

# Phantasmal Crusaders. Decaying Millenarianism and the Trauma of Colonial War in Twentieth-Century Portuguese Literature

EWA A. ŁUKASZYK

*Uniwersytet Warszawski*

*ewa.a.lukaszyk@gmail.com*

## Keywords

Portuguese colonial war; Sebastianism; millenarianism; trauma; grotesque; phantasmal.

The article focuses on the connection between the early-modern roots of Portuguese millenarian mythology and the literature dealing with the trauma of the colonial war that put an end to the Portuguese empire in 1975. The analyzed texts of José Martins Garcia, Manuel Alegre, João de Melo, António Lobo Antunes, and Almeida Faria deconstruct the providential vision of Portuguese colonial empire exploited by the official propaganda of Salazar. They transcribe the grandiose, mythicized image of the Portuguese past into the categories of grotesque and phantasmal. Both soldiers and settlers transformed into refugees by the colonial war continue moving in the oneiric universe as traumatized subjects long after the end of the conflict. The literary deconstruction of the national mythology conducted by the writers, many of whom were ex-combatants of the conflict, may thus be seen as a collective therapy postulated by Eduardo Lourenço, leading to the healing of the trauma.

## Oneiric premises of a millenarian empire

On August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1578, near the town of Ksar-el-Kebir in northern Morocco, a great battle was fought. In Moroccan historiography, it is known as the Battle of Three Kings; in the Portuguese one, as that of Alcácer-Quibir. The combatants were the deposed sultan Abu Abdallah Mohamed II and his uncle, the new sultan Abd al-Malik I. The Portuguese king Sebastian I (D. Sebastião) was a mere foreign ally invited by Abu Abdallah. Bringing the Christian power into the domestic conflict, he hoped to recover the throne that Abd al-Malik had taken from him with Ottoman support. Yet in the vision imposed by the young Portuguese king, an almost Quijotesque reader of chivalry literature, the expedition was presented as the beginning of a new crusade. The military disaster, the childless death of D. Sebastião that put an end to the Aviz dynasty, the loss of Portuguese independence as the country fell into the Iberian Union under the dynamic Spanish Philippine dynasty, nothing was strong enough to bring down the newly launched myth of the pure knight. Perhaps it was precisely the extent of the damage and the intensity of the collective trauma that appealed for soothing through mythologization.

Be that as it may, the disappearance of the king, whose body was never recovered, created the ground for the expectation of his return. As it was initially presumed, he might have been captured by the Moroccans and might be liberated against the payment of a ransom. Yet as months and years passed by, the expectation was transcribed into an elaborate, semi-popular,

semi-erudite mythical construct speaking of the miraculous stay of D. Sebastião and his companions on an enchanted island, from where they would return on a misty morning, on a ship surrounded by fog, to establish the rule of justice and prosperity. The popular projection of the new myth is testified by the fortune of a prophetic poem allegedly written by Bandarra, a shoemaker from Trancoso. The erudite contribution was given by authors belonging to the social elite, such as D. João de Castro. During the decades of foreign dominance, Sebastianism became a collective dream of a miraculous renaissance, associated with the figure of an ideal king who would become the ally of an angelical pope, establishing a perfect balance between secular and spiritual powers and granting everlasting peace to unified humanity. The nationalistic legend should thus be inscribed in a wider context of early-modern millenarianism. The crucial step in this evolution was performed in the seventeenth century by the Jesuit priest António Vieira who transformed the millenarian beliefs circulating in the Portuguese culture, codifying them into an elaborate prediction of what he called, in reference to the biblical Book of Daniel, the Fifth Empire – a global state unifying evangelized mankind under Portuguese aegis.

### **Colonial battlefields and the wounds of identity**

It may be quite surprising for any reader but a Lusophone scholar that the imagery related to the sixteenth-century disaster of the chivalrous king played such an important role in the quest for a literary expression of the trauma caused by the colonial war. In the novels written by combatant authors, such as *Lugar de massacre* by José Martins Garcia, and even more prominently, *Jornada de África* by Manuel Alegre, Alcácer-Quibir appears as a prefiguration of disasters suffered by the Portuguese in the twentieth-century conflict. The heroes constantly move and act on two intersecting temporary plans: those of the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries, as if waging two interconnected wars. As the historical analogies and allusions play such a prominent role in those texts, serving as a major key for the expression of the war trauma, there must be something beyond the soldiers' suffering that strives to be voiced. The implications of the defeat seem to cut deeper than just the bodies, involving the underlying structure of individual and collective identity. The literary scholar must step into the domain of the history of ideas to see how the deconstruction of early-modern millenarianism contributed to the quest for suitable means of expression, able to render the trauma of colonial conflict.

