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## Written Exercises: Ancestral Magic and Emergent Intellectuals in Mia Couto, Lhoussain Azergui and Dorota Masłowska

### Abstract

The article consists in a comparative reading of three novels: *Um rio chamado tempo* by Mia Couto, *Le pain des corbeaux* by Lhoussain Azergui and *Paw królowej* by Dorota Masłowska. In spite of the difference of the historical circumstances of Mozambique, Morocco and Poland, these three books meet at an intersecting point: the emergence of an intelligentsia that uses literacy and writing as an instrument to deconstruct the post-colonial concept of nation and to operate a trans-colonial renegotiation of identity. By the notion of trans-colonial, I understand the opposition against new kinds of symbolic violence that emerged after the end of the colonial period; here this new form of oppression is related to the concept of national unity – an artificial construct that leaves no place for a dualism or pluralism of cultural reality (two shores of the Zambezi river, Arab and Berber dualism in Morocco, "small homelands" in Poland).

The young heroes of the novels grasp the pen in order to break through the falseness or the taboos created by the fathers, establishing, at the same time, the relation of solidarity with the world of the grandfathers. The act of writing becomes an actualization of the ancestral universe of magic. The settlement of accounts with

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Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

Editor-in-chief: Jolanta Sujecka

Conception and academic editing of this issue: Jolanta Sujecka

the parental generation concerns the vision of nation built upon the resistance against the colonizer (it also refers to the Polish cultural formation, based on the tradition of uprisings and resistance against the Russians).

**Keywords:** Mia Couto, Lhoussain Azergui, Dorota Masłowska, post-colonialism, national unity, trans-colonialism, identity.

The grind-stone of history never stops. For major expanses of our planet, subdued formerly to colonial powers, physical and symbolic oppression did not stop with decolonization. The post-colonial era of autonomous yet imperfect governments often wrought havoc where the colonial systems had worked in vain to establish their illusory order. After several decades of independence, the state of Africa is still far from satisfactory. Especially the problem of national unity, a notion essentially alien to precolonial Africa, requires flexible and creative solutions, adapted to the multiplicity of local histories. But it is not only on the African problems that I want to reflect. Certain aspects of the post-colonial frame of mind are visible in countries like Poland, unwilling to recognize any share in the fate of the colonized or to subscribe to any form of post-colonial discourse.<sup>1</sup> Yet the growing cohesion of the contemporary world, beyond disparity of origins and local histories, brings us all to surprisingly similar symbolical configurations. Cultures that have followed apparently very dissimilar historical roads meet at a point of intersection where we might never have expected to find ourselves.

The emergence of the young intellectual as a figure incarnating a new hope against the decadence of the local elites and insufficiency of the political systems may be seen as such a common denominator at the crossroads of dissimilar cultures and historical destinies. This surprising convergence may be exemplified by three novels published over the last decade or so: *Um rio chamado tempo, uma casa chamada terra* by Mia Couto (2002), *Le pain des corbeaux* by Lhoussain Azergui (2012) and *Paw królowej* by Dorota Masłowska (2005). What is even more surprising, the emergent intellectuals do not appear any longer as yet another instance of modernization; they build up an essential solidarity with the ancestral forms of culture, representing justice, community, and the voice of the earth, to

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<sup>1</sup> The post-colonial theory was accepted very late in Poland; the discussion on its application to the East-European cases began as late as the first decade of the twenty-first century, partially provoked by the publication of the Polish translation of *Imperial Knowledge* by Ewa Thompson (2000). As the generally accepted conclusion of this debate, the concept of “post-dependent” discourse, theory or studies (“postzależność”) has been adopted instead of “post-colonial.”

which – crucially – a written, not oral expression must be given. They play a double game of resistance, against the modern instances of nation and nationalism, falsified in the post-colonial histories of many countries, and against equally falsified “traditions” that have been used and abused in what appears as the post-colonial falsification of identities.

