

Article

World(s) apart – Borges Coelho’s *Museu da Revolução* and Writing in (and of) a Changing World

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ABSTRACT

*This article will depart from Said’s position on the worldliness of texts and Pheng Cheah’s reflections on postcolonial literature as world literature (2016) towards a reading of João Paulo Borges Coelho’s 2021 novel *Museu da Revolução*. Borges Coelho’s position on the articulation between history, politics, and literature, as well as on the latter’s aim of transforming the local place without losing sight of the universal, will provide insights into the ways in which the novel confronts the wordlessness of globalization. By staging a fictional democratization (RANCIÈRE), *Museu da Revolução* inscribes new ethico-political horizons as a “text that strives to generate the context” (BORGES COELHO), necessarily including those that have been forgotten from consensual (historical, political, memory) narratives. Lastly, the novel’s positing of the transformative power of imagination will help flesh out the ways in which the “poetico-literary performativity” (DERRIDA) of texts can inscribe new ethico-political horizons and open up worlds (CHEAH) when faced with the neoliberalist cancellation of the future (BERARDI).*

Keywords: *World Literature, Postcolonialism, Worldliness, Poetico-literary Performativity, Fictional Democracy.*

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The worldliness of texts

In the article “Globalizing Literary Study”, Edward Said issued a reminder that literary studies have evolved under globalization, thus implying that both the literary and the postcolonial are expected, required even, to face the globalized age (SAID, 2001 p. 66). In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, first published in 1983, Said had lamented the rise of textuality as “the somewhat mystical and disinfected subject matter of literary theory” (SAID, 1991, p. 3), “the exact antithesis and displacement of what might be called history” (SAID, 1991, p. 3-4). For Said, the response should entail acknowledging that “texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted” (SAID, 1991, p. 4).

This article will focus on the worldliness of texts within postcolonial studies, and it will be addressing specifically the 2021 novel *Museu da Revolução*, by Mozambican author João Paulo Borges Coelho. The article will not aim to “world” the novel, or the author, or Mozambican literature for that matter; equally, it will not read the novel within a world literature or world-literature framework.¹ My aim is to consider how texts written in, from, and about the postcolony engage with questions crucial to postcolonial and world literary studies without necessarily being restricted or contained by the boundaries of postcolonial studies or world literary studies. In fact, I would propose that Borges Coelho’s novel provides a fruitful platform from which to consider or reevaluate discussions of literary systems or methods, and on the relations between literature and politics, history, or ethics and aesthetics. Although Borges Coelho’s profession and practice as a historian can provide fruitful ground for discussions on cross-fertilization between history and literature, Coelho consciously explores literary texts insofar as, and perhaps because, literary texts can perform and can *do* differently from, say, a research paper. One should nuance Said’s binary construction (textuality *vs* history), particularly because Said does seem to take onboard Hayden White’s arguments that one cannot “get past texts in order to apprehend ‘real’ history directly” (SAID, 1991, p. 4). I would nevertheless stress what Derrida termed, in an interview with Derek Attridge, the “paradoxical historicity of writing” (1992, p. 54), just one among a number of nuances that may have been lost in the transatlantic translation of textualist practices inspired largely by the tradition of French critical theory. Derrida makes clear that “not all reading is historicized, the ‘historian’s’, still less ‘historicist’” (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 54), and yet:

There is a sort of paradoxical historicity in the experience of writing. The writer can be ignorant or naive in relation to the historical tradition which bears him or her, or which s/he transforms, invents, displaces. I wonder whether, even in the absence of historical awareness or knowledge

¹For insightful readings of other novels by Borges Coelho within a world literature or world-literature (see WReC 2015) framework see: Helgesson (2013), Santos (2020), Waller (2021).

s/he doesn't "treat" history in the course of an experience which is more significant, more alive, more *necessary* in a word, that that of some professional "historians" naively concerned to "objectify" the content of a science. (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 54-55)

Without necessarily entirely subscribing to Robert Young's statement that "the basis of postcolonial literature has never been, in the first instance, aesthetic criteria, but rather, the effect that it seeks to achieve" (YOUNG, 2011, p. 216), one could nevertheless argue that texts are "worldly, to some degree they are events" because the "experience of writing is 'subject' to an imperative":

to give space for singular events, to invent something new in the form of acts of writing which no longer consist in a theoretical knowledge, in new constative statements, to give oneself to a poetico-literary performativity at least analogous to that of promises, orders, or acts of constitution or legislation which do not only change language, or which, in changing language, change more than language. (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 55)

In the case of Borges Coelho, such a "poetico-literary performativity" could be identified in what he sees as the aims of writing, both academic and literary:

É ajudar a diminuir o sofrimento da existência (no sentido literal e cultural); é combater a ignorância; é, munidos de inteligência e das armas da escrita que o destino pôs em nossas mãos, ajudar a transformar o nosso local concreto sem perder de vista que fazemos parte do universal. (COELHO, 2008, p. 236)²

²To help lessen the pain of existence (in the literal and in the cultural sense); to combat ignorance; armed with intelligence and the weapons of writing that destiny has put before us, to help transform our concrete local place without losing sight that we are part of a universal space". All translations are my own unless when otherwise noted.

It is with this passage in mind that Borges Coelho's consistent calls for the autonomy of the literary text to be respected can be understood; as literature "written against something" (YOUNG, 2011, p. 216) but also *for* something, grounded as it is on the transformation of the local without losing sight of the universal. In no way do such calls advocate for a return to Literature with a "capital L" (COELHO, 2013, p. 22). In an article titled "Writing in a Changing World: The Difficult Relationship with Reality", Borges Coelho postulates that "the ultimate purpose of literature is to mirror life and the world, having, therefore, to be open and attentive to its surroundings. What I mean is a mirroring of life and the world *according to its own terms*" (2013, p. 22, emphasis in the original). Borges Coelho is particularly critical of readings that take "the text, and for that matter the author, as a direct reflection of a reality that has in its turn been resumed to a linear narrative" (COELHO, 2013, p. 28). These reading frameworks overlook a "difficult relationship with reality" – *i.e.* not direct, one that refracts rather than merely reflect –, and therefore addresses the challenges of writing in a "changing world" (COELHO, 2013, p. 22).

The questions of the worldliness (or mundanity) of the text – its relationship with reality, but also of the importance of the text as refraction, as "event", as showcasing a "poetico-literary performativity"

³The world is a vast place made up of a thousand places, and each of these is also a vast place filled with meandering spaces”.

- are very dear to the structure of the novel, as can be identified in the epigraphs to the novel and to specific chapters. The epigraph to the first chapter puts forward in a striking way a definition of the world as something other, and different from, the world of globalization: “O mundo é um lugar vasto feito de mil lugares, e cada um destes é também um vasto lugar cheio de meandros” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 9).³ The world as a vast place, made up of countless other places; together with the reference that is made to “meandros” (a notion that evokes at least as much spatial connotations as it does temporal one), the world that is put forward in the epigraph stands resolutely against the flat world of utopian neoliberalism and globalization (HARVEY, 2009, pp. 51-76) and of time-compression (HARVEY, 2017, p. 109-132). As Borges Coelho does not fail to point out in a recent interview, the epigraphs in the novel fulfill a particular function, that of articulating the “local concreto” and the “universal” by moving beyond the borders of the national and integrating a wider context: “Nós não somos uma ilha. Fazemos parte de um todo mais vasto. Portanto, somos, à nossa maneira, cosmopolitas” (COELHO, 2021b, n. p.). Besides the obvious echoing of John Donne, Borges Coelho’s strand of cosmopolitanism, as Stefan Helgesson noted regarding another novel by the same author, reflects – and refracts – “the strained relations and constitutive hierarchies of colonial society as well as, by implication, of contemporary globalisation” (HELGESSION, 2013, p. 94). As for the epigraph of the novel, it brings in another dimension of the worldly or the mundane, as that which is cut across through and by history, but also that which is often – since it cannot, perchance does not, aspire to transcendence – too easily forgotten. The epigraph features the last three lines of Ingrid de Kok’s poem “Some there be”, part of the poetry volume titled *Terrestrial Things* (2002), whose poems largely address the hearings for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the HIV/AIDS epidemic that was sweeping through South Africa: “Can the forgotten/ be born again/ into a land of names?”.

