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Mia Couto's Postcolonial Epistemology: Animality in *Confession of the Lioness* (*A Confissão da leoa*)

In his essay “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice”, Bataille aims to ground the human back into the realm of the animal: “He [Man] is not merely a man who negates Nature, he is first of all an animal, that is to say the very thing he negates: he cannot therefore negate Nature without negating himself.¹ Bataille thus takes an opposite stance to the idea, predominant in philosophy for centuries, that the animal and the human are, in many ways, totally different creatures. Not surprisingly, in an epigraph to his essay Bataille quotes Hegel’s statement that “the death of the animal is the becoming of consciousness”: for Hegel, the human being is a *thinking* being, conscious of its actions, while animals neither have any desires, rationality, nor any form of consciousness. Challenging Hegel’s reductive thought, the French philosopher makes it clear that “It is the very separation of Man’s being, it is his isolation from Nature, and, consequently, his isolation in the midst of his own kind, which condemn him to disappear definitively.”² Thus Bataille, and in his wake philosophers such as Derrida in *L’animal que donc je suis*, appear to be at the very other end of “enlightened” philosophers such as Hegel, or even more radically Rousseau, who described animals as the diametrical opposite of men, rather than their equal. Discussing animal death itself for Rousseau would be a futile task: “I say pain and not death because an animal will never know what it is to die; and knowledge of death

¹ Georges Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice”, *Yale French Studies*, no. 78, On Bataille (1990), 15.

² Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice”, 15.

and its terrors is one of the first acquisitions that man has made in moving away from the animal condition.”³ Meanwhile, the human sciences, among them philosophy, but also cultural and literary studies, have increasingly embraced an active rethinking and re-valuing of animals in their relation to – and as part of – human life and vice versa: human life as integral part of animality. Recent studies such as Agamben’s *The Open. Man and Animal*⁴ or Kelly Oliver’s *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human*⁵ can be read as attempts to conceive of a more inclusive relationship to animals. According to Oliver,

Rather than acknowledge the ways in which we benefit from animal pedagogy and animal kinship, we exclude the animal, animality, and animals so that we can fence off what is properly human. [...] Instead, a sustainable ethics would have to be an ethics of limits, an ethics of conservation. Rather than assert our dominion over the earth and its creatures, this ethics would oblige us to acknowledge our dependence on them. It would require us to attend to our responsibility by virtue of that dependence. Again, it would challenge us to witness to what is beyond recognition, beyond rights, but not beyond responsibility, namely, what sustains us (even if it is nameless).⁶

In this article I will argue that postcolonial fiction, as exemplified by the case of Lusophone African authors, can be read as alternative theories of animality, naturally challenging the “Western” concept, still largely predominant in the 21st century in spite of the rise of animal rights movements, of animality as radically different from (or opposed to) human life. While the philosophical debate has focused on the intranscendable distance between the animal and the human, such an opposition naturally links animality and the human, instead of approaching both as each other’s opposites. This can be exemplified in postcolonial novels from Lusophone Africa and the Caribbean. In what follows I will briefly focus on the case of Mia Couto, Mozambique’s best known writer, and particularly on his novel *A confissão da leoa / Confession of the Lioness*. Mia Couto is best known as the writer of novels, such as *O último vôo do flamingo (The Last Flight of the Flamingo)* and *Terra somnâmbula (Sleepwalking Land)*, even though he has also been very active as a writer of short stories and poetry.⁷ Couto was the winner of major awards, such as the Premio Camões,

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Two Discourses and the Social Contract* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 297.

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

⁵ Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁶ Oliver, *Animal lessons*, 306.

⁷ Mia Couto, *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* (London: Profile Books, 2005) [*O último vôo do flamingo*. Lisboa: Editora Companhia das Letras, 2000]; Mia Couto, *Sleepwalking Land*, trans.

the most prestigious award in the Lusophone world, as well as the Neustadt Prize, which is often referred to as the “American Nobel”. Writing and publishing quality novels at an impressive pace, a ratio of one new book every two to three years, Couto combines his literary activity with his professional work as a biologist. He grew up in Beira, Mozambique’s second biggest city, and worked for some time as a journalist during the civil war that struck Mozambique after independence in 1975. As with many Lusophone African writers (for instance, Pepetela from Angola), the trauma of war has deeply impacted his literary work.