These three novels, as I claim, reflect the apex of the post-colonial crisis, translating it into the terms borrowed from the ancestral stocks of culture. In all of them, the post-colonial freedom as well as the socio-economic transformations are presented as deficient. What becomes striking since the first glance at these texts is the troublesome aspect of independence, seen as a state of uncertain balance and a crisis. Such is the freedom of the political prisoner released by his tormentors in the wilderness of the Berber mountains only to discover that his people do not want him back. Such is the everyday existence of a young female writer surrounded by a kind of phantasmal war: “chciałaby zapomnieć, w jakim kraju żyje straszonym o dziwnej nazwie Polska, w którym jakby jeszcze trwała jakaś spoza numeracji wojna”<sup>2</sup> (Masłowska, 2005, p. 31). Such is the African world that had never been a good place to live, but has also ceased to be a good place to die. Yet the value of literacy and literary creation breaks the silence of *mangondzwane* (the hamerkop), the African bird that is supposed to remain quiet in times of the generalized crisis (cf. Couto, 2002, p. 27).

*Um rio chamado tempo...* deals with the problem of nation building in Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony that gained independence in 1975. The main slogan of the post-colonial nationalism, “o povo unido do Rovuma ao Maputo,”<sup>3</sup> is clearly a calque of the former banner of the Portuguese empire: “Portugal do Minho ao Timor”<sup>4</sup>; the post-colonial falsification follows closely the colonial one. The main problem diagnosed by Couto is thus the imperfect unification of diverse ethnic elements. Mozambique is symbolized by a common house, called the Nyumba-Kaya in order to render its composite nature: *nyumba* is the word for “house” in the northern tongues, while *kaya* is the correspondent term in the south (Couto, 2002, p. 28). Azergui’s novel essentially deals with quite a similar problem of

<sup>2</sup> “She would like to forget that she lives in a horrible country by the strange name of Poland, where a war not included in the numbering scheme seems to go on, still” (all unmarked translations mine – E.L.).

<sup>3</sup> “United people from Rovama to Maputo”; the evocation of the rivers situated on the northern and southern ends of the country covers up the importance of the Zambezi valley that coincides with the crucial ethnic division into culturally quite dissimilar zones.

<sup>4</sup> “Portugal from Minho to Timor” reflects the dogma defended by the Salazarist regime, claiming that the ultramarine territories of the colonial empire, such as Timor situated at the eastern end of the Lesser Sunda Islands, are as unalienable parts of the Portuguese homeland as its European province Minho.

falsified unity that covers up the Arab-Berber dualism of Morocco. *Le pain des corbeaux* is a slightly modified French version of *Aghrum n ihaqqaren*, a novel originally written in Amazigh (Azergui, 2006) by an activist fighting for Berber cultural emancipation and linguistic revitalization. The post-colonial concept of nation in Morocco requires thus yet another kind of renegotiation: creating space for the development of an autochthonous group, marginalized already in precolonial times by the dominating Arab culture. Finally, the novel by Dorota Masłowska, written in a suggestive hip-hop rhythm, often strong of flavor at the level of expression, may be read as a popular voice rising against the dominating social group, the so-called ethos intelligentsia (“inteligencja etosowa”), which pretends to guide the nation through the torment of its historical destiny, incarnating resistance against a mythologized enemy: the Russians. What appears as the stake of this renegotiation is the birth of a new, healthier configuration of the nation, beyond the symbolic dominance of the intelligentsia, which had failed to “marry” the other social strata, as epitomized already in *Wesele* (*The Wedding*) by Stanisław Wyspiański (1901).