While this article will explore how Borges Coelho’s novel can contribute to a renewed understanding of what “worldly” may mean in postcolonial texts and contexts (as well as the relationship between both) and why an understanding of the postcolonial is fundamental for an approach to the “world”, it is particularly interested in the opening of other “ethico-political horizons” (CHEAH; DAMROSCH, 2019, p. 308-309) and in the opening up of other worlds when faced with the unworlding brought about by globalization (CHEAH, 2016, p. 193). In other words, to query how this land of names can be opened up to the worlds (with its spaces, and worlds, and meanderings within) that have been forgotten or deliberately shunned into oblivion.

Museu da Revolução will help tease out a given worldliness of postcolonial studies while also, crucially, discussing the “politics of literature” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 152) alongside postcolonial literature’s “politics of the real” (YOUNG, 2011, p. 2017) for a deeper appreciation of

how literature can help transform “nosso local concreto”, without ever forgetting the “universal” (Borges Coelho), the “terrestrial” (de Kok), the “worldly” (Said). While the article will draw from Pheng Cheah’s reflections on postcolonial literature *as* world literature in order to discuss the opening up of worlds in the context of globalization – as well as in the wake of decolonization – it will also draw from Jacques Rancière’s notion of “fictional democracy” (2017, p. 152) to explore some of the ways in which, “without losing sight of the literary perspective” (COELHO, 2013, p. 29), literature may be seen as enacting the opening of other worlds and ethico-political horizons, and as resisting the cancellation of the future (BERARDI, 2019).

The worldliness of postcolonial studies, postcolonial studies, and the world

Borges Coelho’s use of notions such as “local” and “universal” obviously overlaps with notions that have played a structuring role in postcolonial studies and world literary studies. Yet the epigraph to the first chapter evokes the concept, “mundo”/world, which has played a relevant role in literary studies since the start of the 21st century, to the extent that those in postcolonial studies have felt they needed to respond in one way or another (BOEHMER, 2014, p. 299). I would like slightly to invert the order of things by picking up on Achille Mbembe’s reflections in *Sortir de la grande Nuit: Essai sur l’Afrique décolonisée*, a volume written in the wake of the commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of decolonization in the context of spaces colonized by France’s imperial actions. Mbembe, like Said, recognizes globalization as “le fait central de notre époque” (MBEMBE, 2013, p. 80),⁴ but it his framing of postcolonial thought as a “world-thought” [“pensée-monde”], in a reflection which references Said amongst other postcolonial thinkers, which is of interest:

On peut dire que la pensée postcoloniale est, à plusieurs égards, une pensée-monde même si, au départ, elle n’utilise pas ce concept. Et, d’abord, elle montre qu’il n’y a guère de disjonction entre l’histoire de la nation et celle de l’empire. [...] La pensée postcoloniale montre comment le colonialisme lui-même fut une expérience planétaire et contribua à l’universalisation des représentations, des techniques et des institutions (cas de l’État-nation, voire de la marchandise sous ses espèces modernes). Elle nous dit qu’au fond ce processus d’universalisation, loin d’être à sens unique, fut paradoxal, gros de toutes sortes d’ambiguïtés. (MBEMBE, 2013, p. 84)⁵

The postcolonial is worlded and worldly, even if the term is not used, or used only with great caution, understandably. The terms of the discussion have moved considerably since Robert Young wrote in 2011 that “[t]he relation of world literature to postcolonialism remains virtually unmarked territory” (YOUNG, 2011, p. 213).⁶ Even perspectives that cast a critical eye, such as that espoused by Elleke Boehmer, which objects to an unquestioning conflating of the two fields, have posited

⁴the central fact of our time: globalization” (MBEMBE, 2001, p. 71)

⁵One may say that postcolonial thought is, in several regards, a world-thought, even if at the beginning it did not use this concept. It shows, first, that there is scarcely any disjunction between the history of the nation and the history of the empire. [...] Postcolonial thought shows how colonialism itself was a planetary experience and contributed to the universalization of representations, techniques, and institutions (this was the case with the nation-state, and even with commodification in its modern forms). It tells us that, at bottom, this process of universalization, far from having only one meaning, was paradoxical and pregnant with all sorts of ambiguities.” (MBEMBE, 2001, p. 74).

⁶See Gerday (2021) for an overview of the discussion between postcolonialism and world literature.

nevertheless that a critical convergence between “world literary studies” and the “postcolonial” could prove to be of benefit in a “globalizing world”. It could arguably produce, Boehmer suggests, “a more radical and expansive conception of the world” as well as “a constructive interrogation of its still-definitive Eurocentric paradigms” (BOEHMER, 2014, p. 307).

Pheng Cheah’s 2016 monograph, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, however, marks an important inflection point as it attempts to work through some specifics of the difficult relationship between world literary and postcolonial studies. As Laura Gerday demonstrates in her analysis of the intersections and juxtapositions of the two fields, the subtitle of Cheah’s book itself already inscribes a dynamic (postcolonial *as* world) which differs substantially from approaches that juxtaposed or counterposed both fields (GERDAY, 2021, p. 13). Cheah is particularly critical of recent theories of world literature, following the revival of world literature at the turn of the century in the wake of the publications by Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova and David Damrosch, among others. A key issue identified by Cheah is that the “key defining term [*i.e.*, ‘world’] was under-specified and unexamined”; it was “primarily a descriptive term, where the world was taken to be the same as a globe” and the object was “global literature, literature that circulated globally” (CHEAH; DAMROSCH, 2019, p. 306). Following Cheah’s rationale, postcolonial literature from the Global South is, if not *the* world literature, it is at least always already world literature, along similar lines to how Mbembe considered postcolonial thought a “pensée-monde”.

Cheah’s reflections on what constitutes a world (departing from Goethe, Marx, Arendt, Derrida) and, crucially, his rethinking of world literature “in the more robust sense of literature that worlds and makes a world” stand both as a corrective to world literature theories that emphasize circulation, thus reinforcing “globalisation’s unworlding of the world”, and as a contribution to world-literature theories which, while reflecting “on the implications of [Immanuel Wallerstein’s] world-systems theory for understanding literary production”, remain “reactive responses to the world-system and globalization” (CHEAH, 2016, p. 193). Cheah hopes to resolve the issues brought about by a “spatial understanding of worldliness” firstly by insisting that the “the world is originally a temporal category, from which its normative dimension derives” (CHEAH; DAMROSCH, 2019, p. 307); secondly, it eschews the idea that “literary processes reflect global processes” (CHEAH; DAMROSCH, 2019, p. 308).

It is not in the remit of this article to focus specifically on the relative merits of recent approaches to world(-)literature. Nevertheless, Pheng Cheah’s normative view of world literature, with an understanding of the world (not the globe) as temporalization, by crucially rejecting the notion that literary texts in postcolonial and/or world studies merely register

or reflect context, represents a fruitful attempt to address the “difficult relationship with reality” in a changing world of which Borges Coelho speaks. It constitutes also a helpful contribution in an effort to move away from “the context that generates the text” towards an approach that takes into account what Derrida would call the text’s “poetico-performativity”, that can home in on “the text that strives to generate the context” (COELHO, 2013, p. 28). How does *Museu da Revolução*, if we take it as world literature in the sense prescribed by Cheah above, open and make worlds in Cheah’s terms, or generate contexts, in Borges Coelho’s?

