of harmony and unity that, according to Igor Cusack, define the more nuanced masculinity of the Marxist new man (115),³⁹ women’s presence is confined either to the memory of some of the characters or to the outskirts of the island.

However, time and space are not enough to keep women at bay from the base camp in the Mayombe forest. Contrary to the ideal he pursues, Sem Medo’s reason is

³⁸ The only erotic relation the Mayombe forest permits in its territory is, as Rita Chaves intimates, between the guerrilla warriors and itself (“Pepetela: Romance e Utopia” 220).

³⁹ As Igor Cusack further argues, the notion of the Marxist new man was central to the revolutionaries’ conceptions of citizenship before, and immediately after, Independence: “This New Man, no longer alienated from himself, would emerge following the transformation from capitalism to socialism” (104).

unable to isolate him completely from the feelings that assail him. As Clive Willis points out, Sem Medo's erotic evocations of Leli—his former girlfriend—always appear before beginning combat, disrupting his ability to think clearly (213). In fact, Sem Medo is far from being the perfect warrior capable of divesting his actions of any traces of a concrete, subjective emotion. As he recognizes to himself, he can neither dominate his emotions, nor reach “o êxtase sensual de dominar, arriscando friamente, lucidamente” he rationally strives for (*Mayombe* 216). Leli's memory always returns and imposes itself, unleashing daydreams in which Sem Medo, despite all his pondered and stoic rationality, projects his repressed erotic desire (*Mayombe* 51).

Like Sem Medo, João—the political commissar—also faces the threat of losing his lucidity because of a woman. A new schism threatens the camp's stability when Ondina—João's girlfriend—has an affair with André—a high-ranking official of the movement in charge of the logistics in Brazzaville. Their affair has the potential of breaking the tense equilibrium the movement has been able to build so far between the different tribes. The tribal dispute, though, is only the consequence of a deeper fissure within the MPLA. The rift between individual passions and cold rationality broadens as Ondina's increasing demands to satisfy her sexuality clash with João's strict code of revolutionary discipline. Rather than allowing room for her in the island of freedom he and his comrades are trying to create, João refuses to acknowledge Ondina's right to satisfy her desire (*Mayombe* 91). Her lack of commitment to the greater cause and common good threatens to perpetuate the political and sentimental alienation of the colonized subjects. Portrayed as a depoliticized, unreliable member of the movement for whom personal interests trump the greater good of the organization, Ondina, as Ngugiwa

Thiong'o highlights, is only a sexual means in João's voyage of political self-discovery (24). She, like Leli, plays no role among the new men Sem Medo tries to forge for the new Angolan nation.

In this revolutionary bildungsroman, most of Sem Medo's teachings are aimed at educating João, his favorite disciple and successor in command. True to his relativism, Sem Medo does everything in his power to veer the political commissar away from his ardent attachment to the revolutionary code of conduct. This irrational adherence to the law proves to be, paradoxically, a source of destabilization to the island's harmony. João's zeal in complying with the rules goes to the extreme of condemning to death one of the members of the base for a petty theft, and threatens to exacerbate tribalist prejudices among the soldiers. Sem Medo is keen to highlight the contradictions of a liberation discourse that, according to its members, fights for the Angolan people but is completely blind to the context in which war is staged (*Mayombe* 62). Likewise, Sem Medo questions the validity of the claims to appreciate human life and is willing to eradicate it at the slightest hint of insurrection. Revolution, argues Sem Medo, is not an excuse to relinquish judgment. Exceptions must always be conceded if authoritarianism is to be avoided. The strict sense of discipline the political commissar extols is, along with tribalism, one of the most conspicuous obstacles the movement has to overcome to achieve a sense of nationhood.

Tellingly, the political commissar's instruction includes both politics and his sentimental education. To Sem Medo, love is just as destabilizing to the future of the nation as political bigotry in that they both render reason obsolete. Indeed, love's own agenda of unity clashes with the fraternal bonding revolutionary praxis endeavors to

attain for Angola. Love's symbiosis, as Sem Medo accurately observes, rests on a dialectic relationship of domination. This reconciliation of contraries hides beneath its surface as much tension and conflict as a duel in which any opponent must find ways to destroy his adversary (*Mayombe* 150). Much in line with his thought on love, Sem Medo depicts his relationship with Leli as a war of conquest in which every party always strives to get the upper hand. To subdue her to his will and consolidate his victory over her (*Mayombe* 145), Sem Medo forces Leli to leave him only to attack her once he is absolutely sure of her despair. After a short, unsatisfactory relationship with a petit bourgeois, Leli returns vanquished to beg Sem Medo for one more chance. His victory over her is absolute, but his plan is far from flawless. Indeed, by the time they are back together Sem Medo realizes he no longer loves Leli. All his efforts to extricate any trace of feelings from his actions and act only guided by reason ends up by hardening his character (*Mayombe* 146). After regaining Leli, Sem Medo transforms into a new man, that is, a man who can no longer be dominated, a man who can easily extinguish his passion (*Mayombe* 148). A complete master of himself, Sem Medo rejects being subdued by the already enslaved Leli.⁴⁰

No real love can evolve out of Leli and Sem Medo's relationship if Sem Medo is not willing, like Leli, to subdue himself. In wishing to remain absolute master overall his feelings, Sem Medo defies the mediation that exists both between Hegel's master and slave, and between the lover and his loved object.⁴¹ Like the master, the lover himself is a

⁴⁰ In his efforts to remain always master of every feeling he experiences, Sem Medo refuses to acknowledge his enslavement to his beloved unlike Camões's love confession to Bárbara the slave: See "Aquela cativa / Que me tem cativo" (Camões, *Sonnets and Other Poems* 116).

⁴¹ The master can only be a master to the extent the slave acknowledges his superiority. Thus, the master's subjective position of domination is never absolute. His need for recognition makes him a slave to the slave's avowal of his authority (Hegel 70-9).

slave to the loved object insofar as he is in love. Love depends on domination that can never be absolute because it requires the consent of the dominated as well as the domination of the dominator. Hence Sem Medo's unwillingness to accept the domination love intrinsically implies. To succumb to love would amount to entering the endless cycle of oppression Portuguese colonialism tried to justify through their discursive practices—from Camões's *Os Lusíadas* to Gilberto Freyre's Lusotropicalism (Klobucka 124). Instead, Sem Medo prefers to reject love in its entirety rather than to accept the possibility of relinquishing the freedom his lucidity gives him (*Mayombe* 214). Only through his purification from love can the new Angolan citizen become completely independent and free.

Freedom from love's enslavement is the main goal of João's sentimental education. To become a New Man, João must first create a shell that both isolates and protects him from the blows he receives (*Mayombe* 142). Like the base camp in the forest of Mayombe, he must completely detach himself from women to obtain his independence. In other words, he must first become a dominator and stop being the slave (*Mayombe* 171). Indeed, João is Sem Medo's hope for a better future. According to Sem Medo, João belongs to the generation that will surpass his traditionalist point of view. This is a generation that will be able to transcend Sem Medo's tendency to destroy and dominate his sexual partner—a generation that will completely detach from the feelings that Sem Medo, despite all his efforts to reify them through the use of reason, is unable to overcome (*Mayombe* 216).

João's sentimental indoctrination proves to be a success insofar as his feelings, unlike Sem Medo's, no longer trouble him by the end of the narration. João proves

himself an independent man when he decides to part ways with Sem Medo and Ondina and assume the commander's role during the attack on the Portuguese base. As Sem Medo predicted, João becomes the absolute master of both love and war. However, by the time João's transformation takes place, Sem Medo, almost simultaneously, abjures the dominating image he created of himself. Indeed, minutes before his death, Sem Medo's discourse of liberation changes. As he waits for the start of the operation he realizes things would have been different if he had given his relationship with Ondina a chance:

Pensava em Ondina: Leli ficara nas trevas, só Ondina aparecia. Ondina e a ternura escondida por uma capa de frieza; era uma personagem; mas ele arrancara-lhe a capa, o personagem era destruído e Ondina vinha, nua, um Oceano de ternura nos olhos, um vulcão nas coxas. Ondina, Ondina, porque se encontravam tão tarde? Era irremediavelmente tarde. (*Mayombe* 241)

In a surprising discursive turn, affect—until then rejected and considered, as Inocência Mata suggests, something secondary to the political struggle (*Ficção e História* 348)—suddenly becomes a priority. While he lies dying, Sem Medo tries to go back on his words regarding the need to be master over feelings. Contradicting his own principles, Sem Medo dies entreating João to get Ondina back (*Mayombe* 244).

Sem Medo's rationalism is a reaction against Portuguese colonialism's deft use of love to justify domination. His struggle—as well as that of the MPLA soldiers—goes beyond capitalism and colonialism and extends to love. Thus, to accomplish his full liberation from the Portuguese, the Angolan New Man must, through a rigorous use of reason, extricate any remnant of love from his core. However, the lucidity reason confers is no guarantee against oppression. Rationality, as Theodor Adorno states, also implies domination and control of both “external nature and man's inner nature” (*History and*

Freedom 13). The same techniques rationality uses to subdue, classify, subordinate and cut short human beings are, as Adorno further develops, also applicable to feelings.

Enlightenment—the progressive technical domination of nature (Adorno, “The Culture Industry” 106)—does not differentiate between its materials. Both inner and outer natures are equally external to rationality, and thus different from it, justifying rationality's domination over them.

Unlike Adorno, Sem Medo differentiates between the subjugation of outer and inner nature—that is, of human beings and subjective passions. While Sem Medo is wary of the oppression a dogmatic belief in a political system can unleash upon Angolans once independence arrives, he unreflectively encourages the domination of love. Love, as Sem Medo points out, replicates the structure supporting the colonial relationship between the master and the slave. However, Sem Medo's depiction of love is rather one-dimensional. Indeed, love can either comply with domination or foster resistance, depending on the particularities of the context in which it is deployed. Sem Medo's vehement reaction against love's oppressive kernel blinds him to love's ability to disrupt the dogmatic rationality he fears. Love's resistance to rationalization—“Quem pode delimitar o amor, quem o pode geometrizar?” (*Mayombe* 170)—is also a way of checking the irrational rationality of the members of the movement.

Passions are both a means of domination and a way of curbing reason's excesses. As Jacques Lacan argues in this respect, rather than being a direct consequence of unbridled passions, the cruelty behind Sade's bedroom philosophy emerges from an excess of reason (“Kant with Sade” 667).⁴² A secret desire to classify every aspect of the

⁴² To Lacan, Sade's fantasies have nothing to do with desire. Indeed, what the Sadean fantasy highlights is an insurmountable impasse. Sade, as Lacan argues, stops at the exact point “where desire and the law

subject's love life animates Sade in his sexual fantasies. Nothing is left to chance in his descriptions. Each element of human sexuality is classified and rigorously subjected to innumerable tests designed to extract as much pleasure as possible.⁴³ As Roland Barthes highlights, in the isolated enclaves where Sade places his libertines, a new social autarchy develops: "Once shut in, the libertines, their assistants, and their subjects form a total society, endowed with an economy, a morality, a language, and a time articulated into schedules, labors and celebrations" (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola* 17). Tellingly, in Sade's utopian societies, as Horkheimer and Adorno highlight, everything is socialized except sexuality (85). To Sade, sexuality is not socially mediated and, thus, not a constitutive part of any community. He treats sexuality as a fact of nature and deals with it with the utmost scientific rigor. Thus, by considering love and sexuality as residual, external instincts, Sade can justify his enlightened quest for domination over them.

Like Sade's communities, the enclave *Mayombe* depicts removes love and sexuality from the social field. There is no place for love in Sem Medo's imagined community. Sem Medo brands both sexuality and love as foreign elements, instead of treating them as an integral part of the community of the base camp in the forest of Mayombe. Indeed, of all the elements that compose the Angolan nation, the movement only excludes Ondina's volcanic sexual desire from its territory. Unable to dominate their

bound up with each other" ("Kant with Sade" 667). Rather than using the law to become "inordinately sinful," that is, to reach the point that lies beyond all fear and pity—the Lacanian Real of desire—Sade submits to the law he so desperately wishes to break: "His apology for crime merely impels him to an oblique acceptance of the law" ("Kant with Sade" 667). Thus, contrary to common belief, Lacan's analysis suggests that, instead of being the paradigm of sexual liberation, Sade's fantasy is one of the many rational utopias that have haunted humanity since reason became its sole guiding light.

⁴³ According to Barthes, systematization, not creativity, lies behind Sade's writing: "From Sade to Fourier, sadism is lost; from Loyola to Sade, divine interlocation. Otherwise, the same writing: the same sensual pleasure in classification, the same mania for cutting up ... the same enumerative obsession ... the same erotic, fantasmatic fashioning of the social system. None of this three authors is bearable: each makes pleasure, happiness, communication dependent on inflexible order or, to be even more offensive, a combinative" (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola* 3).

passions and assert themselves at the same time, as Stephen Henigham argues, the guerrilla fighters consider her a major destabilizing presence amidst their community (171). *Mayombe*'s narrative proposes a new, rational, integration discourse against the oppressive love the Portuguese use to justify their hold on their colonies. However, the removal of love from the little island of Mayombe does not guarantee the advent of reconciliation between the different factions that strive for power. Once the national narrative takes love out of the picture, Enlightenment's tendency to subdue and subordinate differences can easily end up imposing itself. With nothing to oppose rationality's advancement, Sem Medo's predictions about the future of the revolution will, as he realizes near his death, come true.

Despite its urgency, Sem Medo's final advice to João is left without avail. A month later, from a new front in Bié, João writes *Mayombe*'s epilogue. In this brief appearance as a narrator, João acknowledges Sem Medo's influence in his metamorphosis but, significantly, excludes Ondina from his account. João is now one of the few men capable of perceiving where the sand path is between the desert sands, a man whose relativism does not comply with any fixed categories of good and evil: "Sem Medo também o sabia. Mas insistia em que era um caminho no deserto. Por isso se riam dos que diziam que era um trilho cortado, nítido, o verde do Mayombe. Hoje sei que não há trilhos amarelos no meio do verde. Tal é o destino de Ogun, o Prometeu africano" (*Mayombe* 252). Relativism, though, comes at a price. If there are no trails inside the forest of Mayombe, as João affirms, there are still trails that cut off this enclave from other, more romantic, utopian islands. The future Ogun has in mind for his people runs

contrary to the destiny Venus has in mind for the brave Portuguese explorers in Camões epic poem.

Pepetela's narrative output continues Sem Medo's search for an elusive third way—a sand path in the desert—to unite the disparate elements spread over Angolan territory. However, in *Yaka*, his novel published in 1985, this search is primarily located in the past rather than during the revolutionary struggle. Through a revision of history, Pepetela's narrative gathers the missing pieces Portuguese colonial accounts tore from the Angolan nation's body.

Historically Foregrounding Love's Exclusion: Building Yaka's Body

After imagining an alternative heterogeneous space in which to erect his ideal nation in *Mayombe*, in *Yaka* Pepetela continues to explore new ways of bringing together the different parts of Angola. From the inclusive Island of Mayombe, Pepetela moves to the creation of an organic—meaning living and eclectic—Angolan national body. Like Victor Frankenstein—the modern Prometheus—Pepetela's fiction stitches back together the different and oftentimes-disparate components left behind by Portuguese colonialism in order to create the utopian fraternal society he envisioned in *Mayombe*. However, much like the Sadean autarchy he unwittingly devises out of rational zeal, the national body he produces is no less perverse in its apparent wholeness. A closer examination of Pepetela's deft narrative efforts to assemble the parts of the national body exposes how the same rift separating love from the base camp in *Mayombe*, still marks the fictional sutures of the hybrid nation *Yaka* depicts.

Yaka, as Phyllis Peres affirms, is both a family drama and a story of resistance (“Traversing PostColoniality” 114). Set in the port city of Benguela, *Yaka* portrays the contradictions of colonial society during the last 85 years of Portuguese colonialism in Africa through five generations of the Semedo family—a family of Angolan-born “brancos de segunda.” Starting with Alexandre Semedo’s birth in 1890, and ending with the arrival of independence in 1975, the narration follows family members as they thrive on and suffer the effects of the strict segregation of colonial society. *Yaka* depicts both the ways in which colonizers capitalize on their identity to oppress the colonized and thus, as Hanna Betina Götz suggests (69), benefit from the colonial encounter, as well as the permanent revolts of the colonized as they fight to subvert this order. Besides introducing a new generation of the Semedo family, each one of the novel’s five chapters narrates a different uprising against Portuguese rule: the Bailundo revolt (1902), the revolt in the coffee lands north of Benguela (1917), the Cuvale uprising (1940-1), the beginning of the war of independence (1961), and the final battle for power among the three guerrilla groups after the Portuguese announced their final retreat from Angola (1975).

Yaka’s exposure of the tensions between the different cultural groups that compose Angola brings to the fore the constant fear of the white Portuguese population of Benguela. Fear bolsters the colonizers in their increasing zeal to tighten their security measures against the colonized, furnishing an excuse to further their economic exploitation as well as their so-called civilizing mission. For as long as Alexandre Semedo can remember, fear has been the most efficient form of maintaining the colonizer’s privileges: “Todos pensam que vão morrer e a salvação é estar ao lado do

Governo. No momento da vitória diz-se a verdade, já não preciso exagerar. A Monarquia inaugurou o método, a República seguiu, o Estado Novo só continua a tradição. O exagero do número de massacrados, o requintes de detalhes, e também a influência estrangeira” (*Yaka* 229). Colonial practices are no longer an excuse for ruthless exploitation, but a legitimate claim to self-defense. Through fear, the oppressor and the oppressed change roles only to advance the colonizer’s rule. As Inocência Mata argues, in the binary logic of exclusion *Yaka* depicts, there is no room for the discourse of friendly harmony that haunts both Portuguese colonialism and Angolan nationalist narratives (*Ficção e História* 233). Every conflict boils down to a choice between us—the colonizers—and them—the colonized.