In each of these novels, the main personage may be identified as an emergent intellectual, who is, according to Edward Said’s definition, an individualized figure fostering cultural change through his or her “mastery of language” (Said, 1994), and specifically, the mastery of writing. The question of literacy is crucial in all the cases we analyze; access to the written culture, denied to certain groups, is the central demand. Earlier post-colonial reflection on rebuilding cultural identities has shown that the living voice, unsupported by writing, is doomed to be silenced either by the instances of modernization or by the traditional, precolonial figures of dominance. To give just one example, in *Moha le fou, Moha le sage*, Tahar ben Jelloun has shown how the essentially oral figure of the Maghrebian *rawi*, epitomizing the living voice of the earth and alien to both spheres of writing, the Arabic and the French one, is silenced twice: by the local patriarch and by the psychiatrist applying a treatment deriving from the modern concept of the clinic (Ben Jelloun, 1978). No wonder that the emergence of the written culture is presented by Azergui as a must: “J’entends vos voix. Elles sont similaires au bruit provoqué par le chaos, au déchirement de la vie, à une plaie ouverte. Moi, je désire donner vie à votre langue agonisante et décrire votre réalité, rien qu’avec des mots, avec de l’écriture”<sup>5</sup> (Azergui, 2012, p. 83).

The same attitude towards literacy is accentuated by other figures of the Berber cultural and intellectual revival, promoting the key notions of *asgudi*

<sup>5</sup> “I hear your voices. They are similar to the noise of the chaos, to the ripping of life into shreds, to an open wound. I want to give life to your agonizing language and to describe your reality, with nothing but words, nothing but writing.”

and *taskla* – emergent literary creation conditioned by the crucial transition from oral to written culture. Ayad Alahyane says:

*Asgudi* présente une nouvelle conception de la littérature amazighe qui assoit les fondements de la nouvelle écriture, et favorise l'émergence de la néolittérature au moyen d'un ensemble d'idées, d'opinions, de concepts qui s'articulent en un système idéal au centre duquel loge la nécessité du passage à l'écrit. C'est pour cela, nous pouvons élever *asgudi* au rang d'une théorie. Concept élaboré par l'intelligentsia amazighe, il désigne le processus scriptural déclenché à partir du début des années 70 comme une nouvelle forme d'affirmation identitaire<sup>6</sup> (Alahyane, 2013, p. 46).

El Kathir Aboulkacem-Afulay goes even further, speaking about the necessity of literacy in absolute terms:

Sur le plan de la réflexion, l'idée de l'écriture s'est progressivement imposée, elle est devenue une valeur absolue. Elle constitue l'habit légitime de la renaissance culturelle. Elle institue la visibilité publique d'une identité occultée<sup>7</sup> (Aboulkacem-Afulay, 2013, p. 39).

For Azergui, literary creation is a gesture of resistance against an adversary wishing to conserve the Amazigh culture in its subaltern position: “Ils veulent qu'on végète dans l'oralité et qu'on vive sans livres, sans histoire et sans mémoire”<sup>8</sup> (Azergui, 2012, p. 80). As a typically post-colonial paradox, this form of oppression does not derive from an external but from a domestic source. The ascension of the writing man as a representative of the subaltern culture clashes against the resistance of the local people themselves, as they have integrated the messages causing their stagnation into their own symbolic system. They believe that “tous les poètes sont des sorciers”<sup>9</sup> (Azergui, 2012, p. 105) and that “seule l'écriture écrite avec la main et dans la langue de l'imam est permise”<sup>10</sup> (Azergui, 2012, p. 102). A glimpse into the history of the Amazigh language and identity allows for an understanding of this apparent contradiction between the value of literacy proclaimed by

<sup>6</sup> “*Asgudi* presents a new conception of Amazigh literature that rests upon the foundations of the new writing and fosters the emergence of a neoliterature through assembling ideas, opinions, concepts that articulate themselves in a system of ideas concentrated around the necessity of switching to literacy. For this reason we can call *asgudi* a theory. This concept elaborated by the Amazigh intelligentsia designates the scriptural process put into practice since the 70s as a new form of identity affirmation.”

<sup>7</sup> “On the level of reflection, the idea of writing has gradually asserted itself, it has become an absolute value. It constitutes a legitimate form in which to clothe the cultural renaissance. It institutes public visibility of a silenced identity.”

<sup>8</sup> “They want us to vegetate in orality, and to live without books, history or memory.”