The novel’s plot is reduced to a bare minimum and can be summarized in a few sentences. Kulumani, a small town, experiences a wave of attacks by lions, and a hunter is called in in order to resolve the problem. Local hunters soon organize their own hunt in an attempt to kill the lions. The story is told through the eyes of two characters, each of whose diaries we read: a hunter (Arcanjo Baleiro), and a woman (Mariamar) from Kulumani whose sister got killed by a lion. We thus get a double perspective on the action – or lack thereof – taking place. The diary is thus a kind of filter: what we learn about Kulumani (an imaginary town, even though it strongly resounds with Quelimane, a city in Mozambique) comes in two complementary, at times conflictive, versions. In addition, it is significant that almost the whole novel takes place at night. Mariamar lost her sister in the attacks, and, like the hunter, she keeps a diary where she writes about her grief and about the events. A third character comes into the picture: Gustavo, a writer who accompanies the hunter and appears as an *alter ego* of Mia Couto. The novel’s story is allegedly based on real facts: *Confession of the Lioness* indeed explicitly draws from Couto’s real-life experience as a biologist, as acknowledged in the Author’s note at the beginning of the novel.⁸ In 2008, Couto carried out field work in the Cabo Delgado region in Northern Mozambique, during which twenty people were attacked by lions over a period of four months. As in the novel, hunters would be called in order to protect the people in the area, among them Mia Couto’s colleagues carrying out their field work, thus becoming “um alvo fácil para os felinos” [an easy target for the lions].⁹

Mia Couto’s work is deeply rooted in the traditional beliefs of Mozambique, and through that traditional scope the theme of hunting is important. According to philosopher Roger Scruton, “In the hunt [...] are revived, in transfigured form, some of the long-buried emotions of our forebears. The reverence for a species, expressed through the pursuit of its ‘incarnate’ instance; the side-by-sideness of the tribal hunts-man; the claim to territory and the animals who

David Brookshaw (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2006) [Terra somnâmbula. Alfragide: Caminho, 2015 (1992)].

⁸ Mia Couto, *Confession of the Lioness*, trans. David Brookshaw (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 9–10.

⁹ Couto, *Confession of the Lioness*, 9.

live in it; and the therapy for guilt involved in guiltless killing”.¹⁰ However, the novel is neither a homage for nor a condemnation of hunting, but rather it taps into the matter to deal with deeper reflection on animality. Couto includes many relevant African proverbs about lions (the authenticity of which cannot always be verified, something that the author’s work seems to foster); among them one that features as the novel’s epigraph: “Until lions invent their own stories, hunters will always be the heroes of their hunting narratives.”¹¹ The proverb stems from the Ewe-mina tribes and is telling/told for it indirectly refers to Africa’s condition of (past and present) submission to colonial rule. Until Africans will have their own epistemologies to draw on, and their own histories to write, the colonizer/oppressor and the (European) white and African elites will always dominate at the cost of the native people. The “subaltern” voices that have been silenced, embodied in Mariamar’s diary, that is, the lioness’ untold story, will continue to suffer until true redemption takes place. Interestingly, by putting this preliminary note before the actual (fictional) story, Mia Couto creates the effect of a documentary for it is “inspired by real facts and people”, and thus the reader logically looks for clues that allow them to identify the geographical and historical accuracy of places, names, and events. However, to look for such parallels would be to miss the point: the novel, as I endeavour to prove here, does not aim for verisimilitude. While the precision of the spatial coordinates is not so important – as in Couto’s earlier work – the dialectics between local and global should not be neglected. Kulumani indeed is a metaphor for globalization’s forgetfulness of the local (African) village.

Even before local Kulumani hunters start hunting on their own account, they are being described by Arcanjo Baleiro as bewitched human beings, transmuting into animals.

Durante um tempo os homens dançam e, à medida que rodam e saltam, vão perdendo o tino e, em pouco tempo, desatam a urrar, rosar e sujar os queixos de babas e espumas. Então percebo: aqueles caçadores já não são gente. São leões. Aqueles homens são os próprios animais que pretendem caçar. Aquela praça apenas confirma: a caça uma feitiçaria, a última das autorizadas feitiçarias.