Yaka’s narrative refuses to align itself completely either with the white, hegemonic, vision of History or with the black, subaltern, history of resistance.⁴⁴ Contrary to what Luis Kandjimbo suggests, its reconstruction of past events is inclusive instead of exclusive insofar as *Yaka* textualizes the hybrid origins of the Angolan nation (72). Each of the five chapters corresponds to a torn part of the Yaka statue’s body. As the story progresses toward independence, the narrative adds the mouth (1890-1904), the eyes (1917), the heart (1940-1), the sex (1961) and the legs (1975), to the dismembered statue. In this respect, every revolt and act of resistance the Yaka statue recounts brings closer the foreshadowed rain that will, from the moment of Alexandre Semedo’s birth, bring all its missing parts into a single, complete unit (*Yaka* 19). The Yaka statue’s allegorical representation of the Angolan nation goes beyond the assimilation of the

⁴⁴ To destabilize the History both colonial and nationalistic master narratives construct, *Yaka*, as Laura Cavalcante Padilha foregrounds, follows what Linda Hutcheon terms metafictional historiography, that is, a narrative that looks for difference, recuperates the past without any traces of nostalgia and interprets history through fiction (“Literaturas africanas e pós-modernismo” 323).

different indigenous cultures that rise up against the Portuguese and extends to the insertion of the white colonizer's culture as well. Despite being of Jaga's hybrid craftsmanship, the statue Alexandre Semedo inherits from his father represents, according to his great grandson Joel, a white colonizer: "A estátua representa um colono, avô. Repare bem. É o que o escultor pensava dos colonos. Ridículos. Veja o nariz. Burros e ambiciosos" (*Yaka* 339).⁴⁵ As a symbol of nationhood, the Yaka statue leaves, in its artistic assimilation of the different Angolan cultures, not one of its constitutive historical or cultural parts behind.⁴⁶

Like the Yaka statue, Alexandre Semedo's sapalalo—or two-story house—is another allegoric representation of Angola's hybrid origins. The symbol of the Semedo family's increasing economic prosperity and elevated hierarchal position, the sapalalo serves as a common space where every generation of the Semedos meet and expose their contrasting views on the revolts that, throughout the years, shake the foundations of colonial society. Under its roof parade three of Alexandre Semedo's four children: the bullying and reckless Aquiles Semedo and his wife, Gloria; the calm and dispassionate Orestes Semedo and his greedy wife, Matilde; and Eurídice Semedo and her predatory and remorseless husband, Bartolomeu Espinha. Likewise, the sapalalo is the place of encounter of the members of the younger generation: Chucha Semedo—his lascivious granddaughter—, Olívia Espinha—a revolutionary mystic—, Chico—Alexandre Semedo's mestizo grandson—and Joel—the only Semedo who decides to stay and fight

⁴⁵ According to Phyllis Peres, in the context of Pepetela's fiction the Yaka statue symbolizes, as a representative of the hybrid and dynamic Jaga culture, the question of a hybrid national identity: "The Jaga are identified as assimilators of cultures and a people whose continual struggle against colonial domination involved an alignment with other Angolan ethnic groups" (*Transculturation* 78).

⁴⁶ The Yaka statue is a clear example of the creole aesthetics that, according to Déa Drndarska-Réty, animates Pepetela's narrative (291). In this aesthetics of synthesis, several narratives coalesce both the multiple historic processes and the heterogeneous forms that compose the Angolan nation.

for Angola after independence. However, rather than being a secluded enclave for the Semedo family, the sapalalo is, as Laura Cavalcante Padilha argues, a liminal space where the frontier that divides the colonized and colonizer becomes blurry (“O sapalalo” 82). Instead of a pure, white Portuguese source, the Cuvale people are, as Padilha asserts, “o elo de ligação do romance, o outro que se esconde por trás da máscara branca representada, nas teias narrativas, pelo protagonismo da família Semedo” (“O sapalalo” 81).⁴⁷ Purity, then, is out of the question. From its foundation, the Semedo family is linked to at least one indigenous African culture.

To unify the different components of Angola and form the longed-for hybrid nation, *Yaka* must first exclude any pernicious elements from the national body. The imminent victory of the MPLA for control of the central government over UNITA, the FNLA and Bartolomeu Espinha and Matilde’s opportunistic political party, sets in motion the family’s plans for emigration. The MPLA’s socialist discourse of equality and social justice threatens the Semedo family privileges in the colonial system. An independent government implies the end of Bartolomeu Espinha’s agricultural empire as well as the imprisonment of Xandinho Semedo—Aquile’s son—due to his excessive zeal during his years working as a PIDE torturer (Policia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado).⁴⁸ The end of colonialism also provides an opportunity to vanquish Olívia’s dubious political activism. Less explicit than the menace the more overt colonial practices of the rest of the Semedo family, Olívia’s brand of revolutionary mysticism, as Sem Medo tirelessly

⁴⁷ Alexandre Semedo’s life and his possessions are the mirror image of the Vilonga, the Cuvale patriarch with whom he shares the heart of both the novel and the *Yaka* statue (Padilha, “O sapalalo” 80). They are linked at the moment of their birth—Alexandre Semedo is born in Cuvale territory, under a mulemba, the Cuvale’s sacred tree (*Yaka* 17)—, as well as by their love for their grandson and their similar patriarchal position in their respective properties. Moreover, by the time of their death, both their spirits remain, following the ancestral African rites, trapped in trees (Padilha, “O sapalalo” 80-1).

⁴⁸ The PIDE was the New State’s political police.

repeats in *Mayombe*, is one of the main obstacles interfering with the unification of Angola. Indeed, Olívia never abandons her faith, she simply changes religion: “Passou a ler Lenine ... E, cúmulo de cúmulos, espetou um retrato do revolucionário russo e outro do Che Guevara no quarto ... mesmo na parede à frente da cama, onde antes estava o de Jesus” (*Yaka* 294). To guarantee the success of the nation, *Yaka*’s narrative betrays its inclusive rhetoric. As autonomy becomes a real possibility, *Yaka* removes from the sapalalo—the small replica of the Angolan nation—anything that might compromise its future as a free, independent, territory.

To stay in Angola, the members of the Semedo family need to accept their hybrid inheritance and show signs of real political commitment. Joel is the only Semedo of the new generation who decides to stay and consciously sides with one of the three guerrilla groups that fight for power in Angola. Despite being a firm believer in the political program of the MPLA, Joel’s political pragmatism contrasts with Olívia’s theoretical and dogmatic approach to politics. Indeed, whenever Olívia blames the MPLA for betraying their socialist creed, Joel’s relativism recognizes a realistic plan to gain control of the country (*Yaka* 295). True to his political convictions, Joel joins his friend Ruca to help the FAPLA—the Forças armadas populares de libertação de Angola—take control of Benguela and celebrates each victory over both the FNLA and UNITA, its political adversaries. Likewise, Joel is no longer afraid of the uprising. He oversteps the fear that corroded the colonizers during the previous 80 years and that still troubles the rest of his family. No longer a “bimba que está no meio do rio,” Joel knows the time has come to choose his own country (*Yaka* 337). He is the only Semedo that understands the importance of the historical moment and is willing to choose his own path.

The sacrifices Joel's path imposes on him include the renouncement of his corrupt family and the rejection of love. To become a member of the FAPLA and fight against the enemies of the nation, he must, first and foremost, "deixar tudo para trás" (*Yaka* 333). Indeed, Joel must break away from Nízia, the girl who during his "curta vida ... foi o bálsamo para as dificuldades em casa ou na escola" (*Yaka* 328). Faced with the prospect of leaving Angola to follow Nízia and her family to Portugal, he chooses to stay and join the militia rather than to continue their life-long romance. Joel's decision is all the more taxing insofar as only recently did his relationship stop being "um amor infantil" (*Yaka* 328). By the time they part, Joel and Nízia's relationship takes a more sexual turn: "Só há pouco tempo ela deixou que a mão dele envolve-se por completo o seio nu ... alimentados com o calor do outro e a mão dele abraçou o seio dela ela deixou e Joel perdeu a cabeça ... mas no último momento ela fechou as coxas" (*Yaka* 328). In refusing to accompany Nízia's family on their exodus from the country, Joel proves himself strong enough to resist and thus liberate himself from his increasing sexual desire.

The menace of unbridled sexual desire goes beyond Joel's commitment to the MPLA and extends to the Semedo family harmony. To exemplify this lurking hazard, the fourth part of the novel—*O sexo*—revolves around the consequences for the family of Chucha's acknowledgement of, and subsequent urge to assuage, her immoderate sensuality. The narrative begins with Chucha's betrayal to Dionísio—her lover and cousin—and follows the repercussions this initial act has on Dionísio's life. It is no coincidence the chapter opens with Chucha's efforts to render her inordinate sexual pleasure into words, as she struggles to explain to Dionísio the reasons why she had an orgasm when Jaimito—another cousin—forced her to have sexual intercourse with him:

Queria com os olhos dizer-te que a isso era forçada, que só tu contavas. Miravas-me angustiosamente e com raiva ... que aumentou quando eu comecei a vibrar. Involuntariamente. Juro que não me concentrava nele ... até que lancei aquele grito ferido e lhe rasguei as costas com as unhas. Perdi a consciência, não sabia o que fazia, deixei de te ver, desculpa, e rebolei sobre ele e caímos da cama.(*Yaka* 221)

Chucha's refusal to curb her sexual immodesty produces a double fracture in the sapalalo.

While Dionísio decides to leave of his own accord after being unable to accept the fact that Chucha can enjoy her sexuality more than he can ever enjoy his (*Yaka* 236), Chico is expelled from the sapalalo after the family finds him in bed with Chucha (*Yaka* 274).

Rather than bringing harmony, as the Portuguese claimed, Chucha's uncontrolled sexual *hybris* creates discord in the heart of the hybrid community *Yaka*'s narrative tries to construct.

Moreover, Chucha's sexuality triggers a chain of sexual violence that clashes with the New State's imperial rhetoric of integration. After Chucha's sexuality destroys all Dionísio's illusions (*Yaka* 236), he leaves the sapalalo and joins his uncle Bartolomeu Espinha's project to expand his farm and build an empire in Bocoio. He actively participates in the scheme Espinha orchestrates with the help of some PIDE officers to incriminate the local Moma—an indigenous landowner—with terrorists, and thus justify his claims to the Moma's land. However, due to Dionísio's sexual frustration, Bartolomeu Espinha's final imperial assault on the Moma's land ends up rehearsing, in detail, a story of colonial sexual violence. Tellingly, *Yaka*'s narrative highlights the violence the Portuguese imperial discourse of love-based harmony endeavored to conceal. By weaving into a single, simultaneous narrative, the story of the birth of Bartolomeu Espinha's empire, the account of Dionísio's rape and the depiction of Chico's expulsion from the sapalalo, the *Yaka* statue foregrounds the connections

between sexuality and colonial violence (*Yaka* 272-7). Chucha Semedo's excessive sexual proclivities prove to be as destabilizing to the community as the more overt colonial ideology each of its members professes. Hence, it comes as no surprise that *Yaka* excludes Chucha from the rising nation once independence arrives. After all, Chucha's desire is better off in the company of the Portuguese military officer, a character that, according to Lusotropicalism, also shares her insatiable sexual appetite.

Like Joel, Alexandre Semedo earns his right to remain in Angola the moment he conquers both the great fear that haunts the colonizers and his passion. Alexandre Semedo's opportunity to prove himself appears in 1917, while the narrative recounts the events that will give rise to the Yaka statue's eyes. Alexandre dances with Njaya during the burial celebration the Africans organize for Acácio—the only good white man in Benguela—and, from then on, is obsessed with her (*Yaka* 99). Njaya—a black woman—awakens Alexandre's dormant and unsatisfied desire: “Nunca nada parecido lhe tinha sucedido ... nunca se tinha interessado assim por uma mulher. E logo uma negra!” (*Yaka* 109). However, unlike his feelings for Donana—the calm and quiet Portuguese white woman his mother imposes on him—Alexandre's desire for Njaya's insatiable sexuality threatens his friendship to Ernesto Tavares, the only white friend of Alexandre's who openly favors the independence of Angola. Ernesto Tavares relationship with Njaya upturns Alexandre's life and his ability to maintain self-control. Indeed, only the memory of a previous rape prevents Alexandre from forcing Njaya in his quest to reach sexual ecstasy (*Yaka* 112). After his failed attempt to possess Njaya, Alexandre's love for her starts to wane: “já não doía não a ter. Porque a tivera a mão, a vira nua e sem fugir” (*Yaka* 114). By the time Ernesto breaks up with Njaya, Alexandre's passions no longer

dominate him. He still finds Njaya beautiful, but he feels she is not as enticing as the first time he saw her (*Yaka* 137). A complete master of his own feelings, Alexandre can now see clearly how his love underpinned his colonial privileges. Loveless, he realizes he is neither willing to let go of Donana and his family nor strong enough to withstand the exclusion from Benguela's white community.

Yaka's historical reconstruction, like Mayombe's island, is based on a fake discourse of integration. The slow and painstaking recomposition of all the parts of the Angolan nation's social body requires, as Maria Aparecida Santilli foregrounds, a raising of the consciousness of all the parts that compose it (128). Through its destabilization of homogeneous historical narratives, *Yaka* allegorically represents, as Inocência Mata argues, every single part of the nation's body as belonging to a bigger, hybrid and plural totality ("Pepetela e as novas margens" 132). However, to insert itself in the new imagined community, each part of *Yaka's* body must divest itself of any sexual residue. Any part unwilling to sacrifice his or her sexual appetite for the greater stability of the new nation must be expelled from the nation's boundaries. Indeed, in its efforts to create a cohesive whole, the *Yaka* statue is willing to remove from its eyes, sex, legs and heart, the remnants of any affect that might perturb the harmony the advent of independence will bring.⁴⁹

At the same time as *Yaka's* nation-building narrative foregrounds its hybrid origins and explores new ways of bringing its different elements together, it banishes love and its discourse of unity from the heart of the nation. The novel dismisses Ernesto Taveres's ardent thesis in favor of Angolan independence as a sham as soon as it exposes

⁴⁹ Contrary to the Latin American Foundational narratives Doris Sommer analyses (1991), *Pepetela's* first allegorical representations of the nation exclude love and affect from the communities they try both to allegorically represent and bring together.

that, behind it, there is nothing more than inextinguishable lust. An unredeemable womanizer and a frequent visitor to Benguela's shantytowns, Ernesto Tavares's political loyalty lies only with the satisfaction of his sexual appetite, "sempre a mudar de negra para negra" (*Yaka* 169). Despite the constancy of his lasciviousness, Ernesto is well known for his fickle political positions. From being an adamant supporter of an autonomous government for Angola in his youth, Ernesto becomes one of the most zealous supporters of the New State colonial policy of integration, and a harsh critic of all infidels daring to deny the patriotic image of the Portuguese empire displayed in *Os lusíadas* (*Yaka* 170). True to Camões and Lusotropicalism's political agenda, Ernesto dies while having sex with a Maria, a poor black woman, while "ímpetuoso ainda erecto," his phallus points towards the heavens like a powerful "azagaia"—lance—challenging time (*Yaka* 168-9). A symbol of the Portuguese pertinacious sexual politics, Ernesto's phallus refuses to go down even after his death. Significantly, while Ernesto's weapon is buried with him, the Cuvalé "azagaia" emerges as a symbol of resistance against colonial oppression: "A azagaia de Vilonda estendeu no espaço acima dos rochedos, picou silvando, e se enterrou no peito de Aquiles Aragão Semedo" (*Yaka* 197). This change of weapon signals a change of discourse. In the new Angola, love will play no part in bringing together the torn pieces of the nation's body.

Like Victor Frankenstein's creation, the Yaka statue also went berserk. The purified limbs and organs composing its body were no guarantee to baulk the brutal spiral of violence that followed independence. Indeed, *Yaka*'s narrative ends on the eve of the decisive battle for control of Angola in 1975, several years before Angola's corrupt elite smashed the fragile national unity the Yaka statue cherished. For vast portions of the

population, little changed when the country moved from colonialism to independence other than the ruling elite. The new elite perpetuated the same structures of oppression to maintain its grip on power. Exclusion and discrimination became the trademark of the privileged minority of black Portuguese-speaking Angolans who, like the white expatriates during Portuguese colonial domination, accumulate most of the country's wealth (Birmingham 184). The immense revenues the country obtained through mineral resources were never democratically distributed. Instead of spurring the country's development, wealth only helped to fuel the civil war that soaked Angola in a blood bath for more than thirty years. Furthermore, Angola's ruling elite betrayed the political utopia *Mayombe's* fighters fostered. Like *Yaka's* much-reviled Eduardo Tavares, Angola's ruling elite also proved to be just as ideologically fickle as it converted from "Soviet-style command management in the early eighties, to an American-style free-market in the late 1890s" (Birmingham 156). However, in place of Ernesto Tavares's politics of sexual conquest, an unquenchable appetite for wealth and power has guided the ruling elite's policy.