<sup>9</sup> “All the poets are sorcerers.”

<sup>10</sup> “Only the writing written by the hand and in the language of the imam is permitted.”

the Berber activists and the narration of Akli in Azergui's novel: "il m'avait raconté comment ils avaient brûlé sur la place du village tous les livres, les cahiers et les crayons retrouvés dans les maisons des habitants"<sup>11</sup> (Azergui, 2012, p. 118).

It is indeed a paradox that the Berbers acceded to literacy at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Inscriptions in *tifinagh*, an alphabet descending from the Libyco-Berber script, are attested from the third century BC, making it one of the oldest forms of writing in the Mediterranean region. An abundant literature in Amazigh appeared during the Middle Ages. Yet it progressively fell into oblivion over the modern period, circumscribed to the peripheral regions and replaced by Arabic. Both the Amazigh language and script came to be associated with a determined standpoint in Islam, namely the Almohad reform movement. This is why their cultivation in the epoch that followed the decline of the Almohad dynasty at the end of the thirteenth century had been seen as a sign of a separatist tendency, causing unacceptable division inside the Muslim community. Once again, this historical background became vital at the moment of the construction of the post-colonial state. The option that prevailed after the independence of Morocco in 1956 consisted in building a unified, Arabic-speaking nation. The Berber claims for cultural and linguistic autonomy had been repressed. After several decades of activism and persecution, this policy officially came to an end in 2001, with the creation of IRCAM, the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture, and the introduction of Amazigh into schools and universities. The dualism of ethnic and cultural identities, so obvious throughout the Maghrebian history, has finally been recognized, opening space for the autonomous cultural development of the Berbers and the emergence of Berber intellectuals. At the same time, the need of transcribing the post-colonial notion of national unity into a new version admitting such a pluralistic vision has become evident.

The Mozambican case is different and analogous all at once. Apparently, the native African cultures are eminently oral traditions. The gesture of writing appears as the prerogative of the white man not only in the colonial, but also in post-colonial times. This is why it is crucial to give Africa the opportunity of a truly autonomous development. Couto himself, as the author of *Um rio chamado tempo...*, goes beyond the limitations of his own physical condition as a white, blue-eyed and blond-haired writer. Dércio Braúna comments on his "situação particular de literato no interior de seu meio social"<sup>12</sup> (Braúna, 2014, p. 37). In spite of all his effort of solidarity

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<sup>11</sup> "He had recounted to me how they burned in the main square of the village all the books, the notebooks and the pencils found in the houses of the inhabitants."

<sup>12</sup> "A delicate situation as a man of letters inside his social context."

with Africa, he is a descendant of the colonizers, not of the colonized.<sup>13</sup> With *Um rio chamado tempo...*, he places himself in the position of a forerunner, wishing to foster the emergence of a truly African intellectual, such as his personage Marianinho, directly incarnating the spirit of the African dead. The writer is conscious of the fact that his own presence and literary creation is only a makeshift solution, typical of the general rough-and-ready state of the post-colonial affairs. Similarly to the emergent Berber scholars, Mia Couto comments on the absolute necessity of literacy as a means of stepping from circular conceptualization of time into the modern domain of history: “Para a oralidade, só existe o que se traduz em presença. Só é real aquele com quem podemos falar. Os próprios mortos não se convertem em passado, porque eles estão disponíveis a, quando convocados, se tornarem presentes”<sup>14</sup> (Couto, 2009, p. 130). The modern historicity requires writing as a medium of building the past and memory, and, at the same time, of building a future: “tempo por acontecer resulta de equilíbrios entre os vivos e os antepassados”<sup>15</sup> (Couto, 2009, p. 131). Different relations with the dead thus give different scenarios for the future.