(The men dance for a little longer, and while they are gyrating and jumping they begin to lose their inhibitions, and soon they are screaming, growling, and soiling their chins with froth and spittle. It’s then that I understand: Those hunters are no longer humans. They are lions. Those men are the very animals they seek to hunt. What’s happening in the square merely confirms

¹⁰ Roger Scruton, “From a View to a Death: Culture, Nature and the Huntsman’s Art.” *Environmental Values* (1997): 479–480.

¹¹ In Ewe language, the proverb is “*Gnatola ma no kpon sia, eyenabe adelan to kpo mi sena*”.

this: Hunting is witchcraft, the last piece of witchcraft to be permitted by law.)¹²

While witchcraft is officially not allowed by authorities, hunting is viewed as one of the few surviving local traditions which are officially allowed yet looked at with suspicion, as Kulumani's governor Makwala explains. Conscious of their position of outsiders, Arcanjo and the writer who accompanies him, Gustavo Regalo, observe with fascination the rituals and witchcraft taking place at the local hunters' gathering. Yet as the story unfolds, there seems to be little or no progress in the hunt, the main "event" in the novel. While hunting is initially presented as the principal theme of the novel, the readers are effectively lured into a narrative trap: instead of being the pursuer who follows the action, they become the pursued one. Like the Cortazarian protagonist of the short story "Continuidad de los parques" ("Continuity of Parks"), the reader who looks for progress in the novel's action is bound to become disappointed.¹³ The action seems to come to a halt, resembling, up to a certain degree, an anti-detective novel whereby the reader realizes that the *whodunit* was a mere trap for the reader. Here, the trap is quite literally the village of Kulumani itself, where the tension builds even though nothing really happens: the narrative stagnation reflects the habitants' lack of any free movement (except at the cost of their lives: as soon as they leave their habitat they will get wounded or killed). For the women in Kulumani, ironically, not much change is on the horizon, for they were already trapped before the attacks started: symbolically Mariamar suggests that many were already born dead and continue to "live" as living dead.

Rather than hallucinations of one particular character, I argue that almost all characters in the novel are haunted by the condition, conscious or unconscious, of *becoming* animals. Arcanjo Baleiro undergoes a similar experience, yet in very different circumstances. At a given moment in the novel, the hunter Arcanjo Baleiro, patiently waiting for the lions to approach the town, says, "Lá fora, a lua cheia desperta em mim uma *felina inquietação*." ("Outside, the *full moon* awakens some feline restlessness within me").¹⁴ More than an incursion into the poetic realm, which is a major feature of his work, Mia Couto here reveals his subscription to cross-gender boundaries by foregrounding the hunter's "lado feminino", the feminine side of all creatures, a side proper to all human beings yet one that has remained in the shadow for too many centuries. From the outset the "feminine" thus largely transcends the narrowly defined realms of the biological sexes, the masculine as the opposite of the feminine. Moreover, this sentence shows well Couto's cleverly tying together what are supposed to be opposites: animality and humanity. Soon after starting the hunt, Arcanjo

¹² Couto, *Confession of the Lioness*, 160.

¹³ Julio Cortázar, "Continuidad de los parques", in *Final del juego* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1956).

¹⁴ Couto, *Confession of the Lioness*, 110 (my emphasis).

Baleiro gets absorbed by a lioness. The hunter is suddenly taken by surprise by the lioness' gaze, triggering a moment of estrangement, reminding us of Cortazar's Axolotl, whereby the animal appropriates human features of the observer. In another passage the hunter recalls his missed opportunity to kill the lioness:

Mas eis que, de repente, a leoa suspende a carga. Surpreende-a, quem sabe, não me ver correr, espavorido. Está frente a mim, com os seus olhos presos nos meus. Estranha-me. Não sou quem ela espera. No mesmo instante deixa de ser leoa. Quando se retira já transitou de existência. Já não é sequer criatura.