Pepetela's narrative evolution reflects Angolan society's changes since independence from Portugal. Significantly, as the predatory capitalism the elites practice threatens to disjoin the nation's body, his narrative turns toward an integration of elements of the lover's discourse it originally excluded from the imaginary community. Love and sexuality, Pepetela indicates, despite all the risks and contradictions they pose to society, are necessary to check the perverse mechanization to which capitalism's irrational rationality subjects the contemporary, war-wrecked, Angolan nation. The rift between love and the Angolan national project his earlier novels like *Mayombe* and *Yaka*

created must be sewn back into the totality if the Yaka statue is, finally, to fall from its plinth “e ficar em cacos pelo chão, a boca para um lado, os olhos pelo mar, o coração embaixo da terra, o sexo para o Norte e as pernas para o Sul,” without fearing the dissolution of the hope that arrived with its creation (*Yaka* 347).

The Trouble with Language and Capital: Predadores’ Reinsertion of Love

As the exclusion of love from Angola’s imagined community proves ineffective to hold together the nation’s different elements in peace, Pepetela revises the basis of the national project he outlined in his first novels. Instead of deeming love an obstacle to Angola’s development and cohesion as a modern nation, Pepetela’s later novels expose the perverse formalism of language as the cause behind the unequal state of affairs in contemporary Angola. In a last effort to portray the full-fledged complexities of Angola’s sociopolitical landscape, I will discuss how *Predadores*—a novel published thirty years after independence, in 2005—turns to love as it explores new ways of rebuilding the social and material communal bonds the new elite’s shrewd use of language betrayed.

Predadores (2005) begins where *Yaka*’s narration ended—that is, the eve of independence in Angola. Contrary to *Yaka*’s historical portrayal of a white family of colonizers, *Predadores* delves into the life of Vladimiro Caposso, a member of the new class of predatory businessmen that will flourish after the MPLA’s congress of 1985. From Caposso’s first steps as a member of the MPLA movement in 1975, until his political and economic decline in 2004, *Predadores* dissects the patron-client politics that, according to Patrick Chabal, has been the common denominator of most African ruling parties (96). A traitor, a crook, a liar, and a murderer, Vladimiro Caposso is the

epitome of the political opportunism of a voracious younger generation of Angolans who did not fight the colonial war, and who are now in charge of most of the formerly state-run enterprises (*Predadores* 360). Indeed, for this unscrupulous latter generation, everything is a matter of the connections they can establish within the party and how much they are willing to pay for certain illegal benefits. Replicating the clientelism critiqued by Chabal, Vladimiro Caposso both enters the MPLA movement in 1975 and manages to establish himself as a promising youth leader in the JMPLA (Juventude do MPLA), after the MPLA's reorganization following the 1977 attempted coup.⁵⁰ While working for the government as an adjunct in the Secretaria de Estado dos Desportos, Caposso uses his bureaucratic benefits to build up his own fleet of illegal buses in Luanda and slowly, but steadily, increases his own capital. By 1986—a year in which the MPLA began to show signs of switching from socialism to capitalism—Vladimiro Caposso had enough contacts inside the government to guarantee the success of his new enterprise.

Vladimiro Caposso's power, influence and wealth increase continuously as his former JMPLA colleagues acquire more important positions in the government. In 1992, the year in which Angola officially changed from a one-party system to a plural democracy, he is the sole proprietor of the CTC (Caposso Trade Company) and one of the most renowned entrepreneurs in Angola. Caposso retains his prestige and power for the next decade but, despite his network of contacts, his influence begins to wane soon after the advent of peace, in 2002. The end of the thirty-year civil war between UNITA

⁵⁰ In 1977, due to the already rampaging corruption and inefficiency of the MPLA elites, there was a coup attempt against then-president Agostinho Neto, led by Nito Alves, and supported by a faction of the army. With the help of Cuba, Agostinho Neto's faction remained in power while the coup leaders were fiercely persecuted and many executed. Despite the coup being thwarted, there was a subsequent crisis that "led to fundamental changes in the country's management and from aspiring to be a mass movement seeking support throughout the city, the ruling MPLA turned to becoming a self-elected elite party mendaciously calling itself 'the workers' vanguard'" (Birmingham 153).

and the MPLA brings new international players to Angola's economic arena. These foster a younger generation of capitalists backed by foreign investors anxious to obtain contracts to rebuild the country, displacing Caposso's overtly corrupt and antiquated management methods. Debt-ridden and with no capital to back him up in his new investments, the novel ends when his creditors take most of CTC from him and relegate him to his enormous country estate in the southern plains of Huíla.

Both *Mayombe* and *Yaka* deployed multiple narrators that allowed for a polyphony of competing voices to steer the plot. The approach is eminently dialogic. In *Predadores*, Pepetela changes stylistic tact, penning an omniscient narrator whose narrative reconstruction includes Vladimiro Caposso's vicissitudes and the lives of multiple characters he encounters. As Ana Mafalda Leite suggests, Caposso's life is the guiding thread from which the adjacent stories proliferate in a process similar to "cell division" ("Predadores" 71). From his many meanderings sprout the stories of his wife—Bebiana—, his four children—Djamila, Ivan, Mireille and Yuri—, his associate—Karim—, as well as the story of Sebastião Lopes, an old acquaintance from Vladimiro's first years in Luanda.

Sebastião Lopes's life serves as a narrative counterpoint to Caposso's vertiginous ascension in society. Unlike the opportunistic Caposso, Sebastião—"um jovem puro" who actually wants to join the FAPLA and fight for the country (*Predadores* 67)—is quickly disenchanted with the revolutionary government and his young petit bourgeois friend, Vladimiro Caposso. From early on, Sebastião's sincere enthusiasm for the political utopia the MPLA government promises clashes with the systemic corruption of the party's leaders. Indeed, by 1977, Sebastião Lopes is already in jail for belonging to a

clandestine committee interested in bringing about a true revolution (*Predadores* 125). Significantly, after being released, Sebastião retires from politics and abandons the revolutionary utopias he embraced during independence. Rather than going back to the theoretical and abstract social models he supported during his youth, he decides to study for a law degree and works, usually for free, to help Luanda's poorest in their daily plight for recognition. As Fernando Arenas highlights, Sebastião Lopes moves from "the surplus of faith in utopia" that accompanied the emergence of the Marxist-Leninist postcolonial African states, to a new "microutopian horizon of hope" (171).

From this new subjective position Sebastião Lopes builds an alternative to the failed positive utopias that spurred the projects of his youth. As Nicholas Brown argues, the positive utopias the newly formed African nation endorsed were mere projections of the present onto the future that never enacted the social and political change they promised (*Utopian Generations* 22). Indeed, by idealizing contemporary society, these positive utopias pay no heed to the real contradictions that assail the social totality. They replicate rather than alter the system they endeavor to overturn even as they adopt an alternative discourse. Thus, as Phillip Rothwell affirms, the arrival of independence did not enact a real structural difference between the colonial elite and the corrupt Angolan elite that replaced it ("Introduction" xiv). The MPLA that once ordered all the barbed wire to be cut in the great prairies in Huíla is the same institution that, years later, gives Vladimiro Caposso the right to fence his property against the interests of the indigenous peasant communities, the traditional owners of the land (*Predadores* 128).

True change is only possible if social actors place their emphasis on the concrete, rather than dwelling on the abstract possibilities of change. As Adorno asserts, the

abstract depicted by ideal future utopias is already “diluted to a formal legality of thought” (*Negative Dialectics* 56). Only from the concrete—that aspect of society that formal rigor has not yet “disfigured”—can a different sense of utopia arise (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 57).⁵¹ Indeed, this emphasis on the concrete allows Sebastião Lopes more effectively to oppose Caposso when he helps Bernardino Chipindela’s ONG file a lawsuit against his former colleague. By the time of their final encounter, Sebastião Lopes refuses to play Vladimiro Caposso’s ideological game. In fact, their difference, as Sebastião points out, has nothing to do with communism or any other abstract utopia he cherished as a young man. Their difference, Sebastião remarks, is ethical, not formal. In this respect, he is aware that communism as such has nothing to do with his ideas about social justice: “as generosas ideias de solidariedade para com os outros, não pretender explorar ninguém, lutar para que todos os angolanos tenham oportunidades semelhantes ... essas ideias ainda são as minhas. Se isso é comunismo, tudo bem, assumo. Mas poder a certeza, não é aquele que alguns pretenderam impor aos seus povos pela força” (*Predadores* 338). Sebastião does not require a formal system to put his ideas into practice. He knows that if he were to do so faced with Vladimiro Caposso, he would stand no chance against Caposso’s opportunistic use of language. To change discursive practices only changes the phrasing of events, leaving the underlying reality intact. A simple change of words, Sebastião now acknowledges, “não muda nada o fundo das coisas” (*Predadores* 340).

⁵¹ The utopia that thus arises from the concrete should be understood, according to Nicholas Brown, as negative (*Utopian Generations* 22). Indeed, contrary to positive utopia’s all too predictable future, negative utopia originates from the unknown, that is, from “a lack or contradiction in the actually existing social totality whose presence hints at an as yet unimaginable future” (Brown, *Utopian Generations* 22).

Language is at the heart of *Predadores*'s critique of self-serving Angolan elites. More than any of Pepetela's earlier novels, the story of Vladimiro Caposso exposes the reasons behind Sem Medo's avowed distrust of words: "Há muito que deixei de acreditar nas palavras" (*Mayombe* 209). Vladimiro Caposso's rise to power in post-independence Angola is linked to his ability to use words. Gifted with an inordinate ability for oral expression, he reinvents his past to become a martyr of freedom. Besides changing his name from José to Vladimiro, a name more suited to the revolutionary trend of the mid-seventies, he modifies his history to become a more appealing prospect to the MPLA as it takes control of the government. Caposso changes his place of birth from Calulo—a poor town in the province of Cuanza Sul—to Catete—the hometown of most independence leaders. Likewise, he transforms the story of his father's life—a poor nurse who went from plantation to plantation giving vaccinations to workers—into a tale of political commitment and resistance against the Portuguese (*Predadores* 92). The names of his children bear witness to Caposso's shrewd use of language. With the exception of Mireille, named after a famous French singer, the names of his other three children reflect his political past: "O primeiro nome, o de Djamila, foi copiado das filhas dos camaradas que vieram da luta de libertação, era um nome muito comum entre os guerrilheiros ... E os dois russos, Ivan e Yuri, provêm da sua fase de exacerbado soviétismo" (*Predadores* 50). Indeed, to achieve success in Angola, Vladimiro Caposso only needs to adapt the words he uses to the political discourse power wields. During his youth, he avidly absorbs all the words he can from his political sessions with Sebastião Lopes without paying much heed to the concepts his young friend was trying to express through them (*Predadores* 85). In *Predadores*, words, like names, "pouco significam" because behind

them there is no real substance (*Predadores* 51). Devoid of any qualitative value, they are the empty traces of the hoped-for utopia the elites systematic persistence in gaining wealth distorted (Brown, “African Literature” 272).

Predadores is a novel about the paradoxes of language—that is, the field of the signifier. As Barthes stresses, by presenting “instant, not consistent, relationships,” this field dismisses all “center, weight and meaning” between the signifiers that compose it (*Sade/ Fourier/ Loyola* 6). Neither beliefs nor ethical consistency have anything to do with the ways in which signifiers associate. Caposso’s astute use of words exemplifies how signifiers continually replace each other in their realm regardless of the varying discourses that articulate them. Non-being, rather than Being, sustains their interactions, as signifiers are only place markers for the absent referent.⁵² Indeed, only by killing the thing it represents, that is, by representing its absence, can a signifier aspire to represent its referent whenever it is not present.

A constitutive lack is the only thing that exists “na verdadeira consistência das palavras” (*Predadores* 32). Like Barthes’s Sade, Vladimiro Caposso uses language to say nothing, that is, “to observe a vacancy” (Barthes, *Sade/ Fourier/ Loyola* 6). Like other members of the MPLA elite, Caposso skews the signifiers in political discourse without producing anything substantial or truly consistent. That elite insists on power and privilege, willfully oblivious of the lack of congruity “between political theory and praxis, between economic potential and actual performance, and, worst of all, between national income and indices of general human development” (Rothwell, “Introduction” xvi). These internal contradictions, though, are no deterrent for the Angolan elite’s

⁵² As Lacan foregrounds, a word frees itself from the here and now—*hic et nunc*—of its referent due to its vanishing being: “Through the word—which is already a presence made of absence—absence itself comes to be named” (“The Function and Field” 229).

predatory quest for capital. As Slavoj Žižek argues, a lack of consistency is a constitutive part of capitalism itself (*The Sublime Object* 53). Capitalism's immanent imbalance between productive forces and the social relations that frame them, forces it constantly to revolutionize itself in a perpetual quest for equilibrium (Žižek, *The Sublime Object* 52). Insofar as this lack or limit is inscribed in its system, capital will continue to seek out new markets in which to continue its permanent development.

Similarly to language, capitalism's expansion requires a radical transformation of the things it wishes to symbolize. To be part of the market, every object must be divested of its substance. Capital, as Alain Badiou points out, is "indifferent to the qualitative configuration of things" (106). Every object is reduced to its exchange value, in order to begin its circulation within the world market. Tellingly, once transformed into a numerical figure, the circulation of the objects thus symbolized greatly resembles the flow of signifiers in language. Instant interactions governing the association of different signifiers reign over monetary transactions in globalized markets. Assets are sold and bought as speculation rises but nothing consistent is created in these transactions. Capital converts things into figures only to produce, insistently, more figures. As our experience of the world shows us, an increment in wealth does not necessarily imply its equal distribution. As a native of Angola—a country whose huge reserves of material resources have failed to produce a significant increment in the indices of human development—Pepetela searches for ways of resisting the irrational rationality behind the logic of both capital and language.

Predadores plays out the opposition between form and substance, Being and Nonbeing, or as Barthes puts it, between consistent, meaningful relations, and the instant

relations characterizing the associations between signifiers (*Sade/ Fourier/ Loyola* 6). Its narrative explores different possibilities to counter the predominance of strict formalism in contemporary Angolan society—that is, Vladimiro Caposso’s instant skewing of signifiers—by opposing it to what the narrative considers to be more substantial, consistent relations between both things and people. To this effect, the novel introduces Nacib Germano de Almeida, a young boy from O Catambor, a shantytown in Luanda, reconstructing his slow rise out of the misery of the slums to become a mechanical engineer for one of the transnational oil companies operating in Angola. Unlike Vladimiro Caposso, money is not the driving force behind Nacib’s desire. From a young age, Nacib has always had a keen interest in applied science. Building, rather than management, is his primary goal (*Predadores* 194). Indeed, Nacib dreams of designing motors that would propel cars and planes of the future as well as of building a new oil refinery. Like Sebastião Lopes, he endeavors to return to things and people alike the substance and meaning language and capital’s rigorous formality withdrew from them. Through his work, Nacib struggles to build the infrastructure the Angolan elite neglected with its voracious appetite for wealth after thirty years in power.

Likewise, the novel’s quest for different, qualitative-oriented, socio-economic activities goes beyond characters like Nacib and Sebastião Lopes, and extends to Ivan Caposso’s radical metamorphosis. Described as a troublemaker and a good-for-nothing in his first narrative appearances, Ivan’s irresponsible life-style changes suddenly when Vladimiro Caposso decides to send him to supervise the construction of his newly acquired estate in the southern province of Huíla. Freed from his father’s asphyxiating authority, Ivan begins to transform into a different man. As he distances himself from his

father, Ivan is able to form new kinds of bonds with both people and nature. He becomes good friends with Gongga, a security guard with whom he has philosophical conversations at night and discusses practical things during the day (*Predadores* 266). A former farmer, Gongga patiently explains to Ivan everything he needs to know in his new rural environment. He teaches him to differentiate and name trees, birds and bulls at the same time as he shows him how to build rabbit traps, and grow collard greens and lemon trees. Most importantly, he explains to him how to “conquistar uma rapariga do campo sem ofender a família e a linhagem” (*Predadores* 267). The time Ivan spends with Gongga in the fazenda changes him so much that, by the time Vladimiro Caposso finally shows up to enjoy his newly built southern-style mansion, Ivan and he neither share the same world view nor agree on future plans for the estate. While the father can only think of building an airport to bring his guests to celebrate the inauguration of the mansion, Ivan is thinking of creating a new, more productive, breed of cattle and of expanding the arable land. Moreover, where Ivan is able to appreciate the beauty of a waterfall and the pureness of the water, Caposso only sees the chance of creating a dam to practice sailing. In fact, Ivan’s ideas on production, preservation and development for the estate are the polar opposite of his father’s predatory and selfish managerial practices.

Ivan’s projects for developing the Huíla estate are the sole possibility for the redemption of the Caposso family. Left with ten percent of the shares of CTC, Vladimiro Caposso has no choice but to turn his back on the city and head toward the countryside. By the end of the narrative, the new capitalist elite forces Vladimiro Caposso to retrace the steps that brought him to Luanda and, literally, to go back on his words. The first decision Vladimiro Caposso takes upon arriving at his estate on Christmas Eve 2004 is to

change its name. He replaces Karam, his former associate's last name, for Calulo, his actual, if foresworn, hometown in the province of Cuanza-Sul (*Predadores* 374). Despite Vladimiro Caposso's objection to adopting any measures that might improve the conditions of his workers and his insistence on running the farm as he ran his companies, this significant replacement of names signals a possibility of change. Instead of further entangling himself in the web of language, Caposso's final Freudian slip reveals a vague chance to bring back to his discourse the part of his past life he sacrificed to satisfy his inextinguishable greed.