Obviously, the sixteenth-century Moroccan disaster did not put an end to the Portuguese presence in Africa. The factories and slave emporiums developed further south. A streak of strongholds dispersed along the maritime route to India utterly gave birth to modern colonies in Guinea, Angola, and Mozambique. As the centuries passed by, the millenarian myth of unified humanity evolved into the vision of a perfect, providential colonial empire. The Portuguese dominion, that had grown such far-flung millenarian roots, proved to be the most long-lived among Europe's colonial empires. Its foundations were launched at the dawn of the European maritime expansion in the fifteenth century, long before other modern colonial nations resolved to set sail; its definitive end, as late as 1975, happened almost two decades after the main wave of decolonization which liberated peoples and territories around the world. What is more, while France, Britain, and Belgium generally acquiesced to pacific decolonization, maintaining neocolonial economic relationships with their former colonies, Portugal resolved to wage a devastating colonial war rather than accept the idea of independence of its African possessions, officially presented as overseas provinces (*províncias ultramarinas*), akin to French Algeria. The bloody colonial war raging simultaneously in Guinea,

Angola, and Mozambique lingered for thirteen years (1961-1974). The recognition of independence of those colonial territories, formalized in 1975, became possible only after the change of the regime in Lisbon. If one may argue that the decolonization of Portuguese-speaking Africa was a direct consequence of the political upheaval in the metropolis, the Carnation Revolution of 1974, things may as well be seen the other way around: the lingering upheaval in the colonies led to the long overdue revolution in the politically and mentally stagnant metropolis.

Historians may hesitate to consider the illusion of grandeur as a force intervening in history, yet the decolonization, at least as long as literature is in the focus, should be seen not only as a factor of economic and political upheaval but also as a crucial turning point in the collective self-definition of the Portuguese. The loss of the colonial empire interfered with the profoundly rooted awareness of a nation allegedly endowed with a providential mission. Portugal under the retrograde rule of Salazar, as late as the decades of 1950s and 1960s, was profoundly imbued in anachronistic messages of colonial providentialism. The Portuguese maritime endeavor of discovering and colonizing the world, presented as a Christ-like collective sacrifice, was regarded as a pivot of the glorious Christian history of the salvation of mankind. Yet the national egotism was suspended, as a flimsy and fragile construction, between the celebrated glories of early-modern maritime beginnings and rather shabby reality of colonial territories. The colonial war was a moment of painful confrontation not only with the decolonial guerrillas but also with the acuteness of colonial misery. Thousands of young metropolitan recruits, who previously had only a vague idea of what the Portuguese colonies might be, were shuttered not only by the discomforts of the military life but also by the collapse of imperial imaginings in which they had been educated.

Along the decades of the conflict as well as in the years that followed, the topics related to the deconstruction of colonial providentialism as the basis of national identity were constantly present under the pen of Portuguese intellectuals, most prominently of Eduardo Lourenço, author of the crucial essay *O Labirinto da Saudade* defining the Portuguese self-awareness shortly after the end of the colonial war (1978). Later on, the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos studied the process in which a peripheral country such as Portugal in its European context reinvented its own image of a country occupying an imperial, metropolitan, 'central' position (1990). The peculiarity of Portuguese imagery was also studied by scholars speaking of the colonial war from the internal (e.g. Ribeiro, 2004) and external perspectives (e.g. Vecchi, 2010).

To provide a clearer view of the literature of the downfall of the Portuguese empire for the benefit of a comparative literature scholar, it is important to comment briefly on the persistence of Sebastianism and millenarianism in modern Portuguese culture. The twentieth-century Sebastianism was obviously a reinvented one, not just the natural continuation of the millenarianism born in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the first decades of the twentieth century, it found a fertile ground in the reinvention of the national spirit fostered by the generation of *Renascença Portuguesa*, most prominently by Teixeira de Pascoais. The generation of the first and second decade of the twentieth century developed not only a nationalistic mythology but also a cluster of imagery that would be later on described by its major deconstructor, Eduardo Lourenço, as "visionary blindness" (*cegueira visionária*). This metaphorical expression, transferred from poetry to cultural criticism, became a fixed phrase in Portuguese discourse. It resumes the idealistic and irrationalist tendency whose poetic and (pseudo-)philosophical foundations were created by such thinkers as Leonardo Coimbra and popularized by the members of the generation of *Renascença Portuguesa*. Later on, Salazarism,

the official ideology of the Portuguese state for almost half of a century, fostered a feverish flight from the distressing international reality, i. e. the weakness of Portugal on the European playground, toward imperial imagination. Throughout the decade of the 1950s, the grandiose idea continued to develop, despite its obvious anachronism, in parallel to the accelerated processes of decolonization going on in other African territories, often bordering with Portuguese possessions.