(But lo and behold, suddenly the lioness stops her onward rush. Who knows, maybe she is surprised not to see me run away, terrified. She stops in front of me, her eyes fixed on mine. She is puzzled by me. I'm not what she expected. At that same moment, she ceases to be a lioness. When she withdraws, she has already left her existence. She is no longer a living creature.)¹⁵

Arcanjo's eyes are captivated by the lion's gaze, undergoing a moment of estrangement, which triggers an "anthropomorphization" of the lioness, and simultaneously triggers an animalization of the hunter, and towards the end of the novel, of Mariamar: "A leoa continua enfrentando-me, medindo-me a alma. Há uma luz divina nos seus olhos. Ocorre-me o mais estranho dos pensamentos: que em algum lugar já havia contemplado aqueles olhos capazes de hipnotizar um cego" (The lioness continues before me, appraising my soul. There is a divine light in her eyes. I am beset by the strangest of thoughts: that somewhere, I have already contemplated those eyes that seem capable of hypnotizing a blind man).¹⁶ Baleiro gets caught up in a dream-state in which he becomes the pursued one, gaining life only after having been killed by these "brave creatures"¹⁷:

Sou o oposto do caçador tradicional que, de véspera, sonha o animal que vai matar. No meu caso, sonho-me a mim mesmo, ganhando vida apenas depois de ter sido morto por bravias criaturas. Essas feras são agora os meus monstros privados, a minha mais diletta criação. Nunca mais deixarão de ser meus, nunca mais deixarão de passear pelas minhas noites. Porque afinal, sou eu o seu domesticado prisioneiro.

(I'm the opposite of the traditional hunter who, the night before, dreams of the animal he's going to kill. In my case, I dream of myself, gaining life only after having been killed by the creatures of the wild. These beasts are now my private monsters, my favorite works of creation. They will never cease

¹⁵ Couto, *Confession of the Lioness*, 181.

¹⁶ Couto, *Confession of the Lioness*, 182.

¹⁷ Couto, *Confession of the Lioness*, 182.

to be mine, never stop moving through my dreams. Because I am, after all, their docile prisoner.)¹⁸

It is tempting to interpret the novel *either* simply in terms of a romance between the hunter and Mariamar, or as a description of women's tragic faith in rural Mozambique, embodied in Mariamar. While such readings are definitely valid, to dismiss the broader link to animality – announced in the title – would be to do injustice to the novels' many semantic layers: it is important to grasp the symbiosis between animals and human beings in Couto's universe. The theme of hunting is thus closely related to Couto's deeper, philosophical, literary, and existential concerns. These concerns are embedded in African beliefs which are often hard to grasp for the non-initiated reader. It is questionable, though, to call these Mozambican traditional beliefs, for "Tradition", especially in an African and Caribbean context, has too often been interpreted as the sharp opposite of (Western) "Modernity". The second theme that I have been discussing, animality, emerges from that African context. However, as I have emphasized earlier, there are interesting links with Western philosophers, and Derrida is a case in point. Therefore we should be careful to "Africanize" Couto's work as much as we should resist the temptation to see him as a European writer with a strong European inclination. Rather, it is the hybridity of both worlds (Mozambican African with strong European influences) that makes his work so attractive.

Recent anthropological findings are extremely helpful to place the characters' "turning animal" in a specific Mozambican and African context. In his recent study of state formation in Mozambique, *Violent Becomings. State Formation, Sociality and Power in Mozambique*, Bjorn Enge Bertelsen describes his field work carried out in 2008 in the city of Chimoio, in the Northwestern part of Mozambique.¹⁹ While more southern than Cabo Delgado, the province where Mia Couto worked as a biologist (as he points out in the Author's note), the analogies are more than striking: in a similar account to Mia Couto informing the reader about the true events upon which the novel is based, Bertelsen describes how during his fieldwork three women in Honde were fatally attacked by lions. Significantly, the news was put in political context, for the attacks served to bolster RENAMO's "war of the spirits" against the FRELIMO state form – a war where the former's "particular sociopolitical force was premised on its self-styled protective role vis-à-vis the traditional field".²⁰

¹⁸ Couto, *Confession of the Lioness*, 182.

¹⁹ Bjørn Enge Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings: State Formation, Sociality, and Power in Mozambique*. (New York-Oxford : Berghahn Books, 2016).

