

Mamiwata, Migrations, and Miscegenation: Transculturation in José Eduardo Agualusa, Mia Couto, and Germano Almeida

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Abstract: *This study forges a tryptic partnership between the notions of Mamiwata, migrations, and miscegenation to examine selected works by Mia Couto, José Eduardo Agualusa, and Germano Almeida. Considering miscegenation as the point of convergence for the legacy of Portuguese colonialism, the three writers share the varied responses of their respective nation to cultural contact with Portugal. The intersection between transculturation and miscegenation evokes the negotiation of a new identity where the colonized supersedes the dominating effects of colonialism. The fluidity of the sea and the image of the water spirit thus converge into a phenomenon of shifting, migratory identities.*

Keywords: Lusophone Africa; novel; identities; colonialism; Lusotropicalism; water

The defining legacy of colonialism in the Lusophone world lies in the enduring relics of cultural miscegenation. While each former colony has responded differently to this intercultural exchange, Lusophone African writers frequently deploy transcultural phenomena both to question and embrace post-colonial realities. For formerly colonized subjects, the stakes of such artistic practice are especially high, as feelings of marginality, alienation, and oppression

persistently accompany the sense of unfulfilled promises that constitutes the very logic (or the lack thereof) of colonial and neo-colonial cultural contact.

In the present essay, I examine three novels, José Agualusa's *Nação crioula* (1997); Mia Couto's *O outro pé da sereia* (2006); and Germano Almeida's *O testamento do senhor Napumoceno* (1989), in light of the question of miscegenation and transculturation. My goal is to problematize the racial and power asymmetries that obtain within the supposedly empowering "neutral spaces" of transculturation, while also highlighting the sexual oppression, physical violence, and persistent silencing that find camouflage in fashionable terms such as "modernity," "multicultural identity," and "cosmopolitanism." Throughout my analysis, the transcultural migration of the subject will vary from one narrative space/text to the other; however, the fundamental shifting of identities and negotiation of power relations and (in)equality remain an inextricable constant.

Lusophone African literature at the turn of the new millennium finds itself in a constant struggle with the memory of the fight for independence, the equally devastating civil wars, and ongoing efforts of reconstruction, reconciliation, and integration into global cultural patterns that everywhere place identity (however defined) in a precarious situation. Couto has offered some pertinent thoughts on this matter in his 2005 volume, *Pensatempos*. He speaks, for example, of the Mozambican as a "cultural frontiersman" who must cease looking externally to place blame and find solutions for the nation's internal problems. He argues that the African writer is fundamentally a "traveler between identities, a smuggler of souls" (23), and that *mestiçagem* need not be limited to the biological sphere insofar as it is at its core a metaphor for cultural crossing. Couto finally proposes a critical vision that eschews -isms and might serve as an effective point of departure for rethinking issues of identity that pervade most contemporary literature emerging from Lusophone Africa: "Confronted with our most deeply felt vulnerabilities, we must create a new vision. . . . We cannot beg the world for another image. . . . The only solution is to continue the long, hard journey towards conquering a place of which we and our nation are worthy. And that place can only be the product of our creation" (13). It is along these lines—a deep problematization of identity—that I find concepts such as Mamiwata, migration, *mestiçagem*, and transculturation to be pertinent. Such terms are meant to evoke a sense of

constant motion, of shifts, transformation, hybridization, and fluidity that evoke not a loss of identity but rather an enrichment of it.