Arguably, the Mozambican writing, whether in the Portuguese or in the Bantu languages,<sup>16</sup> has at least a century-long tradition (cf. Mendonça, 1987); the roots of literacy in the Arabic script may reach even further back in time (the latter has often been neglected in Europocentric optics; perhaps new discoveries, beyond ideological manipulation, may throw a new light on the precolonial literacy of the eastern coast of Africa). On the other hand, Couto evokes, in very touching terms, the enthusiasm with which the idea of creating a university in Zambia, launched by the president Kenneth Kaunda in 1966, was accepted among the illiterate peasants (Couto, 2009, pp. 28–29). Nonetheless, this possible or emergent tradition has been overshadowed, also in post-colonial times, by the vision of writing as a “white” activity; literacy has been associated with a single group and thus the access to it as a practice has been symbolically restricted.

The hero of *Um rio chamado tempo...*, Marianinho, is a son of parents involved in the decolonization as well as the first stage of the post-colonial

<sup>13</sup> Couto was born in 1955 in the city of Beja in Mozambique as a son of a Portuguese couple that moved to the colony in the early 1950s.

<sup>14</sup> “For orality, there exists only that what can be translated into a presence. The only real entity is the one with which we can talk. Even the dead are not transformed into the past but may appear, whence called, and become present.”

<sup>15</sup> “The time to come is the result of a balance between the living and the ancestors.”

<sup>16</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ronga, a Bantu language belonging to the Tswa-Ronga family, spoken in southern Mozambique (also called *landim* by the Portuguese), became a written language attested in the emergent journals *O Africano* (1908) and *O Brado Africano* (1918).

transformation, and a grandson of a traditional patriarch, who is currently believed to be neither dead nor alive. This is why the burial ceremony has been suspended. The roof of the Nyumba-Kaya, a house representing the unity of the North and the South, has been removed due to the mourning. Symbolically, this element may represent the opening of the discussion on the national issue, previously closed by the dogma of unity that reveals its falseness through a generalized crisis (the life has “lost its beauty”). The domestic climate is heavy with unspoken truths. The appearance of the young hero, who has just completed his studies in the city, incarnates a new hope, as his purity seems to shine, contrasting with the multiple, dubious and unclean compromises of the previous generation. In a mysterious way, Marianinho plays the role of a medium, receiving strange letters that appear as written by his own hand and at the same time epitomize the voice of the (un)dead grandfather. In this way, the writing becomes a bridge between the past and the present, a way of recuperating the magical contact with the *xicuembo*s (ancestral spirits worshiped by the family). The task of the young hero is to trace a new destiny of the community: “a sua tarefa é repor as vidas, deitar os destinos desta nossa gente”<sup>17</sup> (Couto, 2002, p. 126).

This vital task, a duty towards the community, is nonetheless to be performed in solitude. Writing is essentially an activity of a lonely subject. The crucial aspect, accentuated by Edward Said in his *Representations of the Intellectual*, is the mediation between an individual consciousness and the community: “the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty of representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public”, in order to “represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rag” (Said, 1994, p. 9). Such people and issues are many: starting from the fate of the blind *Miseirinha*, former lover of the patriarch, and finishing with the affair of the sunk ferry. The catastrophe wasn’t an accident; it had been caused by the influential local businessmen, as they took advantage of the public ferry to transport the logs cut in the primeval forest. Evidently, the personal risks the young intellectual is facing are in proportion to the financial stakes implied in the game; there has been an assassination before, yet another issue swept under the rug. Nonetheless, the fear Marianinho experiences at the moment of grasping the pen derives from his confrontation with the *tremendum* of non-human entities he is to represent. A powerful flow of energy is channeled through his hand, as he becomes a medium for “an ancient voice” representing justice, community, the earth: “Seguro a caneta. O desejo arde em minhas mãos mas, ao mesmo tempo, o medo me paralisa.

<sup>17</sup> “Your task is to put lives back together again, and trace the destinies of our people.”



É um receio profundo de que qualquer coisa esteja desabando. Começo escrevendo, a mão obedece a uma voz antiga enquanto vou redigindo”<sup>18</sup> (Couto, 2002, p. 233).