Incidentally, it should be remarked that all along their presence in Africa, the Portuguese were rather indolent colonizers. Their presumed possession of vast territories, established early in colonial history as the Portuguese were the first explorers of the African shores, was made effective very late. The early-modern maritime empire operated as a network of emporia, with little or no interest in land-locked occupation. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, in the metropolitan optics, the colonies were almost invisible. Finally, the impulse to effectively occupy, control, administrate, and exploit the overseas territories came from abroad. The importance of the African space suddenly increased in 1890 in response to the English ultimatum requiring the unconditional transfer of a considerable part of those territories to the British crown. As Eduardo Lourenço remarked, the importance of Africa in Portuguese imagination rapidly increased in confrontation with the danger of losing those possessions to foreign powers: “[After the Ultimatum] we woke up to the African empire, until then despised, and there we sought an image of ourselves that would compensate for the little or no European projection. From then on, until 1974 [...], «our» Africa became the unavoidable horizon of our destiny as predestined colonizers. And became oneirically imperial” (Lourenço, 1999: 56). In other words, all along the first decades of the twentieth century, the Portuguese turned to their colonial possessions in search of importance and symbolic status, transforming the ugly reality of backwardness and exploitation into an outer-worldly dream of essentially just, benign, and prosperous empire. The disparity between reality and this oneiric vision could not be more blatant.

The desperate defense of the African territories ravaged by local uprisings was rooted in a mythicized perception of national history, described as “visionary blindness” by its own defenders originating from the *Renascença Portuguesa* movement. It made invisible the realistic reasons for the upheaval in the colonies. The metropolis turned a blind (and no longer visionary) eye to the events that gradually muted into a full-scale war that Portugal had to wage on multiple fronts. Not only the reasons of the opposite side but also the unavoidability of decolonial solutions could not be perceived in Lisbon, since the dominant cultural awareness was still based on the understanding of Portugal as a predestined savior, playing a providential role in history. This is why the deconstruction of the nationalistic mythology underlying the colonial war required such intense exploitation of Sebastianism and Portuguese millenarianism as we will see in the analyzed examples. The streak of novels published during the years that followed the downfall of the colonial empire shows the persistence of the war trauma in Portuguese imagination and its lingering presence in Lusophone cultural discourse. Paradoxically, the return to the Moroccan disaster helped to find a literary idiom permitting not only to speak about the war but also to address the traumatism involving the collective identity.

### **The grotesque taking the place of the heroic**

Thirteen years of colonial war that Portugal had to wage simultaneously on multiple fronts required the mobilization of the entire generation. No wonder that military episodes mark the biographies of a vast group of contemporary Portuguese writers. The war in Africa was in

many cases the circumstance lying at the origin of their literary vocation. The combatants took up the pen to give voice to their personal experience that translated and exemplified collective destiny. The first, most accessible literary tool to employ appears to be the grotesque. Such aesthetic categories as tragic, pathetic, and heroic seem unavailable in the literature appearing as an almost direct testimony of the trauma suffered.

Almost immediately after the end of the conflict, the absurdity of the ideology underlying it was demonstrated by José Martins Garcia in *Lugar de massacre* (1975). The novel's heroes impersonate the anachronistic imagery and values to the point of caricature. They live in a oneiric world in which the Portuguese are expected to play the role of apostles of moral renewal and civilized flourishing of humanity. Such a character is the young Count d'Avince, an idealistic upper-class young man brought up in a complete detachment from reality. He perceives his participation in the colonial war through the prism of a "glorious mission" (Garcia, 1975: 15). Although he quickly sinks into the moral decay of the barracks, he refuses to abandon his anachronistic vision of the "National Church" ("Igreja Nacional"), which should lead the Portuguese on a new crusade. His dreams, deeply rooted in the millenarian imagination, are as grandiose as they are global:

the restoration of the crusading spirit, the conversion of Africa, Russia, the World, to the universal kingdom of Christ. (...) The new crusade would encompass Europe, Africa and Asia, to begin with. It was necessary, first of all, to take down the statue of Stalin (...). Ethiopia would be invaded and the renegade heir of Prester John would be devoured by leeches (...). There was also a plan to kidnap Mao Zedong (...), which would reopen China to missionary action (88-89).