The first term, *Mamiwata*, refers to a kind of mermaid representative of all other water spirits in the Atlantic coastal areas of Africa as well as in the African diaspora.¹ In a highly suggestive essay, Henry Drewal has described Mamiwata (Mother Water) as simultaneously “beautiful, protective, seductive, and potentially deadly” (60). This ability to cross oceans and continents while retaining one’s basic characteristics exemplifies the sort of transculturation that I embrace as a means of understanding the constant migration and mixing of cultures that have shaped African life for centuries, both within the continent and in the diaspora. Transculturation, to be clear, implies the playing out and resolution of tensions occurring in a cultural contact zone where different groups meet, clash, and resolve their conflicts through adaptations and mutual influences (Ortiz; Pratt). In the specific case of Lusophone Africa, what has taken shape through centuries of contact between the Portuguese and their former colonies is unmistakably marred by forms of colonial violence and oppression that still find expression through transculturalized identities. The triangular relations implicit in the three novels that I have chosen for analysis, even with their varying thematic concerns, all underscore Portuguese domination vis-à-vis the respective colonial setting: Angola, Mozambique, and Cape Verde. The themes of adventure and misadventure, of history and identity, of lost love and recuperation of lineage as depicted in Aqualusa’s *Nação crioula*, Couto’s *O outro pé da sereia*, and Almeida’s *O testamento do senhor Napumoceno* offer a unique window into the shifting dynamics of identity within the broader process of cultural migration.

The treatment of the sea in Lusophone literatures dates back at least to Luís de Camões’s epic, *Os Lusíadas* (1572), and it likewise finds extensive development in texts as wide-ranging as the *História trágico-marítima* (1735-36); Fernando Pessoa’s “Mar Português” (1934); and Jorge Amado’s *Mar morto* (1969). For Lusophone African literatures, much of the poetic production regarding the sea comes from Cape Verde, given its insularity and the widespread and seemingly continuous emigration of its people to Europe and

¹ It is known as *Kianda* in Angola, *Lasirene* in Haiti, *Yemoja* in Yorubaland, *Iemojá* in Brazil, and *Mamiwata* in Western, Central, and Southern Africa.

the Americas. While Camões and Pessoa evoke the ambivalent greatness and marginality of Portugal, Cape Verdean poets such as Jorge Barbosa have addressed issues of struggle between humans and nature as the islands' inhabitants cope with alternating cycles of drought and torrential rains.

Agualusa, Couto, and Almeida are writers of the sea, although from the decidedly postmodern and transnational perspective that David Brookshaw has defined as an “undermining of realism” and a “re-establishment of the division between history and fiction, reality and art, [that] at the same time question[s] the validity of history as a fixed objective truth” (190). Even when these authors differ in their treatment of the sea, or in the narrative construction of the motif of the trans-oceanic journey, their commonality resides in their shared problematization of location and culture. It is along the same lines that Phillip Rothwell has characterized Couto's overarching concern with the sea (or water, more generally) in his works as “the forum of plexiform history and emblem of the unconscious, the ability to undermine the binary certainties that underscore European tradition . . . [while] favoring ambiguity over definiteness, and liquidity over rigidity” (100). The texts under analysis in the present essay coalesce in their commitment to transculturality while embracing the persistence of migration and miscegenation facilitated by the fluidity of the sea.

Agualusa's Nação crioula

Agualusa is an innovative Angolan author in the sense that, as a postcolonial writer, he revisits the historical tragedies of colonialism and critiques them through ironic distantiation. This is especially the case of his third full-length novel, *Nação crioula*, the plot of which moves between Portugal, Angola, and Brazil over the last half of the nineteenth century. Through a series of letters, Agualusa targets the Portuguese, Angolan elites, and Brazilian merchants—all of whom participated in the triangular slave trade. At the center of the novel is Eça de Queirós's curious Portuguese adventurer, Fradique Mendes, who marries Ana Olímpia, a beautiful former slave and daughter of a Congolese prince. As the novel nears its end, the couple find themselves on a ship christened *Nação crioula* that carries a heterogeneous group of slaves, slave traders, and abolitionists. In this apparently conflictual and co-existential setting, the novel itself comes to serve as a metaphoric journey designed to

undermine the middle passage and the slave trade. Agualusa effectively retells the story, re-charting the course of history, even as he questions the inequalities and economic benefits that were at the root of the slave trade. *Nação crioula* works to expose the contradictions of slavery and miscegenation in a humorous yet indicting manner. Its subtitle, “The Secret Correspondence of Fradique Mendes,” unveils the epistolary structure of the novel, which almost entirely consists of a series of letters sent by Mendes to his godmother, to Ana Olímpia, and to Eça de Queirós. The one exception is the novel’s final letter, sent by Ana Olímpia to Eça.

