

THE WIND OF CHANGE IN *NÓS MATÁMOS O CÃO-TINHOSO*

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This article centres on the most iconic collection of short stories published in Mozambique prior to independence, namely *Nós Matámos o Cão-Tinhoso*. Its publication in 1964 in the then Lourenço Marques constitutes a significant landmark insofar as it crystallizes on a fictional level the need for a collective change of mood. The year of its publication coincides with two other significant events: as is well known, the start of the armed struggle (in September) and as is perhaps less well known, the publication in book-form of José Craveirinha's overtly political collection of poetry, *Chigubo*, in Lisbon, (the manuscript version of which, *Manifesto*, had won the Casa dos Estudantes do Império prize two years previously in 1962). *Chigubo* was seized by the Portuguese censors on publication.

Given that *Nós matámos o Cão-Tinhoso* is dedicated to Craveirinha,¹ and that both writers would soon after be imprisoned for their Frelimo support and activities, the possibility of reading *Nós Matámos o Cão-Tinhoso* as an in-depth reflection on the unavoidability of armed conflict logically presents itself. This hypothesis makes all the more sense if we bear in mind the political context immediately preceding its composition and publication, both within Mozambique and in the African continent at large. That Honwana was *au fait* with such a fraught context is undeniable, for he was both a journalist and a member of the youth section of the Centro Associativo dos Negros de Moçambique (founded by Eduardo Mondlane in 1949) (Laban 660).

By the early 60s, the decolonization process in Africa was already well under way. Most importantly for our purposes, given the geographical proximity of South Africa to Mozambique, is Macmillan's watershed speech in Cape Town, in

1960, which charts the changing mood of London towards African claims to autonomy:

Ever since the break up of the Roman Empire, one of the constant facts of political life in Europe has been the emergence of independent nations. Today the same thing is happening in Africa, and the most striking of all the impressions I have formed since I have left London a month ago is the strength of this national consciousness. In different places, it takes different forms, but it is happening everywhere. *The wind of change is blowing through this continent and, whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact and our national policies must take account of it* (emphasis added) (Horne 193-98).

The wind of change was indeed sweeping through the continent. French decolonization, begun in the second half of the 1950s with the independence of Morocco and Tunisia, would culminate in 1962 with the independence of Algeria after a bloody war. Writing from Algeria during those turbulent years, Frantz Fanon's opening chapter in *The Wretched of the Earth*, (published in French in 1961 and translated into English in 1963) goes much further than Macmillan's speech and advocates the use of violence: "Violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (Fanon 74). His concluding remarks highlight the need for Africa to dissociate itself from Europe: "Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe" (Fanon 251).

By the early sixties, in a climate where the harmonious resolution of conflict was proving to be singularly difficult across the African continent, to state that the wind of change was blowing was surely an understatement. Even in the Portuguese empire, armed conflict was imminent, with the beginning of the liberation war in 1961 in another Portuguese colony, Angola. In Mozambique itself, a bloody repression had occurred in 1960 in Mueda, paving the way for the creation of Frelimo.

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It is my contention that we cannot fail to take into account this broader political landscape in order to correctly interpret the seven stories under scrutiny. At the same time, in a specifically Portuguese-speaking context, the restrictions on free speech must also be taken into account. Literary censorship was, at least in theory, operational in the “overseas provinces,” although arguably more stringent in the mainland, as Craveirinha was to find out when *Chigubo* came out. Nevertheless, Honwana’s journalistic apprenticeship under the constraints of censorship entailed *per force* the necessity of using double entendre, euphemisms, and coded words as a survival strategy, in order to both disguise and convey deeper meanings. When it comes to his first literary book, this experience results in a very sophisticated collection where structure, narrative technique and imagery masterfully combine in order to achieve a deeper layer of significance than a cursory surface reading might at first suggest.