The worldview presented by Pierre Avince, the nobleman's plebeian alter ego, is quite similar. He also abandons the categories of linear time in favor of a vision of a cyclical return to old historical projects related to unchanging geographical space, the globe seen as a scene of Portuguese endeavor of the salvation of humanity. Soldiers and officers alike wage thus an everlasting battle: "There is only Space and in that Space, the same year always settles, (...) because everything is circular, exactly like this war in which we are involved" (61-62). However, such a vision of history constantly repeating itself carries a disturbing prediction of inevitable defeat, of which the outcome of the Moroccan battle is the prefiguration. The heroes remain unaware of it since they obstinately deny the fact of the death and defeat of the original hero, the founder of the Sebastianist legend.

In his novel *Jornada de África* (1989), Manuel Alegre builds an even more systematic juxtaposition of the contemporary soldier's journey to the African front and D. Sebastião's expedition to Morocco. The war resulting from the Portuguese determination to control the Angolan colony at all costs and the failure to find a peaceful decolonial solution is presented as a repetition of the historical mistake that was the sixteenth-century dream of conquering North Africa: Nambuanguo appears as the new Alcácer-Quibir. The text is woven of fragments of an early-modern chronicle (the Journey Report, "Relação da Jornada") and the narration of contemporary events. Both time planes (the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries) are constantly associated across the carefully measured lapse of historical time: "Almost three hundred and eighty-four years ago (it was the day after Saint John, says the Journey Report), another Sebastião left Oeiras and with him eight hundred embarkations" (Alegre, 1989: 25).

The differences between the former and the current expedition are limited to superficial, technical aspects, such as the means of transport used, which conceal a fundamental similarity or even identity of patterns and events: “And here comes Sebastião, now in a jeep. It could have been on horseback, but that was a long time ago, in another time and another story. Or maybe not” (27).

The contemporary hero, Sergeant Sebastião, is an alter ego of the young king lost in Morocco. Other names and surnames of characters appearing in the novel also bring to mind the story of the tragic expedition and foreshadow the final catastrophe inscribed in the predestined fate of the nation: “(...) at his side is Jorge Albuquerque Coelho (...). A name taken from Alcácer, like his. Coincidence, chance? Kairos, say the Greeks” (27). The reference to Christian apocalyptic vision, suggested by the Greek word taken from the New Testament (e.g. Mark 1:15), where it means “the appointed time in the purpose of God”, when the heavenly kingdom is at hand, is re-employed out of its traditional millenarian context. Rather than the fulfillment of the ideal empire, the mention of the apocalyptic time of crisis anticipates quite earthly, inglorious, and abasing tribulations of the soldiers.

As his fellow writer Urbano Tavares Rodrigues remarked, in Alegre’s novel we are dealing with a conflict of two imaginary orders: traditional Portuguese Sebastianism, associated with the hope for the rebirth of the homeland, leading to a sort of “lunatic heroism” (“um heroísmo lunar”), and “anti-Sebastianism”, meaning disbelief in the possibility of such solutions, which is also a legacy present in the Portuguese culture since Romanticism. The protagonist who appears as earmarked by his Sebastianist destiny despite his personal anti-Sebastianist stance “consciously denies war and the blood shed in the two hostile, yet fraternal camps” (Rodrigues, 1996: 26). The Sebastianist belief widespread among the soldiers is nothing but the result of manipulation. The foundational mythology used in the indoctrination of the soldiers is a simple fraud intended to lull the vigilance of young men sent to slaughter. The comparison between the colonial war and the Moroccan expedition of D. Sebastião does not lead to the construction of a heroic vision. On the contrary, it is not the present that is sanctified by comparison to the past, but the past that is trivialized in contact with the present marked by the brutal reality of war.

