"Decolonial Metamorphoses:" The Animist Unconscious and Transmutations as a Cosmovision in African Literatures /
"Metamorfoses decoloniais": o inconsciente animista e transmutações como cosmovisão nas Literaturas Africanas

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ABSTRACT
Metamorphosis is a term inherent to colonial reality in which ontological and identity paradigms and conceptions reveal a recurring question in African literature: Who am I? Based on this, this article aims to analyze the phenomenon of metamorphosis/transmutation as a characteristic of real-animist texts, which is an aesthetic consequence arising from the animistic conception of perceiving the world. We will discuss how the presence of the imaginary of traditional African religiosity translates into recurrent unusual episodes, such as transmutations, through the works of African writers such as Nigerian Amos Tutuola, Angolan Décio Bettencourt, and Mozambican Mia Couto. Finally, we will observe that the presence of this phenomenon translates not only into a mythical imaginary but also into becoming-individual and becoming-nation in societies fragmented identity-wise by colonialism.
KEYWORDS: Animist realism; Metamorphosis; Transmutation; African literature

RESUMO
"Metamorfose" é um termo inerente à realidade colonial, em que os paradigmas e concepções ontológicas e identitárias descortinam uma questão recorrente na literatura africana: Quem sou eu? A partir disso, este artigo objetiva analisar o fenômeno da metamorfose/transmutação como uma das características do texto real-animista, consequência estética advinda da concepção animista de ver o mundo. Para tanto, discutiremos como a presença do imaginário da religiosidade tradicional africana se traduz em recorrentes episódios insólitos – como a transmutação –, através da obra de escritores africanos, como o nigeriano Amós Tutuola, o angolano Décio Bettencourt e o moçambicano Mia Couto. Por fim, veremos que a presença deste fenômeno traduz não só um imaginário mítico, mas os devires homem e nação em sociedades fragmentadas identitariamente pelo colonialismo.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Realismo animista; Metamorfose; Transmutação; Literatura Africana

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Initial Remarks

It is known for a fact that the process of analysis of African literatures pervades a postcolonial approach (Hamilton, 1999), given that one of the thematic connections of such literary projects, in a continental scope, is colonialism and its consequences – both geopolitical and mental (Fanon, 1961). However, one must not disregard that such colonial process raided, developed and was followed by different subprocesses for each African nation, but that, in a certain way, shaped a way of thinking: the "postcolonial" one, located epistemologically in an ambivalent philosophical model, which "would have to imbue itself with the colonial, incorporate and hold talks with it in order to describe and prescribe it" (Mata, 2008, p. 30).[1]

However, postcolonial studies have failed to distance the religious theme from its central role under themes inherent to its epistemological basis. Such topic, downgraded to a substrate of "culture" and "identity," in addition to its subjective and ambiguous character – in a Marxist perspective, much present in the theoretical framework of postcolonial critique which Michael Löwy previously discussed in *Marxismo e religião: ópio do povo?* [Marxism and Religion: People's Opium?] (2006). Mário Lugarinho (2019) points out that postcolonial literary critique caused a "divorce" between religious aspects and knowledge itself, quoting an excerpt of Barthes' *Mythologies* (1972).[2] In that work, Barthes mentions that ethnologists such as Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, and Leroi-Gourhan tried to disrupt that divorce although grounded in racial and ambiguous concepts. Lugarinho (2019) goes on with reinforcing the need to disrupt such divorce without, however, reinforcing positivist and Cartesian aspects regarding religiosity since

> the divorce referred to by Barthes served the ways of colonial domination, the forms of cultural subjugation, and the preservation of the structures that sustained the opposition between the so-called

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[1] In Portuguese: "teria de se imbuir do colonial, incorporá-lo e dialogar com ele para descrevê-lo e prescrevê-lo."
[2] BARTHES, Roland. *Mythologies*. Selected and translated from the French by Annette Lavers. New York: The Moonday Press, 1972.

civilization and the so-called barbarism. Overcoming this divorce is part of the agenda of postcolonial studies (p. 16).[3]

Thus, this article aims to discuss the presence of religiosity in African literature, in a way that it is particular to African traditional religions. Furthermore, it will articulate that the presence of this imaginary, hereby referred to as "animist unconscious," has unfolded into aesthetic discussions about the unusual in these literatures, as well as the specific way in which such phenomena must be observed in a local cosmovision. Further on, it will point out recurring features in real-animist texts, such as metamorphosis – shape-shifting phenomenon – which, at the same time, unveils both an animist thought and the identity tensions of a postcolonial world.

1 African Literatures and Religiosity

The absence of knowledge about religiosity in postcolonial studies until the 1980s delayed a postcolonial phenomenology of religion, in which the religious phenomenon is analyzed in a postcolonial perspective that, in the words of Loiola (2011), validates the theoretical and theological relations that reinforce the alterity in written (or not) traditions, both within a colonial context and beyond. Even though Nigerian Chinua Achebe, when releasing *Things Fall Apart*, in 1958 – a milestone in African literature and postcolonialism – had disposed to readers and critics that religious aspects were, in colonial critique, as important as colonialism itself, it was only in the mid-1990s, when Ashton Nichols' article "Dialogical Theory in the Novels of Chinua Achebe" (1996) was published, that the religious matter in Achebe's work was analyzed under a postcolonial perspective, and not merely as anthropological or as a cultural substrate. Achebe would become fundamental in drawing attention to fellow Nigerians Daniel O. Fagunwa, with *Ògbójú Ọdẹ nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ̀* [*Forest of a Thousand Daemons*] (1982);[4] and Amos Tutuola with *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) since both works treat the Yorubas' religious mythology as paramount. From the theoretical viewpoint, Wole Soyinka, with

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[3] In Portuguese: "o divórcio referido por Barthes servia às formas de dominação coloniais, às formas de subjugação culturais, e à manutenção das estruturas que mantinham a oposição entre a dita civilização e a dita barbárie. Superar esse divórcio faz parte da agenda dos estudos pós-coloniais."
[4] FAGUNWA, Daniel O. *Forest of a Thousand Daemons.* Translated by Wole Soyinka. New York: Random House, 1982.

his essay "The Fourth Stage" (1973), initiates a discussion on the need of a specific outlook upon African literatures, mainly from its religious imaginary. Then, in 1991, Nigerian Ben Okri's novel *The Famished Road* inaugurates specific (postcolonial anglophonic) studies on African religiosity within a postcolonial literary critique context, especially with the work of Brenda Cooper (1998), whose scope of study is devoted to Syl Cheney-Coker from Sierra Leone, the same Ben Okri from Nigeria and Kojo Laing from Ghana. As it can be perceived, African literatures in English were essential in this process, but not exclusive.