As an educated black writer, Honwana belonged to a very small elite group, the less than 1% of the black population who could read and write Portuguese and therefore had been granted an *assimilado* status. African by birth but culturally European, Honwana was able to rely on the patronage of several well-placed liberal European-born intellectuals to secure the publication of his collection in Lourenço Marques itself and its almost immediate translation into English, five years later, in 1969.² Bearing in mind his youth, it is hardly surprising that he should primarily rely on European and New World models, but it is my contention that his collection displays, as it progresses, an awareness of the inadequacy of European models. Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry provides a useful analytical tool for reading this collection. According to Bhabha, mimicry leads to mockery and deconstruction of the original premises: “Mimicry represents an *ironic* compromise ... mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (italics in original) (Bhabha 122). Likewise, it will be shown that Honwana often makes use of surface

mimicry, but on closer inspection, it transpires that its underlying tone is frequently ironic in intent.

One of Honwana's key devices is the overall structuring of the work into a meaningful whole. His literary mentor, Craveirinha, had likewise used structure to impart meaning to his collection of poetry. According to Ana Mafalda Leite, in both the manuscript of *Manifesto* and two years later in the first edition of *Chigubo*, where the poems retained their original order "O que será talvez mais significativo ... é a ordem de apresentação dos poemas ... O texto de abertura é o 'Manifesto,' título aliás, do original a concurso: o último poema, de fecho, é 'Hino à minha terra,' e o central, 'Chigubo'" (Leite 26). In *Nós matámos o Cão-Tinhoso*, these places are occupied respectively by the eponymous story (at the outset), "A Velhota" (the central tale) and "Nhinguitimo" (at the close). As I have argued elsewhere,³ a collection of short stories is a medium especially well-suited to repeat and progressively develop themes and motifs over the course of several tales, in a way such that, subliminally, readers' perceptions of a familiar reality are forced to undergo change during the process of reading.

Inextricably linked with structure, another strategy deployed by Honwana to convey his message is that of narrative technique, namely, his choice of a child narrator in five out of the seven stories. Many critics have commented on the child-like naivety of the narrator as an enabling device which exposes, through sheer incomprehension, the ludicrous social and racial inequalities of colonial society. Rather less, however, has thus far been written about the added value derived from featuring the same child narrator, Ginho, a black *assimilado*, in three out of the seven stories. Yet, clearly, the general point about a short story collection enacting plots that repeat and progressively developing key themes is especially pertinent here. For, as the collection progresses, we experience first-hand the growing awareness of Ginho concerning the prevailing double standards of the colonial society into which he was born and his ensuing "coming of age." As such, it can be argued that the reader's awareness matures hand in hand with that of Ginho.⁴ Given

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the success of the formula of presenting the growing intellectual development of a black *assimilado*, it is curious that this protagonist should no longer feature in the closing two stories of the collection, and equally perplexing that critics, thus far, have not scrutinized Honwana's decision, which is unlikely to have been unintentional. Admittedly, the adoption of new narrators in the two last stories may have been deemed necessary to "disorient" censorship, but the later part of this article argues that it may also achieve other purposes.

Alongside sophisticated structuring and complex use of narrative technique, imagery is of course an essential device in literary works and this holds true of Honwana's work too. In recent years, critics have come to an understanding of the ambiguity surrounding the Cão Tinhoso of the title. Afolabi convincingly argues that it is so ambiguous that it can stand for both European colonizer and African colonized. After all, the dog has Aryan blue eyes and is very old. Nevertheless, it can simultaneously stand for the black colonial subject, not least in its resignation, submissiveness and eventual death for completely arbitrary reasons. I would like to further Afolabi's argument by suggesting that the ambiguity surrounding the ethnic identity of the dog perfectly mirrors the in-between position of the *assimilado*, African by birth, but culturally European. This may account for a key description of the dog as neither white nor black: "o Cão-Tinhoso tinha a pele velha, cheia de pelos brancos, cicatrizes e muitas feridas, e em muitos sítios não tinha pelos nenhuns, nem brancos nem pretos."⁵ In what constitutes surely a supreme instance of ironic surface mimicry, the dog is characterized by a skin disease.⁶

