



From self-identity to universality: a reading of Henri Lopes' works

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Abstract

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Born in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, yet a citizen of Congo-Brazzaville, Henri Lopes is one of those African writers who were not only educated in Europe (France) but also lived there while writing a certain portion of their literary work. Being an influential political figure in his country, the author expresses his vision of an independent Africa through his literary works such as "Tribaliques"¹ (1971), "La nouvelle romance" (1976), "Sans tam-tam" (1977) and "Le pleurer-rire" (1982). However, from 1990, Lopes distances his writings from general political issues. In "Le chercheur d'Afriques" (1990) and "Le lys et le flamboyant" (1997), he veers into a new ideological direction, predominantly embedded in issues pertaining to existence: the quest for identity and issues related to hybridisation are recurrent themes and objects of scrutiny. It is clear that this biological approach serves as a pretext for the author to perform an in-depth interrogation of the complex issues of the universal in the context of a modern and globalising world. In his works, human blood and race represent an important aspect of culture; the blending of different cultures is an essential element

1 *Tribaliks* in English, however, other Lopes' works have not yet been translated into English. My translation of the titles would be "The new romance" (*La nouvelle romance*), "Without a drum" (*Sans tam-tam*), "The crying-laughter" (*Le pleurer-rire*), "The searcher of Africas" (*Le chercheur d'Afriques*) and "The lily and the flamboyant" (*Le lys et le flamboyant*) – PKM.

for the construction of society. A community founded on cultural diversity is thus depicted as dynamic, strong and sustainable. One wonders whether the author is not describing his own life experiences through fiction. This might indeed be the case, considering that Lopes himself is a person of mixed origins, herein referred to as a "métis". However, the experience described by the author, who lives in France, transcends race; it addresses the modern debate on the issue of cultural hybridisation.

Opsomming

Van selfidentiteit tot universaliteit: 'n vertolking van Henri Lopes se werke

Henri Lopes, gebore in Kinshasa in die Demokratiese Republiek van die Kongo (DRK), maar 'n Kongolese burger (Brazzaville), is een van die Afrikaskrywers wat nie alleen in Europa (Frankryk) sy opvoeding ontvang het nie, maar ook daar gewoon en 'n aansienlike deel van sy literêre werk daar voltooi het. As 'n invloedryke politieke figuur in sy land het die outeur sy visie van 'n onafhanklike Afrika verwoord in werke soos "Tribaliques" (1971), "La nouvelle romance" (1976), "Sans tam-tam" (1977) en "Le pleurer-rire" (1982). Vanaf 1990 het Lopes hom egter in sy skryfwerk van algemene politieke kwessies gedistansieer. In "Le chercheur d'Afriques" (1990) en "Le lys et le flamboyant" (1997), beweeg hy in 'n nuwe ideologiese rigting, naamlik hoofsaaklik gefokus op eksistensiële kwessies: die soeke na identiteit en kwessies oor hibridisering raak terugkerende temas en areas van ondersoek. Dit is duidelik dat hierdie biologiese benadering as 'n voorwendsel dien vir die skrywer om 'n diepgaande ondersoek na die komplekse aard van die universele in 'n modern en globaliserende wêreld te loods. In sy werk verteenwoordig bloed en ras 'n belangrike aspek van kultuur; die vermenging van verskillende kulture is 'n noodsaaklike element vir die konstruksie van die samelewing. 'n Gemeenskap gebaseer op kulturele diversiteit word dus uitgebeeld as dinamies, sterk en volhoubaar. 'n Mens wonder of die outeur nie sy outobiografiese ervarings deur fiksie verwoord nie. Dit mag inderdaad die geval wees, aangesien Lopes self 'n "métis" (van gemengde bloed) is. Sy werk transendeer rassegrense en neem deel aan die moderne debat oor kulturele hibridisering.