The fight for the African possessions of Portugal, as shown in this novel and numerous other literary testimonies of the combatants, appears as an absurdity, leaving no room for a heroic act. A common theme, as we will see, is the feeling of being lost and trapped in a foreign space, which is not perceived as a part of the homeland, contrary to what official propaganda tried to instill in the soldiers. This alleged appropriation of the African space, perceived as a great fraud, is sometimes presented in a macabre way. In *Jornada de África*, the act of taking possession of Africa is achieved by scattering shreds of soldiers’ bodies torn by the force of the explosion. The drops of Portuguese blood are projected at a great distance by the blast, as in a sacrilegious, scatological transposition of the gesture of a Catholic priest sparkling holy water: “Angola is ours, come and see, there are pieces of flesh here, there are bits of Portugal blooming in the jungle, blood and shit” (Alegre, 1989: 189).

### **Moving among ghosts and phantoms**

If metropolitan writers might busy themselves with the deconstruction of the millenarian Fifth Empire in a more euphemistic manner, the direct testimonies of the colonial war reject euphemisms. Yet in parallel to the unforgiving, shocking images of direct hostilities, there are also testimonies speaking of anxiety and the sensation of being lost in a strange and hostile

space. Africa ceased to be, or perhaps never was, a familiar space for the young recruits brought directly from metropolitan Portugal. The world is broken down into fragmented areas, each of which is hostile or unfavorable to the soldiers in a different way. Certainly, this African reality is no longer the space of colonial intervention, assimilation, or transformation. It is presented as a habitat of hostile forces beyond the heroes' understanding and control. The colonial war becomes thus a war waged against ghosts.

The conflict presented in Alegre's *Jornada de África* is phantasmal in many ways. As we have seen, it is placed under the auspices of the undead king who is supposed to return to haunt the world of the living. On the other hand, it is also a war against multiple, unnamed and unknown African ghosts. It is waged not only against people, but also against the very space and the phantasmal forces inhabiting it: "It is difficult to know who is shooting at who, this war has no face, neither the troops see the enemy, nor does the enemy now see the troops, it is a war of hearing and feeling much more than seeing" (Alegre, 1989: 239). In the final scene, the hero is not killed by the materialized, visible enemy but – just like the young king in the desert – disappears without a trace, absorbed by the jungle whose paths lead to the unknown reality of some kind of unknown, undefined afterlife: "He entered the bush alone, heading towards who knows what" (242).

Incidentally, a similar vision is recurrent in the poetry of Manuel Alegre. An example may be taken from the volume *O canto e as armas* (1967). Alegre's poetry was created directly during the conflict. It is not by chance that the title is an allusion to Camões's *The Lusíads* (the epic poem declares precisely the intention of "singing the weapons"). It is yet another reference dating back to the time of D. Sebastião and the early-modern epic ambitions of the Portuguese that find a grotesque and phantasmal fulfillment in the colonial war. In the poem *Metralhadoras cantam*, Africa becomes a macabre space of death, located entirely outside the world of the living: "And there are two hundred kilometers of death / and two hundred kilometers of land. / On this path from Luanda to the north" (Alegre, 1967: 40). In another poem, *As columnas partiram de madrugada*, the structure based on parallelism reflects the monotony of an endless procession whose goal is lost somewhere beyond the ordinary space of the living. The soldiers go straight to the afterlife, entering death almost unnoticed, fused with the light of dawn. The land of the dead is, in a macabre way, an extension of the African geography of the living, as no visible border separates the two areas: "From Luanda the columns left / to the north they left a trampled flower / from Luanda they took to the north / the death of dawn. // The columns from Luanda left / went to death / the dawn: trampled flower / to the north" (35-36).

Alegre's texts are rather typical than exceptional. Also in other combatants' literary testimonies, Africa is often presented as an alien and aggressive space that hems and stifles the soldiers. Harboring the invisible enemy, the partisan, darkness and emptiness in themselves become an amorphous, omnipresent enemy. This warlike space appears in the opening sequence of João de Melo's novel, *Autópsia de um mar de ruínas*, where Private Renato, on a night watch, is beset by mysterious, invisible forces that inhabit the darkness (Melo, 1984: 7-13).