In its struggle to bring consistent relationships back to Angolan society, *Predadores* integrates the elements of Angolan society Pepetela excluded in his first attempts at imagining the nation. Rather than considering love as a threat to the harmony of the emergent community, *Predadores* locates in the perverse formalism of reason, language and capital the cause behind the failure of Angola. The novel moves away from the puritanical, social ideology that, according to Russell Hamilton, deemed sexuality to be bourgeois and antirevolutionary during the first years after the independence, and uses love to make a social and political statement (131). As David Brookshaw highlights, love in Pepetela's later novels is a way of preserving the ideal that spurred the struggle for independence (112). Against the background of ruthless capitalism and increasing social distress, love becomes a way of keeping utopia alive.

Love endows social relationships with a consistency that opposes the instant relationships guiding both the irrational rationality of capitalism and the strict formalism of language. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, love compensates for one of the effects of the emergence of the subject into language, that is, the nonexistence of a

relationship between the sexes (*Encore* 6). By positing the possibility of a perfect complementarity between opposites, love adds depth and imbues with sense the insistent and repetitive interactions that constitute the field of the signifier. In this respect, love gives meaning to interactions that otherwise would obey no purpose at all. Its narrative, despite all its contradictions, allows the subject to place himself within a discourse in which, contrary to the symbolic chain, the qualities of the loved object are a priority. Significantly, the lover's overvaluation of the sexual object Freud describes is simultaneously a source of authority and means of resisting symbolization (*Three Essays* 16). Insofar as loved objects are invaluable they become, literally, priceless to the lover who cherishes them.⁵³

Furthermore, love offers an alternative to the dubious freedom commodity fetishism affords subjects. As Žižek affirms, far from repressing the relations of domination and servitude that structure bourgeois society,⁵⁴ the freedom love provides to subjects depends, first and foremost, on their acceptance of what is already given: "the paradox of love is that it is a free choice, but a choice which never arrives in the present—it is always already made. At a certain moment, I can state retroactively that I have already chosen" (*The Sublime Object* 187). The lover can neither be forced to love someone in particular nor can he choose, as would be the case with any other kind of commodity, with whom to fall in love. To be free, the lover needs to recognize a previous

⁵³ The lover's overvaluation of the loved object is evident in our use of every day language. Common, trite formulas, of comparison such as "I love you more than tongue can tell" and "my love for you is bigger than the ocean" bear witness to the incommensurability of the feelings love narratives try to render intelligible through symbolization.

⁵⁴ According to Žižek, while formally, in a bourgeois society, all interpersonal relations between subjects are free and devoid of any traces of the fetishism that characterized masters and servants' interaction in feudal societies, the repressed truth is that such relations of domination have only been displaced. Indeed, from fetishizing the "relations between men," as was the case in feudal society, bourgeois society moved on to fetishize the "relations between things" (*The Sublime Object* 22).

state of affairs, that is, the lover must accept responsibility for a circumstance for which he was not, until then, accountable. To this effect, love offers an advantage over the freedom capitalist societies offer because it imposes the acknowledgement of the relations of domination that bourgeois society displaces. Unlike modern society's discourse of equality, the lover's discourse refuses to deny the violence that articulates it (Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse* 188-9). Acceptance, though, is not equivalent to resignation. The recognition of the existing inequalities in Angolan society is the first condition to search for new forms of altering reality. Otherwise the structural relations of domination will remain, regardless of any play of words.

In contrast to *Mayombe* and *Yaka*, *Predadores* brings to the fore the need to socialize love in order to rebuild the nation. However, this narrative return to love does not imply a naïve depiction of possibilities of solving society's contradictions. Nor does it deny love's affinity to domination. The novel follows the development of the failed relationship between Mireille—Vladimiro Caposso's favorite daughter—and Nacib Germano de Almeida. Nacib and Mireille never surpass the class barriers that keep them apart. From their first platonic and wordless exchange of looks in the elitist neighborhood of Alvalade, to their secret strategies to bypass Vladimiro Caposso's surveillance, their different origins prove to be an insurmountable obstacle. Significantly, the class privileges that kept them apart during their youth become more prominent as they grow up. The distance that separates Alvalade from Catambor stretches even further when Mireille decides to study Art History and to live a bohemian life in Paris. After Mireille parts, their encounters become increasingly erratic as their lives go in different directions. While Nacib sticks tenaciously to his dreams of building, Mireille becomes more like her

dominating father as she sheds off her childish innocence. As Nacib finally recognizes, Mireille—a frivolous upper-class girl—always had the upper hand in their relationship:

Desde o princípio. Eu passava na rua dela, no passeio oposto, sem ousar mirá-la de frente e ela a gozar. A perceber os meus sentimentos e a minha timidez e a gozar. A perceber os meus sentimentos e a minha timidez e a gozar ... Se mudei de passeio, foi porque ela mandou. E se um dia parei e com ela falei, foi porque me chamou. A iniciativa era sempre dela, brincava comigo como uma criança com o seu brinquedo. E eu babado, sofrendo e feliz ao mesmo tempo, anos a fio, dependendo de um sorriso dela, de um capricho, de um esgar. (*Predadores* 378)

Nacib acknowledges Mireille's control over him, but this does not induce him to dismiss love completely.

Apart from its potential for domination, Nacib is aware of the possibilities love offers to resist the insatiable hunger of the new capitalists. *Predadores* recounts the fleeting love affair between Nacib and Susan Dean—a young American biologist Nacib meets after the oil company for whom he works sends him to study for six months in Berkeley, California: “De bons companheiros passaram a bons amantes, sem grandes análises nem discussões teóricas, e sem nunca falarem do futuro” (*Predadores* 187). Despite their never talking about the future, Nacib and Susan still manage to form an interpersonal bond stronger than the relationship Susan establishes with her childhood friend Omar—one of the new unscrupulous foreign investors in Angola. Indeed, Susan is the only thing Omar's money cannot buy. She refuses to go to bed with him despite all his money and his calculated, strategic flirting. She sees through Omar's intentions and knows that behind him, there is nothing more than a religious zeal for money (*Predadores* 192).

Nacib willingly accepts love's ambivalence. In contrast to Sem Medo and the political commissar in *Mayombe*, Nacib enthusiastically helps his best friend, Kasseke, to

resume his truncated sentimental education. Accidentally castrated by his father when he was child, Kasseke—one of many orphans roaming the streets of Luanda—is free from the influence of love and sexuality. He is completely protected from the sadness and despair that permanently besieges Nacib due to his troubled relationship with Mireille (*Predadores* 327) and from Vladimiro Caposso’s immoderate sexual appetite. Indeed, Kasseke, more than most Angolans, concentrates on running his small business to make enough money to survive in the newly formed nation. Unable to indulge his sexual desires, he is the paradoxical incarnation of the perfect Angolan citizen Pepetela’s first novels depict. He does not pose a threat either to the secluded community of *Mayombe* or to the nation’s body *Yaka*’s narrative aims to put together. Without a “kinhunga,” and thus, unable to “arranjar mulher” (*Predadores* 328), Kasseke attains the freedom Sem Medo, despite his theory and rhetoric, never manages to achieve. However, in the context of rampaging corruption and reigning inequality, the freedom from love imposes too great a sacrifice on the oppressed. To take love away from them amounts to condemning them to utter despair. Love, despite its contradictions, gives Pepetela’s characters the possibility of resisting the senseless social relations capital establishes. It is no coincidence *Predadores* finishes when Nacib decides to pay for Kasseke’s reconstructive surgery. Like a new Prometheus, Nacib does everything in his power to stitch back into his friend’s body the unwanted elements Pepetela left behind in his construction of the national body. As a final gesture of friendship, Nacib gives Kasseke the opportunity to build an invaluable and priceless interpersonal bond—that is, a bond capable of escaping from the perverse formalism and inconsistent dynamic of language and capital.

Revisiting *Mayombe*: Revising the National Myth in *O planalto e a estepe*

After introducing love into the nation's body, Pepetela's nation-building narrative revisits the myth of origins it imagined in *Mayombe*. Published in 2009, *O planalto e a estepe* follows the path opened by *Predadores* in its revision of the foundational premises of the new nation. Forming a contrast with the rational zeal of the first African Prometheus Sem Medo impersonated, I will examine how Júlio Pereira—*O planalto e a estepe*'s new commander—refuses to base the foundations of the new Angolan nation on a perverse mastery over feelings. Instead of basing itself on the fake sense of inclusion characterizing Pepetela's first novels, Júlio Pereira's first-person account of the war and his experience as an MPLA member during the first turbulent years after independence proves to be fully encompassing.

In *O planalto e a estepe*, love stops playing a secondary role and becomes, finally, the main theme of Pepetela's narrative. The love story of Júlio Pereira—the son of poor Portuguese farmers and a member of the MPLA—and Sarangerel—the daughter of the Mongolian defense secretary—, serves as a framework against which to dissect the rational folly of modern political utopias and the voracious insanity of contemporary capitalism in Angola. After thirty-five years of forced separation, the story of their love's resilience is the only element endowed with consistency in Júlio Pereira's reconstruction of the swift historical changes weaving through the often-contradictory twentieth century.

From the beginning, Júlio and Sarangerel's love clashes with the communist regime's strict political formalism. Their romance interferes with Sarangerel's father's political agenda and threatens the Russian strategic alliance with Mongolia against the

Chinese. Scarcely tolerated at first due to her father's racism, in Moscow their relationship is immediately interrupted when Sarangerel's pregnancy prompts her father, with the complicity of Russian authorities, to take her back to Ulan Bator against her will. International socialism's discourse of solidarity and fraternity between revolutionary nations, as Júlio soon finds out, is just a façade hiding the same racism and discriminatory policies of colonialism. His appeal to this discourse is of no avail in convincing the heavily politicized communist state apparatus. In the Cold-War political climate, love—their self-proclaimed reason to keep on fighting for humanity (*O planalto* 108)—is the least of the worries of the communist regime.

Unlike the void discourse of fraternal love and inclusion the communist regime deploys, Júlio Pereira's future is inextricably bound to the incontestable concreteness of his affection for Sarangerel. His buried, forever displaced future lies in all the concrete possibilities of finding Sarangerel, and not in the promise of abstract happiness and comradeship that spurred the failed utopias of his past (*O planalto* 134). After their separation, Júlio Pereira witnesses, as one of the most renowned generals in the military, the decomposition of Angolan politics and society. He recounts the initial excitement of a whole generation as the independence war begins, as well as the disenchantment of that same generation when they realize their socialism was “só de boca” (*O planalto* 136). Likewise, he observes impassively Angola's turn to unbridled capitalism in the mid-1980s, the oil boom that helped the MPLA win the civil war, and the entrenchment of social inequalities between the new elite and the rest of the population, but he never gives up on Sarangerel. He knows from the moment he loses her that his future will only be fulfilled when he can hold her hand in his hands again (*O planalto* 184).

In refusing to give up on his feelings Júlio Pereira represents a new kind of hero in Pepetela's narrative. Indeed, Júlio Pereira's narration drops the epic tone that characterizes *Mayombe* at the same time as it veers from the tragic traits that characterize, according to Robson Dutra, the heroes in Pepetela's later novels (237). A pragmatic and humble war hero, Júlio Pereira no longer conceives love as an obstacle to the construction of Angola. On the contrary, his love for Sarangerel is the sole reason he has left after the crumbling of all political utopias (*O planalto* 189). Unlike the guerrilla warriors of *Mayombe*, Júlio Pereira is not willing to dismiss either the memory of or his love for Sarangerel and his daughter in order to fight for the future. To him, love and political commitment are compatible, not unredeemable opposites. He gladly joins the liberation struggle and puts into practice all he learnt during his training in Ukraine, but he is constantly aware of the lack that runs through the Mayombe forest in Cabinda, where he, like Sem Medo and his comrades, also fights for independence: "me faltava o ouvido de Sarangerel a quem contar dúvidas e certezas, contar vitórias e derrotas. Me faltava o olhar orgulhoso da filha" (*O planalto* 122).

The differences between Commander Alicate—Júlio Pereira's war name—and Commander Sem Medo encompass their attitudes to love and the prerogatives of reason. Despite sharing Sem Medo's distrust for power structures and political discourses, Júlio Pereira refuses to subject himself to the rigors of Sem Medo's program of liberation in *Mayombe*. Commander Alicate has no illusions about reason's capacity to purify feelings and justify murder. Significantly, he juxtaposes simple common sense to Sem Medo's desperate efforts to liberate his actions from hate (*O planalto* 123). Likewise, he has no qualms regarding the ways of gaining his comrade's confidence. Contrasting with Sem

Medo's final epic sacrifice in order to unify different factions in *Mayombe*, Júlio Pereira's craftily uses a widely spread legend of "a prova do galo" to convince his soldiers of the efficacy of the charm that protects him against bullets and unite his companions around him (*O planalto* 127). Júlio Pereira is not interested in teaching his soldiers to be rational. In fact, he tries to build a community in Mayombe in which all the different elements that compose Angola—from the irrational magical beliefs of this fellow men and love—coexist without suffering reason's oppression.

A man "de decisões rápidas, sempre guiado pelo instinto" (*O planalto* 63), Júlio is not afraid to stop using his reason both in war and in love. Unlike Sem Medo, he refuses to devise strategies to maintain his status as dominator in his relationship with Sarangerel and to deny to his feelings the complete possession of his senses. Indifferent to his self-image, he willingly lets his emotions get the upper hand over him and take control of his actions when he both meets and reencounters Sarangerel (*O planalto* 151). Calculations are out of the question when it comes to love. Rather than quenching his feelings in order to prove himself a true master, Júlio Pereira voluntarily risks his own safety to win Sarangerel back. Regardless of its contradictions and collusion with domination, Júlio Pereira is aware that love offers him one last stronghold to resist systemic oppression. Indeed, his love for Sarangerel is the only way he has left to exercise his free will in a society where everything seems to be stealthily planned and decided in advance (*O planalto* 114).

O planalto e a estepe closes the rift *Mayombe* opened in Pepetela's narrative with its delusional rhetoric of inclusion. Tellingly, like Pepetela's own literary voyage, Júlio Pereira reaches the end of his "larga e sinuosa curva para o amor" at the end of his life-

long story (*O planalto* 11). Júlio Pereira brings Sarangerel back to the territory from which *Mayombe* expelled both Leli and Ondina. Pepetela is willing to take the risk of incorporating the lover's discourse into his own narrative, even though he is well aware of the potential for aggression lying dormant at its core. By allowing Sarangerel to ravish him, Júlio Pereira is willing to pay the enslaving price that comes with the overvaluation of the loved object. With Júlio Pereira's love story, Pepetela denounces the chimera of absolute freedom he built in *Mayombe*. As Adorno highlights, freedom, in order to be really liberating, must always be negative (*History and Freedom* 243). Its reach and extent can only be measured against a concrete oppressive context, a specific situation of unfreedom. Otherwise, the liberating potential its concept designates can easily be used to justify coercion, as was the case with the Marxist utopias informing Lusophone Africa's independence struggle.⁵⁵ No wonder that in the context of contemporary Angola, and despite its complicity with Portuguese colonialism and its overt claims to domination, love's contradictory attempts at creating a consistent relation between lovers are necessary to check the perverse association of signifiers characterizing the political discourse of the Angolan elites.

After a prolonged absence, *O planalto e a estepe* marks the return of love to Pepetela's novels. Despite the resistance of Pepetela's first novels to the lover's discourse the Portuguese so deftly used to justify their colonialism, the historical transformations that shook the country prompted Pepetela to revise the imagined community he outlined from the early seventies to the early eighties. As the same oppressive structures

⁵⁵ According to Adorno, the fetishization of ideas that are supposed to be meaningful only in the process of reflection is the signature of modern forms of irrationalism (*History and Freedom* 262). Regardless of its content, as soon as any idea becomes fetishized, it unleashes its oppressive potential. Thus, by fetishizing love and freedom, both Portuguese colonialism and Marxism stand, structurally, on the same ground.

reconfigure their discourses after independence, Pepetela's narrative also explores new ways of resisting the new reality of Angolan social dynamics after disillusionment with former political utopias sets in. In the atmosphere of social decomposition during Angola's first decades of existence, love plays a pivotal role in Pepetela's work. At first completely excluded from its narrative due to its complicity with domination, love returns as a means of opposing the inconsistent relations characterizing the elite's fickle political discourse as well as their insatiable appetite for capital. The contradictory, violence-ridden, consistency love attempts to create between lovers is, notwithstanding its risks, necessary to balance both language and capital's irrational rationality. Its exclusion, as Pepetela's narrative shows, neither wards off violence nor deters political actors from committing to the reconstruction of the nation. Unlike the perverse, insistent, repetition of power relations, love maintains a concrete, insofar as it is consistent, sense of real possibility.

Chapter 3

Fernando Vallejo's Splendor: Building a Post-National Anti-Romance.

The Colombian writer Fernando Vallejo acquired notoriety in the last decade of the Twentieth-century for his virulent prose and his political incorrectness. Bent on transgressing all moral limits, Vallejo's radical writing spares no social conventions in its visceral denunciation of Colombian society's failure in the pages of his autobiographical cycle. Interspersing personal memories of his family, friends and lovers with angry rants against all the social actors he blames for the country's endless spiral of violence, Vallejo's narrative is constructed as a patchwork of unrelated and often-contradictory themes. Full of unexpected turns and abrupt transitions, Vallejo jumps from his joyful childhood memories and his desperate quest for love, to disparaging comments on the Catholic Church, the Colombian state and its useless paraphernalia of empty national symbols, or Colombian peasants and ethnic minorities. Despite his apparent refusal to connect the threads of his narratives, Vallejo's transgressive approach to affect is deeply correlated to his unorthodox political views. In this chapter, I will discuss how the multiple acts of love Vallejo describes throughout his work are intricately connected to his stance against authority and his persistent calls for anarchy. Vallejo puts a new spin on the fruitful allegorical relation between love and polis that Nineteenth-century Latin American writers developed to cement their burgeoning nation-states. While staying within its allegorical bounds, Vallejo inverts this productive dialectical relation. Indeed, rather than using love to build Colombia's failed national project, Vallejo dwells on love's latent aggressiveness and radical nonreciprocity to completely annihilate any remnants of the nation.