1. Introduction

Being a politician and a writer, one can easily discern through Lopes' writings, a complete picture of despotic postcolonial political (mis)management, coupled with a dire dearth of humanism on the part of the new political authorities. *Tribaliques*, *La nouvelle ro-*

mance, *Sans tam-tam* and *Le pleurer-rire* depict a particular worldview which provides an insight into the overarching reality of a young Africa that had just attained political independence. Lopes's stance, throughout his literary work, is clear: the liberation struggle against the occupation of the African continent by European powers is over; it is time now to fight against the ills of new political leadership comprised of Africans themselves.

While Lopes' works decry the shortcomings of postcolonial Africa, it is important to note that through writings published during the 1990s, particularly *Le chercheur d'Afriques* (1990) and *Le lys et le flamboyant* (1997), the author adopts a different angle from his customary thematic thrust: understanding issues of existence in the context of which questions such as identity and hybridisation come starkly to the fore. Whereas his work revolves around the search for identity in an empirical sense, or a purely physical perception of the cosmos, it is equally inspired by an ideal and impalpable conceptualisation process where the quest for inner identity seems to take precedence over physical appearance.

This article will demonstrate how the search for identity at an empirical level can finally lead to thoughts of a more abstract and general nature. As it were, the question whether personal identity exists separately from collective identity is relevant in this regard. To address the issue, Lopes uses personal identity or individuality as a point of departure which, in his view, is a kind of confluence between one's race and land of birth. However, once subjected to an overtly racial dialectic, this distinction seems to change throughout his work as it gives way to a more comprehensive view that embraces the idea of an overarching universal identity from which European, African and other identities take root. The various positions propounded by different characters throughout Lopes' works show a deliberate progression from the individual towards the universal.

2. Being *métis*

In *Le chercheur d'Afriques*, the author depicts the situation of Europeans sent into the colonies, leaving their spouses and families behind and subsequently engaging in casual relationships with indigenous women. Children born out of these unions used to be abandoned by their fathers who would eventually return to Europe to be reunited with their families (Lopes, 1990:65), but once these children matured into adulthood they would feel a strong moral urge to look for their fathers. The protagonist André Leclerc is indeed a perfect example of these abandoned children. He looks for his father

through all possible means and channels. Taking advantage of his stay as a student in Europe, he courageously embarks on the search for his father, regardless of the obstacles: his inability to establish his father's surname as a probable starting point for his quest, not knowing his physical address in Europe and the absence of anything that would have facilitated his search. Against all odds, he finally manages to track his father down. However, the narrative ends on a rather macabre note in that the lost child of mixed parents in search of his father is ultimately disowned by his white progenitor, who subsequently dies instantly from a heart attack caused by the presence of a child he would never have wanted to see in his family in Europe. This sudden death could be construed as a symbolic negation of harmonious inter-racial relations. It would appear that Lopes intended to use this episode as metaphor for the sour relations between races which, in physical terms, could be viewed as diametrical opposites.

It seems that the act of disclaiming the *métis* or people of mixed blood on the part of whites is embedded in the precepts and ideological bases of a colonial system – a system founded on the ideal of inculcating the notion of the racial superiority of whites over indigenous peoples. According to this plot, the world was officially perceived to be irreconcilable in so far as homogeneity constituted the central pillar underpinning all forms of association. However, for their part, blacks generally perceived the *métis* as “le rejeton honteux d'une trahison de la lignée”² (Blachère, 1994:115). Rejected thus by both sides, the *métis* embarks on a journey to determine his own identity, on his own terms. It is a drawn out existential quest from deep inside that culminates in anxiety:

Malgré l'affection dont on m'entourait, je me suis souvent demandé si je n'étais pas un enfant recueilli. A bien y réfléchir, je ne pouvais être le fils ni du commandant ni de Ngalaha. Ma peau était différente de la leur, différente même de celle des albinos.³ (Lopes, 1990:182.)

2 “disgraceful offspring resulting from the betrayal of the bloodline”. All translations from the original French text into English were done by the author of this article.

3 “Notwithstanding all the affection around me, I often wondered if I was not a foundling. After much thought, I (realised that I) could not have been the commander's nor Ngalaha's son. My skin (pigmentation) was different from theirs; different even from that of albinos.”