Points of departure

Although the plot of the novel is built around a journey, it is bookended by interactions between two characters in the physical space of the *Museu da Revolução*, located in the Mozambican capital, Maputo: the narrator, who shares a number of biographical details with the empirical author (including, apparently, his profession as a historian) and who remains nameless; and Jei-Jei, who is the closest thing the novel has to a central character.⁷ They are both presented as relatively frequent visitors to the Museum, drawn by different motivations, seemingly fuelled by a vague attempt to make some sense of the past and, in a way, of how it is remembered (COELHO, 2021a, p. 66). Jei-Jei wants to understand the Mueda massacre, during the colonial period, and according to Jei-Jei, “a causa de tudo o que veio depois” (2021a, p. 56). As for the narrator, he is there on research, and aims to “entender a natureza da relação do Museu com acontecimentos do passado e do futuro” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 66).

Their first chance encounter is prompted, on the narrator’s side, by the reading of a text by South African poet P. R. Anderson titled *Museu da Revolução* [sic], and on Jei-Jei’s side on his taking refuge from police aggression towards a manifestation in which he was taking part. As one of the *Magermanes* who worked in the German Democratic Republic [GDR] at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall (one of the many migratory experiences which the novel features), Jei-Jei is joining protests demanding payment owed by the Mozambican government. It is of course ironic that Jei-Jei’s main point of interest in the museum is the Mueda massacre, the result of violent oppression of a peaceful protest. Yet the main concern goes beyond that of History repeating itself and seems in fact to be the presumption that History has ended. Jei-Jei, working in the GDR at the time that the Berlin Wall fell, evokes Francis Fukuyama’s announcement of the end of History (FUKUYAMA, 1992).⁸ The museum is a good place in which to think, says Jei-Jei (COELHO, 2021a, p. 482); Borges Coelho, in an interview concerning the novel, could be seen to agree by having made the *Museu* the title of the novel: “o romance serve para pensar como os moçambicanos (o moçambicano é cosmopolita) se relacionam com o mundo e com o seu passado” (COELHO, 2021b, n. p.).⁹ Even the nickname Jei-Jei, attributed to the character because of a supposed resemblance to the North-American Jazz musician J.J. Johnson

⁷Elena Brugioni highlights the relevance of the emergence of the figure of the narrator as a “pivotal character” and how it takes on “a fundamental role in the construction of the novel” in Borges Coelho’s *Rainhas da Noite* [Queens of the Night] (2013), a work that also addresses questions related to memory and history (BRUGIONI, 2020, pp. 181-186).

⁸Fukuyama’s thesis has been the object of some fierce criticism since its publication. See, for instance, Jacques Derrida’s critique in *Specters of Marx* (2006), first published in 1993.

⁹the novel allows one to think how Mozambicans (and Mozambicans are cosmopolitan) relate to the *world* and to their past”.

by Maputo Jazz enthusiasts who befriended him upon his arrival to the city, not long after he was orphaned, collateral damage from the conflict with South Africa in 1982, speaks to a certain sense of cosmopolitanism.

As one of the *Magermanes*, Jei-Jei's presence, and persistence, are a reminder that History did not come to an end in 1989. One could be forgiven for thinking otherwise: the museum represents a spatialization, and fossilization, of the past (not to mention "revolution") which renders both narrator and Jei-Jei powerless and even confused as to how to interpret it. Crucially, however, their visits to the museum spur them on in their attempt to make sense of the past in the present and, ultimately, not to give up on an idea of a future; not necessarily teleologically oriented, in the Marxist-Leninist sense, but certainly emancipatory in an anticolonial sense.

The history of Mozambique that the novel retraces reveals a number of emancipatory attempts at and challenges posed by moving away from precolonial pasts, colonial presents and neocolonial futures. In Mozambique, neocolonialism did not simply occupy the empty colonial structures, as was the case in a number of other independent nations to emerge from decolonization (MBEMBE, 2013, p. 58). And yet its project for independence was certainly conditioned by internal, regional, and international (e.g., Cold War) pressures and restraints (NEWITT, 2002). The historical events depicted in the Museum stand in stark contrast with the adoption of neoliberalist doctrines and the adoption of a "brutal version of capitalism" gradually implemented in Mozambique by FRELIMO after independence (ROTHWELL, 2004, p. xiv). As for Borges Coelho, he presents the following scathing assessment:

Socialism was replaced by a radical form of neo-liberalism and the new society gained some distinct characteristics: Poverty is rampant as well as immense wealth is concentrated in a few hands; as elsewhere, economy and finances are the hegemons, threatening to become, under the firm control (or non-control) of the political sphere, the sole categories and even the undisputed calculus of existence; everything has a cost and is therefore measured in terms of "efficiency". Even a certain authoritarian spirit that characterizes a democracy that in practice is a single party state (the political elite is the same as in the socialist period) is somehow seen as the cost of maintaining the efficiency of the system (COELHO, 2013, p. 27)

The police's brutal repression of a peaceful protest, which the narrator describes as evoking the "dias festivos do nosso próprio socialismo" (COELHO, 2021a, p. 49),¹⁰ is further confirmation of how there is no place for the political in the neoliberal state, and no complacency for the those left behind by the inexorable march of global(ized) progress. The museum functions as a time capsule to a time when it was thought – or political discourse included, and indeed was structured around, the notion – that, to paraphrase, another world would have been possible.

¹⁰ the festive days of our own socialism".

The *stasis* in and of the museum – the North Korean-style representations, the account of colonial injustice (still incomplete), objects belonging to important political figures of the liberation struggle and independent Mozambique such as Eduardo Mondlane and Samora Machel – represent more than the “failure” of the revolution or than a criticism of its precocious end and enshrinement; after all, the museum was created in 1978, the year after FRELIMO formally declared its Marxist-Leninist orientation. They reveal, in a striking fashion, how the “teleological time of decolonisation remains tragically uncompleted” (CHEAH, 2016, p. 198). Two items in display at the museum will acquire particular significance later in the novel; at the beginning, the narrator merely homes in on the image of phoenix bird in Samora Machel’s old “Zambian” telephone, with which he negotiated independence (COELHO, 2021a, p. 52) as he expresses an “impulso de tocar no vetusto telefone eu próprio, a fim de marcar um número e entrar em comunicação com o futuro. Quem me escutaria? E que teria eu a dizer sobre este presente e os seus desejos?” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 53).¹¹ Eduardo Mondlane’s grey Volkswagen, that he used to drive to his office in Dar-Es-Salaam as he coordinated the liberation of the Mozambique, is described as being “ali exposto como se estivesse perfeitamente operacional, pronto a partir pelas estradas do futuro em nova iniciativa libertadora” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 60).¹² The telephone and the car are a first glimpse into a more material, mundane even, side to the heroic events that the Museum represents. They open the way for a worldlier assessment and understanding of what is at stake in the museum and beyond it, one which notes the intricacies and the gaps of what is on display in the hope that the museum can wake from the “modorra” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 52) that P. R. Anderson diagnosed in his text *Museo da Revolução*.

¹¹ an impulse to touch the old telephone myself so I could dial in a number and get in touch with the future. Who would listen to me? And what would I have to say about this present time and its desires?”

¹² exhibited there as if it were in perfect working condition, ready to set out through the roads of the future in a new thrust of liberation”.

¹³ I am referring here to academic works produced by João Paulo Borges Coelho focusing on the relations between politics, history and/or memory in Mozambique. From a historiographical perspective, Borges Coelho critiques the closed off narratives which dominate political memory and which leave no space for competing or conflicting accounts. For an overview of Borges Coelho’s trajectory as a historian, see Israel, 2020.

More than a supplement to P.R. Anderson’s text, the novel titled *Museu da Revolução* will perform a revisitation of the major events and figures on display in the museum with the history and the memory of events that took place in the Mozambican recent history in their local and global complexity. Other massacres, other vehicles, other figures, forgotten.

Coming to a halt: infinite circulation meets the “mundo recuado”

If we are to understand literature as both a “site where different processes of worlding are played out” and an “agent that participates and intervenes in these processes” (CHEAH; DAMROSCH, 2019, p. 308-309), we must engage with the novel’s picking up where historiographical representation and political memory left off, to “open up the fable” and other worlds and horizons beyond the hegemonic “Liberation script” in Mozambique (COELHO, 2015, 2019).¹³ Jei-Jei’s and the narrator’s first encounter ends precisely with a reference to the journey in which Jei-Jei will participate, together with ex-independence fighter Bandas Matsolo, driving a group of foreign nationals through the country.