Fernando Vallejo (1942-present) is one of Colombia's most renowned, versatile and polemical contemporary authors. Ranging from fiction to non-fiction, his writings include autobiographical novels—*El río del tiempo* (1999), *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994), *El desbarrancadero* (2001) and *La rambla paralela* (2002)—, biographies—*El mensajero* (1991), *Almas en pena, chapolas negras* (1995) and *El cuervo blanco* (2012)—, scientific essays on topics such as physics and evolution—*Manualito de imposturología física* (2005) and *La tautología Darwinista* (1998)—, and a historical reconstruction and critique of the Catholic Church and its Gospel—*La puta de Babilonia* (2007). Despite its wide scope of themes, a strong anti-establishment and nonconformist first-person narrative voice connects and holds together all his output. As María Mercedes Jaramillo foregrounds, Vallejo's literature attempts to desacralize the institutions and beliefs structuring the reigning social order (409). Indeed, Vallejo's first-person narrator models himself on the nonconformist, transgressive tradition present in the conservative and religious region of Antioquia, his place of birth. That tradition can be seen in the poetry of Porfirio Barba Jacob (1883-1942) (Medrano-Ollivier 100), and the philosophy of Fernando González (1895-1964) as well as in the activities of the group of radical poets called Nadaístas in the late fifties and early sixties (Montoya 160-1). However, Vallejo's influences are not limited to the Colombian context. According to Fernando Díaz Ruiz, Vallejo's blasphemous and imprecatory writing against morality can be traced back to the tradition of *écrivains maudits* for whom the individual takes precedence over socially sanctioned behavior (234).⁵⁶ Thus, for Vallejo's narrator,

⁵⁶ Jacques Joset analyzes the influence of Louis Ferdinand Céline's groundbreaking *Voyage au bout de la nuit* on Vallejo's prose and style, as well as their common anticlericalism, racism and the anti-humanism grounding several of their most controversial political positions. For more on the connections between

transgression is paramount. As Francisco Villena Garrido affirms, his narrator's identity is fashioned as a response and challenge to any normative or hegemonic discourse (53).⁵⁷

Vallejo's affirmation of his individuality clashes with both traditional morals and with the more liberal precepts of respect for diversity structuring democratic societies. A racist, a classist, a fascist, a confessed murderer and an impenitent sinner, Vallejo's narrator has no qualms about justifying murder, cursing the poor, and sanctioning policies of social culling to control population in his never-ending rants against society. He also insists on maintaining his class privileges as a member of the Colombian elite. Yet his violent diatribes and incessant imprecations indiscriminately lash out against any form of institutionalized authority regardless of its humanitarian claims or a politically correct respect for difference. As his narrator tirelessly declares throughout his autobiographical cycle, he is the only measure and the only authority in his books (*El fuego secreto* 176), and the only point of reference amid the surrounding nothingness (*El desbarrancadero* 139). Beyond Vallejo's whims, loves and hates, there is nothing meriting his consideration, pity or respect.⁵⁸

Vallejo's overt disregard for popular culture and his endorsement of repression towards the dispossessed have been interpreted in light of Angel Rama's concept of the lettered city—that is, the educated, self-perpetuating, elite that wielded political power in

Céline and Vallejo see Jacques Joset's *La muerte y la gramática: los derroteros de Fernando Vallejo*, 2010.

⁵⁷ Despite the similarities Vallejo's narrator shows throughout all his narrative production, in this chapter I will only limit my analysis to *El río del tiempo* (1999), *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994) and *El desbarrancadero* (2001).

⁵⁸ Due to Vallejo's overt play and overlap between authorial and narrative figures in his fictional autobiography, from now on I will refer to his narrator simply as Fernando Vallejo. For more on the particularities of fictional autobiographies and on how Vallejo transgress both the novelistic and autobiographical pacts established between author and reader by Phillipe Lejeune, see Francisco Villena Garrido's *Las máscaras del muerto: autoficción y topografías narrativas en la obra de Fernando Vallejo*, 2009.

colonial and nineteenth-century Latin America through its control of writing (25). As Jean Franco argues, by introducing himself as a presumed grammarian and an enlightened intellectual—that is, the sole holder of knowledge in his narrative—, Vallejo’s narrator looks to turn his readers into his allies in his fascist depiction of Colombian society (225). However, Vallejo’s self-assumed subjective position as a *letrado* is not entirely complicit with the educated elite’s exclusive political project. On the contrary, Vallejo’s blatant exploitation of stereotypes is also a hidden critique of the discursive strategies the educated elite uses to perpetuate its hold on power. As Rory O’Brien stresses, Vallejo voids stereotypes of their truth claims and reduces them to their own absurd “internal *jouissance*” (Representations 202-3).⁵⁹ Furthermore, as Maria Fernanda Lander shows, Vallejo’s impersonation of an intellectual exposes the violence hidden behind the failed hegemonic national project the Colombian elites created to perpetuate their privileges (80). Rather than being biased toward the downtrodden, Vallejo’s invective against Colombian society spares neither the oppressors nor the oppressed. In a country where no one is innocent and where, regardless of his or her class and social origin, everyone that exists is guilty (*La virgen de los sicarios* 87), Vallejo holds all its citizens accountable for the collapse and failure of the Colombian nation.

Vallejo’s fiction is both a critique and a response to the nation-building narratives nineteenth-century Latin American authors unraveled to cement the disparate elements included within their borders. According to Doris Sommer, the romantic passion between heterosexual lovers served as a powerful allegorical motif to resolve, in a nonviolent manner, the social tensions between the different social and racial elements composing

⁵⁹ Vallejo uses stereotypes to portray both the popular mass and the educated elite. In this sense, Vallejo’s radical, contradictory and, more-often-than-not nonsensical fascist claims expose what for Slavoj Žižek is the main goal of any ideology, that is, “the consistency of the ideological attitude itself” (*The Sublime* 92).

the nation (6). Indeed, romance afforded the elites with a narrative capable of weaving together personal passions and the nation's destiny at a time when to govern was tantamount to populating the vast expanses of still unoccupied and, thus, underexploited resources (Sommer 15). In this context, the Western lover's discourse provided a felicitous narrative in which to prop up national narratives. The logic of love—that is, its climactic resolution of all conflict and difference into a “locus amoenus” of peace and harmony—solved all the social contradictions among competing factions, guaranteed the reproductive stability of the nation, and covered behind the veil of a willing, passionate renunciation between lovers, the oppression resulting from the hierarchical structure Latin American states inherited from colonial societies.

Despite the appropriateness of romance narratives for the nation-building projects Latin American societies undertook in the nineteenth century, their success in bringing together the nation's disparate elements was far from guaranteed. As Sommer remarks, the allegorical relationship between politics and eroticism requires the active dialectical interlocking of both layers of meaning in order for romance to produce its effects (43).⁶⁰ Without an adequate political referent, no allegorical production of meaning can take place. Although incipient, an imagined community is necessary for love narratives to integrate all the members of the nation.

Colombia's nineteenth-century national romances reflect the country's division and the elite's inability to create a truly national discourse. Fragmented into four economic regions since colonial times—the Caribbean Coast, Antioquia, the Eastern

⁶⁰ Rather than understanding allegory as the relationship between two parallel and otherwise unrelated levels of signification, Doris Sommer builds on Walter Benjamin's notion of allegory as a dialectic process that constantly overlaps different semantic levels in their mutual efforts to produce meaning (Sommer 42-5).

Central and the Southwest—, independence did little to bring together these politically and culturally distinct areas that composed the emerging Colombian nation. Nor did it put an end to the internal conflicts between the different elites (Palacios 19). As Carlos Alberto Patiño Villa asserts, most of the civil wars, regional conflicts and revolts that shook Colombia had their origin in the limited ability of the central power to impose a common agenda over the federalist interests of the different regions (1105-6).⁶¹ Indeed, only in the 1930s did the Colombian state begin a process of territorial, economic and social integration leading to the formation of a consolidated national identity (Patiño Villa 1099). This uneven process of unification had its allegorical counterpart in the national romances written in each of the different regions during the nineteenth century. As Idelber Avelar points out in four nineteenth-century novels he analyses, a sexual expectation is created that is never resolved (126).⁶² In their efforts to explain the failure of the nation, these novels share the trope of catachresis—that is, of the metaphor of a nonexistent referent (Avelar 111). National romances cannot come to fruition because the national project—the political referent they wish to endow with stability—did not have a “literal existence in reality” (Avelar 110). The allegorical dialectic between eroticism and politics is held at an abrupt stand still as the relationship of these romances to their absent referent is, at best, only phantasmatic.

Colombia’s national romances prove themselves useless in compensating for the absence of a coherent and cohesive project to unify the fragmented nation. Despite being

⁶¹ According to Carlos Alberto Peña Nieto, the more than seventy internal conflicts—nine of which reached a national level and are considered civil wars by historians—constantly tested the Colombian state’s capacity to survive (1105).

⁶² In his article “Transculturation and Civil War: The Origins of the Novel in Colombia” Idelber Avelar analyses four novels from Colombia’s most important regions during the nineteenth century: Juan José Nieto’s *Ingermina*—Caribbean Coast—, Eugenio Díaz Castro’s *Manuela*—the Eastern Central Andean region surrounding Bogotá—, Jorge Isaacs’s *María*—the Southwestern Cauca region—, and Tomás Carrasquilla’s *Frutos de mi tierra* as a representative of the foundational novel in Antioquia.

nation-building narratives, they yield the same results as the nineteenth-century Latin American a-foundational and non-reproductive narratives that, according to Juan Carlos González-Espitia, championed individuality and opposition to authority instead of the socially sanctioned hetero-normative morality, which the elites felt should be the pillars of the nation (33). In Colombia, both foundational and a-foundational narratives reflect the failure of the Colombian national project within the limits imposed by their respective narrative tropes. Indeed, the same constant feeling of social crisis that disrupts Colombian national romances, fuels the decadent and a-foundational nineteenth-century works relegated to the dark side of the archive—the secret section of any archive where, in contrast to its open and public area, “useless, confidential or dangerous” documents are stored (González-Espitia 16).

The limit Juan Carlos González-Espitia traces between the open archive and its somewhat inaccessible annex becomes indistinct and blurry in Colombian nineteenth-century novels. Colombia’s national romances’ unsuccessful attempts at consolidating a unified political project paved the way for the inclusion of literary works whose content overtly opposes the goals of foundational narratives. In the absence of an all-encompassing national telos capable of uniting the nation’s citizens, the phantasmatic presence of decadent narratives becomes a rule rather than an exception in Colombia’s archive. Thanks to this permeable, spectral threshold, it comes as no surprise that both Fernando Vallejo’s literary denial of national symbols and his endorsement of “a radical brand of Malthusianism,” achieved a visible place in Colombia’s open archive (González-Espitia 179).⁶³ Hence, in Colombia, the nation’s diffuse archival limit between

⁶³ Juan Carlos González-Espitia traces Fernando Vallejo’s bleak views on the nation to: “the denial of a positive origin embodied in the supposedly constructive founding figures; the literary defense of a radical

foundational and a-foundational narratives is a result of the nation's ghostlike consistency.

Fernando Vallejo's corrosive narrative emerges as an attempt to unveil Colombia's historical failure. Like González-Espitia, Rory O'Bryen interprets Vallejo's narrative as an exercise in spectrology—that is, as an endeavor to conjure up and give voice to the spectral presence of the period of sectarian political violence known as La Violencia (Specters 48).⁶⁴ According to O'Bryen, Vallejo's futile efforts to symbolize La Violencia through cinema, media and writing, clash against its “ghastly” presence (Specters 56). As a remnant of the Lacanian Real, La Violencia returns with the persistence of the repressed to disrupt and defy any fixed representation. Historical, yet not dated, La Violencia remains, much like the a-foundational narratives that constitute the public archive's annex, an unwanted presence that Colombian society cannot ignore. Without a clear beginning or a clear end, La Violencia's oppressive historical excess exposes the failure of the Colombian state to legitimize its presence and control violence within its borders (O'Bryen, Specters 5-6). Indeed, being too weak to assert its authority and affirm its institutions over all the country's territory, the Colombian state's ghost-like presence can only produce, paradoxically, more ghosts.

Vallejo's scalding diatribes expose the nation's fragility and the state's connivance with the entrenched violence he denounces in his autobiographical fiction *El*

brand of Malthusianism; and the detachment from a sense of belonging to a palpable nation—expressed as a desire for belonging anchored in the intangible past or fictionalized present” (179).

⁶⁴ Marco Palacios defines La Violencia as the period of roughly 20 years (1945-1965) of sectarian crime and impunity between Liberals and Conservatives, Colombia's leading political parties (193). An unprecedented phenomenon in Colombia due to its brutality, its pervasiveness throughout most parts of the territory, and its death toll (between 100.000 and 300.000), La Violencia disrupted the already frail social tissue of Colombian rural society, exposed the weakness of the Colombian institutions, and triggered mass migrations of peasants to the cities (Palacios 190). Despite its relevance, the political elites covered with a veil of silence their responsibilities in the conflict as truth and justice were sacrificed in favor of a dubious partisan peace (Palacios 190).

río del tiempo. Composed of five books—*Los días azules* (1985), *El fuego secreto* (1987), *Los caminos a Roma* (1988), *Años de indulgencia* (1989) and *Entre fantasmas* (1993)—*El río del tiempo* follows Vallejo's narrator's memories of his childhood and adolescence in Medellín, his years as a cinema student in Rome, his short stay in New York, and his efforts to film a movie about La Violencia in Mexico. Long invectives against Colombia and its patriotic symbols are interspersed among Vallejo's disorderly arrangement of memories. In his whimsical recollections of his past, passing associations of ideas and events unleash Vallejo's tirades against the so-called liberator, Simon Bolívar, the presidents of Colombia and Mexico, the Liberal and Conservative parties, and the bureaucratic apparatus deeply entrenched inside the Colombian state. To Vallejo, Bolívar is nothing more than an empty symbol. A small and ambitious man, impersonated by a dirty statue in Medellín, Bolívar never liberated Colombia from its Spanish inheritance (*Los días azules* 139). Likewise, he does not spare insults to refer to Colombia's presidents—greedy politicians who, regardless of their political affiliation, only wish to sit on Bolívar's throne in order to steal, squander, lie and oppress the population (*Años de indulgencia* 44). Indeed, to Vallejo Colombia is an abortion, a monster with two equally mongoloid and Siamese heads—the Liberal and the Conservative—which have, in turn, destroyed its future (*El fuego secreto* 232). Nothing remains of the optimistic, hopeful picture of a country full of mountains, rivers and forests, his geography professor depicted for him during his high school years (*El fuego secreto* 231). Instead, all that remains of that idyllic past is a jealous, murderous and insane country, a nation whose only law is the law of Thanatos—the infernal kingdom of death (*Entre fantasmas* 29).

Slaughter is the common passion all Colombia's inhabitants share. As far as Vallejo can recall in *Los días azules*, death has been a constant presence in Colombian society. From his first accounts of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán's murder in 1948 and the destruction that spread like fire throughout the country igniting the crudest period of La Violencia and splitting the country in two (*Los días azules* 56), Vallejo's narrator has been obsessed with representing La Violencia's atrocities.⁶⁵ Vallejo travelled to Rome for a year to study cinema at Cinecittà so that he could film a movie in which machetes, the partisan war between Liberals and Conservatives, dead bodies flowing down Colombia's fast-flowing rivers, and lines of mutilated, headless corpses appeared in all their ruthless and unspeakable horror (*Los caminos a Roma* 77-8). In fact, whenever Vallejo sees Colombia he only sees the interminable sequence of all the genocides that, from his childhood, mark Colombia's twentieth-century history:

Vi a Colombia: el genocidio del Dovio, el genocidio del Fresno, el genocidio del Líbano, el genocidio del Águila, el genocidio de Tuluá, el genocidio de Supía, El genocidio de Ríosucio, el genocidio de Anserma, el genocidio de Génova, el genocidio de Icononzo, el genocidio de Salento, el genocidio de Armero, el genocidio de Irra, el genocidio de Falan. (*Los caminos a Roma* 77)

Besides genocides, nothing can be expected from the bloodthirsty and criminal race of Colombia—a country where to die assassinated is considered a natural cause of death (*El fuego secreto* 26).

Death is a pervasive presence in all the books composing Vallejo's fictional autobiography. Although it is only described as a vague presence in his childhood in *Los días azules*, death acquires a more prominent role in Vallejo's narrative as he grows

⁶⁵ Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, the presidential candidate for the Liberal party, was murdered in Bogotá on the 9th of April 1948. After his assassination hordes of drunken and rebellious political partisans vandalized, destroyed and pillaged Bogotá in what was later known as El Bogotazo. From Bogotá, the partisan conflict extended to small rural areas where several civilians replicated the violence that, with time, will turn into the partisan conflict between Liberals and Conservatives that characterized La Violencia (Palacios 199).

older. Ghosts start to fill Vallejo's memories as his narration progresses toward the present. His grandfather's farm in Envigado, the Medellín of his childhood, his gay friends from el Café Miami in his adolescence, his time in Rome and his lost years with his brother Darío in New York, all dilute in the river of time leaving no traces of their former existence except in Vallejo's memory. As time passes Vallejo becomes aware that every act of memory is an act of summoning. In his efforts not to lose his past experiences lest he should forget them (*El fuego secreto* 10), the memories of places and people that disappeared long ago haunt Vallejo's narrative like impenitent souls. Overpowered by their unruly presence, Vallejo's mnemonic writing is condemned to revisit time and again the lost fragments that compose his life. His narrative, then, is a work of mourning—that is, an attempt at dealing with the pain triggered by loss.