As the theme begins to draw visibility through Achebe and the aforementioned novel – which denounced the importance of the religious thought both from the colonized and the colonizer – in a colonial scenario, devoted to Portuguese-speaking African countries, Angolan writer Pepetela, with *A revolta da casa dos ídolos* [*The Revolt of the Idols' House*] (1980), presents the relations between religiosity (African and Christianism) and the context of colonization in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, Pepetela is the one who argues towards an African literary aesthetics of its own, based on the traditional psycho-religious unconscious: animist realism. Thus, in the 1980s, in Angola and Mozambique, several texts began to value local religiosity, as part of its own aesthetics, as pointed out by Trigo (1981) – *Lueji* by Pepetela (1989); *A Morte do Velho Kipacaça* [*The Death of the Old Kipacaça*] by Boaventura Cardoso (1987); and *Voices Made Night* (1990)[5] by Mia Couto are a few examples.

Postcolonial studies' *mea culpa* on disregarding religious matters did not come until 2007, in the second version of the acclaimed *The postcolonial studies: key concepts*, in which Bill Aschcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, some of the first scholars to concentrate postcolonial theory in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (1989), advocated for the urgent need to tie postcolonial and religion studies together.

As it can be perceived, African literatures were essential in the process of convergence between religion and postcolonial studies, which enables us to understand the impact of Imperialism on religions (both of the colonizer and of the colonized), its consequences on the religious imaginary of both groups, and on how literary work has responded to all of that (Goulet, 2011). In the particular case of African literatures,

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[5] COUTO, Mia. *Voices Made Night*. Translated by David Brookshaw. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1990.

especially Sub-Saharan Africa, understanding the religiosity of its countless peoples means understanding its *aesthetics* (Cooper, 1998).

2 Traditional African Religions and the Animist Unconscious

If the postcolonial studies nowadays converge the studies on religions and religiosities in their purposes, much is yet to be done, for the range of religious universes within colonial contexts is vast. Regarding English-language postcolonial studies, Islam, Christianism and Hinduism (Said, 1979; Roy, 1998; Spivak, 1988; Van Der Veer, 2002) have already got abundant material. As for the case of traditional African religions, there is a long and necessary path, especially due to their presence in African tales, plays and novels after the 1980s. The importance of the traditional African religious thought is paramount to the understanding of African culture and its literatures, as demonstrated by numerous writers. Mia Couto, for instance: "(…) I cannot understand Africa if I do not understand a thing which does not have a name, which is African religion, that at times is called animistic" (2002, n/p.).[6] Such proposition is also supported by Angolans Pepetela (*apud* Chaves; Macedo, 2009, p. 39): "generally speaking, Angolan people are religious (…) [Thus], it is compelling for Angolan literature to extensively address the matters of religiosity;"[7] and Henrique Abranches (2011, p. 5), who writes: "What I do are mostly stories around an animist realism, which is a realism that ensouls nature. Which, in a traditional reality, are animistic predicates."[8]

The study on the presence of the traditional African religious imaginary, which Wole Soyinka (1976) would interpret as "African cosmovision," assumes that certain concepts and terms take their rightful place which, *a priori*, are lubricous and demand prudence. Firstly, the term "Traditional African Religions" itself.

Initially, talking about "religion" in an African context is a challenge, especially when it refers to a native religiosity, for, since Africa is a continent with 54 countries organized into five regions (Northern, Southern, Central, Western and Eastern) with

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[6] In Portuguese: "(…) eu não posso compreender a África se não compreender uma coisa que nem tem nome, que é a religião africana, que chamam às vezes de animista."
[7] In Portuguese: "de um modo geral o povo angolano é religioso (…) [Assim], é forçoso que a literatura angolana toque muito no aspecto da religiosidade."
[8] In Portuguese: "O que eu faço muitas vezes são estórias à roda de um realismo animista, que é um realismo que anima a natureza. Que, na realidade tradicional, são qualidades animistas."

nearly 500 ethnic groups using at least 40 different languages, pluralization of the term "religion" alone will not be enough to resolve the issue. First and foremost, one must understand that the continental diversity of Africa is not limited by a homogenization of terms, but by a flexible idea for the set of religious experiences and practices prior to the arrival of the colonizers (and that remains to this day). Although the term accepts the use of the concept of "religion," the thought manifested in the concept of "Traditional African Religions" refers to the feeling, the practice of faith, without so much foreordination (Holdcroft, 2006). According to Altuna (1985, p. 380), "the nature of African religion consists of practical experience, and not in theological explanation." Thus, such "religions" are not institutional, but a set of psycho-social practices, supported by a cosmovision. And that cosmovision is what mobilizes the use of the term in its generic meaning, for it is upon which falls the characteristics shared by hundreds of beliefs and cultural practices that constitute the religiosity and life of Sub-Saharan Africa, also known as "Black Africa" (Souza, 2012; Altuna, 1985; Ribas, 1958).

The term "Traditional African Religion" was made official in events such as the Abidjan Colloquy and the Bouake International Meeting, held in Côte d'Ivoire, which addressed African issues. Following anthropological and ethnological analysis, the term was elected to describe the set of religious practices across the African continent. That occurred because, within the anthropological context, the term "religion" was adopted after occidental patterns, i.e., as a creed, since religious traditions are, above all, an organization around practices related to the spiritual world. Previously, such beliefs were called animistic, but it was noticed that animism corresponds to cosmovision and not necessarily to practice. Those meetings were important to deconstruct stereotypes and ethnocentric approaches regarding the religiosities of several peoples in Africa. According to Rehbein (1985), Anthropology, Sociology and History experts who attended the events agreed that there was a basic common structure in traditional African religions, especially in the West and South-Central coast of Africa. Thus, the term "Traditional African Religions" is used, but taking into account that the word "religion" carries an etymological interpretation that is different than the one based on Christian thought, and "African" as a valid generic term, considering the recurring structures of belief grounded in the same "cosmovision" (Baudoin, 1965), which relies on the animistic conception of understanding of the human being and the world.

This animist thought has recurring elements, according to Souza (2012), Ribas (1958) and Altuna (1985), such as: belief in existence, order and manifestation of the visible and invisible worlds. In the invisible world: the supreme divinity, the arch patriarchs, the spirits of nature, and the ancestors. In the visible world: the kings, the heads of kingdom, tribe, clan or family, magic specialists (healers and sorcerers), elders, the community, human beings, animals, plants, minerals, natural phenomena and the stars. These two worlds may be subject not only to beliefs, but to cult. There is also belief in the after-death; worship of the ancestors; the existence of spirit possession; the belief in magic and the possibility of its manipulation; the use of sacred objects, such as totems, masks, amulets, garment, liturgical objects etc., among other characteristics.

Despite the criticism over the term "Traditional African Religion," there are African scholars such as Congolese Vincent Mulago, head of the Center of African Religions of Kinshasa, in Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Rwandan Alexis Kagame who suggest and ratify the use of the term "Traditional African Religions" to define the set of African religious beliefs and traditional practices (Martinez, 2009; Altuna, 2014). Contemporary pan-Africanist groups, such as Afrikania Mission, currently embrace the term "Traditional African Religion" to represent it as a modern pan-African religion. It is important to highlight that, even with these details, complexities, additions, and criticisms, the most widely used term in the context of Anthropology and Sciences of Religions is still "Traditional African Religions," clearly understood in its global meaning, limits, and terminological complexities.