The mission of the intellectual is to invert the downgrading tendency that marks the post-colonial history of the country. During the second half of the twentieth century, it passed through several stages: the fight for independence (1964–1974), a short period of socialism (1975), the civil war (1976–1992), the deficient transition to the market economy and a multiparty political system (after 1992). This historical evolution is presented in the novel as a continuous decadence, especially as it is referred to the evolution of the leaders and the local elite: “Começamos por pensar que são heróis. Em seguida, aceitamos que são patriotas. Mais tarde, que são homens de negócios. Por fim, que não passam de ladrões”<sup>19</sup> (Couto, 2002, p. 223). At the same time, the crisis does not only have a social, economic or political dimension. It takes a generalized, nearly a cosmic turn. The earth “closes itself,” forbidding the men to dig the graves for their dead. Not only life, but also death becomes impossible: “O mundo já não era um lugar de viver. Agora, já nem de morrer é”<sup>20</sup> (Couto, 2002, p. 23). Thus the mission of the intellectual stretches beyond the usual, rationalistic paradigms of action established by the modernity. He or she becomes a figure of universal salvation, redeeming the “world” conceptualized as a cosmic whole.

Curiously, the same situation of a generalized crisis is to be found in *Paw królowej*. In the Polish case, the transition to the market economy has been undoubtedly much smoother than in the African case. Nonetheless, in psychological terms, the situation of indigence characterizing the new Polish society, whose apparent, consumerist abundance is financed by an economy of debt, appears as very similar to any other form of human poverty. The former uncertainty of the peasant existence, periodically marked by the lack of means of subsistence in early spring (*przednowek*) is translated into a new definition of hunger, based on the image of the empty wrappers of instant soup: “a tu wiatr po klepisku przegania od zupek chińskich opakowania”<sup>21</sup> (Masłowska, 2005, p. 96). Analogically to the African novel, the whole cosmic reality participates in the time of the crisis, although it is lived through by the paradigmatic figure of Stanisław

<sup>18</sup> “I grasp the pen. The desire burns in my hands, but at the same time the anxiety paralyzes me. It is a deep fear that something is falling apart. I start to write, my hand obeys an ancient voice as I go on writing.”

<sup>19</sup> “First we believed they were heroes. Later on, we accepted they were patriots. Still later, that they were businessmen. Finally, that they were none other than thieves.”

<sup>20</sup> “Already before, the world wasn’t the right place to live. Now, it’s not even the right place to die.”

<sup>21</sup> “The wind blows the empty wrappings of Chinese instant soup across the threshing floor.”

Retro, who during his anxious wandering through the city, is convinced that somehow, for some unclear reason, he must die – and yet he is unable to commit a suicide. This individual experience coincides with the winter solstice and the end of the year: “sylwester, feralny rzeczywistości przester”<sup>22</sup> (Masłowska, 2005, p. 80). The new year, as well as new opportunities of gain, seem never to come. Symbolical ways of dealing with grief, such as the collective rituals of mourning the dead Pope (“a ludzie płakali, świece zapalali”<sup>23</sup>; Masłowska, 2005, p. 128) seem insufficient to provoke a real change. In the primitive cultures, such a situation would require the sacrifice of animal or even human blood, and indeed, an unwanted and undesired ugly girl, Pitz Patrycja, “która miała ciało psa i twarz świni”<sup>24</sup> (Masłowska, 2005, p. 5), is to be sacrificed as a scapegoat. An act of writing, yet another magical way of dealing with the crisis, appears as indispensable. But the writer, the “knowledgeable woman” (*wiedźma*), identified, similarly to the Berber case, with the sorcerer’s powers common to all the poets, must perish.