As psychoanalysis teaches us, mourning is deeply connected to the loss of the object of desire. Whether it is an object cathected with libidinal energy, as in Freud, or an object that has momentarily taken the place of object *a*, as in Lacan, mourning is triggered when such an object “has attained an existence that is all the more absolute because it no longer corresponds to anything in reality” (Lacan, “Desire” 37). Lost objects obtain most of their relevance from their absence. They are present only insofar as they remain irretrievably lost. In fact, for Lacan, mourning only takes place when the subject is unexpectedly confronted with a hole in the Real (Lacan, “Desire” 37).⁶⁶ The whole symbolic order—that is, the domain that according to Lacan makes representation possible—is needed to make up for the disorder caused by the lost object. No single

⁶⁶The Real, at least at this earlier stage of Lacanian thought, should not be confused with the later version it became. The Real should be understood, not as that which constantly refuses and disrupts symbolization, but as reality insofar as it is rational (Lacan, “The Function and Field” 255). Or, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, the Real, at this stage of Lacanianism, is nothing but another name for the symbolically structured reality (*Looking Awry* 17).

signifier can fill the hole its absence left behind in the Real. “Swarms of images” and a complex set of rites are necessary to restore to both reality and time’s fabric their unruffled and smooth texture (Lacan, “Desire” 38). Moreover, rites are required to appease and satisfy the dead. As Lacan highlights, any failure or insufficiency to comply with the mourning rites will cause their appearance as specters (“Desire” 39). Insofar as they are required to pay their symbolic debt, mourning rites serve to incorporate their absence back into the symbolic network (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 23).

In Vallejo’s work, remembrance is part of the ritual of mourning. His writing summons swarms of memories both to cover up the hole in reality left behind by the living’s absence, and to release the living from the chains that tie them to the dead (*Los caminos a Roma* 19). To fill this absence, Vallejo’s loosely joined and fragmentary memories appear in a disorganized manner that subverts time’s continuity. Time is out of joint in a book that tries to create a semblance of order amid despair and that, simultaneously, claims to advance while it goes backward in time (*Entre fantasmas* 144). As Andrés Alfredo Castrillón highlights, omissions, anticipations and retrospections—ellipsis, prolepsis and analepsis—are the main rhetorical devices Vallejo uses to jump back and forth from the narrated past to the present, where the act of narrating takes place (60). Vallejo goes from the here and now of his writing desk in his house in Amsterdam Avenue, Mexico City, to the there and then of Santa Anita—the idyllic farm of his childhood—the Medellín of his youth, Rome, New York and all the places he describes in his memoirs (*Años de indulgencia* 73). Despite being triggered by the most unexpected Proustian associations, as Jacques Joset affirms (163), Vallejo’s recollections are not entirely random. Most of his time travels have as their utmost destiny the idyllic days of

his childhood he reconstructs in *Los días azules*—a sphere of happiness and plenitude whose center is in the middle and in the periphery and everywhere, and whose translucidity nothing can perturb (*Los caminos a Roma* 95). Like Proust's Combray, the happiness Vallejo feels in Santa Anita becomes a referent point in his narration. His grandparents' country house becomes a lost paradise to where, regardless of the distance travelled and the time elapsed, Vallejo is always bound to return. In Vallejo's box of memories, Santa Anita is contained within all his other memories, just as one instant contains within itself many others (*Años de indulgencia* 62).

Vallejo's fractured narrative challenges the realist literary models informing the nation-building canon of Latin American literature. As Carmen Medrano-Ollivier observes, Vallejo's fragmentary depiction of the world runs counters to the dream unity and totality these novels tried to bring forth with their descriptions (70). Advancing while it retraces its way to the past, Vallejo's writing questions the unhindered march toward progress of both national and historical master narratives. Like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, Vallejo advances without giving any mind to the future (392). Full of gaps and unexpected interruptions, Vallejo writes with his face turned toward the shattered pieces of time he has left floating behind as he moves toward death.

The fragmentation of time in Vallejo's autobiographical cycle radically opposes History's temporal frame. According to Walter Benjamin, the homogeneous and unruffled surface of time History requires to unfold itself is only a semblance (394). Indeed, every historical document must first omit countless exclusions and hidden atrocities in order to unravel its inexorable and teleological narrative (Benjamin 392). History, then, is only a fiction composed of selected pieces scooped from a bigger

sample—that is, from all the fragments remaining from the Angel of History’s passage. Rather than looking toward a fixed goal in the future, Benjamin’s Angel of History advances paying little heed to what lies ahead of him. In its backward movement toward the future, the Angel of History advances facing the past. No unbroken image of time can emerge after its passage because no predetermined rut guides the Angel’s flight. The only image of time left after the passage of the Angel of History is made up of unexpected jumps and sudden interruptions—that is, an image of time that, like Vallejo’s acts of memory, can only be said to be continuous in its discontinuity (Adorno, *History and Freedom* 92).

Vallejo’s narrative jumps and leaps in search of the shattered fragments that compose his past in a race against oblivion. Aware of time’s tendency to unify and erase the independent sensations that compose memory, Vallejo relies on romance languages’ distinction between imperfect and preterit to expose his literary project. Rather than identifying the imperfect with the ideal tense of memory—the tense used in Spanish to refer to habits and events that took place repetitively in the past—, Vallejo equates it with oblivion. In dismissing all the rich nuances of monotony—that is, in turning into something homogeneous what was experienced as discrete, heterogeneous sensations—, the imperfect only traces the opaque brush-strokes on memory’s final picture (*El fuego secreto* 155). However, among the apparent monotony of the imperfect, the preterit emits intermittent touches of light: “Abrió Clodomiro con su manojo de llaves la puerta y entré con Rodrigo al cuarto. Cuánto se traiciona la verdad escribiendo toques de luz, en pretérito, según la vieja formula del relato que reduce la vida a sus solos momentos radiantes, los que del pantano de la repetición y la costumbre rescató la memoria” (*El*

fuego secreto 155). Indeed, Vallejo's performs, much like Benjamin's historical materialist, a tiger's leap into the past to grab hold of these elusive time-fragments (395). Still imbued with a kernel of time—that is, with the latent possibility of what always “will have been” (Žižek, *The Sublime Object* 158)—Vallejo endeavors by all means possible to actualize these elusive fragments of light in the present of his writing and through them, both retrieve and mourn his past.

Vallejo only possesses language to perform these leaps into the past and to both summon and actualize his memories. However, language is as unstable and volatile as the reality surrounding him. Vallejo is aware of the futility of Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro, Andrés Bello, Nebrija, Salvat and the other French and Spanish normative grammarian efforts to contain language's irrationality within rational bounds: “No conozco mayor cerrazón ... que la de los monjes de Port Royal con su sueño de una gramática universal y eterna, lo cual usted bien sabe que es una aberración” (*El fuego secreto* 160). All Vallejo's efforts to control the continuous and inevitable slippage of meaning of words are in vain because language—the only means Vallejo has to stay time's current and go against its flow—is as inconstant and free-flowing as time itself.

Language is made out of time and, like time, can invest itself of spectral qualities. Like the memories of events and people lacking a referent in the present, language also acquires a ghostlike dimension when it manages to stop itself from changing. Vallejo encounters a language that, similar to most of the mnemonic specters that haunt him, transports him back in time. The moment he remembers a young girl speaking to him in the old Judeo-Spanish he believed to be extinct, the specter of this old-Castilian language contaminates Vallejo's narration. Thus, in the lugubrious musical atmosphere of Ravel's

Gaspard de la nuit, Vallejo uses the young girl's language to narrate the expulsion of her ancestors from the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth century: "Año de mil cuatrocientos y noventa y dos, en la cibdad[sic] de Toledo, la postrera noche antes de que amanezca el día. Dexan [sic] los judías las [sic] sus casas y cortijos, vánse por todos los rumbos como espigas que vola [sic] el viento" (*Los caminos a Roma* 37). The ghostly encounter between a language both old and new holds crystalized within itself the story of a past forever lost—that is, a spectral past that Vallejo can only rebuild with his imagination.

As Vallejo disrupts the temporal flow, his transgressive narrative blurs the limits between fiction and reality. As he capriciously shuffles his memories using "la imaginación del recuerdo" (*Los días azules* 14), Vallejo purposefully combines cinema, literature and fiction to narrate his past life. Like his association between the road to Sintra Eça de Queirós describes in his homonymous novel, and the road that leads to Sabaneta from Santa Anita, Vallejo knows that all his memories transform into fictions in a sinister twist of reality (*Los días azules* 75). Whether it is in the form of witches flying over the Medellín sky in his adolescence, or in his impersonations of his childhood heroes in their fights against crime in New York, Vallejo's fictional autobiographies are full of these undefined twists where fiction and reality overlap. Of course, Vallejo's autobiographical cycle is far from being based exclusively on real events. As he stresses, his narrative aims at transgressing and going beyond the prosaic reality in which he lives (*Los caminos a Roma* 18). As long as they help him evade reality and begin a new voyage of adventure, it matters little to Vallejo whether he dreams with his eyes open or closed (*Los días azules* 114). Truthfulness, then, is the least of Vallejo's concerns as he revisits and revises his memories from his studio in Mexico City. As Francisco Villena

Garrido points out, Vallejo's deployment of the underlying agreement of veracity between reader and author characterizing the autobiographical pact is only a semblance (32). His fictionalized autobiography consciously plays with and subverts the differences between novelistic fiction—where rather than on the veracity of the events narrated, all emphasis is put on the effects of discourse in the construction of fictional egos—and non-fictional autobiographies—where a direct correspondence and identity between the author, the narrator and the character of the story is presupposed by the reader.

Besides blurring the difference between fiction and reality, Vallejo's acts of memory gradually efface any clear-cut image of his ego. As Silvia Valero highlights, rather than representing a compact, homogeneous subject, Vallejo's fictional autobiography renders his subjectivity unstable, plural and oscillating (148).

Remembering makes Vallejo aware of his fragmented and ephemeral self while it demands he renounce any form of transcendence. In being made out of time's always-flowing and revolving stuff, Vallejo knows that his present self is nothing more than a patchwork of memories—that is, a composite being in which all his former selves coexist like strangers. Memory may bring them together in one of those sinister twists where fiction and reality combine, but only so they can realize how far apart from each other they really are. There is an insurmountable gap between the happy and innocent boy who walks to see the nativities in Medellín, and the old man this boy finds, narrating from his house in Mexico City, the joy that boy felt on that long-lost December night of his childhood (*Los días azules* 110). Likewise, the passionate young man who only lived for life's banal sake is the complete opposite of the old man who, from the present, lives and writes in order to remember (*El fuego secreto* 41). Time explodes Vallejo's self-image

leaving behind only a patchwork of ill-bundled memories tied together by the weak thread of his ego (*El fuego secreto* 118). Ghostlike, he walks in front of mirrors without his image being reflected (*Años de indulgencia* 171) and in front of people without being noticed (*Años de indulgencia* 77). Unable to abandon his incorporeal, fragmented self, Vallejo's vague and fleeting specter wanders through his memoirs between the thin line that separates life and death.

Both memories and sexual desire are bound up in Vallejo's fictional autobiography. From its first appearance in Vallejo's adolescence in *El fuego secreto*, the satisfaction of sexual desire—or love, as he calls it—is one of the recurring themes Vallejo uses to unravel his memories and jump back and forth through time. In *El fuego secreto*, Vallejo depicts a cohort of gay misfits whose lives, like his, revolve around the conquest of the hoards of young men who walk down Junín, one of the main streets in Medellín's downtown. Every evening, Chucho Lopera—an inveterate hedonist who keeps a notebook with the name of every single person with whom he has had sex in Medellín—, La Marquesa—an irreverent who lives to make fun of all institutions—, Alcides Gómez—a fifty-year-old whose passion for youth knows no bounds—, and Vallejo gather to share their secret and obsessive passion at El café Miami (*El fuego secreto* 14). From bar to bar Vallejo and his brother—Darío—drive their Studebaker filled with young men through all the streets of Medellín parading their happiness in front of Colombia's envy (*El fuego secreto* 59). Indeed, Vallejo and his crew have no qualms about satisfying their desire in the conservative and prudish Antioquian society. Love is their sole goal, and to achieve it, they are willing to transgress any social convention and to risk their own lives as long as they can indulge in their satisfaction.

In Vallejo's narrative, death is a consequence of the fragmentation of the ego and the fulfillment of desire. To cut the blind knot of contradictions preventing him from getting what he desires, Vallejo must, first and foremost, symbolically kill himself on the altar of the devil (*El fuego secreto* 35). Upon meeting Rodrigo—the young boy from the Caribbean coast meant to be number 99 on his personal list—, Vallejo liberates himself from all the laws that until then kept his desire in check. However, his liberating self-sacrifice comes at a high price. As soon as he rids himself of his last moral qualms, Vallejo precipitates into an abyss so absolute nothing can prevent him from falling: “Ni mi padre ni mi madre ni mi ciudad ni mi patria ni el amor ni el dinero” (*El fuego secreto* 44). He gives free rein to his desire only to fall into a void where all the symbolic references that define him as a subject lose meaning. Thus, in order to live to the fullest, Vallejo must cross the barrier that separates life from death (*El fuego secreto* 44).

Vallejo's narrative and moral transgressions are an effort to reach beyond the limits of fear and pity that, according to Lacan, signal the return to the inanimate (*The Other Side* 46). Instead of being clinically verifiable, Vallejo's death is symbolic. Vallejo sacrifices himself to transgress the frontier that in Lacanian psychoanalysis separates the symbolic—that is, the life-preserving pleasure principle—from the inordinate kernel of jouissance that defies all attempts at symbolization. In this respect, Vallejo's repetitive and reiterative writing furrows the frontier between the life the signifier affords subjects and the second death Lacan describes in his interpretation of Antigone's behavior in Sophocles' play (*The Ethics* 279).⁶⁷ His desire to transgress and exceed all possible limits

⁶⁷ According to Lacan's Reading of Sophocles' play, Antigone manages to go beyond the limits language imposes on desire (*The Ethics* 278). In refusing to comply with Creon's law, Antigone reaches a position between-life-and-death that marks the break the Law imposes on the life of man: “Outside of language it is inconceivable, and the being of him who has lived cannot be detached from all he bears with him in the

and remain absolutely free leads him to a form of death so absolute not even language—the symbolic network of signifiers—can account for it. Like Antigone’s death drive, Vallejo’s symbolic death tends toward the *ex nihilo*—the total purification through desire of all historical contingencies (*The Ethics* 279). Rather than being accidental, like most of his friends’ deaths, Vallejo’s death is a conscious attempt to reach that “point in the horizon, ideal point, a point that is off the map” where all laws loose their grip on life (Lacan, *The Other Side* 46).

Vallejo assumes morally disreputable and socially condemned practices in order to become “inordinately sinful,” and go beyond the limits of the law (Lacan, “Kant with Sade” 667). A convinced Jacobin and an irredeemable follower of Voltaire’s anticlericalism, Vallejo employs Catholic imaginary to enact his desire for transgression. In this sense, the world, the devil and the flesh—the three enemies of men according to Catholic dogma—become his allies in his quest for satisfaction and his demands for liberation from his former self (*Los días azules* 45). Vallejo’s sinful ritual takes the form of an Aquelarre—a witches’ Sabbath—in which he impersonates, during all its stages, its demonic participants (*Años de indulgencia* 7). In this ritual Vallejo acts the part of the devil, the witches and the profaned corpse of his former self (*Años de indulgencia* 10). He both performs, and is the object of, his satanic ritual of liberation. Vallejo is convinced of the need to awaken the hidden demon, the intimate foreigner every man holds within. Rather than God and his laws, Vallejo makes himself a follower of Satan’s ever-changing and rebellious image. To him, as for Lacan, liberation boils down to loving

nature of good and evil, of destiny, of consequences for others, or of feelings for himself. That purity, that separation of being from the characteristics of the historical drama he has lived through, is precisely the limit or the *ex nihilo* to which Antigone is attached” (*The Ethics* 279, emphasis in the original).

his inner neighbor—that remnant of the Real, the Thing— whose unwanted and often overlooked presence points to an intolerable cruelty (*The Ethics* 194).

Laws ignite desire's secret flame and prevent access to jouissance (Lacan, *The Ethics* 83). Instead of affirming and protecting life—the life the signifier affords to all subjects of language—, commandments, laws and prohibitions unwittingly flare up desire and trace the subject's path toward death. Without the Law there can be no desire for death or an urge to go beyond its bounds. Insofar as the Law mediates the subject's access to desire, both the Law and desire are inextricably enmeshed. Order, then, is required to imagine the possibility of freedom. In the absence of any Laws to transgress, Vallejo's quest for liberation from all moral impositions would lose its radical edge.