Split across three continents, Fradique’s travels and letters serve to alleviate his nostalgia while allowing him to explore his curiosity regarding the world outside of Europe. His encounters with other cultures, as well as his active participation in parties, escapades, and courageous escapes from near-death experiences form a dialogic discourse through which the reader gains insight into his worldview and philosophy on life. For example, in Fradique’s August 1872 letter from Luanda to his godmother in Lisbon, he recounts his wonderment as to why slaves were not set free; for if this occurred, he reasons, they could be more productive and produce ten times more than when they were slaves. Relating a conversation with his slave-owning wife, he asks: “So why didn’t she free her household slaves? ‘Because,’ she said to me, ‘it would be like letting my own family go.’ . . . ‘We have responsibilities to them. We can’t set them free, as the wretches wouldn’t know what to do with their freedom’” (41). This is, in effect, a commentary on the fallacious justification for continued slavery and the resistance to abolition. It is of course not true that slaves would not know what to do with their freedom; it is equally false that slaves were “members” of the slave owner’s family. Rather, the free labor provided by slaves was the foundation of numerous family fortunes. Fradique’s letter, in the hands of a perceptive reader, makes it clear that the matter is an economic rather than a human one.

Fradique is hardly a prototypical abolitionist; however, his sense of humor and depiction of the ironies of slavery foreground the abolitionist movement while providing dry comic relief for the reader. One such moment occurs in the last letter of the novel, written by Ana Olímpia to Eça after Fradique’s death. Offering reflections on her own life, Ana Olímpia presents to her Portuguese counterpart a kind of religious reasoning for her failure to free her own slaves,

even though she had once been a slave herself: “Once Fradique asked me why I didn’t free my slaves. I explained to him that they had been brought up with me, under my roof, that I felt attached to them as though they were my own family. . . . And I quoted the Bible: ‘It may be that thy bondman will say unto thee, ‘I will not go away from thee’ . . . and he shall be thy servant forever’” (145). This is hardly an argument, and it stands as something of a contradiction, given that Ana Olímpia’s slaves would likely not echo the sentiments expressed in Deuteronomy 15:16 if asked. This final piece of correspondence, a mix of joy and melancholy, serves as both the pretext for the publication of Fradique’s letters and the novel’s close. In this way, Agualusa gives his novel a circular structure: its end is its beginning.

The question remains regarding how the reader is to see anything resembling abolitionist sentiment in Fradique or Ana Olímpia. Both are deeply implicated in the drama of slavery, and even the empathy that Fradique displays is likely attributable to the Lusotropicalist ideals of “race-mixture” that serve as a symbolic validation of his erotic relations with Ana Olímpia. For her part, Ana Olímpia balances her suffering as a slave under the ugly Gabriela Santamarinha with the power she acquired as the owner of the slaves that she inherited from her former master and husband, Vitorino. As she reflects on all this at the end of the narrative, Ana Olímpia seems to continue her quest to understand and justify slavery. Indeed, her account is far from that of an abolitionist:

Many people are unable to understand why most slaves accept their lot once they have arrived in America or Brazil. At the time I didn’t understand it either. Now I do. On board the ship on which we fled Angola, the *Nação crioula*, I met an old man who claimed to have been a friend of my father. He reminded me that in our language (as in almost all West African languages) the same word is used for ‘the sea’ and ‘death’: *Calunga*. So for most slaves that journey was a passage across death. The life they had left behind in Africa was Life; the one they found in America or Brazil, a Rebirth. (151-52)

This ritualistic understanding (as regeneration) of the journey of the slave from Africa to the Americas is problematic and essentially escapist. If the Atlantic

journey is a mix of life and death, the violence that takes place during that same journey, which for some led to death by murder or suicide, cannot be understood as a wholly positive transformation. In the broader context of Lusotropicalism, the only possible “regeneration” is a limited one, encoded in the ideology of miscegenation. This is, of course, no less problematic than slavery itself, given that it revolves around both sexual violence and a widespread program of genetic engineering. Seen through the lens of Mamiwata, however, we understand the sea as the abode of this (fe)male deity who embodies both destructive and protective forces.