The space, the sheer extension of the immense territories, is the worst enemy of the Portuguese since it is filled up with jungle, heat, and malaria-spreading mosquitoes. However, these factors that we could describe as material or physical do not exhaust its aggressive potential. In José Martins Garcia's novel, the perpetrator of the massacre mentioned in the title is the place, sheer spatial extension. An entire generation of the Portuguese sent to the fronts of the colonial war fell victim to the "place" (*lugar*) rather than the people. The Space (written

with a capital letter in the novel) degrades in the physical and spiritual sense whoever ventures into it. The combatants return from Africa not only bodily but also mentally mutilated because it is a space inhabited by a mysterious “devil of the swamps” (“diabo dos pântanos”) who leads people to mental breakdown: “Men who returned from Africa were mutilated inside and out, some without legs, others without arms, some without penises, others without soul. There was no white man who came back from the jungle in one piece, even when he didn’t have as much as a scratch on the outside” (García, 1975: 90). The hero’s path ends in a psychiatric field hospital, where he suffers from uncontrollable bursts of laughter – a grotesque wound inflicted by a phantasmal enemy.

The motif of mental mutilation also appears in the “Formative Trilogy” (“Trilogia da aprendizagem”) published by the major Portuguese writer shaped by the experience of the colonial war, António Lobo Antunes, who in 1971-1973 served as a doctor and soldier in the Portuguese army in Angola. This cycle of three autobiographical novels includes *Memória de elefante* (1979), *Os cus de Judas* (1979), and *Conhecimento do inferno* (1980). In the last part of the cycle, the hero, a psychiatrist returning from the front and taking up his civil work in a hospital, confesses that he learned the true face of war, its “hell” suggested in the book’s title, only when he came into contact with the internal reality tormenting the veterans: “In 1973, I had returned from the war and I knew about the wounded, the howls and moans on the road, explosions, gunshots, mines, bellies dismembered by the explosion of booby traps, I knew about the blood spilled and the longing, but I had been spared the knowledge of hell” (Antunes, 1988b: 28). Therefore, it is all about the hell transferred from the physical space of a country to the internal space of the human soul ravaged by war. The symptom of the disease suffered not only by the hospital patients but also by the doctor himself is the confusion of places, the inability to realize where the hero is and why he is there, expressed by the persistently recurring question: “What am I doing here?” (44, 47). Even after his return to civilian life, the protagonist is trapped in the circularity of history, no longer constituted by the prefiguration of Alcácer-Quibir repeating itself in Nambuanguo, but by the universal military destiny. As he arrives at the Hospital Miguel Bombarda in Lisbon to assume his duties as a psychiatrist, he believes to arrive once again to Mafra as a recruit: “They will give me a rifle, cut my hair, teach me how to die in a disciplined manner” (28).

### **Bringing the trauma home**

As the colonial war went on in distant territories, the “visionary blindness” and its deconstruction occupied a lot of space also in metropolitan writing. The criticism of national mythology appeared not only in direct connection with the topic of the colonial war but also more generally, as it was extremely relevant at the time of the final collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire and imperial self-awareness. Yet another problem related to the collective trauma caused by the disastrous outcome of the colonial war was the transformation of hundreds of thousands of colonial settlers into refugees. The topic of the return from Africa was also presented through the literary device of interconnecting the events of the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries. In *As Naus* (1988), António Lobo Antunes sketched a caricaturist portrayal of the national myth of voyage and discovery. Due to the author’s parodist adoption of an anachronistic perspective, the novel brings together characters from the era of Portuguese expansion and the so-called *retornados*, former settlers returning to the metropolis from the liberated colonies. The ghostly appearance of this population in the metropolis derives from the fact that, according to Eduardo Lourenço’s pertinent intuition in *O Labirinto*



*da Saudade* (1978), the empire was the object of an “amputation” experienced by the nation without apparent trauma, as if in a dream. Sebastianist allusions are present till the final pages of Antunes’ novel. Among the last persons awaiting the possibility of returning to Portugal, there is a group of tuberculosis patients on the beach of Ericeira, a parodist transcription of the mythical island beyond time where the eternally young king was supposed to stay, awaiting his miraculous return to Portugal. As the imperial cycle of Portuguese history ends, the patients are absurdly stuck on a deserted coast.