Vallejo is aware that there is neither pleasure without sin, nor is there any sin in the absence of prohibitions (*Entre fantasmas* 72). As Vallejo intimates to Peñaranda—his secretary and interlocutor for most of *Entre fantasmas*—, the only way to achieve happiness lies in the total liberation of desires and the adamant refusal of any sort of compromise in their satisfaction: “No te enfermes de contención, Peñaranda. Ni huyas de lo que no se puede huir ... ¿Que quieres robar? Roba. ¿Que quieres matar? Mata. ¿Que quieres fornicar? Fornica” (*Entre fantasmas* 70). Tellingly, this firm belief in the relation between law and desire catapults Vallejo's success as a psychoanalyst in Mexico City. During the short period of time in which he replaces Dr. Flores Tapia, Vallejo accurately diagnoses the cause behind the symptoms of Lady Wallerstein—Dr. Flores Tapia's most complex case—and provides an effective cure for her hysterical attacks. As he soon realizes after a few sessions, the tortuous efforts to overcome her parents' prohibitions and give free rein to her desire for a black man are the cause underlying Lady

Walderstein's crises. To cure her, Vallejo's psychoanalytical treatment hinges on summoning the dark demons inhabiting Lady Wallerstein's heart (*Entre fantasmas* 70). Like the satanic ritual he performed on himself in *Años de Indulgencia*, he encourages her—as he encourages Peñaranda—to indulge in transgression regardless of the consequences of their acts.

Cruelty and pain are inextricable from Vallejo's quest for jouissance. Besides being fascinated by the young criminals from the underworld (*El fuego secreto* 163), Vallejo has no misgivings when it comes to murdering one of his lovers (*Los caminos a Roma* 57). Love—this gonorrhea of the soul—is both his obsession and his illness (*Los caminos a Roma* 38). Vallejo is aware that love's promise of reciprocity is only a semblance, a fantasy that he and all his friends from Junín need to cover up their solitude (*Los caminos a Roma* 97). Moreover, Vallejo conceives of love as an unbalanced, ill-adjusted, unstable and shaky feeling (*El desbarrancadero* 124). There are neither constellations, nor mutual communion of souls in Vallejo's universe. There are only individual stars wandering in space without a fixed course that share, momentarily, a common passion (*El fuego secreto* 101). Like his mad efforts to save his memories from oblivion's menace, Vallejo's narrative insists on the search for the disperse sparks of love that still shine in the dark night of hate in which he entered the moment he left his childhood behind (*Los días azules* 122). Rather than differentiating between love's reciprocity and desire's selfishness, as Western thought demands, Vallejo willingly conflates love with desire. To him, love resolves neither conflicts nor contradictions

between lovers because love, like desire, is completely non-reciprocal and one-dimensional.⁶⁸

Despite his emphasis on the contravention of socially sanctioned morals, Vallejo refuses to give his search for love and jouissance any orderly and law-like character. Unlike Sade's rationalistic and methodical transgressions of sexuality—transgressions that, as Lacan points out, hide a secret obsession with the Law ("Kant with Sade" 667)—, Vallejo withholds from his reader the descriptions of all the details related to his sexual encounters. Once he crosses the frontier the Law traces around jouissance, his writing abandons any attempt at elaborating a systematic approach at classification. Beginning with the description of his sexual encounter with Rodrigo in *El fuego secreto*, and extending throughout his books, Vallejo avoids describing what happens as soon as he traverses the limits of the Law. He forbids the reader's and God's entrance, confining both to the door's threshold. From there, as he declares, both can witness how these bright instants he experiences reduce to dust both God's law and His eternal hell (*El fuego secreto* 43).

However, in his efforts to eradicate prohibition, Vallejo's will for liberation usually falls into a dangerous obsession with the Law. Vallejo's quest for jouissance has perverse overtones as his will transforms his desires into rigorous mandates, and his whims into rules. Assuming the role of the Colombian President in front of Peñaranda, Vallejo draws a sketch of the laws that will govern the country if he were to be elected. His absurd rules include the replacement of all his personal guards by young men with

⁶⁸ Part of the problem of defining Vallejo's use of affect lies in the fact that he uses love and desire as interchangeable terms. In this sense, his narrative blurs the limits between what Lacanian psychoanalysis terms the act of love—the male's polymorphous perverse approach to his object cause of desire (object *a*)—and the literary tropes we use to talk about love (Lacan, *Encore* 72).

green eyes, the death penalty for whoever transgresses Spanish grammatical rules, the brutal control of the reproduction rights to the elite members of his personal guard, the exploitation of women, the destruction of all national symbols, and the elimination of all bureaucracy and taxes—that is, the ultimate annihilation of the state apparatus (*Años de indulgencia* 150-2). Rather than becoming a means of liberation, his will and his “libido imperandi” become an instrument of oppression (*Años de indulgencia* 149). His constant diatribes against power become, in the blink of an eye, a systematic, yet whimsical, excuse for violence.

Vallejo’s unrelenting quest for liberation exemplifies one of the most striking paradoxes of freedom. As Theodor Adorno highlights, freedom has little to do with the all-inclusiveness of its postulates or the consistency of its content, but with form (*History and Freedom* 262). Freedom should always be understood in the negative, that is, as a reaction to a particular situation of unfreedom. Otherwise, freedom can easily become an instrument for oppression as soon as it is taken as positive and unmediated. As Lacan stresses, the freedom subjects derive from their desire only becomes apparent against the background of the Law (*The Ethics* 83). Limits must be traced in order for transgression to be liberating. Without the mediation of prohibitions, desires may transform, as in Sade’s case, into a rationalistic program not very different from the organizing, law-abiding principles Vallejo opposes.

Throughout his fictional autobiography, Vallejo fluctuates between a destructive drive against all sources of authority and a perverse attachment to the Law. Vallejo’s efforts to dismantle all national symbols and state institutions go hand in hand with his acute longing for order in Colombia. A country of lawyers, clerks and petty bureaucrats

whose sole aspiration is to become presidents, Colombia's law is just another mirage of chaos (*El desbarrancadero* 135). Instead of rendering Colombian society more organized, the ghostlike Colombian state only increases the country's entropy. Indeed, Colombian law is both excessive and futile. Everything within its frontiers has been legislated, taxed and immobilized, but to no avail (*Los días azules* 147). While the congress produces laws with the perversity of a Spanish churro machine, Colombians are doomed to deal with a chaotic reality in their every-day life (*Los días azules* 148).

Colombia's chaos and decay extend to Vallejo's household in Medellín. Like Colombia's political elite, Vallejo's mother—Lía Rendón—has absolutely no respect or use for laws (*El desbarrancadero* 70). Anarchy has always been the rule in Vallejo's house as far as he can remember due to his mother's erratic and wanton acts of destruction. Described as “el filo del cuchillo, el negror de lo negro, el ojo del huracán, la encarnación del Dios-Diablo,” or as the embodiment of Murphy's laws, Lía is the incarnation of pure evil (*El desbarrancadero* 69-70). With her uncontrollable presence, Lía boycotts all his siblings' efforts to organize the house and bring order to the family. In giving birth to twenty children, she transformed the house into hell—that is, into a miniature version of Colombia (*El desbarrancadero* 161). As Néstor Salamanca León highlights, Colombia and Lía represent the same shameful and disgraceful motherly figure to Vallejo (318). Equally anarchical and insane, they both fractured the social and sentimental fabric between all the siblings, plunging them into a series of internal wars that only ended when they all parted ways (*El desbarrancadero* 161).

Besides blaming his mother for the decay of the house, Vallejo holds her responsible for the death of both his father and his closest brother, Darío. In *El*

desbarrancadero, amid the usual temporal jumps so characteristic of his other fictional autobiographies, Vallejo relates Darío's last days and his failed struggle against his incurable decease. As he remembers alongside Darío all the moments they shared in Medellín and New York, Vallejo does everything within his power to stop HIV's unrelenting assault on Darío's body and to banish death's virulent presence from their parents' house. However, like Colombia, Darío is beyond all hope. As Rosana Díaz Zambrana points out, his diseased body reflects the absolute and irreversible social decadence of Colombian society (181). Despite all his efforts and knowledge, none of Vallejo's attempts at delaying the advancement of Darío's disease succeed. Overwhelmed by the presence of death, the country crumbles alongside Darío's body and falls into pieces like Vallejo's life.

Colombia's violent insanity is one of Vallejo's fictional autobiography's most pervasive tropes. From his depiction of La Violencia in *Los días azules*, to his heartfelt description of the last days of his brother in *El desbarrancadero*, Vallejo's narrative is full of references to the overpowering presence of violence in Colombian society. However, Vallejo's obsession with Colombia has little to do with a real interest in analyzing the social and historical objective causes triggering the country's violence. Rather than looking for political solutions to Colombia's fractured society, Vallejo's narrative refuses to adhere to any institutional or democratic intervention. Beside the nation's total and radical annihilation, nothing can be done to save Colombia from its irregular, unpredictable, inconsistent, disorganized, unmethodical and ghostlike nature (*La virgen de los sicarios* 124). As Vallejo intimates in *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994)—a fictional autobiography in which Vallejo recounts his return to Medellín after the

events narrated in *El río del tiempo*—, Colombia's only hope lies in the possibility of starting, *ex nihilo*, all over again.

In *La virgen de los sicarios*, Vallejo offers his version of the dissolution of Colombian society due to the violence associated with drug cartels in the early nineties. Set in Medellín in the aftermath of Pablo Escobar's murder, this further example of Vallejo's fictional autobiography narrates the romance between Fernando—a self-proclaimed grammarian—and Alexis—one of the many adolescent hired guns that roam unemployed the streets of Medellín following Escobar's death. Jumping back and forth between past and present, Vallejo walks around Medellín next to Alexis, his Angel of death. With Alexis by his side, Vallejo enters the spiral of senseless hatred and violence that defines the ephemeral lives of the young assassins from Las comunas—Medellín's shantytowns. Murder becomes part of Vallejo's daily routine during the seven months he spends with Alexis. Any excuse is good enough to make Alexis pull the trigger and kill hippies, punks, taxi drivers and other hired guns who come looking for him and Vallejo. As Erna von der Walde foregrounds, *La virgen de los sicarios* is an attempt to render intelligible and thus, to represent, the wanton violence disrupting the already frail social tissue of Medellín (35). Propelled by the fire of his unending passion, Vallejo immerses himself into Medellín in an attempt to symbolize the city's contemporary chaos.

Vallejo guides his reader in this tour around Colombia—the world's most criminal country—and Medellín—the capital of hate (*La virgen de los sicarios* 8). As Carmen Manzoni states, Vallejo assumes the role of cultural translator for the foreign tourists he constantly addresses during his narration (48). He walks around the city introducing to this reader the meaning of most of the words and expressions the young

assassins use in their daily trade, the correct use of Spanish, and the historical changes Medellín has undergone in the last fifty years. Vallejo's description superposes on the organic and idyllic landscapes of his childhood in Santa Anita, the incongruity of a fragmented city where life and death, and heaven and hell, coexist in a tense urban atmosphere. Thus, the city Vallejo returns to is divided between Medellín—the timeless lower part of the city, in the valley—and Medallo—the murderous and chaotic upper part of the city (*La virgen de los sicarios* 86). Built on top of the mountains, the poverty, the misery and the violence of Las comunas weigh on Medellín like a disgrace (*La virgen de los sicarios* 28). While the Medellín of the city never goes up, Medallo descends to steal, kill and wander in the streets of its twin city (*La virgen de los sicarios* 86). Due to the presence of Las comunas, all order or sense of equilibrium has been lost in Medellín's desolate landscape. The closer the visitor gets to heaven, the further he or she must enter into the hell of Las comunas (*La virgen de los sicarios* 29).

Like Virgil in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Vallejo takes his reader on a trip through this recently created inferno. However, instead of being an impartial observer, Vallejo becomes an active participant in the chaos he describes. According to María Angélica Semilla Durán, Vallejo and Alexis walk through the city's apocalyptic scenery eliminating all the excess from its streets (58). In their daily promenades through Medellín, Vallejo and Alexis's wanton acts of violence become the rule rather than the exception. Alexis becomes Vallejo's executioner and his avenging companion. He fulminates without remorse or any shadow of doubt against all the targets Vallejo's fury marks as despicable. Indeed, to Vallejo, Alexis incarnates the purifying wrath of the angel of death in a city where, like Sodom and Gomorrah, nobody is innocent (*La virgen*

de los sicarios 87). All of Alexis's murders are justified because, from Vallejo's perspective, any means employed to eliminate Medellín's perverse race is considered valid (*La virgen de los sicarios* 57).

Despite his complicity in all Alexis's murders, Vallejo is not willing to accept his responsibility for them. As he emphatically confesses to the reader, he has never shot a gun or worked as a hired thug in the service of drug lords (*La virgen de los sicarios* 66). He is outraged when he listens to the news of a recent shooting in which both he and Alexis were involved and he is referred to as a "presunto sicario" (*La virgen de los sicarios* 45). As Juana Suarez stresses, rather than identifying himself with the young assassins, Vallejo defines himself as a "presunto gramático" and, as such, as a member of the elite that composed Colombia's nineteenth-century lettered city (105).

Vallejo identifies himself with the members of the elite, but refuses to identify himself with any of the actors accountable for the decomposition of Colombian society. As Vallejo affirms, he was not present when everybody else in Colombia—the oppressors, the oppressed, the priests and, recently, the drug lords—messed up the country (*La virgen de los sicarios* 9). He only returns to die in it, many years later, when the destruction and fragmentation are irreversible. From the beginning of his narration, Vallejo endeavors to separate himself from the rest of Colombia. However, his efforts to extricate himself from the surrounding mayhem and exonerate himself from any responsibility are futile. As Nicholas T. Goodbody argues, Vallejo's narrator fluctuates between his attempts to differentiate and keep his distance from Medellín's environment, and his emotional involvement in the complex weave of hate and sorrow besieging him (448). Like all other Colombians, Vallejo ends up taking part in the nation's cycle of

madness. As soon as he realizes there is neither redemption nor atonement possible for himself or for Colombia, Vallejo joins the rest of Medellín's inhabitants in their daily routine as living-dead:

Hombre vea, yo le digo, vivir en Medellín es ir uno rebotando por esta vida muerto. Yo no inventé esta realidad, es ella la que me está inventando a mí. Y así vamos por sus calles los muertos vivos hablando de robos, de atracos, de otros muertos, fantasmas a la deriva arrastrando nuestras precarias existencias, nuestras inútiles vidas, sumidos en el desastre. Puedo establecer, con precisión, el momento en que me convertí en un muerto vivo. (*La virgen de los sicarios* 80)

After killing an abandoned and injured dog in one of Medellín's opened sewers, knee-deep in the city's waste, Vallejo realizes he is part of the same filth as the rest of the country. Trapped in the endless cycle of hatred propelling Colombia's violence, he fails to extricate himself from Medellín's destiny (*La virgen de los sicarios* 42). Colombia's insane reality strips Vallejo of his future and condemns him—as it condemns all the young assassins of Las comunas—to an ephemeral and pointless life.

Vallejo's Manichean representation of Medellín is linked to his stereotypical representation of the two young assassins with whom he falls in love. Like his representation of Medellín's shantytowns, Vallejo's privileged position as a member of the cultural elites mediates his portrayal of Alexis and Wilmar—the young assassin who replaces Alexis once he is murdered. As Ana Luengo points out, Vallejo dwells neither on the sociological causes behind the violence in Medellín nor on the details of his lover's past lives, thoughts or desires (144). Rather than being detailed and meticulous, Vallejo's descriptions of his lovers are strikingly sparse and vague. He provides very few details of the physical appearance and personality beside their green eyes, their apollonian beauty, their daily commerce with death and a fascination with commodities. According to Ana Mutis, this lack of any individualizing and concrete qualities reduces

both assassins to playing a subordinate role as Vallejo's passive erotic commodities—that is, as replaceable objects on which the narrator projects his erotic fantasies (211). Indeed, Vallejo quickly realizes after his first walks around the city with Wilmar that, apart from their names, both his lovers are, in fact, interchangeable (*La virgen de los sicarios* 104). After Alexis's death, Vallejo merely replaces his "Angel of death" for a "servant of Satan" to continue his mad quest for order amid Colombia's chaos (*La virgen de los sicarios* 105). Regardless of the specific traits of the object of his desire, Vallejo always plunges into the same unending spiral of desire, violence and death that defines his erotic fantasies.

The love story Vallejo narrates in *La virgen de los sicarios* defies love's logic of reconciliation. Like Vallejo's previous relationships—from Rodrigo in *El fuego secreto*, to the American he murders in *Los caminos a Roma*—, his love for Alexis and Wilmar is riddled with violence, sexual desire and destruction. Instead of solving the social contradictions between opposites and displacing social tensions, as Doris Sommer argues when discussing the rhetorical effects of love (6), Vallejo's desperate love narrative questions love's positive and redeeming properties. No enduring peace or lasting locus amoenus comes out of the union between the erudite member of the Colombian elites and the marginal, uneducated assassins from Medellín's shantytowns. Unlike the contradiction-eliding qualities of Western love narratives, in Vallejo's narrative love's rhetoric fails both to conciliate differences in a climatic synthesis, and to transform coercion into mutual agreement. In this respect, his relationship with the assassins shows what love narratives usually whisk from the reader's view. Vallejo's perverse merit lies

in exposing love's unacknowledged complicity with oppression as well as its complete disregard for reciprocity.