Couto’s O outro pé da sereia

If Agualusa derives pleasure in *Nação crioula* from interrogating slavery and its willing participants, Mia Couto adopts a narrative-within-a-narrative approach to dislocate Western cultural hegemony. In short, he suggests that Africa remains the “other foot of the mermaid,” or Portugal’s inseparable (and paradoxical) Siamese twin. Couto’s adoption of a Lusotropicalist vision in this novel is a critical and strategic one, as the reader notes throughout the narrative. It is, in essence, an attempt to bridge continents, historical periods, value systems, mythologies, belief systems, and cultural crucibles that are all interfaced with a migrational narrative, the knot of which can only be untied by the singular mysteries of the sea as personified by the figure of the *kianda*. In terms of plot, we begin in the sixteenth century, with the Portuguese Jesuit Dom Gonçalo da Silveira, who leaves Goa on an adventurous quest for the mythical Monomotapa kingdom in Africa in order to convert its emperor to Christianity. In a historical leap from the colonial past to the post-independence present, Couto deploys a one-legged statue of the Virgin Mary that the colonial missionary had inadvertently left in his ship. Five hundred years later, a naïve couple, Zero Madzero and Mwadia Malunga, stumble upon this statue floating down the Mussenguezi River. They are warned by the diviner Lázaro Vivo that failure to create an abode for the statue will result in unimaginable consequences, since they have disrupted its peace. The moral of this narrative is multiple; but fundamentally, it is an enactment of an allegory of transgression and reintegration as a process of bringing about cosmic harmony across many continents.

Drawing a parallel with the attributes of Mamiwata, Couto's *kianda* echoes Drewal's postulation of this water spirit's boundless possibilities:

It is her hybridity, her trans-ness, that helps to explain her power and presence. She is compelling because she transgresses boundaries; she embodies the qualities of "mixed origins." In her manifestation as mermaid, *Mami Wata* is at once human and fish, air-breathing and water-dwelling: she is fish, yet not fish; human, yet not human. Often shown handling snakes, she bridges cultural and natural realms. She may be female or male. She lives on the hyphen of existence. She is a complex multivocal, multifocal symbol with so many resonances that she feeds the imagination, generating, rather than limiting, meaning and significances. (*Sacred Waters* 5)

This expansive characterization confirms the real and figurative transnational journey that Couto's *kianda* has made in the process of becoming not just a symbol inadvertently left on the colonial missionary ship, but one that manages to ease back into the sea to continue its mission of protecting its devotees both under the sea (such as the spirits of the dead) as well as those who are living above it, those who are indeed struggling against the vicissitudes of colonialism and enslavement of the children of Mamiwata. It is instructive that while Couto deploys a mermaid as an allegory of transnationalism, religiosity, and transculturalism, he is also careful to create unusual characters, such as the African American Benjamin Southman, who sets out to discover his roots in a Lusophone African setting. Benjamin's affiliation with an NGO, usually an entity set up locally but benefitting from external funding, suggests that Couto is at once critiquing the ambivalence of such development projects and at the same time celebrating the African American search for identity in Africa.

At issue in *O outro pé da sereia* is the broader question of the perception of Africa by the West over the course of history. Stereotypes about Africa as barbaric, a dark continent, an exotic location to observe subservient species, and the deluding convictions that Africans are less than human or at least "inferior" to Europeans, even before establishing any truth about the complexity of African cultures and identities, often preclude any adequate understanding of African reality. Couto's choice to juxtapose the early modern

period with the post-independence present is curious. The conclusion may well be that the representation of Africa—both by Africans who have yet to overcome the negative stereotypes that they somewhat shamefully continue to accept and by Europeans who continue to flex the muscles of their fallacious superiority—has progressed little over five centuries. The result is a haunting quagmire, which Couto highlights and contests. It is often common for the West to see Africa as superstitious and backward, largely because adventurous “strangers” in Africa mostly do not take the time to study, respect, and appreciate African cultures in anything resembling their full complexity. Couto’s presentation of Southman in fact stands as another instance of the simplification of Africa. The female diviner of Vila Longe helps Southman to connect with his past; and in the process, she plays into the deceptive stereotypes about Africa rather than exposing the American to the complex realities of African culture. Couto criticizes this romantic view of Africa and proposes a rethinking of the dependent mode of existence in relation to the European colonizer: “A Europa continua a visitar África como quem vai em peregrinação—para encontrar o que ela acredita ali ter deixado. África ainda olha a Europa com algum oportunismo desresponsabilizante—ficámos independentes mas não nos emancipámos” (“A guerra” 491).