Thus, the main point here is that the term "Traditional African Religion" does not condense a heterogeneity of practices, but a common *Weltanschauung* [worldview], which justifies the term, summarized in the expression of an "animist unconscious."

The animist unconscious, according to Nigerian poet and professor Harry Garuba (2012), does not concern a religion, neither the old idea of "animism" as proposed by anthropologists of the nineteenth century. To him, this unconscious is a "manner in which an animistic mode of thought is embedded within the processes of material, economic activities and then reproduces itself within the sphere of culture and social life" (Garuba, 2003, p. 269). Such concept complies with a Jungian idea of "collective unconscious," constructed by information, preconceived ideas and impressions inherited by society, family and the self, which we return indirectly. It is like the way of seeing, interpreting

and conceiving the world was naturalized to the point of manifesting in numerous practices, conceptions and discourses. This way, according to Garuba, is based on a mode of thought guided by the spiritualization of the material world (Garuba, 2003) which, to him, converges to the term "animistic" in its purest form, etymologically speaking, "belief in the *anima* [soul]" (Goldwag, 2007).

Garuba's studies start from the observation of the figure of the Yoruba deity Shango (Ṣàngó) in contemporary Nigerian culture, and from how a common religious thought permeates time, borders and institutions, far beyond the religious sphere:

> Garuba claims that, instead of erecting carved images to symbolize the spiritual being, the important conclusion about animist realism lies in the influence it exerts through an "animist unconscious" in the material cultural forms of contemporary societies. Thus, it is inappropriate to restrict animism to the religious sphere. Animist thought would reorganize scientific and modern discourses, affecting social behavior, economic production and *artistic creation* (Silveira, 2019, n/p.; our emphasis).[9]

Regarding critics of the term "animist," stuck in the reproduction of the anthropological thought of German doctor Georg Ernst Stahl (1660-1734) and English anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) – now outmoded –, Garuba reinforces that the word does not reduce the traditional African religions to the concept, for animism is not a religion (2003, p. 267), but a "religious consciousness," whose rectification, initially, had religious yearnings, but was distanced as part of a social significance. Kabwasa (1982, p. 14), when mentioning the "African animistic view of the universe,"[10] also refers to the term as an aspect present within the beliefs, and not the beliefs themselves. The issue is in understanding that traditional religions – and each one, at times, with its own designation, such as Yoruba Ìṣẹ̀ṣe, Igbo *Odiani*, Bechuan Badimo, Vodou from Ghana, Togo and Benin peoples etc. – are not reduced to being animistic, but holding, at different measures, an animist thought. Inasmuch as the animism is a mode of thought which is present in numerous cultures, not only African. Thus, when

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[9] In Portuguese: "Garuba afirma que em vez de erigir imagens esculpidas para simbolizar o ser espiritual, a importante conclusão acerca do realismo animista está na influência que ele exerce através de um "inconsciente animista" nas formas culturais materiais das sociedades contemporâneas. Desse modo, não é adequado restringir o animismo à esfera do religioso. O pensamento animista reorganizaria os discursos científico e moderno, afetando o comportamento social, a produção econômica e *a criação artística*."
[10] In Portuguese: "visão africana animista do universo."

addressing these religions with the term "animistic," we are figuratively relating them to the recurring *modus vivendi* of these religions. Helen Tiffin, an important character in postcolonial studies, reinforces such idea: "It is timely that animism be radically reconsidered, especially in relation to Western poetry and politics" (Tiffin, 2000 [back cover]).

Understanding that means distancing from the initial use of the word "animism," giving it a new meaning (as well as its variations, e.g. animistic, animist), as widely seen in the work of the same Garuba, Philippe Descola (2015), Graham Harvey (2006), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2002) and more substantially in the research of Zimbabwean Caroline Rooney (1957), professor of postcolonial literature at Kent University who suggests, in *African literature, Animism and Politics* (2000), maintaining the term as a means of opposing the once ethnocentric discourse.

Therefore, this *animist unconscious* converges into a way of conceiving the *realia* which, in turn, manifests through an animist realism which, to Garuba (2003), is the defining expression of the literary composition that results from this unconscious.

3 Animist Realism

Animist Realism, as a concept, began to be theorized by Garuba in the text *Ben Okri: Animist Realism and the Famished Genre* (1993) and later in *Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society* (2003). However, in 1989, Pepetela had already mentioned the term in his novel *Lueji* (1989):

> – To flog the dogmas, this is what I wanted (…)
> – I know, Jaime. That is why you follow the current of animist realism…
> – Indeed. The misfortune is that I create nothing to exemplify. And no mind has yet appeared to theorize the current. There is only the name and the reality of the matter. However, this entire spectacle is animist realism, from end to end. Let us hope that the critics acknowledge it (…).
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> – Jaime says the only aesthetics that serves us is the one of animist realism, Lu explained. Like there was realism and neo-realism, socialist and fantastic realism, and other realisms out there.

– (…) this is what we are doing, without a doubt. If we triumph, it is thanks to the amulet that Lu wears around her neck. She does not want to tell us the story, but it is an amulet, she cannot deny that (Pepetela, 2015 [1989], pp. 451-456).[11]

What Garuba and Pepetela are describing refers to an attempt at understanding how this cosmovision, drawing from the traditional religious imaginary, reproduces an aesthetic model of representation of reality. Initially, the debate starts from the idea of categorizing the African unusualness, since the presence of a religious imaginary were to be directly related to the conceptions of reality, as well as the subversion of it, through uncommon and unusual phenomena (within the Western perspective).

The work of Nigerian Ben Okri was essential to this debate, since the presence of a fictional unusualness were to bring about the relevance – or not – of classifying it as magic realism. However, besides Garuba, other African scholars and researchers like Nigerian Ogunsanwo (1995) and Ghanaian Appiah (1992) and Quayson (1997) criticize the displacement of terms such as "magical" and "marvelous," particular to a Latin American context, to a reality of African textual production, which considers the animistic cosmovision:

Quayson demonstrates the manner in which the traditional resource base (…) has been put to service in literary texts (…) strategies and narrative techniques, which are demonstrably superstructural effects of an animist conception of reality and the world (Garuba, 2003, p. 270).

Thus, from the 1990s onwards, a discussion of literary critique began on the representation of the African unusualness which, at the same time, refutes the well-established Latin American classifications and takes into account the African *Weltanschuung*.