The touristic enterprise is conjured up by ex-Political commissar turned businessman Colonel Boaventura Damião, who owns a fleet of transport vehicles besides providing much needed transport in a city where public transports and infrastructures are very basic; while turning up a nice profit, of course. He is also involved in illegal activities and comes to embody the neoliberalist drive and the ethos of savage capitalism. As the novel will reveal, the only thing the Colonel is truly committed to is profit and material gains, and he will swiftly switch from his support of tourism as a potential enterprise in the country to unbridled enthusiasm for a precarious plan to extract mineral wealth.

The flow of materials and commodities which is carefully traced in the text does indeed help position Mozambique within a world-systems view, and it emphasizes how the nation has been and continues to be traversed (as well as structured) by flows, exchanges, circulations – imperial, capitalist, socialist-internationalist. The novel features, and comments upon, the experiences of migration and displacement within Mozambique and neighbouring countries (South Africa, Malawi, Zimbabwe) or in the GDR, as well as mentions to commodities (ranging from pirated DVDs to abalone or precious stones) and (sometimes dubious) enterprising in Japan, Hong Kong, United Kingdom, among others. Together with the references to geographical (often imperialistic or colonial) mapping, this is a reminder of important material conditions which can nevertheless “make us wordless” (CHEAH, 2016, p. 192). However, the tourist journey operated by a politician turned businessman, contracted by a Portuguese veteran who fought against Mozambican independence keen to indulge himself with a trip down (his very selective) memory lane, swerves from its original purpose. In a group that will progressively come to encompass different generations of Mozambican, Portuguese, South African and Vietnamese nationals – each of them engaged with their own personal (and the personal is inevitably political in the journey) memories and postmemories (HIRSCH, 2012) of conflicts, objectives, and goals – the journey will end up focusing on uncovering and recovering people and events that have been forgotten and/or left out from the hegemonic narratives.

Texts are worldly, in Said’s view, because they are part of the world (social world, human life, historical moments) *and* events. As the repression of Jei-Jei and his fellow *Magermanes* illustrates, and as events uncovered and recovered during the journey will make evident, “the reworlding of the world remains a continuing project in light of the inequalities created by capitalist globalisation and their tragic consequences for peoples and social groups in postcolonial space” (CHEAH, 2016, p. 194). As the journey leaves the capital city and traverses rural spaces, neglected by the central government (in terms of infrastructure, investment, planning, or mere attention), the journey does more than convoke memories or force travellers to recognize those who have been forgotten in the various cycles of conflict and violence to have occurred since the war of liberation

for Mozambique's independence. What is plainly revealed is that the world through which they travel is not the flat space of neoliberalism, or "le temps infini de circulation" brought about by globalisation (MBEMBE, 2013, p. 22).¹⁴ As Mbembe is quick to remind us, for millions of people, and Mbembe is in this instance referring to inhabitants of the African continent, globalization is "le temps des villes fortifiées, des camps et des cordons, des clôtures et des enclos, des frontières sur lesquelles on vient buter, et qui, de plus en plus, servent de stèle ou d'obstacle tombal" (MBEMBE, 2013, p. 22).¹⁵

¹⁴ the infinite time of circulation".

¹⁵ the time of fortified towns, of camps and barriers, of enclosures and fences, of borders upon which to abut and that, more and more, act as a stèle or a tomb-like obstacle".

The worldliness of the text entails a resistance to the unworlding brought about by globalization (CHEAH; DAMROSCH, 2019, p. 307-308), as travellers come to struggle with a world that is indeed not flat, and which increasingly proves to be less and less flat (*i.e.*, easily appropriated, reduce to space) to the point where they are left stranded. The flat time of globalization, in its infinite progressions, comes against a "mundo recuado" that opens new worlds and horizon. As the group and, vicariously, the narrator travel through the "mundo recuado" it is the travellers who become affected and less and less set in their, at times, prejudiced ways: "Cada vez mais se instalava a sensação de que, ao contrário de tornar mais nítido aquele mundo recuado, a viagem ia tornando cada vez mais vagos e imprecisos os viajantes" (COELHO, 2021a, p. 385).¹⁶ Jei-Jei and Matsolo take advantage of the obstacles in the "mundo recuado", such as poor mobile phone connection, as a tactic to resist the Coronel's change of mind and the hijacking of their newfound mission: to uncover the fate of those displaced and massacred without leaving their name (to go back to de Kok) throughout the recent history of Mozambique. The journey undertaken thus complements the *Museu da Revolução* exhibitions by revisiting periods not covered by the museum. The point is very much *not* to be "virado para diante",¹⁷ as Phuong, a Vietnamese ex-work colleague of Jei-Jei in the GDR who eventually catches up with the travel group while in cahoots with the Coronel for a new undertaking targeting the appropriation of mineral wealth is described (COELHO, 2021a, p. 310). The "spirit of 89" that Phuong witnessed in person with the fall of the Berlin Wall has ushered in a new stage for capitalism and globalization. For the likes of the Coronel and Phuong (either of them a solid example of the *Homo economicus*), the idea of a future is irrelevant; their pursuits, and visions, are purely transactional and economic: "Mais do que o futuro, para quem soubesse fazer bem as coisas, Moçambique era o paraíso" (COELHO, 2021a, p. 321).¹⁸ Visions of paradise, neocolonial *el dorados*: history repeats itself, with (not much of) a difference.

¹⁶ Increasingly there was a feeling that, rather than allowing that recessed world to become clearer to us, the journey was making the travellers increasingly more vague and imprecise".

¹⁷ forward looking".

¹⁸ More than the future, Mozambique was paradise to whomever knew how to do things".

The journey can be read as a parodical take on naive, simplistic or deliberately ideological and misleading notions of globalization, endless circulation and a spatial understanding of the world; and, equally, against any idea that the project and *ethos* of decolonization belong, so to say, in a museum. However, we cannot expect to pick up exactly where, when,

and how things (well, history and the idea of a future) were left off. Franz Fanon's metaphor of a large universal caravan headed towards the future (see MBEMBE, 2013, p. 17) is most definitely not replicated in the initially planned nostalgia-inflected tourist trip aboard the *Hiace*, even if the Portuguese veteran who initially contracted, Artur Candal, will be mocked for his oversentimental appreciation for Gago Coutinho's imperial efforts in the cartography of the territory and for his clumsy attempts to claim Leonor – a fellow traveller and supposedly the daughter of his brother in arms and Mariamo, a young Mozambican woman – as his own daughter. Rather, what unites the members of the group is the fact that they have nothing in common except the fact that they find themselves together – at least until, and this is crucial, the end of the journey; some, like Elize Fouché, do not even return. The group encompasses different generations, gender, experiences, memories and postmemories; from ex-soldiers on opposing sides (Bandas Matsolo and Artur Candal), to daughters of military operatives fighting for the Portuguese colonial regime or the South African Apartheid regime (Leonor Basto and Elize Fouché), to Jei-Jei (child refugee and *Magermane*); and, later on, the abovementioned Phuong and Chintamuende, an old Mozambican man who had the experience of being in the young Mozambican nation's reeducation centers. Throughout the journey, the different travellers will not encounter a different past; they will rather be inspired to look at the past differently. They might hence be able to imagine a future beyond the one offered by the inexistence of alternatives (teleological and/or ideological – economic through and through) that characterizes the globalized neoliberal age. Their road trip provides no closure; actually it sets up significantly renewed departures as the members of the group are not brought together but actually dispersed by the experience: Elize Fouché leaves in order to make sense of her father's life and involvement in military operations in Mozambique; Artur Candal sees his patriarchal illusions collapse; Leonor resumes her abandoned professional ambitions; Bandas Matsolo and Jei-Jei lose their job – partially, one suspects, because they failed to follow the instructions of their boss about leaving the group and moving out with Phuong in search of stones. However, in the process, Jei-Jei and Matsolo successfully disentangle themselves from Coronel Boaventura Damião's schemings and dealings; the journey to the “*mundo recuado*”, the recessed world, is liberating in that it opens up, and opens them up to, other experiences, other worlds, the experiences and the worlds of others.