²⁰ Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings*, 108. By "traditional field" Bertelsen understands an "unruly and contested domain of the social". The anthropologist's use of the term "traditional field" is interesting, for he gives it a more open meaning than the term "tradition", which in Mozambique

More specifically, Bertelsen explores the “rural-urban continuum of Honde and Chimoio to trace specific instances of deterritorialization.”²¹ What interests me particularly is how the anthropologist goes to conceptualize what he calls “man-animality” in the context of the tensions that have been running through Mozambican society’s veins since independence. Strikingly, the locals’ perception of the *leão tradicional*, or *mhondoro* as they also call him, is in tune with Couto’s view of animality exposed in *A confissão da leoa*:

The term *mhondoro* in its basic Shona [language] sense means “lion” but more commonly refers to “a spirit of a deceased person of eminence held to reside in the body of a lion when not communicating from time to time with the living through an accredited human medium – socially recognized as a source of supernatural power, authority and sanctions,” as Abraham defined it (1966: 28). In more ways than one, the *mhondoro* is the supreme entity coalescing the various ways in which *nkika*, the traditional field, and its beings – both human and animal – are integrated. The *mhondoro* or “traditional lion” (*leão tradicional*), as people in Honde and Chimoio often call it, differs in terms of capacity and orientation from what people recognize as and call “natural lions”. Often called *shumba* or *leão natural* in Portuguese, this type of lion is seen to be dangerous and potentially lethal. However, the ferocity and predatory being of the *shumba* can always be resisted and evaded by eliciting the services of a traditional healer (*nanga*) and engaging traditional ways of protecting one’s body and belongings. A critical distinction is made, however, between the *Shumba* and two other capacities and shapes the lion may take – both of which are generally termed *mhondoro dwozutumua*. Both shapes comprise “traditional lions” in the sense of being nonnatural in origin and spirit if not in guise.²²

Similarly, in the novel, three types of lions are said to live around Kulumani. In a village meeting, the men agree that all three of existing lions are real: “há o leão-do-mato que aqui se chama de *ntumi va kuvapila*; há o leão-fabricado, a quem apelidam de *ntumi ku lambi-dyanga*; e há os leões-pessoas, chamados de *ntumi va vanu*” (There is the lion-of-bush which is here called *ntumi va kuvapila*; There is the lion-brewed, whom they call *ntumi ku lambi-dyanga*; And there are lions-people, called *ntumi va vanu* [my translation]).²³ This tripartition roughly corresponds with the distinction made between *mhondoro* or “spirit lion”, “i.e. a lion possessed by chiefly or other ancestral spirits” and the

resonates with the ideologically charged term *tradição*, often used to denote a number of official issues, such as: formal authority of traditional leaders or ceremonies to hail the president, pre-colonial idealized moral or cultural orders.

²¹ Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings*, 91.

²² Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings*, 103.

²³ Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings*, 124.

mhondoro dwozutumua, which is a “spirit lion” with two possible shapes (yet not further explained by Bertelsen), that has violent, “destructive purposes” and is “sometimes alleged to be created by sorcerous means.”²⁴

According to the anthropologist, following the May 2008 lion attacks, people in the village “speculated in conversations revolving around past and present contested political and social issues.”²⁵ While the evil, destructive *mhondoro dwozutumua* reappeared devouring three women, the benign *mhondoro* in turn had been deterritorialized: its disappearance would have been alleged to “the colonial state, the FRELIMO state, and the RENAMO war machine.”²⁶ Moreover the *mhondoro*, Bertelsen explains, is a “practical example of the dislocating forces of violence and the encroaching colonial state.”²⁷ Colonial and postcolonial violence are thus intertwined in contemporary Mozambique, and are crucial in understanding not only the processes of state formation, but also, I argue, the country's struggle with the problem of cultural identity.