Also, the “Portuguese tetralogy” written by Almeida Faria during the years corresponding to the prolonged crumbling of the colonial empire, including the novels *A Paixão* (1965), *Cortes* (1978), *Lusitânia* (1980), and *Cavaleiro andante* (1983), is imbued with the idea of disintegration of the providentialist mythology sacralizing Portugal and its historical destiny. Through the prism of the fate of a single family, the author presents the process of decay of the entire country. As Maria Lúcia Lepecki writes, all kinds of “agglomerates”, be it a family or a local community, suffer fragmentation (1988: 23-30). The familiar world of the Portuguese homeland slowly falls into pieces; even the meanings of things and events that individual characters try to discover are subject to inevitable and irreversible disintegration. The “Tetralogy” can therefore be read as an allegory of the collapse of the Portuguese empire and the absurdity of waging a colonial war. As all communitarian values crumble and the sacralized imperial vision decays, there remains very little to defend. In the first part of the cycle, *A Paixão*, the paschal symbolism may be read as a reference to the vision of the Portuguese redemptive sacrifice offered for the salvation of the world. However, the tearing of the national body is presented without sharpness or drama. Rather, it is the almost imperceptible disintegration of an organism that is already dead. *Lusitânia*, on the other hand, consists of letters written to each other by family members. Adopting the epistolary formula emphasizes the distances that cannot be shortened, even if the novel’s characters strive for rapprochement. In the initial part of the series, the closed world of a country estate is divided into a number of smaller closed spaces: halls, rooms, cells. These spaces of imprisonment are contained within each other. The greatest of them is Lusitania itself, a prison country. Yet the most pertinent for our topic is the last part of the tetralogy, where the anachronisms of national mythology find a culminating expression. In *Cavaleiro andante*, Almeida Faria offers a caricature of the anachronistic dream of the Fifth Empire. The hero of the novel, João Carlos, obsessively inquires about the possibility of fulfilling the prophecy of the shoemaker from Trancoso and the return of D. Sebastião that might bring the longed-for happiness, collective prosperity, and progress in all areas of life:

Will the prophecies of Bandarra, who promised a Fifth Empire to those who lost theirs, finally come true? Will a king loved because he was crazy, incompetent, and dead, return soon, not to throw us again into lost battles but to save us from all the misfortunes and threats of greater evils? Will the Enlightened One bring with him the Sesame-opener of fortune and progress or to repent our sins we will have to set out in search of the key that will open the cave where the Grail is hidden and not found? (Faria, 1983: 12-13)

The fabric of the novel includes fragments of chivalry romances transplanted into the modern world. Once again, the characters live simultaneously in two worlds: one of them is the Portuguese reality in the aftermath of the Carnation Revolution, the other is the national past,

close to the mythical “time of beginnings” of the empire. Meanwhile, one of the heroes, Arminda, tries to interpret the contemporary world and its problems in the light of the prophecy of the Fifth Empire, which she transposes into categories borrowed from Marxist thought. The characters presented in the novel appear as stranded time-travelers. Not only are they scattered in different regions of the world – Marta is in Venice, André and Sónia in Angola, João Carlos in Lisbon – but also lost in time, trying to epitomize the vision of the Portuguese as a Mundanus, the inhabitant of the whole world in one of Padre Vieira’s sermons. Therefore, they are not only anachronistic but also atopic figures. The space in which the characters move, just like their time, seems to decay and lose its consistency. They wander in a phantasmal geography that seems to deploy in parallel to the world of normal, everyday experience. What is more, the events in the ghostly spaces develop according to the apocalyptic logic of reward and punishment. The colonial war is understood by the novel’s characters as a tribulation sent by God to chastise the generation that disbelieved the prophecy: they “came to be punished, sent to Africa where they were killed and died like great people in order to be redeemed soon by the E.S. [i. e. Espírito Santo, the Holly Ghost] in accordance with the dream of Nabuco [i. e. Nebuchadnezzar], the Babylonian king, interpreted by Daniel the prophet” (168).

Almeida Faria’s grotesque novel is intended to show the anachronisms inherent in Portuguese mythology decaying under the writer’s dissecting glance. Finally, in *O conquistador* (1988), Almeida Faria reduces the figure of the Portuguese warrior to the dimensions of a grotesque conqueror of women’s hearts and inverts the features of the chaste crusader knight that D. Sebastião intended to be. Nonetheless, the female body is the only space of conquest that remains. The crucial point is that in the twentieth century, Portugal lost the colonies not only as a space of economic exploitation but even more importantly, as a space of male self-realization. Offering no opportunity of heroism, Africa is nothing but a hellish place in which an entire generation of Portuguese men are sent to die in a disastrous, inglorious, and grotesque war. Is their defeat an atonement? Such would be the conclusion if only a sparkle of the old faith could be spared. Yet the anti-heroic, faithless, disillusioned reality prevails.