But in another deeply ironic twist, we should note that the dog's apparent submission is radically called into question in one extraordinary moment just before he is shot down. Just as Ginho is finally about to, literally, bite the bullet and kill mangy-dog as requested by Quim, the leader of the gang, he visualises the dog jumping at him: "*A tensão iria aumentar até o cão saltar e perfurar a bala*" (38).⁷ This statement constitutes a reversal of logic, so that readers are suddenly shaken out of complacency. Dogs do not jump to make holes

in bullets. But, by writing in this extraordinary image, Honwana is essentially drawing our attention to the possibility of a complete reversal in the colonial situation, whereby the underdog would be strong enough to launch a counter-attack. Although mangy-dog is then violently shot to death, it is pertinent to note that Ginho does not in fact partake in the shots that kill him, since he and Isaura hold on tight to each other for comfort. At this point, therefore, Ginho becomes a dissident within the group, signalling a shift, albeit it a temporary one, of allegiances.

Nonetheless, the closing section of the eponymous story reinstates the status quo, perhaps predictably, as Quim (the white leader of the gang) and Ginho fall back into previous patterns of complicity. Ginho agrees to lend Quim his maths answers while, in return, Quim volunteers to do the drawing for him. The apparent return to the status quo would be warranted by the logic of censorship, especially given the prominent place occupied by this story as the inaugural one. As the collection progresses, however, it will become clear that, once the balance of power has been upset, a return to the previous order becomes increasingly difficult to live with or indeed justify. In the meantime, it can be argued that, insofar as maths is the more “logical” of the two subjects, Honwana is already obliquely hinting at Ginho’s rational ability. Yet, at home he is the proud owner of drawing materials, as we subsequently discover in the next story, “Inventário,” suggesting a definite aptitude for “desenho” too. With the benefit of hindsight, therefore, reading between the lines, it seems that Ginho does not in fact need any input from his white “friend,” given his expertise in both intellectual and creative fields.

Honwana’s uncanny ability to convey vital information through apparently throw-away remarks is masterfully showcased in “Inventário de movéis e jacentes,” in order to deconstruct from within the legitimacy of the colonial system. At first sight, the disparate elements in this story may seem to be nothing more than the kind of random list that a bored young boy might make in his spare time. But when the bigger picture is taken into account, the seemingly

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innocuous list becomes in fact deeply disturbing in its implications. The story requires the reader's active involvement in order to decode these implications and the imagery used. For instance, it is only retrospectively that the reader is able to ascertain that the first person narrator in this story is Ginho once more. In order to do so, readers require the information contained in the later "Papá, Cobra e Eu," where the names of the narrator's siblings confirm retrospectively Ginho as the protagonist of "Inventário" too. In other words, the reader will need to be a skilled analyst in order for the full picture to emerge.

He or she will also need to be a skilled mathematician to put two and two together, since on the surface of it, Ginho is merely describing his family's belongings, without "doing the sums." By the third paragraph, if we read in-between lines, we can deduce that there are 6 children and two adults. But, as there are only four beds, each child has to share a bed with another sibling. The cramped conditions are compounded by the fact that there are not enough chairs for all eight members of the family to gather together around the table at meal times, a loaded metaphor. In fact the seven chairs are mismatched, an image suggesting that this group of individuals does not have the basic conditions to function as a whole. However, it is not until the last but one paragraph that we discover that in fact the family consists of ten members, since it turns out that in the main bedroom there is an additional cot shared by two babies. This proliferation could, indirectly, point to the potential vitality and growing numbers of Mozambican would-be citizens. At this point in time, the babies do not technically need a seat at the table, but the logical implication is that when they grow up they will.

The very basic living conditions which constitute the lot of this family are at odds with the number of books and magazines available in the house, which suggest a high educational level.⁸ What is implicitly thrown into relief is that, while this family of *assimilados* has an educational level which compares favourably to that of those from a European background, their standards of living remain worlds apart. Equally disturbing is the matter-of-fact way in which we are

told that the father is recovering from an unspecified illness and, more starkly, that he has spent a spell in prison. We never find out why, and it is likely that Ginho does not know either. The time in prison evokes the darker side of political censorship, and may account for the lack of interaction between family members, as if the regime had curtailed their ability to communicate with each other. The lack of interaction is graphically brought out by the use of the self-contained paragraphs, each separated by one blank line. From Ginho's perspective, given the paucity of resources and the inability to communicate or indeed to break out of the vicious circle, inaction (i.e. passively staying in bed) seems the best option.⁹