Historical memory is never easy to confront, especially when such memories are traumatic and reminiscent of moments of ethnic conflict and brutality. Like the overlapping narrative structure of *Terra Sonâmbula*, which brought Couto fame in 1992, *O outro pé da sereia* unveils important historical events that are prone to erasure and forgetting. *O outro pé da sereia* forces the reader, however, to confront these stories as part of a collective postcolonial memory. In its transcultural pretext, the narrative emerges as two alternating histories; one operating in the present and the other functioning as the past reflected upon the present. The reader perceives a deliberate transcultural portrayal of the postcolonial characters who must confront their sensibilities towards indigenous and external influences on their identity formations. In essence, Mozambican colonial history confronts Mozambican contemporaneity. The result of such tension is the reality that Mozambique is permanently stuck in its search for national identity. Couto suggests, for example, that Mozambique has yet to confront its own guilt with respect to Trans-Atlantic slavery. Instead, the dwellers of Vila Longe adopt magical realism to erase

memories of guilt by planting a tree that is supposed to immunize them from any complicity and guilt:

Não havia em toda a redondeza um exemplar maior de mulambe. A árvore era conhecida, desde há séculos, como “a árvore das voltas”: quem rodasse três vezes em seu redor perdia a memória. Deixaria de saber de onde veio, quem eram os seus antepassados. Tudo para ele se tornaria recente, sem raiz, sem amarras. Quem não tem passado não pode ser responsabilizado. O que se perde em amnésia, ganha-se em amnistia. (320-21)

The illusion of masking one’s memory under the mythological potential of traditional belief systems is more ridiculous than facing a painful past and deploying coping strategies to deal with such absurd memories.

In linking the past with the present, Couto craftily subjects the colonial adventure to scrutiny, subverting its pretensions and hypocrisies, while at the same time showing the humanity of the enslaved and the potential redemption of the enslaver. The statue of the Holy Mother, which at some point fuses with that of the *Kianda* (mermaid) serves as a point of religious syncretism even as the colonial missionary and the contemporary traditional healer (*curandeiro*) appear to be engaged in a series of deceptions and abuses. Couto here sets out to question in a subtle rather than radical manner the stereotypes about Africa that exist on both sides of the Atlantic. The (post-)colonial journey connects to African mythology through the significance of water for both. The many instances of culture shock between African belief systems and the Christian faith in Couto’s novel seem designed to educate both regarding the contradictions inherent in their religious faiths. It is also curious that the ship on its way from Goa to Monomotapa carries not only missionaries but also African slaves. One such African slave, named Nimi Nsundi, feels a special bond with the statue of the Holy Mother, whom he quickly associates with the Mamiwata or *Kianda* in Kimbundu.

While the African slave could easily relate the image of the Holy Mother to that of the *Kianda*, Padre Antunes, a priest on board the same ship, comes to terms with his own carnality through a dream in which he has sex with an Indian woman, Dia. In the dream, the woman bids him farewell at the bay of