Concomitantly, the group that travels in the *Hiace* across the Mozambican hinterland experience and explore different temporalities as they travel: monuments to colonial explorers, old train lines, outposts, sites of fighting for liberation, abandoned villages. Their journey intersects, and does so meaningfully and significantly, with imperial and colonial cartographies (exemplified by Portugal and South Africa; metropolitan and regional powers; but also, other contexts: GDR,

Vietnam, Korea); but this is no mere retracing. As Mbembe does not fail to point out in the introduction to *On the Postcolony*, “the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an entanglement” (MBEMBE, 2001, p. 14). The places (and the memorialization) mean different things for the ex-soldier in a puny homage to the exploits of Portuguese agents of colonialism, and the vestiges of South African exploits reverberate in Elize Fouché’s mind, but the point is to deliberately traverse and effectively trespass various cartographies, mappings and toponyms – it is indeed a land of (many) names.

The journey uncovers the stark inequalities and imbalances of the “*mundo recuado*”; the group confronts the people, the *lugares*, the *mundos*, which inevitably entails facing the capitalist world (“*virado para diante*”) in which they live in and in which the stark inequalities and imbalances are increasing still. These are the “*lugares*” [places] and “*mundos*” [worlds] which are hardly if at all perceptible in the museum’s exhibition: the diversity of Mozambique which the national project attempted to unify (sometimes with diversity as an enemy), the porosity of the borders (Rhodesians, South Africans, Malawians) the ethnicities, systems of belief, languages, memories.

And yet, to use a well-worn neoliberal mantra, there are instances when the crisis of imposed ideologies and systems becomes an opportunity, showcasing “compositional logic” in the sense Mbembe lends to the notion (GOLDBERG, 2018, p. 225), instances when “*um pouco mais de imaginação*”¹⁹ (COELHO, 2021b, n. p.) helps to view the past differently and to once again envision a future which is not merely the extension of the neoliberal, globalized present, ever dominant after the “end of History”. The Toyota Hiace, a symbol and remnant of global capitalism, comes to a stop and it embarks on a raft – the current of the river, the sandbanks demonstrate the limits to infinite circulation. It ends up enveloped in traditional forms of cooperation and exchange when the necessity arises to transport it in a raft down the river for lack of infrastructure. In a passage where the inventiveness of tradition steps in where capital fails, local inhabitants assist in navigating the Hiace down the river; the narrator inscribes their “*coro dolente*”²⁰ very much in the same way it inscribes Ingrid de Kook’s poem (COELHO, 2021a, p. 399). As for the vestiges of a pre-1989 world, the tractor and the Combine, departed from the factory on Eastern other side of the Iron Curtain, become part of the landscape, even part of a family’s home.

The narrator does not fail to point out that the second-hand Toyota Hiace, industrial surplus dumped in an African country in the wake of the 2008 crisis, fills in, under various names but almost invariably in the form of the same vehicle, for inexistent public transports infrastructure in a number of countries of the African continent. The novel raises questions on whether the Toyota Hiace – and crucially, what it represents

¹⁹ a little more imagination”.

²⁰ doleful chorus”

- effectively means progress or whether it is symptomatic of a failure to progress. Vehicles take on a meaningful role in the novel, lest one forget that Jei-Jei worked in a car factory in East Germany and will work as a car mechanic for a period upon his return to Mozambique. His pipe dream project of using his experience in order to set up a production plant for Trabants in Mozambique after he comes back from GDR runs into the ground against the dominating logic of capital: when, eventually, Jei-Jei finds work as an auto mechanic, he ends up repairing the SUVs of NGOs staff and, even worse, being involved in fraudulent activities with such vehicles. This turn of events highlights the nefarious effects of assistentialism in post-civil war Mozambique, when, under the banners of peace and development, what ensued was “the continuation of a removed and distanced decision-making process that rendered Mozambique once more the compliant periphery to a Western-orientated power base” (ROTHWELL, 2004, p. xi): rather than locally made Trabants, there are dumped second-hand Toyota Hiaces and instead of an automotive industry we have repair shops that will specialise in covering up the misbehaviour of NGO workers by tending to their SUVs, or worse, taking part in corrupt practices. Globalization is effective in keeping Mozambique and Africa in the past, as the “world’s dumpster”, making it lag behind in terms of technological transition, an indictment also of the lack of imagination (“me pergunto se não somos obrigados a ter um pouco mais de imaginação”; COELHO, 2021b, n. p.),²¹ an inability to *not* look to the future through past-tainted [sic] spectacles: “Olhamos para o futuro com aquilo que o mundo vai considerando passado” (COELHO, 2021b, n. p.).²²

²¹ I ask myself whether we are not forced to have a little more imagination”

²² We look towards the future through that which the world is now considering past.”

This is far from being only a technological issue. The permanence of the same elites in power over the last decades, as denounced by Borges Coelho in the abovementioned article “Writing in a Changing World”, represents a political impediment and impairment, a testament to a manipulation of a political memory in order to achieve altogether different ends. The jig is up, though, as the lack of imagination evidently shines through as the Ex-“Comissário Político”, now businessman, attempts to keep the old soldier Matsolo following orders, now to become complicit in a new scheme to make some easy money: “o Coronel usava palavras antigas, mas dava-lhes um sentido novo para que o mundo de hoje, sendo diferente, nos surgisse disfarçado de antigo e confiável mundo. Melhor seria o contrário, [Matsolo] pensou: o recurso a novas palavras para fazer prevalecer hoje o sentido daquilo que se perdeu” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 397).²³

²³ the Colonel used old words but he gave them a new meaning so that today’s world, albeit different, would come across to us disguised as the old and trustworthy world. The opposite would work better, he [Matsolo] thought: to make use of new words in order to make the meaning of what has been lost prevail in the present time”.

The passage above provides insight into the motivation of both narrator and Jei-Jei as they visit the museum and then embark on a new narration that goes against the narrative espoused there, and with which they are struggling to come to terms in their (the nation’s, the world’s) current circumstances. Not so keen on accepting this “new world” at face value, they are attempting new words to tap into, to inherit rather

than merely resume the old world whose remnants can nevertheless be identified in the museum.²⁴

²⁴ I am using inheritance in the sense Jacques Derrida lends to the term, as a critical and active act (DERRIDA, 2006, p. 18-20).

Breakdown in communication: the forgotten take centre stage

In *Museu da Revolução*, the narrative framework meanders, swerves from presumed destinations, and at times it creates a diversion... but with a point. The narrative is structured around a dynamic dialogue as both narrator and Jei-Jei create backstories and extrapolate from their observations, Jei-Jei's in particular. Concerning the narration of the events of the journey, Jei-Jei provides raw material to which the narrator provides form, openly acknowledging when reporting on information provided by Jei-Jei's account: "Muito do que acabo de relatar foi-me contado no telefonema que Jei-Jei fez a partir de Tete, dois ou três dias mais tarde" (COELHO, 2021a, p. 254).²⁵ The narrative play between the narrator and Jei-Jei as they bring together the group of people in the journey and the journey itself through the fabrication of backstories fuses and confuses the "literary world" (i.e., the narrator who visits the museum, prompted by a text by South African poet) and the "empirical world" (Jei-Jei, dislocated as a child because of war, one of the *Magermanes* who witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and who entered the museum seeking refuge from police aggression).

²⁵ Much of what I have just reported was told to me by Jei-Jei in a phone call he made two or three days later, from Tete".