The novel *Le lys et le flamboyant*, on the other hand, constitutes an embodiment of a proud *métis* identity manifest in the absence of any hang-ups on the part of the characters. The reader can easily discern indirect references to the union between cultures through metaphors contained in the title itself: the “lys” (lily), a Western symbol of purity and brightness is seamlessly juxtaposed with the “flamboyant”, as an epitome of the colourful dimension of African thought. The utterances of Kolélé, the protagonist of this novel, are reminiscent of this selfsame philosophy of symbiotic coexistence when she claims to be a descendant of both “ancêtres bantous et gaulois”⁴ (Lopes, 1997:405). The narrator projects the idea that the lily and the flamboyant are encouraged to accommodate each other. This coexistence gives rise to a kind of harmony which becomes “l’hymne des mariages entre deux jeunes gens des tribus différentes”⁵ (Lopes, 1997:406). The characters in this novel, who are all *métis*, do not seem to pay much attention to racial distinction. This stance constitutes a form of dual acceptance: the characters owe their distinction to not considering themselves peculiar. The identity of a racial grouping is thus reduced to hybridisation which entails accepting the other and finding that same other within oneself.

Furthermore, it seems significant to point out that through his works, Lopes has inductively used the biological hybridisation in terms of races as an empirical pretext to explore much more complex issues of universal import. From the author’s point of view, hybridisation is indispensable to building a society that perpetually reinvents itself, whose inherent dynamism constitutes the very basis of the sustenance of such a society. Thus, it is this same philosophy of symbiotic coexistence that the narrator of *Le lys et le flamboyant* points out:

Il n’y a rien de totalement pur. Sans addition étrangère, on dégénère. [...] Toute civilisation [...] est née d’un métissage oublié, toute race pure est une variété de métissage qui s’ignore.⁶ (Lopes, 1997:135.)

4 “Bantu and Gallic ancestors”.

5 “the hymn for celebrating the marriage between two young people from different tribes”.

6 “Nothing is absolutely pure. The absence of additional outside input leads to degeneration. [...] every civilisation [...] is the product of some forgotten hybridisation; every pure race is a variety of some unacknowledged hybridisation.”

Or in the same progressive vein:

Ainsi, à contre-courant de tous ceux qui prêchaient l'immolation de Lomata, le trouble-fête assurait qu'il fallait écouter le message des Blancs, et des Bruns, pour accroître le spectre d'action des *nkissis*, ces fameuses médecines de la pharmacopée bantoue qui alternativement redonnaient vie ou distribuaient la mort [...] Toute race pure [...] était le fruit d'un métissage oublié.⁷ (Lopes, 1997:46.)

One gets an inkling of this stance in *Sans tam-tam* (1977) where the main character, Gatsé, declares that: "tout pays est le mien, tout peuple est mon peuple"⁸ (Lopes, 1977:16).

Hybridisation is construed as a phenomenon capable of fostering faster social progress. Viewed from that perspective, Lopes certainly appears to have drawn inspiration from a worldview embedded in Négritude as well as positions upheld, among others, by Ousmane Socé, George Ngal and Sheikh Anta Diop. The latter accounts for the present, by exhuming a past characterised by exchange and by hybridisation processes. According to Diop, the only influential Egyptologist that Lopes met when he was studying in France, "les anciens Egyptiens étaient des Noirs, qui se métissèrent par la suite avec les populations venues du Proche-Orient"⁹ (Pageard, 1979: 52). This very same vein runs through Ousmane Socé's works, in which the presence of the hybridisation theme is evident:

Nous nous trouvons mêlés, tout d'un coup à la vie universelle. C'en est fait de vieilles traditions dans tout ce qu'elles contiennent d'incompatibles avec le monde nouveau qui se crée; nous nous métissons, tous les jours, dans tous les domaines de l'activité humaine. Et de ce métissage, va naître, en terre africaine, un monde nouveau.¹⁰ (Socé, 1965:148-149.)