If the experiences and expectations of this *assimilado* family are described as normal, yet implicitly deviate from the white norm, then the question of exploitation becomes a key issue, and the story that follows, "Dina," addresses this issue. In a climate of escalating violence, it is crucial to note, however, that the violence depicted consists entirely of two instances of abuse of power by a white man in quick succession.¹⁰ The first instance is the rape of Maria by the overseer, as her father, Madala, watches on powerless. On a metaphorical level, it can be read as the appropriation of African soil by the unchecked greed of colonial powers. This sexual abuse, however, is not avenged by Madala, who is too weak and submissive to lead an uprising against the white man. But in this instance, Madala's compliance with the status quo, unlike Ginho's in the first story, is shown to be counter-intuitive, given the size of the offence and the sheer numbers of strong workers willing to challenge the lone overseer. Thus the surface message of this story is bleak. By implicitly condoning the capataz's actions, Madala and his men have capitulated: "o silêncio era de derrota" (76). They have, in effect, acquiesced to further violence to be perpetrated against their own kind by the white man. Indeed, when one of the young workers signals his displeasure at Madala's apparent lack of pride by spitting at him, his isolated rebellion is easily quashed by the overseer, who smashes a bottle on his head, and then literally tramples all over him, in a

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second display of gratuitous violence. It is clear that, in the absence of leadership from the older generation, lone action against the status quo may be principled but is not effective.

Yet, while on the surface the status quo is seemingly reinstated, since the story ends with Madala and the other workers resuming their backbreaking work on the *machamba*, the closing paragraph tells a very different story on a symbolic level. The fields, like the sea to which they are compared throughout the story, are shown to sway gently in the wind. The metaphor is undoubtedly very loaded: “a superfície do mar verde era percorrida por uma brisa suave. A ligeira ondulação que lhe era imprimida desfazia-se, avançava e voltava a desfazer-se, murmurando o segredo dos búzios” (77). The “brisa suave” may be read as a thinly veiled reference to the “wind of change” starting to sweep the continent, as Macmillan had so eloquently and publicly outlined. Here, it is presented as “suave,” in other words gentle and non-threatening, but by the closing story of the collection, it is going to turn into an almighty storm. In the meantime, the “segredo dos búzios,” bringing to mind the echo of a timeless memory, remains undeciphered. However, the image implies that there is more to be heard than is presently audible. It may also act as a hidden homage to Craveirinha, whose opening poem in *Chigubo*, “Manifesto,” had featured the unforgettably lyrical lines: “E na capulana austral de um céu intangível / Os búzios de gente soprando os velhos sons cabalísticos de Africa.” Such lines encapsulated the pressing need for a re-grounding of African reality.

As we reach the halfway point of the collection, the immediate contiguity of “Dina” and “A Velhota,” the central tale in this work, becomes especially loaded. For whereas “Dina” ended with a nameless young man left for dead on the floor, “A Velhota” starts with another nameless young man, also violently beaten. But significantly, we now enter his mind and, thanks to the use of a first person narrative, we experience the beating from his perspective. Thus on a structural level, it is as if we were in retrospect allowed to go into the mind of the youth of “Dina.” In other words, the subject position is now granted to a black young adult. Despite the

different setting (we are now in an urban context, with the attack taking place in a bar), the violation of human rights is similar. The crucial point however, is the different outcome. For, in this story, the youth is eventually able to voice his pain to someone who will listen, namely his mother.

Initially, when she probes him, he denies having been beaten at all. When she insists “*não queres contar? Não? Não queres?*,” she is met with a laconic “*não serve de nada*” (86). But eventually, once his younger siblings are in bed, he opens up “*sim, eu vou dizer: eles bateram-me ... Sim, isso não é tudo. E até não é nada. Eles fizeram-me pequenino e conseguem que eu me sinta pequenino. Sim, é isso. Isso é que é tudo*” (87). The speaker is aware that physical violence is compounded by the dehumanizing emotional abuse he has undergone. The blanket plural, “*eles,*” suggests the far-reaching power of an oppressive system. His beating is equivalent to the rape of Maria in the previous story. But, whilst in “*Dina,*” Madala was unable to offer protection or support to either his daughter or his fellow-workers, (which effectively meant that there was no redress for the violence they suffered), this central tale ends on a more hopeful note, as mother and son share a long embrace.