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[11] In Portuguese: "– Eu queria é fustigar os dogmas (…)
– Eu sei, Jaime. Por isso te inscreves na corrente do realismo animista…
– É. O azar é que não crio nada para exemplificar. E ainda não apareceu nenhum cérebro para teorizar a corrente. Só existe o nome e a realidade da coisa. Mas este bailado todo é realismo animista, duma ponta à outra. Esperemos que os críticos o reconheçam (…).
– O Jaime diz a única estética que nos serve é a do realismo animista, explicou Lu. Como houve o realismo e o neo, o realismo socialista e o fantástico, e outros realismos por aí.
– (…) isto que andamos a fazer é sem dúvida alguma. Se triunfamos é graças ao amuleto que a Lu tem no pescoço. Ela não quer contar a estória, mas que é um amuleto ela não pode negar."

Garuba (2003, p. 285), therefore, becomes the forerunner, both of an aesthetic theory which starts from the animist unconscious, and of a heightening of the studies on traditional African religions in a postcolonial context since, according to him: "an animistic understanding of the world applied to the practice of everyday life has often provided avenues of agency for the dispossessed in colonial and postcolonial Africa."

Animist Realism is the aesthetic outcome, starting from the animistic idea of seeing the world, and at this point, it is essential to understand the difference between the literary form (Animist Realism/Real-animist) and the inspirational source (Animist unconscious/animist thought), for a text which depicts the animist thought is not always a real-animist text:

> The presence of Traditional African Religions or Religiosities in the African literary text can manifest in a variety of ways, being basically through phenomena, activities and/or experiences which are cognitive, palpable, tangible and behavioral, either directly or indirectly, that involve the set of native beliefs. For instance, when the text depicts social rites (lobolo, circumcision, rites of passage etc.), rituals (faith healing, manipulation of magic etc.), supernatural practices (possession, Egungun, predictions etc.), or even indirectly, in which the "belief" is made evident (use of amulets, belief in spirits, dreams etc.), these ways in which the religiosity appears lie within a category that I name "real animist thought" or "animist unconscious" (inspirational source) (…). Inside this category are manifestations of religion and religiosity closer to the human, material, sociological and anthropological dimension. In the narratives, when such phenomena, activities and/or experiences meet in a perspective of the unusualness (beyond the Western "real"), as talking animals, dead people communicating, transmutation [metamorphoses] (animals into humans and vice-versa), the presence of mystical extraordinary beings, for example, is added to the previous category, the aesthetic of Real-Animism, the literary form (Paradiso, 2000). [12]

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[12] In Portuguese: "A presença das Religiões ou Religiosidades Tradicionais Africanas no texto literário africano pode se apresentar de várias formas, sendo basicamente através de fenômenos, atividades e/ou experiências cognitivas, palpáveis, tangíveis e comportamentais, direta ou indiretamente, que envolvam o conjunto de crenças autóctones. Por exemplo, quando o texto apresenta ritos sociais (lobolo, circuncisão, ritos de passagem etc.), rituais (curandeirismo, manipulação de magia etc.), práticas sobrenaturais (possessão, egunguns, vaticínios etc.), ou até mesmo através de forma indireta, em que a "crença" é evidenciada (uso de amuletos, crença nos espíritos, sonhos etc.), estas formas em que a religiosidade aparece estão dentro de uma categoria, que chamo de "pensamento real animista" ou "inconsciente animista" (fonte inspiradora)(…). Nesta categoria estão manifestações da religião e religiosidade mais próximas da dimensão humana, material, sociológica e antropológica. Quando nas narrativas estes fenômenos, atividades e/ou experiências se encontram numa perspectiva do insólito (além do "real" Ocidental), como animais falantes, mortos se comunicando, transmutação [metamorfoses] (animais em humanos e vice-versa), a presença de seres místicos extraordinários, por exemplo, soma-se a categoria anterior, a estética do Real-Animismo, a modalidade literária."

Among the characteristics of a real-animist text, some are recurrently visible:

1) the presence of an animist thought which, as previously stated, is the presence of a thought based on the imaginary of traditional African religions;

2) the presence of non-human beings or animal becomings; in the African text, the presence of mythological beings (deities, monsters, hybrids, shape-shifters, spirits, souls) and/or ghosts (in spectral, bodily forms or possessing human bodies in a trance), and animals with human consciousness (e.g., able to speak) are examples of an imaginary of myths, legends and oral traditions, which reinforce a worldview that is particular to these peoples;

3) the presence of an "ancestralyricism." The term *ancestralyricism* comes from the amalgam of the terms ancestor and lyricism. The former relates to "from whom one descends, predecessor" (from Latin: "he who goes before"); *lyricism*, in turn, is used after its meaning of "expression of subjectivity." The term *ancestralyricism*, then, encompasses the presence of the ancestral imaginary, combined with an aesthetics of orality, which manifests in the text following the expression of a collective ancestral memory, in the recurrence of the image of the older people (elders, ancients, *griots* etc.), and how the discourse of such characters are fundamental within the plot or the narrative course. Undoubtedly, ancestry is one of the most important themes in African literatures;

4) the presence of an intersectionality between times and spaces. Such characteristic encompasses a temporal and/or spatial non-linearity, in which past, present and future and several dimensions (like the world of the living, dead and unborn ones, for example) can establish dialogue in the narrative, presenting, in a textual form, a cosmovision – cyclic and intersectional – of traditional African religions (Mathuray, 2009).

Lastly, 5) the presence of transmutation – Metamorphosin/psychomorphosis. This characteristic, besides being recurring towards revealing the animistic imaginary, metaphorizes the intersemiotic translations of identity fragmentation, which results from the colonial encounter and the becoming of nation, a dear theme to African literatures. This is the characteristic that is approached in detail below.

4 Animistic Transmutations – Metamorphoses and Psychomorphoses

Metamorphosis is the changing of form, whilst psychomorphosis is the changing of psyche (soul). At this point, these two entities are distinguished: body and mind and, subsequently, the notion of specific terms for such fields, opting for "psychomorphosis" over "psychic metamorphosis," as attributed by Leite (2012, p. 192) for the "transformation of psychological order."

While metamorphosis alters the form, and not necessarily the identity of the being or the individuality of the thing, the phenomena of possession/trance, also recurring in African literatures, reveal a non-bodily, but identity transformation, which hereby will be referred to as psychomorphosis. Although both phenomena are recurring in African literatures, the episodes of possession and trance, i.e., expressions of psychomorphosis, have been discussed previously in the article "A possessão como ambivalência colonial: Identidade e resistência na religiosidade africana em O Outro Pé da Sereia" ["Possession as Colonial Ambivalence: Identity and Resistance in African Religiosity in The Other Foot of the Mermaid"] (Paradiso, 2011), specifically in the context of Mia Couto's novel.

The issue here, however, is the recurrence of metamorphosis, as an unusual characteristic in the real-animist text.

Metamorphosis, from its etymology (from Greek μεταμόρφωσις *metamórphosis*, "transformation"), means the changing of form. This is a common phenomenon in the animist thought, given that the phenomenon and its variations (transformations, transmutation, transmogrification etc.) appear in the mythology of several Sub-Saharan African peoples (Kaba, 2006; Leite, 2008).