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, there is no such thing as the reciprocal sexual relationship between lovers that love narratives take for granted. Depending on his/her specific fantasy ($S\hat{a}$), every subject relates to his/her object cause of desire as best he/she can within the limits language imposes on him/her. As Lacan affirms, this relation is, by definition, non-reciprocal, necessary and impossible (*Encore* 59). The subject cannot help searching for the lost object that would complement him/her, although he/she is always bound to fail in his/her quest to obtain it. The dialectic of desire—that is, the incessant flow of signifiers the phallic function introduces—has nothing to do with the “thesis-antithesis-synthesis” structure usually associated with love. There is never the slightest hint at a synthesis between the elements of any given fantasy because the object cause of desire always slips from the subject's hands (Lacan, *Encore* 86). Love emerges, then, as a narrative to cover up this constitutive impossibility in the subject. The lover's perfect complementarity, their absolute understanding and their fusion into a greater unity are only a sham to hide the truth.⁶⁹ Love is both an effort to repair and veil the inherent lack the subject's emergence into language produces (Lacan, *The Other Side* 52). Otherwise stated, love is an attempt to deny castration and, thus, the inhuman cruelty every subject must indulge in if he is to hold on to his desire (Lacan, *The Ethics* 263).

Love is inextricable from death in Vallejo's fictional autobiographies. Like in the case of “El difunto”—a young assassin who comes out of his own coffin with an erection

⁶⁹ Truth should be understood here as that form of knowledge that, according to Lacan, can only be expressed or accessible through a half saying—that is, the unconscious (*The Other Side* 51)

when everybody thought him dead (*La virgen de los sicarios* 44)—, Vallejo's narrative constantly fuses two competing and oftentimes warring principles: Eros and Thanatos. According to Milagros Ezquerro, Vallejo condenses in his relationships with Alexis and Wilmar love's tendency toward synthesis and death drive's toward destruction (244-5). In this sense, rather than providing the lovers a sanctuary amid the raging chaos of Colombian society, Vallejo's love for both assassins acts as just another disruptive social element in the city's endless cascade of violence. As Albrecht Buschmann foregrounds, love unites two utterly different lovers who would not have otherwise met in Medellín, only to allow Vallejo to better represent and indulge in wanton acts of irrational, gratuitous violence (140). Vallejo knows death permanently threatens his love for Alexis and Wilmar, yet this awareness does not prevent him from any violent excesses. In fusing love and death, as Aldona B. Pobutsky claims, Vallejo's bizarre aesthetic of horror emphasizes beauty, not ethics (579). Vallejo's acts of love have a complete disregard for the Good. No misgivings regarding good or bad consequences of his acts trouble Vallejo in his attempts to keep up with his desire.

Unlike most forms of social violence, Vallejo's transgressions have no business either with goods, or with any claim to power. As Lacan highlights, the possession of goods—whether material or immaterial—lies behind social and historical dynamics (*The Ethics* 229). Indeed, the control of and privileged access to goods amounts to recognizing both my right to deprive others of them, as well as others' right to deprive me of them in turn (Lacan, *The Ethics* 229). The possession of goods, then, is an essential correlate to the notion of power (Lacan, *The Ethics* 229). The more goods any given subject has at a given time, the more its power over those who, due to their social standing, do not have

access to them. However, property rights over both power and goods do not guarantee the owner's satisfaction. As Lacan affirms, in his defense of his goods from the other, the master usually forbids himself their enjoyment (*The Ethics* 230). Thus, to fall into the dialectics of the Good is to succumb to the unending intricacies of the signifier and the multiple laws that aim at regulating its insistent articulations. As soon as the subject abandons him or herself in a methodical quest for power, he or she must irrevocably let go of desire's destructive drive in order to preserve the privileges he or she has acquired.

Possession plays no part in Vallejo's erotic fantasies. He is neither interested in depriving goods from others, nor in allowing any excess of zeal in their defense from preventing his enjoyment of them. Rather than keeping all his young boys to himself, Vallejo is quite liberal and reckless when it comes to dealing with his lovers. To him, beautiful young men are public, not private property. Moreover, they are to be shared among those who need them and those who can buy them (*El desbarrancadero* 51). As his countless references to their beauty stress, his ecumenical love for all young men is strictly aesthetic, not utilitarian. Tellingly, Vallejo's crimes are performed in the interest of beauty and very seldom in the interest of increasing his power. Rather than megalomania, anarchy propels Vallejo's constant transgressions. Deeply correlated with his aesthetic experiences, Vallejo's violence lacks the systematic and orderly rationality required to maintain a permanent hold on power.

As Lacanian psychoanalysis foregrounds, the beautiful functions as a boundary marker and as a lure in relation to desire. At the same time that it points to the limits between the symbolic domain and the Real, the beautiful deludes the subject as to the nature of his or her desire (Lacan, *The Ethics* 239). The presence of beauty veers the

subject's attention from the destructive drive that pushes him or her beyond the limits of the Law and into total anarchy—that is, towards the unsymbolizable kernel that allows the subject to escape the domain of the signifier (Lacan, *The Ethics* 280). The beautiful, thus, is tangentially related to desire. It simultaneously signals and veils the threshold that separates the subject from his or her symbolic death and, as such, from his or her absolute freedom from all historical contingencies. Unlike the systematic violence that originates the subject's efforts to control the good, the violence that springs from desire's death drive is unrelated to power. Like Vallejo's acts of murderous love, the violence that emerges from desire's destructive drive is completely stochastic and erratic. Instead of concerning itself with the consolidation of any hegemonic relations, Vallejo's narrative endeavors to do away with all forms of authority. As a confessed disciple of Sade, Vallejo knows that from his death drive towards anarchy no tyranny or real hegemony can emerge, simply because tyranny's authority can only thrive in the shadow of the Law (qtd. in Lacan, *The Ethics* 221).

Vallejo inverts the allegory between love and polis foundational narratives used to conciliate differences between social actors in the emerging nations of nineteenth-century Latin American. Keeping himself within the bounds of the same allegory, Vallejo takes the dialectical relation between its two signifying tropes in the opposite direction. In eroticizing violence, Vallejo shifts love's rhetorical effects from synthesis to destruction. Instead of using love to justify the imposition through mutual agreement of the elite's hegemonic project, Vallejo's affect aims at disrupting the failed Colombian nation. Vallejo's pledges in favor of anarchy and desire are in stark contrast to the order required to maintain the Colombian state's supposedly legitimate claim to power, as well as his

allegiance to the nation's teleological narrative of progress. Chaos, not order, is the driving force behind Vallejo's fascism, his iconoclasm and his radical Malthusianism. His disregard for difference and the exclusionary nature of his political discourse have a completely different origin from that proclaimed by the elites. In this sense, while the elite's discourse of integration is propped on a real practice of exclusion from power, Vallejo's radical discourse of disintegration rests on an urgent, yet extreme, demand for transformation—that is, on a desire to start things over *ex nihilo*. The continuous struggle for goods and power propelling Colombia's History of wars and violence do not concern him. Desire is Vallejo's only priority.

Vallejo's conception of love is inextricable from his political position. Rather than being an isolated theme of his fictional autobiographies—from *El río del tiempo*, to *La virgen de los sicarios* and *El desbarrancadero*—, affect plays a fundamental role in his denunciation and reaction against Colombia's failed national project. Love and desire prompt Vallejo's critique of the farce behind the national symbols with which the elite's endeavored to cover up Colombia's torn social fabric. His use of love is all the more significant due to Colombia's foundational narrative's failure to amalgamate, through love narrative's climactic synthesis, the different social actors within Colombia's territory. In the context of Colombia's fragmented and effectively isolated regions, love narratives failed to build a productive dialectical allegory due to the lack of an adequate national referent. The Colombian nation's spectralness—that is, its dubious unity and totality—proved an insurmountable challenge to love's rhetorical effects. However, Colombia's ghostlike character does not prevent all forms of love from participating in an allegorical relation with the polis. In fusing love and death, Vallejo's narrative puts a new

spin on the relation between love and nation Doris Sommer describes. Indeed, while the Colombian nation's spectralness hindered the articulation of the allegorical relation between love and polis in nineteenth-century foundational fictions, Vallejo uses desire's destructive drive to completely do away with Colombia's murderous ghostliness. To accomplish this goal, Vallejo's fragmented and transgressive narrative spares no means. In his desperate efforts to condemn Colombia's insanity, Vallejo is willing to splinter time, fracture his ego and indulge in the most atrocious crimes to give way to desire's radical disruptive potential and undo Colombia's endless history of violence.

Conclusion

Love after Love

As the previous chapters illustrate, love is far from being a completely univocal affect. Its perversions and deviations from the pure platonic feeling Western culture has enshrined as one of the most powerful means of eradicating contradictions are far from being wholly benign. Like any concept Western culture has defined as non-contradictory and ever advantageous, love runs the risk of pledging allegiance to disreputable causes. In this respect, Theodor Adorno's analysis of freedom—another of concept Western culture blindly idolizes—sheds light on the paradoxes of love the narratives of António Lobo Antunes, Pepetela and Fernando Vallejo expose. According to Adorno, freedom should always be understood in the negative—that is, as a reaction to a particular instance of unfreedom (*History and Freedom* 243). Otherwise, freedom runs the risk of being complicit with oppression. The more abstract a concept becomes, the more it recedes from reality and loses its ability to describe it. Indeed, the idea of freedom may be taken by any liberation discourse as part of their ideological repertoire without changing in the least the conditions of oppression against which a revolution irrupted in the first place. Thus, it comes as no surprise that fascism, racism, communism, democracy and many other political movements have coopted freedom to serve their respective discourses. Concrete changes fade to the background as soon as abstract concepts become forcefully imposed over reality.

Like freedom, love has also become one of the main values preached by Western Culture. As the different commentators of *Os Lusíadas* teach us, society has imbued love with the ability to bring harmony and resolve contradictions among opposites. Insofar as

love can only flourish where both parties willingly consent to care for each other, love is usually defined as the opposite of necessity and thus, as the antithesis of any form of oppression. The reciprocal relationship between the lover and the beloved has become the paragon of harmonious coexistence, and has played a key role in contemporary political movements whose goal is to shape society and put an end to all forms of conflict. From Platonic love to Beatles pop songs, love has been consistently prized as a feeling from which, if experienced fully, no harm or violence to any of the parties can ensue. However, in conceiving love as innocuous Western culture has often overlooked the dark side of one of its most treasured assets.

The three authors analyzed show keen insights into both the perils and advantages of the conjunction of politics and this unambiguous conception of love in three different scenarios. As we have seen, through his reluctance to ascribe to the innate love Camões commentators and Lusotropicalism erected as Portugal's defining national feature, António Lobo Antunes's poignant narrative unveils how the Portuguese colonial discourse used love as an alibi to justify domination. In the three novels analyzed, Lobo Antunes points to the perturbing discursive similarities between humanistic commentators of *Os Lusíadas* and Gilberto Freyre's Lusotropicalism. Despite the difference in their fields of study—literature and philosophy in the cases of Jorge de Sena, Helder Macedo and Fernando Gil, and sociology in Freyre's—and the overt political opposition of Jorge de Sena and Helder Macedo to the Estado Novo dictatorship, the same love rhetoric underpins both Lusotropicalism and Camoes's commentators. The firm yet unfulfilled belief in love's ability to bring harmony between opposites and an end to contradictions between factions informs the humanist tradition of exegesis and

Lusotropicalism, making them closest where they seemed furthest apart. Both use love as their theoretical corner stone and because of this, both reach similar conclusions.

Camões's Island of Love is the paragon of Freyre's *Pax Lusitana* insofar as these two utopias rely on love to both veil and justify the oppression of nymphs and colonial subjects alike. In his efforts to shed light on love's complicity with aggression, António Lobo Antunes radically questions the existence of love in the whole Portuguese imperial project, from the glorious pages of *Os Lusíadas* in *As naus*, his rewriting of the sixteenth century Portuguese epic poem, to his overt critique to Portuguese colonialism and Lusotropicalism in *O esplendor de Portugal*.

Due to love's complicity with the Portuguese Imperial project, Pepetela's grounding of Angola's nationalism excludes love from his first efforts at imagining a national community for Angola. These first attempts at building a national discourse of integration of the different tribes inside Angola's frontiers are marked by Pepetela's dismissal of love as a foundation of the nationalist project. Aware of the risk love poses to his liberating ideal, Pepetela erects reason as the sole means possible to achieve total freedom from any kind of oppression—whether this is colonial or emotional—and embraces the fight for independence. Insofar as love depends on the reciprocal subjection of the lover, Pepetela deems the lover's overvaluation of his or her beloved as a source of weakness rather than strength against the enemies of the nation. However, Pepetela's initial stance towards love changes as new enemies emerge with changing times. As the menace of Portuguese colonialism wanes and the menace of capitalism erupts, Pepetela returns to love to counter the Angolan elite's endless appetite for money. Despite being one of the most powerful sources of oppression, the lover's overvaluation of the beloved

is among the affects capable of resisting capitalism's irrational rationality. Indeed, the consistent relationships love fosters are a means available to counter the endless valuations with which capital seeks to turn everything into a commodity and include it in the endless mesh of insistent relations where every object, as long as it has a price, can be a subject to exchange. Insofar as they cannot be priced, relationships between lovers become invaluable. Hence the need to incorporate love into the imagined community Pepetela elaborates in his later novels. The illusion of absolute freedom from all affects must be abandoned if Angola is ever to thrive as a nation.

Tellingly, the latent aggression António Lobo Antunes's and Pepetela's narratives foreground also works as a source of resistance and liberation. Love can either be used allegorically to cement the nation or, as Fernando Vallejo stresses, as a means of destroying the imagined community embodying it. In his autobiographical fictions, the Colombian writer subverts the reciprocity veiling the violence behind every act of love and, simultaneously, uses love's overlooked aggression to counter the failed Colombian national project. Vallejo is far from deceiving himself with the selfsame promise of harmony love represents for both Camões's commentators and Lusotropicalism. On the contrary, from his perspective, love does not have any of the redeeming qualities Western culture usually attributes to it. Lovers pass by as Vallejo tells the story of his life but none of them truly remains. These encounters are brief and marked by multiple misunderstandings that never manage to shake Vallejo's solitude or make him relinquish the fire fueling his desire. Indeed, his relationships expose the insurmountable lack of reciprocity that, according to Lacan, guides the lover's approach to his object cause of desire. Thus, rather than using the union between lovers as a productive allegory for the

emergence of the nation, as several nineteenth century Latin American novelists did, Vallejo's individualistic take on love ruthlessly dismisses any possible reconciliation between the different social groups encompassed within Colombia's borders. In positing his will and the satisfaction of his desires as the center of his autobiographical fictions, Vallejo refrains from using love to cover up the contradictions afflicting Colombian society since colonial times.

Thinking through the contradictions of love, exposing its perils and unveiling its paradoxes, raises the question of its pertinence in the political sphere. As we have seen, this blind faith in love's ability to solve conflicts can prove more harmful than more overt forms of oppression insofar as love hides behind its veil of reciprocity the domination imposed on lovers. However, the fact that love implies domination does not cancel the hidden promise of harmony with which Western culture has imbued it. Harmony and aggression are two sides of the same coin. Both love and aggressiveness are irrevocably bound together despite Plato's insistence on it being otherwise. To indulge in love unreflectively and thus, to entrust oneself to love as if nothing wrong could spring from it, thwarts the best things love's concept offers. Indeed, under the guise of harmony between opposites or lovers, the desire for unity closely resembles what Adorno has described as enlightenment's rationalistic tendency to render everything external and thus, different from it, into something identical to itself (*History and Freedom* 13). Although they base themselves on different faculties, both mind and heart aim at the same goal: resolution of conflict and erasure of differences.

To preserve the promise of harmony and reconciliation between opposites contained within love's concept permanent reflection is required. There is no absolute

answer to the question of love's goodness because there is no unequivocal way of expressing it. The recognition of love's contradictions and unsolvable ambivalence demands from us constant awareness—that is, awareness of both its pitfalls and promises. For love to become a key political player, society must first admit its risks and stop using it as a ready-made answer to its problems. In doing so, love may stop being an alibi for oppression, as António Lobo Antunes suggests, and finally become, as Pepetela and Fernando Vallejo highlight, a forceful player in the political sphere. If love is to contribute towards the enactment of a concrete change, love should struggle to preserve differences rather than aiming at a deceitful reconciliation. The harmonious coexistence of opposites love's utopia promises should not be taken for granted. As Adorno points out, to deny the beloved's strangeness ends up negating the other as a particular human being and thus, inserting him or her into the "inventory of property" (*Minima Moralia* 182). To preserve their difference, lover and beloved do not become one in their love. The recognition of the insurmountable gap that separates them introduces the possibility of a concrete change in their relations. After all, as Adorno further stresses, distance is not a safety-zone. Not in unity, but in difference, lies love's most meaningful contribution to the social and political arenas.

To find ways of preserving difference through love instead of using love as an alibi to impose homogeneity, is perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing the inclusion of affect in politics. Otherwise, this appeal to love as the ultimate goal of all politics may end up either replicating the domination it wishes to counter or canceling out alternative ways of expressing love. Our society still needs to look for more imaginative ways of using love as a political device, but this can only be accomplished if love is not

divested of its complexity. Contrary to what the Beatles affirm, an abstract and absolute understanding of love is not all we need. To break free from the trodden conceptual path that ascribes love's relevance to its complete dismissal of contradictions only impoverishes love's possibilities of enacting a real change. Instead of dispelling ambivalence through wishful thinking, contradictions should be embraced. After all, depending on each particular socio-political context, love's promise of liberation from conflict often lies where it is least expected. In making love one of its most recurring topics, literature offers us many insights into this dilemma. It is up to us to interpret and extract all the possible alternatives literature brings forth to the best of our ability.

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