There is more at play here than a seemingly frivolous *divertissement* between the narrator and Jei-Jei as they create backstories to fill in any gaps in information or to make sense of events. As Borges Coelho stated in an interview when referring to this "artifice", and in a comment that can be applied just as well to characters as it can to writers, "[c]anibalizamos o real, ou roubamos o real, mas também fantasiamos e quando não há uma explicação plausível, precisamos de explicações e criamo-las" (COELHO, 2021c, n. p.).²⁶ What is therefore called into question is what Rancière, in *Les Bords de la Fiction*, going back to Aristotle, terms the poetic or fictional rationality, i.e., the way in which fiction can provide a causality, and rationality, that cannot be found in the succession of historical, empirical events. Fiction, unlike empirical reality (the real, cannibalized or not), can be submitted to an order: "La fiction construite est plus rationnelle que la réalité empirique décrite. Et cette supériorité est celle d'une temporalité sur une autre" (RANCIÈRE, 2017, p. 149).²⁷ Rancière's call for democratic fiction (RANCIÈRE, 2017, p. 152) implies going against and beyond the dominant rationalities of fiction which have dominated both literature and the social sciences (RANCIÈRE, 2017, pp. 148-49) but it also echoes Borges Coelho's denunciation, in the abovementioned article from 2013, of the "political subordination of cultural memory" and the identified challenge for Mozambican literature to "change from the nationalist to the democratic paradigm" (see SANTOS, 2020, p. 215).

²⁶ We cannibalize the real, or we steal the real, but we also fantasize and when there are no plausible explanations, we still need explanations and so we construct them".

²⁷ Constructed fiction is more rational than the described empirical reality. This is the superiority of one temporality over another".

In *Museu da Revolução*, the unusual digressions (the opening chapter, which traces a fantastical backstory for the Toyota Hiace in Japan; the failed genealogy of agricultural machinery, that could be read as a light

parody of Soviet realism; the backstory of each character that Jei-Jei and the narrator fabricate) stage a fictional rationality which will ultimately be put into question, most strikingly when Jei-Jei interrupts it and contests it. The system that places fictional constructs over empirical reality is performatively broken down gradually, as when the dialogue between the narrator and Jei-Jei unpacks the different temporalities traversing each space (“em cada quilómetro”). As the narrator improvises the backstory of Elize Fouché’s father and role in the planning and attacks carried out by South Africa in the Beira region in 1982, which Elize is determined to decipher by rummaging through his notebooks, the fictional rationality which is being imposed is gently brushed aside and supplemented with the reporting of Jei-Jei’s worldly, down to earth experience of the “lugares” and the “meandros” of these worlds. Jei-Jei’s turn to speak, in the first person:

“O que me diz não é novidade”, disse. “Tica, Lamego, Nhamatanda, Inchope, Amazonas, Maforça, Gondola, Cafumpe, Bandula – em cada quilómetro desta estrada houve de certeza mais do que um episódio, muito sofrimento. Ataques às casas, raptos de gente nas localidades que bordejam a estrada, emboscadas aos carros. Sei bem”. (COELHO, 2021a, p. 256)²⁸

²⁸ You’re telling me nothing new’, he said. ‘Tica, Lamego, Nhamatanda, Inchope, Amazonas, Maforça, Gondola, Cafumpe, Bandula – there was in every kilometre of this road more than one incident, much suffering. Attacks on house, kidnapping from the places neighbouring the road, car ambushes. I know this well’.

As someone who was orphaned and displaced as a result of the conflicts, he does know only too well. Ultimately, the journey is not for the benefit of tourists, or profiteers; and neither for the enjoyment of the narrator/writer who is not sure of what they are looking for when they visit the museum. It is the reality of Mozambican’s past and present, and its relation to the future that the novel strives to open up; an “ethico-political horizon”, to use Cheah’s term (CHEAH; DAMROSCH, 2019, p. 308-309), with an engagement with the “politics of the real”, even if – and I would add, particularly visible when – the device is “not ‘realist’ in style” (YOUNG, 2011, p. 217).

If a politics of the real does not equate to a politics of realism (the narrative framework is meant to blur and not reaffirm a neat separation between words and worlds, between literary and empirical spheres; between historicity and history), we might still need to define the use of the term “political”. Specifically, it will be useful to bear in mind Jacques Rancière’s notion of the politics of literature, *i.e.*, “that literature ‘does’ politics as literature – that there is a specific link between politics as a definite way of doing and literature as a definite practice of writing” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 152). Literature is not a mere reflection, Borges Coelho notes, and it is never, it should be added, a mere distraction even when it diverts. As Said reminds us, texts are worldly even when they appear to deny it; in the case of *Museu da Revolução*, the moments when there is an apparent swerving into a separate “aesthetic” realm (for instance, the rather outlandish, semi-fantastical backstory of the Toyota Hiace) reaffirm the worldliness of the text.

The worldliness of the text is reaffirmed textually when the fictional rationality that Jei-Jei and the narrator co-create as the story progresses crumbles altogether when faced with the painful, undisclosed traumas, memories and postmemories that supplement as well as contradict what the museum has on display and what has been left in oblivion. The decisive moment in which the implied contract of the creation of a fictionalized rationality is broken happens after the group's meeting with Deirdre Mizere, which brings to light the suffering endured by herself and Mariamo in their journey through destitution, displacement, violence, experience internment camps, and sexual abuse. The narrator finds himself struggling to satisfy Jei-Jei with an origin story for the *Belarus* and *MTZ80* tractors. As the narrator fiddles around with the best trajectory, Jei-Jei's impatience comes to the fore and he interrupts him: he does not care where the tractors have come from. Jei-Jei's interruption of the narrative of the tractor stages a refusal to be mapped in that narrow sense (the flow of materials), or to be engulfed by the supposedly major and determining historical events and forces (such as the Mueda massacre, which so interested him at the beginning of the novel). The millions of "pequenos sofrimentos", which Jei-Jei and other travellers – not all of them – come across or are imparted by Mizere, "[v]alem tanto quanto os sofrimentos grandes" (COELHO, 2021a, p. 467).²⁹ One must look beyond a, at least partially superimposed, veil of normality:

²⁹ small sufferings" are "worth as much as great sufferings"

³⁰ Everywhere, under a fine veil of normality, one could feel the emptiness left behind by the disappeared and the massacred. In every bend of the road, across the small villages, the porches and the yards, in the lines to the fountain, in the paths connecting places, in the fields and on the riverbanks – in all these sunlit landscapes there were small crowds of survivors turning their heads and waving as we drove by, he said. Small sufferings, millions of them, anonymous, kept private by some sort of modesty of the victims themselves, as if they had concluded long ago that their pain was not worthy of reaching the same heights as the public and trumpeted pain."

³¹ they were no longer people, they were already survivors and nothing else".

³² I am not those persons. To pretend that I am is to steal their voice. Other people's voices are other people's voices"

Por toda a parte, por baixo de uma capa fina de normalidade, sentia-se o vazio dos desaparecidos e dos massacrados. E em cada curva da estrada, nas pequenas aldeias, nos alpendres e terreiros, nas filas dos fontanários, nos pequenos mercados, nos carreiros que ligam os lugares, nas machambas e nas margens dos riachos – em todas estas paisagens soalheiras havia pequenas multidões de sobreviventes virando a cabeça e acenando à nossa passagem, disse. Pequenos sofrimentos, milhões deles, anónimos, mantidos privados por uma espécie de pudor das próprias vítimas, como se há muito tivessem concluído que a sua dor não merecia chegar tão alto quanto a dor pública e apregoada. (COELHO, 2021a, p. 466-67)³⁰

Gradually, the importance of the suffering, however private, of those who were reduced to something less than human – "deixavam de ser pessoas, eram já, e apenas, sobreviventes" (COELHO, 2021a, p.256)³¹ – , is recognized by both narrator and Jei-Jei as standing in sharp opposition to the ossified version of history in the museum and against the erasure of such events and experiences in recent and contemporary Mozambique. The connection between narrator and central character is broken, and the final chapter will show it cannot be restored; the journey has left many gaps to be filled (p. 483). The relationship between the narrator and Jei-Jei may act as a device that addressed the increasingly difficulty that the empirical author has in talking *for* others: "Eu não sou aquelas pessoas. Fingir que sou é roubar-lhes a voz. A voz dos outros é a voz dos outros" (COELHO, 2021c, n. p.).³² However, if the narrative

device allowed for an ethical connection between author and character, the communication breakdown between the narrator and Jei-Jei signals instead the moral imperative of opening up the textual world to the voice of the others, those who have no voice, those who, as per the epigraph to the novel, have been forgotten. This is what Borges Coelho frames as a moral question and a point that resonates for author and characters alike: “falar com a voz das personagens, sobretudo das personagens que sofrem, parece-me uma invasão” (COELHO, 2021c, n. p.).³³