Ousmane Kaba (2006) names various examples regarding men metamorphosing into animals and/or hybrids in African mythologies, like lion-men, leopard-men, serpent-men and hyena-men. Bleek (1875) describes oral narratives of South African ethnic groups in which men and women transform into insects (praying mantis, for instance). Herbert (1993), in turn, mentions the recurrence, all over Black Africa, of myths involving sorcerers who transform into crocodiles to attack adversaries. But the metamorphic imaginary is not reduced to animal forms, there is also belief in transmutations into plants/trees (Adogbo, 2000) and into nature elements such as water and rivers (Drewal,

2008). Furthermore, bodily transformations also fit in this category, given the widely complex imaginary around the body (Leite, 2008).

Although the most common element in these religious narratives is *Therianthropy* (ability of human beings to turn into animals), the presence of several other forms of transmutations is understood here as a characteristic of the animist unconscious, those being: objects, plants and animals taking up human forms; human beings taking up other forms, such as animals, water, plants, objects etc.; human beings taking up plastic forms (disappearing, shrinking, growing, dissolving, stretching, melting etc.); non-human beings (deities, specters, spirits, elementals, creatures) taking up several forms, and; human beings taking up non-human beings forms etc. It is worth highlighting that the indirect forms of metamorphoses also apply to an animistic imaginary, like in this excerpt by Mia Couto (1997, p. 209): "I un-limit myself to a bat. The cities no longer weigh upon me, the roof is no longer suspended upside down on my wings."[13]

Such phenomena also replicate, aesthetically, semantic and lexical relations, with the use of comparison and metaphors, under a perspective of writing which aims to break Eurocentric barriers between human individuals and the Nature-world, revalidating subordinate mythologies and religious imaginaries, while denouncing the psycho-identity fragmentation of peoples violated by colonialism.

Thus, metamorphosis/transmutation, in the characteristic context of animist realism, may imply the recurrence of ontological questions about oneself in (post)colonial circumstances, as also implied through episodes of possession and trance (Paradiso, 2011). The difference here is that, while metamorphosis alters the form, and not necessarily the identity of the being or the individuality of the thing, the phenomena of possession/trance, also recurring in African literatures, reveal a non-bodily, but identity transformation, a psychomorphosis.

However, the focus here was solely on the characteristic of metamorphosis/transmutation as the changing of form, for which I resort to three African authors: Nigerian Amos Tutuola; Angolan Décio Bettencourt; and Mozambican Mia Couto.

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[13] In Portuguese: "Me ilimito a morcego. Já não me pesam as cidades, o telhado deixa de estar suspenso ao inverso em minhas asas."

Amos Tutuola, Yoruba Nigerian, wrote various texts approaching the religious imaginary of his ethnic group, having as a *magnum opus* the novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town*, translated in Brazil as *O bebedor de vinho de palmeira* (1980), written in 1946 and published for the first time in 1952. The story follows an avid palm-wine drunkard who, after the death of his winemaker, goes in search of his servant in the land of the dead. In this journey, the main character lives several experiences which depict the mythology and traditional religious imaginary of the Yorubas. Amongst the various phenomena, metamorphosis is a recurring one, through the use of the powers of his *juju* (amulets): "I used one of my juju and at once I changed into a very big bird and flew back to the roof of the old man's house" (Tutuola, 2014, p. 7); "I used one of my juju which changed me into a lizard" (Tutuola, 2014, p. 23). Besides animals, the man could also turn into a stone and a canoe, as well as into fire and smoke: "a charm which was given me by my father before he died. The use of the charm was this: – If I meet a spirit or other harmful creature at night and if I used it, it would turn me into a great fire and smoke" (Tutuola, 2014, p. 40). Besides him, other characters also seem to transmute, as it is the case of the "incomplete gentleman," who was merely a skull, and his wife: "I performed one of my jujus and it changed my wife and our loads to a wooden-doll" (Tutuola, 2014, p. 111). The narrative of Amos Tutuola makes evident the presence of metamorphosis in the animist thought of the Yorubas, which can also be perceived through the myths involving the local traditional religion (Ìṣẹ̀ṣe) and the cult to the orishas (Òrìṣà) (Olumide, 1948; Prandi, 2001). Tutuola, as well as other Nigerian writers, reveals in his texts what is pointed out by Francisco Soares (2007), a literature scholar: that animism is assumed as a mimetic strategy, which denies the magic, ritualistic, folkloric figure (present in colonial texts), valuing itself as an artistic device (Soares, 2007, pp. 129-132).

In Angolan literature, although *A morte do velho Kipacaça* [*The Death of the Old Kipacaça*] (1987) by Boaventura Cardoso is one of the biggest examples of the real-animist text which, according to the author, emerges from an "atmosphere of the African worldview under the lenses of animism, from the possession by supernatural forces incarnate by people and beings from the animal, plant, and mineral kingdoms, the stars,

the meteorological phenomena etc" (Cardoso apud Padilha; Ribeiro, 2008, p. 20),[14] there are authors such as Luandino Vieira and Unhenga Xitu, for example, who explore the animist unconscious from the recovery of the *missosso* (popular traditional short stories), in which beings whose "metamorphosis [is] achieved by magic granted for such purpose" (Ribas apud Macêdo, 2008, p. 51)[15] are portrayed.

Thus, in order to provide an example, I resort to the short story *Kambut'Ambulante* [*Kambut'Ambulant*], by Décio Bettencourt Mateus (Kwakele), in which the Man-Nature relationship unveils Man-Man social relationships in the streets of Luanda, drawing from the metamorphosis of a wanderer into a tree. During a police inspection, a wanderer is assaulted in an attempt to pin him to the ground. However, the unusually physical strength of the little boy was revealed in the impossibility of, on one leg, falling down or even stumbling. "It is Sorcery, soorcery…" (Kwakele, 2021, p.50).[16] Lastly, the mystery is unveiled:

> From the scar on the kambúta's leg bloomed sprouts. From the flat plant on the lad's foot, resolute roots were born, which violated the hard cement floor of the marginal road, fertilized the underlying sands and laid foundations in its depths. His scarred leg was the sturdy trunk of a tree; a mulemba of the kings of the past. Arms, hands, fingers, hair, dreadlocks were branches populated by fresh green leaves. The kambut'ambulant, tree-person with roots, trunk, branches, sap, leaves and all!
>
> The assaulters noticed. They were beating in vain. What they were trying to knock down was no longer a street bandy leg. They were attacking the strong trunk of a mulemba (Kwakele, 2021, p. 51).[17]

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[14] In Portuguese: "atmosfera da visão africana do mundo sob a óptica do animismo, da possessão de forças sobrenaturais encarnadas por pessoas e seres do mundo animal, vegetal, mineral, dos astros, dos fenômenos meteorológicos, etc."

[15] In Portuguese: "metamorfose [é] obtida por magia concedida para o efeito."