the Mandovi River. Before the farewell, she removes his clothes and hers—reassuring him that this would be the only way he will remember her. Encouraging him to touch her as a magical form of rebirth, he suddenly wakes up in a panic attack. He goes back to sleep only to return to the dream in which he drowns and comes face to face with the same Indian woman (under water) who introduces herself as Kianda. This dream provokes a religious and identitarian crisis within the priest. Couto's narrative is full of many instances of the priest's transformation from a devoted Christian to a man full of doubt—not only about his faith but also about the oppressive treatment of African slaves, which goes against the Christian doctrine. On one occasion, Padre Antunes questions the afflictions of the slaves and becomes conflicted about his own faith: "A mais cruel das memórias de Manuel Antunes era de um escravo, que, desesperado de fome, cortou a língua e a comeu. Mais do que uma recordação era um símbolo da condição da gente negra: exilada do passado, impedida de falar senão na língua dos outros, obrigada a escolher entre a sobrevivência imediata e a morte anunciada" (260). A perceptive reader begins to put the loose ends together: Couto is narrating not just about how the Kianda, as the magical-realist agent of the Atlantic Ocean, controls the lives of the missionaries, the enslaver and the slaves (who, ironically, are crammed together in the most inhumane conditions beneath the ship that is supposedly transporting missionaries). How else can one explain the death of Nsundi, the African slave who ultimately commits suicide for believing that Kianda is "trapped" in the statue of the Holy Mother? He chooses to break off one of the statue's legs to release the Kianda; as a punishment, he is locked up in the hold of the ship and threatened with a possible death sentence. When he is brought up to the ship's main deck, he jumps into the ocean as if to return to Kianda. Dia then finds a letter he left for her that reads, "A verdadeira viagem é a que fazemos dentro de nós" (207).

Though not explicitly a narrative of triangular love as in Jorge Amado's *Mar morto*, in which Yemoja (a variant name of Mamiwata in Yoruba culture), competes with Lívia, there are echoes of mythology and historiography that make *O outro pé da sereia* a compelling work of historical fiction. Couto's work oscillates between two historical moments that often call into question the fluid passage from reality and the imaginary, while the author mediates how the reader perceives and interprets events through his omniscience and

omnipresence. The notion of magical realism, which pervades the corpus of Couto's writing, is an opportunity in this specific narrative to use memory to reconstruct reality, create new identities, and subject past assumptions to ridicule and scrutiny. In the final analysis, the metaphors of the mermaid, the tree of forgetfulness, and interlocking journeys of discovery demonstrate that Mozambican identity, miscegenated or not, continues to be a fluid process of the imagination.

Almeida's O testamento do senhor Napumoceno

While the transculturality of Mia Couto is invested in a journey motif through a revisitation of 'histories'—colonial, individual, and collective—Germano Almeida's transculturalism is achieved through a memorialist construction that is only revealed to the characters posthumously. The "will" left by Napumoceno must be understood as a pretext to share his autobiography with those close to him, including secrets of his past life that were not revealed while he was alive. Deploying a multivocal approach through which Napumoceno reconstructs his entire life, Almeida mixes satire, humor, and sarcasm, to render a social critique of Cape Verde during the early years of independence. The will serves as a migrational instrument to move from the present to the past; and in the process, it highlights a new genre in Cape Verdean literature that moves beyond insularity, drought, and emigration. Unlike the emigration phase of Cape Verdean literature, when drought and torrential rains served as the impetus for emigration, the "migration of the subject" in Almeida's novel takes place within Cape Verde, effecting a creative intra-migration of sorts. The reader is craftily led on a long journey through different moments and spaces of Cape Verde, but the focus is on a number of critical characters such as Adélia, Napumoceno, Maria da Graça, and Carlos.

In merging three narrative times into one, Almeida creatively allows the reader to participate in the critical events that make up the life of the novel: 1) the more visible life of the protagonist, Napumoceno, whose business acumen, despite his shrewd devices, is presented to us through the omniscient narrator; 2) the "other" life of Napumoceno, which is steeped in mysteries and secrets (some of which are unorthodox, entertaining, and comical) yet makes for a documentary account since these decisive occurrences ultimately shape how the

precise, methodical, and satirical Napumoceno will be remembered posthumously; and 3) the “long reading” of the will by Napumoceno’s attorney, who inadvertently becomes another narrator, even as family members and friends participate in the unveiling of Napumoceno’s secret lives. That the reader alone gets the full picture of Napumoceno’s life echoes a similar narrative technique employed in Machado de Assis’ *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, though instead of dealing with a dog to whom the protagonist wills his entire fortune, we are instead dealing with a group of surviving family members. The notebooks found by Napumoceno’s daughter Maria when she discovers the love affair between her father and Adélia in fact set in motion another journey of discovery regarding the identity of her father and mother.² The novel, in this sense, appears fragmented, and the various parts are ultimately given cohesion as the critical emotional side of Napumoceno’s personality and the identity of Maria’s mother are ultimately revealed in order to render a complete narrative of Maria’s family while bringing about closure for a daughter who inherits the fortune of a father she scarcely knew.