What is at stake, then, in the broader Mozambican political context, is a dislocation of the position of the protective lion as a “force and guardian spirit”²⁸, the *mwondoro* or “spirit lion” as a medium has become jeopardized under FRELIMO and RENAMO's violent pressures, as well as through international involvement: the habitants of Chimoio experienced themselves as vulnerable to the ferociousness of *mwondoro dwozutumua*, unleashed through the growing tensions in the regions, which Bertelsen defines in terms of deterritorialization (by FRELIMO's modernization) and reterritorialization (by RENAMO's emphasis on ancestral dynamics or *tradição*). While RENAMO seeks to gather support through the accommodation of ancestral beliefs, FRELIMO's interventions were perceived as a “deterritorializing attack on what they perceived as *tradição*: they made inhabitants of Chimoio feel vulnerable to the “evil lion” or *mhondoro dwozutumua*.

The anthropologist cites another event, more recent but not less relevant, of how transmogrification into animals, as observed in Mia Couto's novel, is deeply rooted in the popular imaginary of Mozambique, to the point that it occasionally reaches mainstream media. It is worthwhile to cite the event at length, in order to show the entanglement of both spheres that are popularly known as the “supernatural” or “magic” and the “real”:

²⁴ Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings*, xxi.

²⁵ Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings*, 103.

²⁶ Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings*, 108. RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance Movement) is a conservative party which was the main protagonist in a bloody civil war against FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front), Mozambique's dominant political party.

²⁷ Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings*, 114.

²⁸ Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings*, 113.

On 29 September 2015 a motorcade comprising a number of cars holding Afonso Dhlakama, his aides, and soldiers drove along a main road from Chimoio in central Mozambique toward the city of Nampula when they were attacked – apparently by the forces of the Mozambican state. Dhlakama, the long-term leader of RENAMO, the country’s largest opposition party, had just spoken at a rally in Chimoio. The attack left a number of people dead, but Dhlakama himself allegedly escaped quite spectacularly: He transmogrified into a bird, a partridge – the symbol of his party RENAMO – spread his wings, and flew off.²⁹

What is key here is the *entanglement* of areas that the Western mind would typically approach as separate or even opposite realms: the supernatural (“magical”) and the empirical (“real”), the human and the animal, the hunter and the hunted. These binarisms are, in Couto’s universe, closely linked to a third realm, the political: “The transformative capacity of Dhlakama underlined not so much sorcery as the multiple and intimate connections between political formations, territory, and human-animal interaction and transmogrification.”³⁰ RENAMO’s frontman Dhlakama’s ability to appropriate man-animality features, to shape-shift into a partridge [*perdiz*] thus “embodies flight and mobility as powerful capacities in defiance of state apparatuses of capture”.³¹ In short, whether the Chimoio lion attacks were directly related to the killings that happened during Couto’s field work in Cabo Delgado is unknown, yet the Chimoio context is very similar to the extent that it helps shed us light on the events that inspired the writer. Couto is careful in not providing too many geographical coordinates: not only are too many details irrelevant for the fictionalized version of the events, but it would also diminish the universal appeal of his work, which is read around the globe.

In spite of the multiple ambiguities and confusion of identities detected in *A confissão da leoa*, animality has altogether a much more positive connotation in the novel than in his early work, especially *Terra Sonâmbola*, which ended – it is worth recalling here – with a spirit medium proposing “Aceitemos morrer como gente que já não somos. Deixai que morra o animal em que esta Guerra nos converteu” (We must accept to die as people which we no longer are. Let the animal into which this war has converted us die).³² “Animal” in his early novel thus bore first and foremost a negative connotation, in the sense of primitive, de-humanized beings. It would be too trivial a statement to make that Mia Couto draws constant inspiration from the world of animals simply because of his interest in issues related to animals and nature, i.e. because of

²⁹ Bertelsen, *Violent Becomings*, 1.

³⁰ Bertelsen, *Violent becomings*, 110.

³¹ Bertelsen, *Violent becomings*, 111.

³² Couto, *Terra somnâmbula* (Alfragide: Caminho, 2015 [1992]), 328.

his official profession as a biologist. Yet the world of animals and what I will call here “animality” as a philosophical concept and way of thinking have come to play an increasingly important role in his work. The extent to which the Mozambican author draws parallels between the human and animal world finds an important parallel in the work of philosophers such as Derrida, Agamben and Deleuze, all of whom have attempted to revalue the place in philosophy of what we commonly call “animals”. Rather than merely referential, I argue that animals and animality weave the textual tissue of *A confissão da leoa*, with deep philosophical implications which are thus both “African” (or “pan-African”) and “universal”. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Mia Couto’s world view is strongly influenced by animals, but it is key to analyze why this is so: are ecological concerns or other preoccupations at stake? Is it the writer’s or his countrymen’s beliefs in the supernatural? And how does this relate to the context of “social conflicts” the author points to in the Author’s note?