7 "Hence, in opposition to all those clamouring for Lomata's immolation, the troublemaker insisted that the white and brown people's message be heard in order to broaden the action spectrum of the *nkissis*, the famous medicines in Bantu pharmacopoeia which either killed or cured [...] Each pure race is the fruit of forgotten hybridisation."

8 "I belong to all countries and all peoples".

9 "ancient Egyptians were Blacks, who became racially mixed following the arrival of populations from the Near East".

10 "All of a sudden, we find ourselves caught up in universal life. It is the confluence of old traditions with all their incompatibilities in relation to the emerging

It is against the same background that Ngal (1984:112) denounces what he refers to as “specificity”, individuality and inertia, which is the danger inherent in the former:

Ce qu’un camarade a appelé tout à l’heure ‘attentat contre notre sécurité’ n’est rien d’autre que ‘attentat contre notre spécificité’, contre notre repli sur nous-mêmes. Mais n’oublions pas qu’une ‘spécificité’ prépare sa propre asphyxie dans la mesure où elle ne reçoit pas l’oxygène de l’extérieur. Les cultures ne survivent que par l’ouverture à d’autres cultures qui les libèrent de leur tendance au narcissisme collectif.¹¹

Lopes explores hybridisation along the same lines, notwithstanding the fact that his characters are mulattos themselves. In his works, the author defines hybridisation in the following manner:

Etre métis pour moi, ce n’est pas une question de peau [...] Le métissage c’est dans la tête. Les métis, pour moi, ce sont tous les individus dotés d’une âme à deux ou plusieurs cultures. Qu’ils soient nègres, blancs ou jaunes!¹²(Lopes, 1997:387.)

The main character, Kolélé, reveals a similar standpoint during a press conference with Mr. Dieng, a journalist from the *Tam-Tam* newspaper in *Le lys et le flamboyant*:

Par métis, je n’entends pas seulement les sang-mêlé [...] mais ceux qui comme moi, ou vous, monsieur Dieng, avec votre peau noire, sont métis dans leur tête et dans leur cœur.¹³ (Lopes, 1997:404.)

President Tonton Bwakamabé, the main character in *Le pleurer-rire*, is also depicted as a person of mixed culture, to the extent that he

new world: we are constantly hybridising in all aspects of human activity. From this hybridisation will emerge a new world on African soil.”

- 11 “What one comrade has just referred to as an ‘attack on our security’ is nothing but ‘an attack on our individuality’, on our inward-looking tendencies. We should nonetheless recall that any ‘individuality’ is bound to suffocate due to a lack of oxygen from outside. Cultures can only survive by opening up to other cultures that can save them from their collective narcissistic tendencies.”
- 12 “As for me, being *métis* is not a question of skin colour [...]. Being *métis* is all in the mind. For me *métis* people include all individuals whose soul is embedded in two or more cultures, regardless of whether they are black, white or yellow.”
- 13 “In my opinion, the term *métis* does not only denote people of mixed racial ancestry [...] but people like myself, or you, Mr. Dieng, with your black skin, are *métis* in their minds and hearts.”

claims to subscribe to a new culture without discarding the old one. He speaks about it with his *maître d'hôtel* with a considerable sense of pride:

Les Blancs sont des Blancs. Nous prennent toujours pour des gamins. Attends seulement. [Ils] pensent que je ne les connais pas parce que je suis nègre. *Or que*, je suis moi-même français.¹⁴ (Lopes, 1982:215.)

Or much more explicitly:

Tonton réagit en affirmant haut et fort qu'il avait lui aussi, la nationalité française; qu'il avait donné une partie de son sang pour la Libération, puis la gloire ultramarine du drapeau tricolore; que nul ne pouvait lui ôter cette citoyenneté et il rappelait qu'à chaque élection française, il votait scrupuleusement contre la gauche et les aventuriers de tout bord.¹⁵ (Lopes, 1982:237.)