Thanks to the comfort derived from being in his mother’s arms (who on a symbolic level may stand for an image of mother Africa), he is at last, in a moment of epiphany, able to see the situation differently: “*Tenho a impressão de que só neste momento é que vi as chamas, embora estivesse há muito tempo a olhar para elas. O seu calor era bom e envolvia-nos, mas para isso elas torciam-se num bailado estranhamente rubro*” (87). Similarly to what occurred in the closing lines of the previous story, Honwana is here using metaphor to convey the need for change. The shift from the passive stance of “*olhar*” to the active one of “*ver*” has far-reaching consequences. What the anonymous youngster is now able to truly see, the “*bailado estranhamente rubro,*” undoubtedly prefigures bloodshed. But the closing lines of “*A Velhota*” are all the more loaded if we bear in mind the title of Craveirinha’s 1964 collection *Chigubo*. According to Ana Mafalda Leite, “*chigubo*” means both a meeting

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(reunião) and a traditional war dance (dança guerreira) (Leite 39). Significantly, “Xigubo” was precisely the central poem in the eponymous collection.¹¹ Not only is thus Honwana indirectly mirroring a device deployed by his literary mentor, he is delineating a point of no-return in terms of African consciousness. The ability to see the flames in a new potentially redemptive light furthermore echoes Craveirinha’s message in the celebrated poem “Grito Negro”: “Eu sou carvão! / Tenho que arder / E queimar tudo com o fogo da minha combustão” (Craveirinha 13-14).

As the central story of the collection, “A Velhota” marks a turning-point, signalling a momentous change of perspective. The first three stories had outlined the day-to-day abuse meted out to both assimilated and non-assimilated black workers, and simultaneously, how their compliance with the system had broken their spirit. Cão-tinhoso, Ginho and Madala were all presented as broken figures, unable to shake off the yoke of oppression. Nonetheless, reading in-between the lines, the skillful use of imagery already pointed to the possibility of eventual insurrection. In the last three stories of the collection, the possibility of insurrection now becomes voiced much more openly. Indeed, all three tales challenge the reader with the question: what if compliance with the inequalities enshrined by the colonial system was no longer the norm?

It is thus fitting that, after “A Velhota,” the next story returns to Ginho as first-person narrator, but a much more mature and therefore rebellious Ginho. This tale explicitly tackles, for the first time, the condition of “double consciousness” of the *assimilado*, who virtually from birth, straddles two cultures. Ginho’s mother speaks both Ronga and Portuguese. Tellingly, by the end of the story, Ginho’s father eschews his daily reading of the Portuguese Bible, preferring to say aloud prayers in Ronga. The indigenous language, Ronga, therefore becomes endowed with positive cleansing value as it brings to the fore an alternative cultural dimension (as well as a revaluing of the African tradition of orality).

But other reversals also take place. Unlike the previous plot in the eponymous “Nós matámos,” in this tale, the black man’s dog, Totó, is much stronger than the white man’s dog, Lobo. In a loaded image, we are told that “apesar de pequeno, o Tótó tinha um pelo grande e branco” (98). By contrast, Sr Castro’s weak dog is eventually killed by a snake, significantly described as “era uma mamba de cor muito escura” (99). One cannot help thinking that Honwana relished the inversion of the stereotypical connotations of black and white. On a more serious note, the snake is an important animal in African culture.¹² In the earlier “Dina,” it presented a danger to workers in the context of the forced labour in the *machambas*. But from his own backyard, Ginho is now shown to be able to orchestrate the death of Sr Castro’s dog by enlisting the lethal power of the significantly black African snake. On a symbolic level, this death suggests the demise of white colonial power, as the dog is expelled from the black man’s hen-coop.