In Morocco, the magical value of an apotropaic inscription produced by a qualified *taleb* in order to ward off the evil seems to be closer at hand than a belief in any beneficiary or malignant powers of writing in the Polish culture. Yet clearly, the fear of the written word, especially if written illegitimately by a figure not belonging to the authorized group, constitutes the main axis of the construction of Masłowska’s novel. The fear unifies the crowd armed with knives; emergent writing becomes an emergency: “Hej, ludzie, są jakieś kłopoty, ona coś tam pisze znowu podobno, o Boże, trzeba temu zapobiec”<sup>25</sup> (Masłowska, 2005, p. 150). *Paw królowej* may be interpreted as a story of transgressive ascension of a writing woman representing the lower social strata against the dominance of the intelligentsia that monopolizes literacy and writing skills as strongly as “the hand and the language of the imam” monopolized it in Morocco. Oral culture and oral communication, connoted by the characteristic hip-hop rhythm of Masłowska’s prose, may not take the same forms as they do in Africa, but remain in the limelight.

Apparently, in a blatant opposition to the former two cases – the Berber and the Mozambican one – Polish culture has always been well versed in literacy; the written tradition has never been interrupted. What is more, as Andrew Wachtel claims, “the majority of East European countries were in substantial measure invented by writers,” who occupied, as a consequence,

<sup>22</sup> “New Year’s Eve, the ominous switch of reality.”

<sup>23</sup> “And people cried, burned candles.”

<sup>24</sup> “Who had a body of a dog and a face of a pig.”

<sup>25</sup> “Hey, people, there is some trouble, apparently she is writing something again, oh God, this must be prevented.”

a prominent place in local hierarchies of importance, incarnating even the figures of “national heroes” (Wachtel, 2006, p. 12). Yet again, the pen, mighty – as a sword, has been used by one group exclusively, not always willing – as declared – to share its prerogatives with the remaining social strata. The Polish intelligentsia created recognizable, individualized figures of women associated with writing and promoting literacy, such as the eponymous heroines of the novels *Silaczka*, by Stefan Żeromski, or *Konopielka*, by Edward Redliński. Yet these female figures appear as ancillary in relation to a cause dictated to them and not created by them for the sake of their autonomous expression. Masłowska Dorota or MC Doris, the intratextual author in *Paw królowej*, writes with a completely different intent, very swiftly recognized as subversive by the dominant patriarchal figures that symbolically shoot her at the end of the novel.

One of the Reith lectures delivered by Said in 1993 had a suggestive title: *Holding nations and traditions at bay* (cf. Said, 1994, p. 19). Indeed, the most important task of the emergent intellectual, both in the African and the European case, seems to be opposing solidly legitimized discourses, such as the national unity forged in the battle against the colonizers, the unbreakable unity of the Ummah, the vision of Polishness formulated by the intelligentsia. These discourses speak loud, epitomizing the symbolic oppression that in post-colonial times should no longer be associated with a colonial power or an external metropolis. The source of this violence is local, yet this fact changes but very little in its oppressive nature. The intellectual’s duty consist in “asking questions, making distinctions, restoring to memory all those things that tend to be overlooked or walked past in the rush to collective judgment and action” (Said, 1994, p. 25). A critical attitude towards these sanctified visions and values permits to introduce constant correction into the course of the public affairs and to adapt the formulas of the communitarian life to the changing conditions of the contemporary world. This fact transforms the figure of the intellectual into the gauge of the survival of the community.

The personal hazards he or she is exposed to are great. Thus the question of immunity granted to the intellectual in order to enable him or her to speak truth to power is crucial; this missing element may be found in the ancestral wisdom or the perennial concepts of right and decency inscribed in the elementary basis of each culture. The journalist in *Le pain des corbeaux*, accused by his native community, is saved by the intervention of an old woman, an ancestral instance of justice and grace in the village. On the other hand, the open conclusion of Masłowska’s novel is deeply worrying, as the feeble voice that repeatedly defends the writer in the name of the elementary value of maternity (“to matka,” “gospodyni domowa,” “ona