In *Sans tam-tam*, still under the broader theme of mixed ancestry, Gatsé also presents a portrait of a professor, Mr. Pannikar, which reads as follows:

Indien de Pondichéry, il portait la nationalité française [...] Noir, il l'était aussi, quand son directeur menaçait de mettre fin à son contrat. Sa peau lui servait alors à obtenir des pétitions de braves étudiants sensibles à l'injustice raciste. Mais qui le suivait de près, savait comme il proclamait et affichait bruyamment sa *francitude* pour s'introduire dans les sociétés de bridgeurs, se faire inviter chez le conseiller culturel ou l'Ambassadeur de France. Européen, il le redevenait aussi pour défendre le principe de coopération, quand nous y voyions néocolonialisme.¹⁶ (Lopes, 1977:45.)

14 "White people will never change. They will always regard us as children. But just a minute [...] [they] think I don't know them because I'm black. Yet I'm French myself."

15 "Tonton responded by proclaiming loud and clear that he too was French; that he has sacrificed his blood for the liberation [of France], then defended the glory of the French flag overseas; that nobody could revoke his French nationality. He would also point out that during each French election, he voted strategically against the Left and all sorts of opportunists."

16 "Indian from Pondichéry, he had French citizenship [...] He was black as well whenever his boss threatened to terminate his contract. His skin colour would then come in handy to help mobilise petitions among dutiful students opposed to racial injustice. Yet those who followed him closely also knew how he ostentatiously proclaimed and displayed his *Frenchness* so as to be admitted

3. Métis and “antillanité”

Lopes’ position on *métis* can be likened to that of Edouard Glissant’s *antillanité*. In the course of expounding his experiential theory he deals with the issue from a creolisation perspective and arrives at the conclusion that exchange in today’s world is not a mere postulate but, indeed, a strong and inevitable challenge:

Le monde se créolise, c’est-à-dire que les cultures du monde mises en contact de manière foudroyante et absolument consciente aujourd’hui les unes avec les autres se changent en s’échangeant à travers les heurts irrémédiables, des guerres sans pitié mais aussi des avancées de conscience et d’espoir qui permettent de dire – sans qu’on soit utopiste, ou plutôt en acceptant de l’être – que les humanités d’aujourd’hui abandonnent difficilement quelque chose à quoi elles s’obstinaient longtemps, à savoir que l’identité d’un être n’est valable et reconnaissable que si elle est exclusive de l’identité de tous les autres êtres possibles.¹⁷ (Glissant, 1996:15.)

The viewpoints propounded by Glissant on the one hand and Lopes, on the other suggests that the common denominator of creolisation and hybridisation is the rejection of the concept of blood-mixing as a singular autonomous parameter. However, Glissant further intimates that creolisation transcends hybridisation on account of the unforeseeable dimension of the former, a characteristic that seems to be lacking in Lopes’ case. Creolisation is thus projected as the emergence from a process of interchange of something unexpected or unforeseeable:

La créolisation exige que les éléments hétérogènes mis en relation “s’intervalorisent”, c’est-à-dire qu’il n’y ait pas de dégradation ou de diminution de l’être, soit de l’intérieur, soit de l’extérieur, dans ce contact et dans ce mélange. La créolisation est imprévisible alors que l’on pourrait calculer les effets d’un métis-

into bridgeplaying circles, be invited by the French ambassador or cultural attaché. He would also become European in order to defend the principle of co-operation, whereas we regarded it as neo-colonialism.”

17 “*The world is creolising*, this implies that cultures of the world brought into contact with one another today, in an earthshaking and perfectly deliberate fashion, change as a result of exchanges such as irreversible shocks, bloody wars as well as advances in terms of hope and conscience that create room for claiming – without being utopian as such, or rather by accepting to be utopian – that present-day humanities can hardly abandon something to which they have been attached for such a long time, namely that the identity of a being can only be valid or recognisable if it precludes the identities of all other beings.”

sage. La créolisation, c'est le métissage avec une valeur ajoutée qui est l'imprévisibilité.¹⁸ (Glissant, 1996:19.)