³³ to speak with the voice of the characters, particularly of those characters who suffer, that feels to me like an invasion”

Open the doors: the promise of no end in sight, but of a future in mind

Before advancing to the final chapter, it would be useful to return to chapter fourteen, before Jei-Jei and the narrator interrupt their game of figuring out who characters were, their backstories and motivations. Their object of speculation in this instance is the first generation of anticolonialists and freedom fighters, such as Bandas Matsolo and Boaventura Damião, who will later follow markedly divergent paths. They reflect on Boaventura Damião’s past as a freedom fighter, a “guerrilheiro”, and his motivations. While they are willing to concede the existence of more mundane interests alongside humanist, cosmopolitan ideals, Jei-Jei suggests that there must have been something more: “Sim! Falta ainda a imaginação!” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 325).³⁴ As first generation freedom fighters, Matsolo and Damião did not merely adhere to the revolution, did not follow in any footsteps, they did not merely choose an alternative. What was required of them was the “criação da própria alternativa quando ela não era ainda verosímil” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 326). This required courage but also “uma grande dose de imaginação. Ver o futuro, que todos sabem intangível, como coisa concreta” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 326).

³⁴ Yes! We’re forgetting about imagination”

We have seen in a previous section how Boaventura Damião, like the elite of the country for which he acts as a synecdoche, now lacks any imagination and resorts to old words in order to maintain his standing in the new world(less) order that characters inhabit. The power of verisimilitude, or of fictional rationality, however, is hardly a match for imagination; politically, ethically, and aesthetically speaking. In the final chapter, both narrator and Jei-Jei will no longer be occupying themselves with filling in the blanks, as they did previously by creating backstories and imagining situations that would make events cohere under a fictional causality. There are gaps to be filled, that cannot be entirely filled perhaps, the significance of which cannot be enclosed in or even acknowledged and recognized by History or a Museum. For one is no longer addressing the idealized image (or script, to use the historian’s term) of liberation and revolution, visible in the murals in the museum. These display a rather simplistic, and essentialized, relationship with reality: “Não havia rasgões nem remendos nem sujidade nos corpos ou na paisagem, era como se a realidade se tivesse enfim submetido

³⁵ There were neither tears nor patches nor any dirt on the bodies or the landscape, it was as if reality had finally been subdued by the world of symbols and desires”.

³⁶ decolonization inaugurated the age of the forking towards unnameable futures. These futures were, by definition, wholly contingent”.

ao mundo dos símbolos e dos desejos.” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 54)³⁵. As Andreas Huyssen noted, in his reflection on how memory practices can “counteract the triumphalism of modernization theory in its latest guise of globalization”, “the past cannot give us what the future has failed to deliver” (HUYSEN, 2000, p. 37). The “estradas do futuro” evoked by Eduardo Mondlane’s car or the idea of finding news from the future which are brought to mind by Samora Machel’s telephone in the first chapters are but fanciful, ultimately vapid and unhelpful, visions of the past. As Mbembe reminds us, “la décolonisation inaugure le temps de la bifurcation vers d’innombrables futurs. Ces futurs étaient, par définition, contingents” (MBEMBE, 2013, p. 11).³⁶ What both narrator and Jei-Jei inherit and (re)enact is the drive to approach the intangible future as a concrete thing. The novelist, unlike the muralists in the novel, cannot afford not to address head on the task of writing in a changing world, where desires are confronted with reality, where the politics of literature traverses the politics of the real, where ethics is in productive tension with aesthetics:

The responsibility, in ethical and aesthetic terms, is enormous: to be on the side of the ones who suffer (and in Africa there are many, and perhaps more than ever) and to keep real the possibility of diverse visions of the world in times when the plurality of perspectives is perhaps threatened more than ever, both globally and locally; and to do so without losing sight of the literary perspective. (COELHO, 2013, p. 29)

In the novel’s final chapter, when the narrator is eventually able to trace Jei-Jei’s whereabouts after the return from the journey and after the whole enterprise is disbanded, we are led back to the Museu da Revolução, which has in the meanwhile been closed to the public. That is where Jei-Jei has been spending some of his time, with the assistance of colluding security guards. The return to the museum, now closed, provides a further pretext for both of them to pick up from where the fighters for independence left off and to use their imagination to make sense of an empirical reality that is not neatly ordered and teleologically restricted. Nevertheless, they are not prepared to give up on new worlds, new ethico-political horizons; *i.e.*, a future, still to come. As the narrator wanders through the now half empty museum – “um vago ar de armazém abandonado” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 479)³⁷ – he wonders how most recent periods in history could be represented in the museum and whether these would be audacious enough to “esboçar uma ideia de futuro” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 481).³⁸ He imagines filling in some of the gaps and supplementing the exhibitions on colonial massacres, the stages of the war, and the first years of independence with the events uncovered in the journey: mannequins in tatters to represent the “deserdados da planície da Mutarara” in order to trace Mariano’s genealogy, a mannequin with a number inscribed, mannequins in pieces to represent the “massacrados”, a can with Mizere’s miraculous water, a grill from a tractor, “coisas assim”

³⁷ looked vaguely like an abandoned warehouse”.

³⁸ sketch out an idea for the future”.

³⁹ the disinherited of the Mutarara plain"; "massacred"; "things like that".

(COELHO, 2021a, p. 481)³⁹. Earlier in the chapter, prompted by Jei-Jei's reflections, the narrator, who appears to be a historian, had mulled over new research areas that could investigate an archaeology of massacres, even in the knowledge that one cannot compare suffering (p. 467-68). The narrator's reflections in the final chapter on what a museum that included history after independence and early revolutionary impetus could look like, coupled with his reflection on the methods and processes by which a different account of the past and, inherently, of present and future could be achieved, opens up a more egalitarian perspective. The question raised by the epigraph to the novel ("Can the forgotten/ be born again/ into a land of names?") echoes in the novel's unresolved aim, that of remembering those with no name. With the emergence of "desaparecidos, massacrados", "sobreviventes" – those who are no longer persons, just survivors –, the writing in the novel moves fully from a performance of a "fictional rationality" to "fictional democracy", in a swerve from "la grande histoire" towards the level of "micro-événements sensibles" (RANCIÈRE, 2017, p. 152).⁴⁰ Rancière highlighted, in Erich Auerbach's discussion of Virginia Woolf's fiction in his *Mimesis* – namely of the moments when seemingly nothing happens or takes place, on "le moment quelconque"⁴¹ – the inscribing of a time that is opposed to the "temps des vainqueurs, ce temps horizontal et continue qui se décrit aujourd'hui comme 'globalisation'" (RANCIÈRE, 2017, p. 156)⁴²: "un temps brisé, à tout instant traversé par ces points qui élèvent n'importe quel rien à l'autour du tout" (RANCIÈRE, 2017, p. 156).⁴³ "[C]oisas assim", which the narrator historian convokes; millions of "pequenos sofrimentos privados", reflects the displaced child and *Magermane*:

tal como as histórias simbólicas de heroísmo, que de resto se vão diluindo numa retórica repetitiva e celebratória até sobrar tão pouco, também estes pequenos sofrimentos privados deveriam ser tornados públicos, ser divulgados, partilhados e valorados por todos. (COELHO, 2021a, p. 467)⁴⁴

Jei-Jei's wish has become, apparently, the narrator's command when he imagined a new museum with other stories and different temporalities, in which "pequenos sofrimentos privados" could be made public. The time of victors becomes but one among others (RANCIÈRE, 2017, p. 155), and the broken temporality in which "coisas assim" and "pequenos sofrimentos privados" become everything to the narrator and to Jei-Jei. The forgotten and the *nothings* inscribe new world and horizons. Mariamo's story, recovered in a ritual that highlights the inventiveness of tradition, stands metonymically and synecdochally for stories beyond recovery. It is no accident that the narrator evokes in the final chapter the same lines, now translated, from Ingrid de Kook's poem that can be found as the epigraph to the novel: "Podem os esquecidos/ renascer/ numa terra de nomes?" (COELHO, 2021a, p. 468).