[16] In Portuguese: "É Feitiço, feitiçoo…"

[17] In Portuguese: "Da cicatriz da perna do kambúta floresciam rebentos. Da planta achatada do pé do gajo, nasciam raízes resolutas que violavam o chão duro de cimento da marginal, fecundavam as areias subjacentes e alicerçavam-se nas suas profundezas. A sua perna cicatrizada era o tronco robusto de uma árvore; uma mulemba dos reis do antigamente. braços, mãos, dedos, cabelo, rasta eram ramarias povoadas por folhas verdes frescas. O kambut'ambulante, pessoa-árvore com raízes, tronco, ramos, seiva, folhas e tudo!"

"Os agressores perceberam. Batiam em vão. O que tentavam derrubar não era mais uma perna arqueada de rua. Batiam no tronco fortaleza de uma mulemba."

This short story by Décio Bettencourt, besides evidencing the Animist Realism as a literary aesthetic project, points out the social and historic engagement, which together reveal a new model of interpretation of the African reality.

However, among the cited authors, it is in Mozambique, in the work of Mia Couto, that the recurrence of this characteristic of animist realism is most evident. The novel Confession of the Lioness (2015) [18] is perhaps the most representative one:

> My grandfather taught me to never fear the gloom. For within it, I would discover my nocturnal soul. In truth, it was the dark that showed me what I had always been: a lioness. That's what I am: a lioness in a person's body. My shape was that of a person, but my life would be a slow process of metamorphosis: my leg becoming a paw, my nails claws, my hair a mane, my chin a jaw (Couto, 2015, p. 181).

Likewise, in *O outro pé da sereia* [*The Other Foot of the Mermaid*] (2006), besides the classical metamorphic figure of the image of Virgin Mary, which symbolically transmutes into Kianda, the Angolan mermaid, from the moment its foot is severed, there are other examples of metamorphoses, which go from youngsters turning into aquatic beings like the protagonist Mwadia:

> (…) were to be taken to the lagoon in Mbenga and would change to a nzuzu, a water spirit. Would submerge to the bottom of the lake and there she would live for months without emerging to the surface. Mwadia's statement shocked her tender Tia: – This is what I wish to be the most, now: a spirit of the river. To be water in water (…) (Couto, 2006, pp. 85-86).[19]

to people transitioning races, as it is the case of Priest Antunes:

> (…) he was white, son and grandson of Portuguese parents. On January 5th, he began to turn black. After putting out a small fire in his cabin, he gazed at his darkening hands. But now it was his entire skin that was

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[18] COUTO, M. *Confession of the Lioness.* Translated by David Brookshaw. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015.
[19] In Portuguese: "(…) seria enviada para a lagoa de Mbenga e se converteria numa nzuzu, um espírito das águas. Submergiria para o fundo do lago e ali viveria meses consecutivos sem aflorar à superfície. A declaração de Mwadia estarreceu a sua delicada Tia: – Era isso que, agora, eu mais queria ser: um espírito do rio. Ser água na água (…)."

darkening, his hair was becoming frizzy. There was no doubt in his mind: he was becoming a black man (Couto, 2006, p.164).[20]

In the novel *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*[21] (2004), also by Mia Couto, it is possible to see references to metamorphoses of people into hyenas: "Or rather they were. Not hyenas as such. But false hyenas, mulattos of creatures and people. And not only this: their heads were those of the town's leaders" (Couto, 2004, pp. 169-170). In the story "De como se vazou a vida de Ascolino do Perpétuo Socorro" ["How Ascolino do Perpetuo Socorro's Life Faded Away"], in *Voices Made Night* (1990),[22] Couto anticipated the myth: "The cry she let out no one had ever heard the likes of before. It wasn't the sound a person would make, it was the howl of an animal. A hyena's voice for sure. Bartolomeu jumped with fright: what am I married to then? a nóii?" (Couto, 1990, p. 42-43).[23] As a matter of fact, the hyena is one of the most mentioned animals in African myths, present in mythologies of Sudan, Chad, Mali, Somalia, Ethiopia and Tanzania, for instance (Woodward, 1979; Frembgen, 1998).

In the Romanesque work of Couto, the author explores various forms of metamorphoses and transmutations. And the short stories are where they expand. In the anthology *Estórias abensonhadas* [*Bless-Dreamt Tales*] (2012), two stories draw more attention to the phenomenon of metamorphosis: in "Rio além da curva" ["River Beyond the Bend"], in which main character Jordão is chased by a *mpfuvo* (hippopotamus), which in the local rumors "is, after all, an old commoner who lost his life in the area where the animal came from" (Couto, 2012, p. 75).[24] In a certain moment, he kills the animal and is reprimanded, for killing a beast-man was certainly a curse: "What could he have done? He was accused of killing not a beast, but a transfigured man. How could he have guessed the true nature of the hippopotamus (…)?" (Couto, 2012, p. 79).[25] In the story "O abraço

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[20] In Portuguese: "(…) ele era branco, filho e neto de portugueses. No dia 5 de Janeiro, começara a ficar negro. Depois de apagar um pequeno incêndio no seu camarote, contemplou as suas mãos obscurecendo. Mas agora era a pele inteira que lhe escurecia, os seus cabelos se encrespavam. Não lhe restava dúvida: ele se convertia num negro."

[21] COUTO, Mia. *The Last Flight of the Flamingo.* Translated by David Brookshaw. London: Serpent's Tail, 2004.

[22] For reference, see footnote 5

[23] For reference, see footnote 5.

[24] In Portuguese: "é, afinal, um velho cidadão que perdeu a vida na zona de onde veio o animal."

[25] In Portuguese: "Que poderia fazer? Acusavam-no de ter morto não um bicho mas um homem transfigurado. Como podia adivinhar sobre a verdade do hipopótamo (…)?"

da serpente" ["The Serpent's Embrace"], Acubar is transformed into a snake by his lover Sulima, who is herself a shape-shifter:

> Images came of a fat snake, dressed in human clothes. She was wearing a capulana (…) the animal approached (…) with its forked tongue. The snake is bilingual to show that *every animal always hides another creature.* (…) Acubar heard her eyes: they were those of Sulima, without any lack or addition (…) (Couto, 2012, p. 83; our emphasis).[26]

Lastly, Acubar also shape-shifts, with his child as a witness: "Then the little one saw his father transitioning from dermis to epidermis, with visible greenish-green scales. It seemed that another monstrous being had stolen the figure of his old man" (Couto, 2012, pp. 84-85).[27]

In *O fio das missangas* [The Thread of the Beads] (1998), in the short story "A infinita fiadeira" ["The Infinite Weaver"], one can see the presence of the Ghanaian imaginary, and the myth of Anansi, through the figure of the spider: "The God of the beasts wished to know what could be done. She was asked to change into a human. And so it happened: in a divine blow, the spider was converted into a person" (Couto, 1998, p. 75).[28] And then again, human turns into creature in the story "O caçador de ausências" ["The Hunter of Absences"].