What Glissant seems to suggest is that creolisation does not lend itself to predictable outcomes in that it spawns a new phenomenon, over which relevant actors cannot exercise any control. In terms of the framework of cultural hybridisation put forward by Glissant, the relation is not reduced to neutralism in the context of "totalité-monde": a modicum of distinction is an indispensable contribution to "chaos-monde" (melting world). Lopes, on the other hand, foregrounds some "ailleurs sans nostalgie ni mélancolie", (place elsewhere devoid of nostalgia and melancholy) a one-way ticket sometimes with no hope of returning. The narrator of *Le lys et le flamboyant*, Houang, couches this concept in the following terms:

Je ne suis pas certain de ressentir pour ma part le besoin de la terre natale. Même si le hasard m'y a ramené, jamais l'exil ne m'a été un baigne. Dans tout pays, pour peu que je puisse m'y faire comprendre et entendre la langue de ses habitants, je trouve toujours des personnages qui ressemblent à ceux de chez moi, à des compagnons de jeux, à une amie chère.¹⁹ (Lopes, 1997:373-374.)

This stance is similar to the one articulated by Jean Veneuse, the main character in the French writer René Maran's novel:

Venu à Bordeaux tout enfant, à une époque où il aurait été difficile d'y trouver huit ou dix nègres, mes meilleurs amis sont des Blancs. Je pense et vis à la française. La France est ma religion. Je ramène tout à elle. Enfin, hormis ma couleur, je me sais Européen. Je ne peux, en conséquence, que me marier avec une européenne.²⁰ (Maran, 1962:184.)

18 "Creolisation requires that associated heterogeneous elements 'enhance each other'. This implies that during this intercourse, the being is not subjected to any degradation or humiliation from within or without this contact. Whereas the effects of hybridisation could be forecast, creolisation is unpredictable. [Hence], creolisation is hybridisation with an extra dimension: the unforeseeable."

19 "Personally, I am not really sure whether I feel a need for my native country. Though fate put me in exile, it never felt like a prison to me. As long as I can make myself understood or understand the language used by the inhabitants of the country where I can always encounter people that resemble people back home, playmates or a cherished female friend."

20 "Having arrived in Bordeaux as a child, at a time when it would have been difficult to encounter eight or ten black people [in that town], my best friends are whites. I think and live like a Frenchman. France is my religion. It represents

The Congolese writer, Tchicaya U Tam'si, does not mince matters; he publicly acknowledges being a proponent of the universal:

Je suis un écrivain: je ne suis pas ou d'une ethnie, ou d'une nation, ou de l'Afrique: toutes ces composantes entrent dans ma personnalité et on ne peut pas limiter mon écriture à une ethnie, dans la mesure où je suis personnellement en rupture avec l'ethnie et même avec l'Afrique.²¹ (Nzabatsinda, 1996:105.)

Is it possible to conceive of an autobiographical literary work through which Lopes exposes his life experiences to the reader? The author's life seems to indicate that such a thought would not be far-fetched. Henri Lopes wrote these two works of literature in Paris where he had been living. His tendency to "write for the whole world" (Maunick, 1988:130), instead of confining himself to the limited audience of his country, bears testimony to his belonging to a boundless universe, an infinite space consisting of multiple elements, one of which is his country of origin. That space is described by one of the characters in *Sans tam-tam*:

Quand j'enseigne la Révolution française [...] je parle en fait à mes élèves de l'histoire du Congo [...] Oui, je soutiens qu'une étude intelligente de la Pléiade, de Diderot et Voltaire peut aider à la cristallisation du sentiment national des citoyens de l'Afrique Noire.²² (Lopes, 1977:62.)

Lopes' stay in Paris, as a student and international official,²³ presented the author with the opportunity to experience global world *in vivo*. Encounters with personalities from all over the world, among whom "Pathé Diagne, Ibrahim Alpha Sow, Cheik Anta Diop, Sembène Ousmane, Abiola Irèle, Edouard Maunick and Guy Tirolien"

everything to me. Well, my skin pigmentation aside, I am totally European. Therefore, I can only marry an European woman."