David Brookshaw’s suggestion that the futile search for Adélia has the potential to play “with our doubts through a game of duplicity and self-undermining” is worth exploring and questioning (191). These doubts may refer to the fact that Adélia herself was not monogamous and was in love with a sailor whose return to Adélia forced Napumoceno to return to Mindelo to organize his life and business. And what if Adélia is not really Maria’s mother? According to the notebooks Maria finds, Napumoceno had somewhat ambivalent feelings about Adélia: “At first Sr. Napumoceno didn’t treat her like a woman . . . it never occurred to him to kiss her less to take her to bed . . . it was a love that he knew was not innocent and that at the same time had nothing carnal in it” (87). Ambiguity is perhaps the best way to describe the relationship between Napumoceno and Adélia, for there are moments in the novel when Napumoceno feels passionately about Adélia despite the triangle created by the existence of another for whom Adélia clearly declares her love:

For nearly 18 months Sr. Napumoceno allowed himself to be slowly consumed by a demented passion that ended up poisoning his

² For an in-depth analysis of this maternal search, see Moser and Brookshaw.

existence, because, when he finally acknowledged it was over, he continued to live with the dream of Adélia, since she had confessed to him that she felt very close to a man whose eyes smiled when he saw her and who treated her like an expensive doll and as sweet and good to her. (87)

The reader is puzzled by Maria's true identity and who exactly her mother might be: Adélia or possibly, Dona Chica, whom Napumoceno raped several times in his office. Given Dona Chica's low-class status, it may well be that Napumoceno was ashamed of identifying his offspring with a maid or a messenger and a convenient "body" that keeps him warm. Almeida may have deliberately left Maria's identity a puzzle. The reader knows that Napumoceno is white, that Adélia is bi-racial, and that Dona Chica is black. The moving-away-from one of these racial poles and movement-to the other evokes the challenges of Lusotropicalism and the attendant preference for the *mestiço* ideal. While Almeida's proposal for miscegenation is subtle, Maria's miscegenated identity clearly suggests that she is a product of at least two races. Even if Adélia's existence is ultimately a figment of Napumoceno's imagination, that of Dona Chica is unquestionable. In sum, whether through fantasy, dream, or reality as a pretext to complicate his love for multiple women, Maria's existence as the heir to whom he leaves most of his fortune confirms Napumoceno's transculturality as well as his perpetuation of a Lusotropicalist legacy.

Conclusion

In all three of the texts that I have examined in the present study, there is an unresolved search for the significant Other, whether through real migration across continents or through symbolic journeying through the lives of the protagonists. In each case, what is revealed, bit by bit, is a fragmented identity that vividly demonstrates the persistence of desire for the colonial Other. The trope of the sea that Mamiwata personifies is problematic in that it is only minimally confronted when one considers the liminal existence of the biracial self. Fradique Mendes, a Portuguese adventurer in Agualusa's *Nação crioula*, seems to defend slavery and fails at his abolitionist pretense. While the Kianda

serves as the unifying force of protection among the dualities of colonizer-colonized; enslaver-enslaved, missionary-pagan, she equally fails to protect Nsundi from death in *O outro pé da sereia*. Maria da Graça, despite the fortune she inherits from Sr. Nepumoceno, is faced with her own crisis of identity: if her mother is Adélia, why did her father keep this hidden from her? And if she is not, who is her mother? All three writers seem to coalesce in the quest for a resolution to the crisis of identity and the imperative of freedom that miscegenation has not resolved. The Mamiwata trope makes a case for multiplicity of identities to the extent that most of her victims or devotees always venerate water and the sea. In the end, a postcolonial reading of these texts deconstructs binaries while proposing a multiplicity as a potential resolution for transcultural ambivalence through the necessity of transgressional migration.

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