But perhaps the most radical moment in the story is the one which brings father and son together in renewed dialogue. As Mark Sabine has argued, this is the first time such dialogue occurs in the collection. Indeed, up to then, the inability of different generations to communicate with each other had been the norm, most notably in “Dina.” Now, the father is able to recognize that Mozambique’s black population is stuck between a rock and a hard place, namely, “quando um cavalo endoidece dá-se-lhe um tiro e tudo acaba, mas aos cavalos mansos mata-se todos os dias” (106) (labels which can retrospectively be applied to describe Madala and the youth respectively). Although it is difficult to verbalize a dehumanizing experience “a gente cresce com muita coisa cá dentro mas depois é difícil gritar, tu sabes...” (106), the father can ultimately articulate his predicament and envisage alternative scenarios, unlike the protagonists of the first three stories: “Sim, já era tempo de sermos doidos” (105). Given that this tale occupies a symmetrical position to “Dina,” it signals a dramatic evolution, insofar as it acknowledges that “madness” (i.e., insurrection) is a desperate measure, but may be preferable to enduring the status

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quo for much longer. Such a conclusion is going to be acted upon in the closing tale, the aptly named “Nhinguitimo.”

Before insurrection explodes, however, the story that follows, “As Mãos dos Pretos,” once more dwells on a much younger and bemused child narrator, whose inability to understand the damaging implications of the racist explanations proffered to him by a selection of adults in positions of authority is emblematic. Indeed, while the fact that he collects mutually contradictory explanations implicitly points to their folkloric nature and thus invalidates them as so-called scientific explanations, he cannot disprove them by himself. His mother, a lone voice amidst a chorus of racist remarks, however, manages to dispel the prevailing racist ideology by pointing to the notion of equality amongst men.¹³ The notion of God-willed equality challenges the legitimacy of the inequalities blatantly obvious in the prevailing colonial system, as portrayed in the core stories “Dina,” “A Velhota,” and “Papá, Cobra e Eu,” where different generations of black men had had their basic human rights systematically violated whereas the white men were shown to relentlessly abuse their position of power. Nonetheless, from the central tale onwards, alternative scenarios were being simultaneously rehearsed from the heart of the home and presented as increasingly legitimate. But what “As Mãos dos Pretos” does is, for the first time in this collection, *explicitly* posit the fundamental equality of all men, irrespective of race.¹⁴ As such, it paves the way for the grand finale, “Nhinguitimo,” where, in a context of growing dissidence, the colonial situation is shown to have reached an explosive public breaking point.

Unlike previous tales, in “Nhinguitimo” the narrative alternates between an omniscient and a first person perspective, in other words, between different subject positions. At the outset, as was the case with the mangy-dog in the opening tale, Honwana teases his readers with the ambiguous meaning of the “rolas,” preying on fertile land. They are described as disciplined and capable of team effort. Whereas the dog was a lone figure, the “rolas” are shown to operate as a group; moreover their activities are described as

a military operation as they perform a “período de reconhecimento no futuro campo de operações” (117). Yet, we are then unexpectedly told that “com o seu colarinho negro, a rola é uma das aves mais antipáticas da criação” (118). But however “antipáticas” they may seem (and to whom exactly, one might ask?), their perspective cannot be dismissed, all the more so, because: “Cantando, a rola não lamenta, como fazem muitos outros pássaros, acusa” (119).

When the wind starts to blow, it only prefigures the beginning of change, as it is shown to pave the way for something much more dramatic, a cleansing storm: “O nhinguitimo irrompe pelo vale” (119). By choosing to foreground the storm in his title, Honwana is signalling that he is moving beyond the European perspective which advocated winds of change, thereby implying that violence is the logical consequence of decades of inequality. It is the first time that a Ronga word features in a story title, an indirect way for Honwana of enshrining the validity of a black perspective, not only in cultural terms, but ultimately in political terms too. In so doing, the closing story completes the cycle initiated in the eponymous story, by returning to the theme of the use of conventional arms. Only this time, in a climate of escalating conflict, the shots are fired at human beings.