The opening of ethico-political horizons is inseparable from a certain way of writing, one which upsets the consensual, hegemonic

⁴⁰ History with a capital H"; "perceptible micro-events".

⁴¹ any moment whatsoever".

⁴² time of victors, this horizontal and unbroken time that is nowadays termed globalization".

⁴³ a broken time, traversed at any given time by these instances which elevate the purportedly insignificant to the heights of all-meaningfulness".

⁴⁴ very much like the symbolic stories of heroism, which anyway become more and more diluted in a repetitive and triumphalist rhetoric until there is so little left, these small private sufferings should be made public, divulged, shared and valued by all".

narratives; one which attempts to bring in new words, and worlds, as a way to recover what is eroded in the present. One of the main issues stemming from neoliberal culture's dominance, globally and in Mozambique in particular, is an erasure of memory which goes hand in hand with a progressive lack of ability to "imaginar o futuro" (COELHO, 2011, p. 109).⁴⁵ The final chapter of the novel comes at the end of the journey, and it promises no end in sight. The journey undertaken in the novel parallels the liberation struggle since in both of them there occurs "uma vaga sensação de perda, a sensação de que qualquer coisa podia ter continuado e foi interrompida (como se a perfeição equivalesse a uma viagem sem fim)" (COELHO, 2021a, p. 463)⁴⁶. It is hardly a surprise then that Jei-Jei is found pondering in the last chapter, facing the now empty expositor where Samora Machel's phone used to be. After dismissing the absurd idea that Jei-Jei was hoping to use the telephone to "saber notícias do futuro" (COELHO, 2021a, p. 482),⁴⁷ the narrator finds that his rather awkward proposal to resume their practice of speculating on what the fellow travellers are up to is flatly rejected. For if the narrator is seeking to supplement History with "coisas assim", Jei-Jei is more worried about its erasure. As he witnesses the gradual emptying out of the museum, such concerns are manifested through a returning nightmare retold by Jei-Jei in which the objects from the Museum are being sold off in the market and he cannot get them back. What was presumed to be a public space in which the narrator and Jei-Jei met, the Museu da Revolução, is not public after all, as the final chapter reveals when the museum closes down. In the book, as inadequate as the museum might have been, the closing of the museum is a far more worrying prospect and symptomatic of deterioration rather than a sign of progress. For although the past might be, as Borges Coelho admits in an interview, "far richer" than the future, particularly when the future is so "poor", we must not nevertheless lose sight of the fact that the future is more important (COELHO, 2021c, n. p.). Hence why, for the writer, a tentative definition of worldly could very well be "transformar o nosso local concreto sem esquecer que fazemos parte do universal" (COELHO, 2008, p. 236).⁴⁸

The novel, performatively, ends on that note: that the closing off of worlds and worldlessness must be resisted. The implications for postcoloniality, where "the tension between cosmopolitanism and globalization, world and globe, is most acute" (CHEAH, 2016, p. 11-12), is that there is the "the urgent need for opening another world today" (CHEAH, 2016, p. 198). In this sense, *Museu da Revolução* seems to fit comfortably into Cheah's four criteria for rethinking world literature, and in his proposal of postcolonial literature as world literature: it takes the globalized world as one of its main themes and it situates a given society in the world-system (CHEAH, 2016, p. 210), and it is literature that "lets us imagine, literature about the "nation as part of the world" (CHEAH, 2016, p. 211). The journey that is set up to glorious failure allows for imagination to supplement the narrow vision of the museum with

⁴⁵ imagine the future".

⁴⁶ a vague feeling of loss, the feeling that something could have kept on going and was interrupted (as if perfection amounted to an endless journey".

⁴⁷ get to know news from the future".

⁴⁸ To help lessen the pain of existence (in the literal and in the cultural sense); to combat ignorance; armed with intelligence and the weapons of writing that destiny has put before us, to help transform our concrete local place without losing sight that we are part of a universal space".

what is forgotten and left out, it presents a “dynamic conception of the world”, “as the effect of dynamic contestations from different national and regional sites instead of as a whole that is governed and closed up by an overarching telos of universal progress” (CHEAH, 2016, p. 211). Last but not least, the communication breakdown between narrator and Jei-Jei and their fictional democratic reorganization of the perceptible world in the final chapter “performatively enact[s] a world” (CHEAH, 2016, p. 211). If “world literature must work toward receiving a world or letting it come” (CHEAH, 2016, p. 211-212), then the paradoxical historicity of writing and the poetico-literary performativity of the literary text, to evoke Derrida, should be emphasized.

The novel ends up signalling the power of imagination in order to keep the future from being cancelled; or, referring back to the first generation of anticolonialist and liberation fighters, to see the intangible future as a concrete thing. It ends with the narrator resuming and reappropriating, in fictional terms, the key feature of earlier anti-colonialists, imagination, as a way of resisting wordlessness and committing to a “world” composed of multitudes of places “lugares” [places] and “meandros” [meandering spaces]. President Mondlane’s Volkswagen, alluded to in chapter two, when narrator and Jei-Jei meet for the first time, has gone missing from its usual spot at the entrance of the now abandoned museum. The narrator’s act of imagining (“Imaginei”) the doors of the museum being swung open with Jei-Jei driving Mondlane’s car (not Trabants, *Belarus* tractors or Toyota Hiace) journeying through the streets of the city performs an opening up of the world and provides an impetus and illustration to the inscribing of another ethico-political horizon. The narrator’s imaginative engagement with the material objects of the past (Mondlane’s car, Machel’s telephone) is framed with the future in mind. There is something worldly in the sense Said lent to the word, mundane even, in the image of Eduardo Mondlane’s car being driven through the streets of Maputo. The reanimated car appears to harness the potential that the narrator glimpsed in chapter two, when he described the car as seemingly ready to embark on a liberation mission; in the absence of “estradas do futuro”⁴⁹, Jei-Jei will have to do with driving it through the city streets, “pelas ruas da cidade” (COELHO, 2021a, p. 484). Jei-Jei’s journey, with no ending in sight, will meander *and* inscribe a new world, open to the other, and still part of the world.

⁴⁹ roads to the future”.

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RESUMO

Mundos à parte – Museu da Revolução, de Borges Coelho, e a escrita em (e de) um mundo em mudança

Partindo da posição de Said acerca da mundanidade dos textos e das reflexões de Pheng Cheah sobre literatura pós-colonial como literatura-mundo (2016), o seguinte artigo empreenderá uma leitura do romance Museu da Revolução (2021), por João Paulo Borges Coelho. O posicionamento de Borges Coelho no tocante à articulação entre história, política e literatura, assim como quanto ao propósito da literatura enquanto meio de transformar o “local concreto” sem perder de vista o universal, permitirá explorar de que modo o romance aborda a “desmundialização” causada pela globalização. Ao encenar uma democratização ficcional (RANCIÈRE), Museu da Revolução inscreve novos horizontes ético-políticos enquanto “texto que tenta gerar o contexto” (BORGES COELHO), incluindo necessariamente aqueles que foram esquecidos pelas narrativas (históricas, políticas, de memória) consensuais e dominantes. Por fim, ao propor um poder transformativo de imaginação, o romance ajudará a destrinçar os modos através dos quais a “performatividade poético-literária” dos textos (DERRIDA) poderão inscrever novos horizontes ético-políticos e abrir o mundo (CHEAH), particularmente em face do cancelamento do futuro (BERARDI) implicado na ideologia neoliberal.

Palavras-Chave: *Literatura-Mundo, Pós-Colonialismo, Mundanidade, Performatividade poético-literária, Democracia ficcional.*

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