### Conclusion

Passing to the conclusion, it is crucial to inquire what kind of relation exists between the cultural syndrome of “visionary blindness” and the Portuguese trauma of colonial war. An element of ideological manipulation certainly exists in all armed conflicts; young men always march to their encounter with fate on the battlefields intoxicated with a manipulative vision or another. The Portuguese illusion of the predestined mission of the nation, the pretension to redeem the world and to lead it toward a millenarian happiness could certainly captivate many minds with its sublime beauty. Yet most probably, the participation in those sublime illusions was the appanage of a narrow elite, as the figure of Count d’Avince in *Lugar de massacre* suggests. Even at its origin, Sebastianism could be seen as a semi-popular movement at best. The young men recruited in the Alentejo or Ribatejo countryside knew very little about the intellectual constructs accumulated over the centuries, even if they were transmitted and revived by Salazarian propaganda.

The presentation of Portuguese soldiers or even officers as convinced Sebastianists is certainly a rhetorical figure. Yet the hyperbole relies on an existing, however residual, layer of the collective imagination that played a role as a mediator of traumatic experiences lived by the generation of colonial war. The factor of holy, redemptive madness, clearly identified and

named already by the generation of António Sérgio, yet overtly exploited by the circle of Teixeira de Pascoaes, created a background screen on which the experience of colonial war was projected. It contributed to the creation of a literature that speaks long about the inner reality of the Portuguese, their oneiric world rooted in past legacies, while it obliterates almost completely the adversary, the causes of the conflict, the debate on the other side's reasons, and possible outcomes for the future. The "visionary blindness" prevented the Portuguese from actually seeing Africa and its inhabitants, even as colonial subjects. Nonetheless, the hardships of the conflict and the final defeat contributed to pierce the imagery bubble in which Portuguese culture lived not only throughout the Salazarian era but also well into the 1980s and early 1990s. The internalization of the trauma, the projection of the events on the screen of a mental hospital (as it happened, the major writer of the colonial war, Lobo Antunes, was a fully-trained psychiatrist, and the major public intellectual, Eduardo Lourenço, promoted the idea of a nation-wide psychoanalytic session) seem to have led to a profound re-evaluation of the Portuguese self-definition. The utter outcome of war is the healing of wounds left by the conflict in the collective awareness. The colonial war literature engaging in the deconstruction of the early-modern premises of collective self-awareness marks the stage of the cultural history in which the Portuguese finally closed, with a rather florid coda, the colonial chapter in their history.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

ALEGRE, Manuel (1989). *Jornada de África. Romance de amor e morte do Alferes Sebastião*. Lisboa: Dom Quixote-Círculo de Leitores.

ALEGRE, Manuel (1967). *O canto e as armas*. Lisboa: Nova Realidade.

ANTUNES, António Lobo (1988a). *As naus*. Lisboa: Publicações D. Quixote.

ANTUNES, António Lobo (1988b). *Conhecimento do inferno*. Lisboa: Publicações D. Quixote.

FARIA, Almeida (1965). *A Paixão*. Lisboa: Portugália.

FARIA, Almeida (1980). *Lusitânia*. Lisboa: Edições 70.

FARIA, Almeida (1988). *O conquistador*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote.

FARIA, Almeida (1983). *Cavaleiro andante*. Lisboa: IN-CM.

GARCIA, José Martins (1975). *Lugar de massacre*. Lisboa: Afrodite.

LEPECKI, Maria Lúcia (1988). *Lusitânia, paixão e morte*. In *Sobreimpressões. Estudos de literatura portuguesa e africana* (pp. 21-33). Lisboa: Caminho.

LOURENÇO, Eduardo (1978). *O labirinto da saudade, Psicanálise mítica do destino português*. Lisboa: Publicações D. Quixote.

LOURENÇO, Eduardo (1999). *Portugal como destino*. Lisboa: Gradiva.

MELO, João de (1984). *Autópsia de um mar de ruínas*. Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim.

RIBEIRO, Margarida Calafate (2004). *Uma história de regressos. Império, guerra colonial e pós-colonialismo*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento.

RODRIGUES, Urbano Tavares (1996). *Os tempos e os lugares na obra de Manuel Alegre*. Lisboa: Edições Universitárias Lusófonas.

SANTOS, Boaventura de Sousa (1990). *Estado e sociedade em Portugal (1974-1988)*. Porto: Afrontamento.

VECCHI, Roberto (2010). *Excepção atlântica: pensar a literatura da guerra colonial*. Porto: Afrontamento.