Finally, if no specific spatial (geographic) coordinates are given in *A Confissão*, if no specific time coordinates are being provided, it is likely the author’s intention. Kulumani could be as much a Mozambican as another rural African village forgotten by globalization. For instance, instead of “Maputo” we are being vaguely informed about Arcanjo and Gustavo as people coming from “the capital”.³³ By making spatial referentiality subordinated to the linguistic, poetic and emotional aspects, the identification with both characters and locations is being expanded. The lack of spatial and chronological referentiality in Couto’s work runs parallel to the lack of a plot. If in *Terra Sonâmbola* “there is neither a real plot nor an elaborated story, this is true for most of his novels. I argue that in *A confissão da leoa*, as well as in his predecessor *Jesusalém*, we are dealing with a similar post-independence setting as in Couto’s first novel. The reader is set amidst a common setting: a wasteland, vaguely located (i.e. without any clear coordinates) in Mozambique, in which the characters live, or rather, attempt to survive. Yet it is not only the lack of time-space references, but an “openness” that challenges the reader.

Although Mia Couto’s writing benefits from the many influences of both European and African cultures, his work occupies a unique, vanguardist place in postcolonial and world literature; animal and human death are closely inter-linked phenomena in Mia Couto’s work and can only be understood by taking into account the cultural hybridity that underlies his prose, deeply grounded in the African beliefs briefly discussed in this article. As such, his work deserves to be read as an alternative mode of rethinking many of the established concepts in Western thought, showing how postcolonial literary epistemologies in many ways precede the critical reevaluation of animality in poststructural philosophy.

³³ Couto, *Confession of the Lioness*, 12.

Abstrakt

Postkolonialna epistemologia Mii Couto:
Zwierzęcość w *Wyznaniu lwicy* (*A Confissão da leoa*)

Celem artykułu jest zbadanie relacji pomiędzy zwierzęcością i śmiercią we współczesnej literaturze postkolonialnej pochodzącej z luzofońskiej części Afryki (czyli dawnych kolonii portugalskich), ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem powieści *Wyznanie lwicy* (*A confissão da leoa*) autorstwa mozambickiego pisarza Mii Couto. Jego twórczość znana jest z zainteresowania animizmem i tym, co nadprzyrodzone, stąd często kategoryzuje się ją pod szyldem „magicznego realizmu”. Jednakże w *Wyznaniu lwicy* Mia Couto zajmuje się raczej złożonym związkiem pomiędzy ludzką i zwierzęcą śmiercią, co wedle autora artykułu należy odczytywać z zupełnie innej perspektywy: wielorakie transmutacje postaci w fabule powieści wskazują na postkolonialne pragnienie renegocjowania granic pomiędzy zwierzęcością a tym, co (trans)ludzkie.

Słowa kluczowe:

zwierzęcość, postkolonialność, literatura afrykańska, Mozambik, transmutacja

Абстракт

Постколониальная эпистемология Миа Коуту:
Мир животных в *Исповеди львицы* (*A confissão da leoa*)

В статье исследуется связь между миром животных и смертью в современной постколониальной литературе португалоязычной части Африки на примере романа *A confissão da leoa* (*Исповедь львицы*) мозамбикского писателя Миа Коуту. Творчество автора известно, прежде всего, интересом к анимизму и сверхъестественному, поэтому его часто относят к «магическому реализму». Однако в *Исповеди львицы* Коуту описывает довольно сложные отношения между смертью человека и животных, которую, по мнению автора статьи, следует рассматривать с совершенно иной точки зрения: многочисленные трансмутации персонажей в сюжете романа указывают на постколониальное желание пересмотреть границы между животным и (транс)человеком.

Ключевые слова:

мир животных, постколониализм, африканская литература, Mozambik, трансмутация