However, it is in the collection *Contos do nascer da Terra* [*Tales from the Bearing of the Earth*] (1997) that one can see abounding exemplification of the phenomenon. It depicts several references, such as people that disappear from shrinking too much, like Maria Sombrinha ("O não desaparecimento de Maria Sombrinha" ["The Non-Vanishing of Maria Sombrinha"]); from losing too much weight, like Indian Modari ("A Gorda Indiana" ["The Fat Indian"]), who "vanished like incense smoke" (Couto, 1997, p. 83);[29] like Jesuzinho Graça ("O viúvo" ["The Widower"]); or like the lad whose bones swell, to the point that his own skeleton covers his flesh, as if it were inside out ("Ossos" ["Bones"]). There are also people who transform into animals, such as birds ("A menina,

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[26] In Portuguese: "Vieram imagens de uma cobra gorda, trajada de humanas vestes. Envergava capulana [...] o bicho se chegou [...] com sua língua bífida. A cobra é bilíngue para mostrar que *todo animal esconde sempre outra criatura.* [...] Acubar ouviu os olhos dela: eram os de Sulima, sem falta nem acréscimo [...]."
[27] In Portuguese: "Então o miúdo viu o pai transitando de derme para epiderme, lhe aparecendo visíveis umas escamas verdes-esverdeadas. Parecia que outro ser, monstriforme, roubava o desenho do seu velho."
[28] In Portuguese: "O Deus dos bichos quis saber o que se poderia fazer. Pediram que ela transitasse para humana. E assim sucedeu: num golpe divino, a aranha foi convertida em pessoa."
[29] In Portuguese: "desvaneceu como fumo de incenso."

as aves e o sangue" ["The Girl, the Birds and the Blood"]) or into a serpent ("A carteira de crocodile" ["The Crocodile Wallet"]); parts of human bodies which shape-shift, like the head of a man which transmutes into a tree, whose roots grow and expand ("Raízes" ["Roots"]); or a human heart which blooms like a cocoon, giving life to a baby ("O coração do menino e o menino do coração" ["The Boy's Heart and the Heart's Boy"]). In the story "O chão, o colchão e a colcha" ["The Floor, Mr. Mattress, and Mrs. Mattressess"] there are examples of objects which transform into people, like a mattress into a woman: "She gladly accepted that conversion. From then onwards, the mattress *turned into* a woman" (Couto, 1997, p. 218; our emphasis).[30] In the same story, the main character, Xavier Zandamela merges into a mattress: "Suddenly, the mattress revolved, involving the miner. Flesh and foam, arms and cloths were entangled. *The man's body lost shape*, dissolving" (1997, p. 219; our emphasis).[31] In the anthology, there are other examples of people who transform into objects, as it is the case of the old man who turns into a boat ("A casa marinha" ["The Sea House"]) and the child who turns into a plane ("Cataratas do céu" ["Waterfalls of the Sky"]). There are also examples of objects shape-shifting into creatures, like in the story "A carteira de crocodile" ["The Crocodile Wallet"]:

> The monster, where did it come from? It was assumed that it emerged from the wallet, transfigured, reincarnated, haunted. It happened in an instant: the frustrated woman was going to take something out of her suitcase and felt it moving, dodging. She tried to grasp it: too late. There was barely enough time for her to see the triangular set of teeth, the yellow tongue in its pitch-black mouth (Couto, 1997, p. 102).[32]

The presence of metamorphosis and transmutation in the animist African literature is also revealed in the poetics of amalgam, in which relationships between humans and the animal, plant, and mineral kingdoms illustrate the animistic perspectives of unity with Nature, so well displayed in the studies of Phillipe Descola, in *Beyond Nature and Culture*

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[30] In Portuguese: "Aceitava aquela *conversão* de bom agrado. A partir de então, o colchão se *convertia* em mulher."

[31] In Portuguese: "De repente, o colchão se revolteou, envolvendo o mineiro. Carnes e esponjas, braços e panos se entreodilharam. *O corpo do homem foi perdendo formato*, em dissolvição."

[32] In Portuguese: "O monstro de onde surgira? Imagina-se, tinha emergido da carteira, transfigurado, reencarnado, assombrado. Acontecera em instantâneo momento: a malograda ia tirar algo da mala e sentiu que ela se movia, esquivava. Tentou assegurá-la: tarde e de mais. Foi só tempo de avistar a dentição triangulosa, língua amarela no breu da boca."

(2013);[33] and of Viveiros de Castro in *A inconstância da alma selvagem* [*The Fickleness of the Wild Soul*] (2002), in which the perspective is multiple:

> The change of perspective would thus be a somatic metamorphosis and would be anchored in the idea of a common background of humanity, in a potentiality of the soul distributed horizontally in the cosmos. If perspectivism is the opposite of anthropocentrism, it is not separated from a certain anthropomorphism, making human prerogatives become no longer exclusive to the human species, but taking on the most diverse forms (Sztutman, 2021, n/p.).[34]

The recurrence of metamorphosis/transmutation in most of African literatures is an indicative of the translation of the traditional religious animist imaginary, recurring phenomena in the oral mythical tradition, which reveals an almost indivisible fusion of the human being with other bodies. A note is worth mentioning here: metamorphosis as a recurring and mythological theme has, in its context, distinct cosmovisions and, therefore, its realities must be approached in detail. As an example, whilst metamorphosis in the mythical Greco-Roman imaginary, from an Ovidian viewpoint, was a strategy of the gods to punish mankind, transforming them into animals, minerals and plants – and thus proving their superiority before the *anthropos* –, in the mythical African universe – and here we can highlight the plurality of mythologies of the continental scope (*Bantu* [*bakongo, kimbundo, shona* etc.], *Yoruba, Gikuyu, Akamba, Dinka, Somali, Tumbuka, Lozi, Zulu, Akan, Dahomey, Dogon, Igbo*, among others) –, metamorphosis is not necessarily punishment, but strategy (when conscious), sign of strength and elevation of the self. At this point, the issue of metamorphosis in the African context converges with the studies of becomings from the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari (2008).[35]

Becoming is a philosophical concept which, in broad terms, is defined as "coming to be," from Latin *devenire*. In this philosophical sense, becoming is a movement towards a possibility: "that existence is never an intrinsic part of essence. One may never infer the

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[33] DESCOLA, Philippe. *Beyond Nature and Culture.* Translated by Janet Lloyd. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.

[34] In Portuguese: "A mudança de perspectiva seria, assim, uma metamorfose somática e se ancoraria na ideia de um fundo comum de humanidade, numa potencialidade anímica distribuída horizontalmente no cosmos. Se o perspectivismo é o avesso do antropocentrismo, ele não se separa de certo antropomorfismo, fazendo com que prerrogativas humanas deixem de ser exclusividade da espécie humana, assumindo formas as mais diversas."