After this loaded description of the impending storm, the story changes tack, and moves into a first person perspective. Out of the six sections, three are narrated from the perspective of a nameless male observer. This narrator, whiling away time in a bar, idly observes a black worker, Vírgula Oito. As he witnesses a bid by Vírgula Oito’s greedy boss Rodrigues to “legally” appropriate his employee’s land, with the stamp of approval of the Sr Administrador, the narrator remains supposedly an impartial observer. Nevertheless, it is very telling that he should be disturbed by “o tom bíblico da última frase que ouvira do Vírgula Oito,” as if it presented a threat to him or society at large:

Quando chegar o “nhinguitimo” tudo vai mudar. As machambas grandes que eles fazem vão ficar destruídas pela fúria do vento. As nossas machambas continuarão a amarelecer

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calmamente porque as grandes árvores do outro lado do rio protegem-nas dos ventos (123).

Vírgula Oito's speech does indeed prophesize a sweeping wind of change, reminiscent of Macmillan's speech. Significantly, it is one which will wipe out white-owned fields, while leaving black-owned ones untouched. Yet, unsurprisingly given a censorship context, his prophesy fails to materialize within the confines of the fictional tale. Instead, by the end of the story, Vírgula Oito's land has been seized. Not before, however, readers have heard him state his firm conviction that there is no fair reason for such an annexation to take place: "Eu não mato nem roubo; como o que ganho no trabalho; gasto o dinheiro com a minha família; pago o imposto..." (126).

In the light of the flagrant injustice perpetrated, while his friends advocate resignation, Vírgulo Oito cannot reconcile himself to the loss of a productive strip of land that had been in his family for generations. In a moment of madness, he turns against his black fellow workers to defend his property. This is the first time in the collection that shots against humans have been fired. Admittedly they pitch black against black, since in a censorship context it would have been all-but-impossible to depict a shot fired against a white man.¹⁵ Pacific resolution of rival claims to the land is thus shown to be utterly impossible, though it is made clear that Vírgula Oito undoubtedly has the historical and moral right to it.

Significantly, the parting section goes back to the first person narrator, who had remained uninvolved while conflict escalated. He is clearly shaken by events. In a momentary outburst, the futility of the life he leads dawns on him: "Caramba, como é que é possível haver tipos como eu? Enquanto eu matava rolas e jogava ao sete-e-meio aconteciam uma data de coisas e eu nem me impressionava! Nada, ficava na mesma, fazia que não era comigo..." (138). After such an outburst, we might reasonably expect that he might change his ways. But the opposite turns out to be the case, since the only action he chooses is to carry on in the same vein: he goes off once more with a presumably black prostitute, Marta, no doubt to try and brush aside the latest unpleasant

events in the kind of private pleasure which effectively serve to enshrine unequal power relations, a behaviour strongly reminiscent of that of the white overseer.

It is my contention that one of the reasons that Honwana chooses a different young narrator is that it enables him to put forward a narrator whose perspective blatantly coincides with the dominant white perspective. In fact, there are several clues that the narrator may be white (or failing that, an *assimilado* whose standard of living and perspective has become indistinguishable from that of a white teenager, which would be equally damning). The first one is his economic status. We are told he has money for card games, cigarettes and prostitutes, in other words, money to squander on luxury “commodities.” By contrast, previous *assimilado* families had barely enough money for necessities such as “arroz com caril de amendoim.” The narrator in “Nhinguitimo” is also able to indulge in more than one shower a day at will.¹⁶ Last but not least, his liberal overuse of swear words, characteristic of those in positions of power thus far, i.e. the whites, also clearly identifies him with a *machista*, colonial hypermasculinity.

As such, his closing remark “Poça, aquilo tinha que mudar!...” (138) is imbued with irony. Since his disgust amounts to little more than lip-service, he is unlikely to change. Nevertheless, read in the context of the collection as a whole, this closing line is of utmost importance, signalling the unsustainability of the whole explosive colonial situation and arguably, therefore, advocating armed struggle as the only possible way forward. In that context, the dual name of Vírgula Oito becomes endowed with significance. As some critics have pointed out, the Portuguese name signifies the size of a gun barrel, prefiguring his violent revolt. Nevertheless, I would contend that his indigenous name, Massinga, is equally loaded. Indeed, it takes up a Mozambican name-place, a town situated halfway between the two main cities, Maputo and Beira. Moreover, this is one of the many locations evoked by Craveirinha in the closing poem of *Chigubo*, “Hino à minha Terra.” The line in question reads “a nostalgia sinto ... das árvores de Namacurra, Muxilipo,

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Massinga,” implying the need to return to a more African-centred mapping of reality. Tellingly too, “Hino à minha Terra” opened with the lines “Amanhece / sobre as cidades do futuro” (Craveirinha 21-23). Virgula Oito, alias Massinga, thus come to embody the future, thereby representing the only way forward.