z dzieckiem w domu”<sup>26</sup>; Masłowska, 2005, pp. 134, 127) remains unheard. The discourse that dominates in the last paragraphs is an aggressive one: “Ognia, panowie!”<sup>27</sup> (Masłowska, 2005, p. 150). It requires the final sacrifice of the female figure that seems doomed for the martyrdom since the beginning. The syndrome of the “Polish Mother” (“Matka Polka”), one of the basic structures of the national imagination, leads to the eternal repetition of such a sacrifice. In *Paw królowej*, the inevitability of the martyrdom is inscribed in the image of the revolving wheel: MC Doris rides a bicycle branded “Kolbe” – the name is that of the Polish Franciscan friar who offered his life to redeem a fellow prisoner in Auschwitz.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the young intellectual is doomed to suffer the martyrdom in order to redeem her community. The Polish incapacity of breaking this sacrificial scheme is as much dis-empowering as the Berber intent of burning all their books, notebooks and pens. The literary work aimed at holding these tendencies at bay is a crucial endeavor.

The transcolonial optics emerging in this essay puts into the limelight the solitary and sacrificial aspect of the individualized heroes in the analyzed novels. They stand alone against the crowd, be it a persecuted journalist rejected by the local community, be it a grandson receiving the message of his undead grandfather, be it a female writer standing apart from the intelligentsia as a cohesive and aggressive group. The most striking resemblance between these novels is that in all these cases the solitary figure of the emergent intellectual seeks and finds solidarity of the ancestors or the ancestral, magical culture of their countries. At the same time, the transforming virtue of their gestures is inscribed into the ancestral symbolic systems and visions of the world. They face the necessity of finding a communitarian, yet not national nor nationalistic standpoint, a different formulation of the “imagined community”, going beyond the logic described by Benedict Anderson (1991). Against the generation of their fathers, they appeal for help to the grandfathers.

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<sup>26</sup> “This is a mother,” “a housewife,” “she is at home with her child.”

<sup>27</sup> “Gentlemen, fire!”

<sup>28</sup> Curiously, in the Polish reception of the novel, the connotations of this detail have remained unnoticed; e.g. Katarzyna Nadana interprets the bicycle “Kolbe” as simply a cheap, unfashionable, low quality one (“jeździ niemarkowym rowerem”) (cf. Nadana, 2006, p. 114).

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### Ćwiczenia pisemne:

#### magia przodków i nowi intelektualiści w powieściach Mii Couto, Lhoussaina Azerguiego i Doroty Masłowskiej

Na podstawie powieści *Um rio chamado tempo, uma casa chamada terra* Mii Couto (2002), *Le pain des corbeaux* Lhoussaina Azerguiego (2012) oraz *Paw królowej* Doroty Masłowskiej (2005) dokonano analizy zjawiska wyłonienia się nowej postaci intelektualisty, zwracającego się przeciwko nadużyciom rodzimych instancji ucieleśniających przemoc symboliczną w warunkach postkolonialnych. Co zaskakujące, można tu dostrzec podobieństwa występujące w tak różnych warunkach, jak współczesna rzeczywistość Maroka, Mozambiku i Polski. Nowy intelektualista wyłania się z kultury oralnej i sięga po pismo, by napiętnować nadużycia stanowiące odbicie minionych form przemocy w nowych warunkach, w tym fikcyjną, sztucznie forsowaną wizję narodowej jedności. Z taką sytuacją można się spotkać zarówno w Mozambiku, gdzie ignoruje się głębokie zróżnicowanie kultur etnicznych, jak i w Maroku, gdzie rzekomą jedność postkolonialnego narodu przekreśla odrębność Arabów i Berberów. W Polsce to zafałszowa-

nie wiąże się z rzekomą kluczową rolą inteligencji, monopolizującej pisanie i zamykającej pozostałe grupy społeczne w hip-hopowej oralności. Młodzi intelektualiści buntują się poniekąd przeciwko pokoleniu rodzicielskiemu, szukają zaś oparcia u przodków, budując pomost solidarności między światem kultury piśmiennej a kulturami tradycyjnymi.

## Note

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The preparation of the article was self-funded by the author.

No competing interests have been declared.