21 "I am a writer: I do not belong to a particular ethnic group, nation or even Africa: all these elements are part and parcel of who I am and one cannot limit my writing to an ethnic group, to the extent that I have already broken away from ethnic groups, or even from Africa."

22 "When I teach [about] the French Revolution [...] in fact, I tell my students about the history of Congo [...] I therefore maintain that a sound critical analysis of La Pléiade, Diderot and Voltaire can help crystallise a sense of nationhood among black Africans."

23 Lopes was a student at the Sorbonne from 1957; he also served as an international official, based in Paris, for UNESCO as Deputy Director General for Africa from 1981 to 1998.

(Chemain, 1988:123), could have inspired the writer to rise against the specific in favour of the universal. The apparent intimate link between the author's ideological positions on the one hand, and the views articulated by his characters on the other, lead to the conclusion that Lopes' work is never neutral and that "the connection between life and literature is understandable" (Tcheuyap, 1998:189).

4. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of two of Lopes' works, *Le chercheur d'Afriques* and *Le lys et le flamboyant*, has revealed that, true to the mould of many black African writers, Lopes pays particular attention to foregrounding the ideological dimension of his writing. His works are embedded in "littérature engagée" which, over and above the aesthetic issues of language use, lays special emphasis on the utilitarian aspect of writing which is underpinned by the content. This propensity to assume certain ideological positions can be mainly explained by a worldview characterised by a deliberate disregard for human values. The ultimate goal of writing could thus be interpreted as the writer's intention to restore the meaning and dignity of the human being by appealing to a generally intellectual audience. Such recourse to indirect means of struggle against dehumanising ideologies is based on the fact that literature, just like all forms of art in Africa, comes across as an esoteric means for expressing oneself by propounding positions, considered to be extremely daring at times, on ills that afflict society.

This article analytically demonstrates how Lopes uses literature as a tool to decry the race issue as a social ill. There is no doubt that colonialism, as evoked by the author, was founded on several pillars, among which was the assertion of differences between people on the basis of physical and racist considerations and prejudices. It is against this background that racism took root, considering that the superiority complex that ensued contributed to the proliferation of racist prejudices. Lopes' perception of hybridisation goads the reader to reconsider his/her views on racial distinction in general. The negation of the existence of "a pure race" is set forth as an argument to counter the separatism encountered around the world today. Literature is also used as a vehicle to illustrate that the world is founded on "forgotten" or "unacknowledged hybridisation". The *métis*, from Lopes' perspective, is a person endowed with a free spirit and a sense of universal fraternity, who is nonetheless evolving in the face of multiple social prejudices. The call for universal fraternity, based on the recollection of "a forgotten past", constitutes

a cycle in the sense that the past is intertwined with the present, with a definite possibility of projecting oneself into a universalistic future. Hence, in this cycle, the end and the beginning dovetail; they beget one another. In Lopes' view, the global world is no longer an utopian entity, given that it exists already and that contemporary human beings are *métis* whose only task is to become aware of that fact. Is the author simply trying to reinvent the world based on the principle of non-discrimination? All indications are that the *métis* world, as envisaged by Lopes, exists in literature, particularly in his works. In this regard, Lopes, just like many others of the similar vein, inaugurates a new vision which should serve as supporting pillars for both the present and future worlds. His works, as it were, usher the reader into a domain of ethical challenges which goad the latter to contribute to the creation of a new society that is aware of the interaction that has already taken place and is ecstatic about the advent of a new world that is poised to share. Ultimately, Lopes believes that it is only through literature that such a new society would have the best chance of seeing the light of day. Today, as stated by Gontard, this theme of hybridisation or *métissage* is characteristic of francophone literature and has "strong echoes of the postmodern principles of heterogeneity, rhizome-reality and chaos-world" (Gontard, 2007:253).

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Key concepts:

African literature
biological roots
hybridisation
individuality
universality

Kernbegrippe:

Afrika literatuur
biologiese wortels
hibridisering
individualiteit
universaliteit