To conclude, if this collection has a parting message, it is surely that only a concerted, collective effort is likely to overcome the prevailing colonial regime. At a time when the wind of change was sweeping through the African continent, Honwana foresaw that, in the Portuguese context, the European perspective which diplomatically advocated winds of change simply could not offer an adequate response. Therefore, he felt compelled to fictionally posit that a cleansing storm would be inevitable, advocating the necessity of the armed struggle. Despite a loaded censorship context, through a brilliant combination of structure, narrative technique and imagery, into which he repeatedly wove the kind of mimicry that was never far from mockery, he was able to undermine colonial ideology at its very roots. In so doing, he challenged the many blindspots of his readership, drawn from both the European elite and his own fellow *assimilados*, in what undoubtedly remains to this day an unrivalled masterpiece of Mozambican literature.

Notes:

1. “Ao José Craveirinha, expressão verdadeira da poesia de Moçambique.” This epigraph features in the first edition, but not in subsequent ones.

2. He acknowledged precisely this fact on the back cover of the first edition “Eugénio Lisboa, Rui Knopfli e José Craveirinha entusiasmarame, publicando algumas das minhas histórias em jornais. Há pouco tempo o Pancho, que tornou possível o aparecimento deste livro, falou-me pela primeira vez em editar alguns contos em livro.” When it came to the dedication only Craveirinha and Dori (presumably Dorothy Guedes, who subsequently translated his work) are mentioned.

3. In a recent article on Clarice Lispector’s *Laços de Família*, in *Closer to the Wild Heart* (Oxford, Legenda, 2002).

4. Especially since the intervening stories, “Dina” and “A Velhota,” neither of which features a child narrator, reveal physical abuse and crushing economic exploitation.

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5. Luís Bernardo Honwana, *Nós Matámos o Cão-Tinhoso* (São Paulo: Editora Atica, 1980) 12. All subsequent quotations will be to this edition, unless we are discussing differences between the first edition and subsequent ones.

6. We cannot fail to note, however, that the more powerful European dogs are simultaneously mocked by Honwana when he lists their names, which range from the hyperbolic masculinity of Leão and Lobo, to anglicized names such as Mike and Simbi, culminating in effeminate resonances of “a Mimosa e o Lulu” (10).

7. In the first edition, these lines feature in bold, in subsequent editions they are italicized.

8. Yet, there is not sufficient furniture for the books to be on display, just as there were insufficient beds and chairs. Many are boxed, suggesting that knowledge remains, for the time being, on hold.

9. The title itself shows how humans have become akin to motionless “jacentes” as the furniture takes precedence over them. The word “jacentes” evokes the set epitaph phrase, “aqui jaz” conjuring up the image of motionless bodies as if wounded or even dead.

10. The fact that the Capataz’s power is portrayed as absolute is underscored by the fact that in the first edition, his job title was capitalized, although in subsequent editions the capitals were dropped.

11. Craveirinha 33-35. Please note that the second edition spells the title differently.

12. The snake was regarded by African people as immortal because it sheds its skin and still continues to live. Significantly, it is the first time that a Ronga word is used to name an animal “nhoka, gritou Sartina” (102).

13. Neither does he understand the tears shed by his mother. But they act as a cathartic device, enacting a necessary mourning.

14. Ironically, it does so from the perspective of a woman, someone normally considered to be devoid of authority, i.e., a second class citizen.

15. Similarly, in the earlier “Dina,” the spitting was directed at Madala, not at the overseer.

16. “outro banho de chuveiro” (123).

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