[35] DELEUZE, Gilles; GUATTARI, F. *A Thousand Plateaus:* Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Translated by Brian Massumi. London: Continuum, 2008.

existentia of being from the concept being – whose *essentia* is nothing more than being itself" (Nietzsche, 1962, p. 82).[36] Becoming, in a Nietzschean sense, is based on an inconsistent reality, bound to difference and multiplicity. Such idea, in present days, comes to be suggested by Deleuze and Guattari (2008),[37] whose theory of becoming pervades the individuality of the being – their subjectivity – from the "molar" lines and the lines of "flight." Molar lines are molecular, hard (rupture); whilst lines of flight are malleable. The molar figures are, therefore, the definitions of previously established social patterns, as form and conscience of a social individual, comprising distinctions of gender, age, race, class, kingdom (animal, plant, mineral), religion, politics, caste etc. However, in this theoretical perspective, the molar/molecular lines are malleable, subject to metamorphoses and processes of deterritorialization (going from a figurative territory into another). By means of such molecular flow, there is disruption of strict structures, unveiling the major act of transformation, *the desire, that is, the becoming*.

> Unfinished, that's what we are, and we come to our end when buried. It's worth it to be a plant, your honor. I'm even going to learn to be a tree. Or perhaps a little clump of grass, for a tree wouldn't fit in here. Why don't those witches I was talking about try and be plants, all green and quiet? (Couto, 1990, p. 47).[38]

In this process, potentially new connections emerge, whose dissemination into or out of prior territoriality generate the lines of flight, which enable the view of alterity. In a simplified manner, we can say that Deleuze regards the *becoming*, and not the being, as the element responsible for constituting reality, given that *realization* relies on desire and transformation:

> Yes, all becomings are molecular: the animal, flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities, haecceities, not forms, objects, or molar subjects that we know externally, and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit (Deleuze; Guattari, 2008, p. 303).[39]

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[36] NIETZSCHE, Félix. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks.* Translated by Marianne Cowan. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1962.
[37] For reference, see footnote 35.
[38] For reference, see footnote 5.
[39] For reference, see footnote 35.

The philosophy behind the becoming is important to reflect upon both metamorphosis and animism, for the connections between realities outside of the being as well as the recognition of the self and the desire to leave that self pervades the political and religious imaginary of postcolonial realities. Metamorphoses are reflections of becoming-nation and becoming-individual; questions inherent to African nations which, for a long time, lived under the authority of colonialism and, consequently, in identity fragmentation, both individually (person) and collectively (nation). In these societies, in which the role model was harshly imposed by violence, the mythical imaginary is essential, providing all beings – either dynamic animate or inert animate – with the desire to be another.

Such phenomena also replicate aesthetically. In semantic and lexical relations, with the use of comparison and metaphor, under a perspective of writing which aims to break Eurocentric barriers between human individuals and the Nature-world, revalidating subordinate mythologies and religious imaginaries while denouncing the psycho-identity fragmentation of peoples violated by colonialism. And it is within this broader metaphor that African texts present the many facets of "transformation," using it as a paradigm of a literary language of its own. The image of metamorphosis in African literature retrieves the myth (in its sense of symbolic narrative of a religious imaginary, in this context, an animist one) from within the text, renovating it. One of the greatest philosophers of the theme, Ernst Cassirer, in *Language and Myth* (1946), understands that

> myth and language are subject to the same, or at least closely analogous, laws of evolution can really be seen and understood only in so far as we can uncover the common root from which both of them spring. The resemblances *in their results, in the forms which they produce*, point to a final community of function, of the principles whereby they operate. In order to recognize this function and represent it in its abstract nakedness, we have to pursue [...] to the point from which those two divergent lines emanate. And this common center really seems to be demonstrable; for, no matter how widely the contents of myth and language may differ, yet the *same form of mental conception* is operative in both. It is the form which one may denote as metaphorical thinking (…) (Cassirer, 1946, p. 84; our emphasis). [40]

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[40] CASSIRER, Ernst. *Language and Myth.* Translated by Susanne K. Langer. New York: Dover Publications, 1946.

Thus, metamorphosis/transmutation/psychomorphosis, in the characteristic context of animist realism, may imply the recurrence of ontological questions about oneself in (post)colonial circumstances. In this regard, I reverberate Mia Couto, when he states: "In Nature, no one is lost, everything invents another form" (Couto, 1997, p. 143),[41] for it is not in whatever "nature," but "In African Postcolonial Nature."

Final Remarks

This work aimed at emphasizing the relevance of religion studies, especially the ones on African traditions, in a postcolonial literary context, from the aesthetics of animist realism.

Initially, we made the point that, within postcolonial studies, the matters of religiosity were, up to a certain point, neglected or put in background as a thematic element. Such fact ended up preventing religion studies to be carried out under a postcolonial approach, as a guiding element towards a political-aesthetical proposition, which is essential in literary phenomena that have in their imaginative basis the heritage of the mythical-religious imaginary as it is the case of contemporary African literatures. Then, we argued that the same African literatures, initially in English and Portuguese, were the seed to this process of convergence between religious and postcolonial studies, enabling the emergence of knowledge around the traditional religions of Sub-Saharan Africa, understanding and relating them to the aesthetic proposition of certain authors, especially from the 1980s, in the twentieth century.

Further on, we discussed that this religious imaginary emerges from the practices of what we call "Traditional African Religion" that, despite not being homogeneous, reflect a common *Weltanschauung* which, in the studies by Harry Garuba, are termed "animist unconscious." Such animist unconscious is important for the aesthetic approaches of the Real-animist conception, a literary form of the African unusualness which confronts interpretations of the unusual as "magic," "marvelous" and "fantastic." Animist Realism is, therefore, an aesthetic phenomenon discussed by several African intellectuals which, although still in development, already shows recurring characteristics

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[41] In Portuguese: "Na Natureza, ninguém se perde, tudo inventa outra forma."

within the texts such as metamorphosis/transmutation. It was pointed out that such characteristic, coming from mythical imaginary, is visibly recurring in several authors and works, having been analyzed in the present text: Nigerian Amos Tutuola; Angolan Décio Bettencourt; and Mozambican Mia Couto.

Lastly, when analyzing metaphors in several examples, as a manifestation of the unusual in animist realism, we observed the emerging of a number of topics about the individual, the self, the other, especially in (post)colonial reality, in which transformation enables discussions on becoming-individual (colonized) and becoming-nation. Undoubtedly, the importance of metamorphosis in African literatures not only highlights the presence of traditional religions imaginary, but also – drawing from real-animist aesthetic – promotes debates on identities, desires, fragmentation and psycho-identity reality in a world divided between tradition and modernity.

The studies on Animist Realism fulfill the agenda of overcoming the divorce between postcolonial studies and traditional African religiosities. Studies, perhaps, in eternal metamorphosis.

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Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

Well-written, well-structured work that responds with a great deal of objectivity and clarity to the theme and objectives proposed. The text is well-developed. The bibliography appears to be appropriate as it offers a good reflection on the issues discussed. Therefore, I recommend it for publication. APPROVED

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