

## **Frases, fragmentos, asas e espelhos de um ser trucho**

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### **Primeiras confissões**

PS: Nosotros somos la alternativa. Nós somos a utopia. Die letzte Schlacht gewinnen wir.

*Não foi em vão. Só ainda não acabou.*

(Aline Frazão, Prefácio, A Vida Verdadeira de Domingos Xavier)

Têm sido anos difíceis. As asas estão cansadas, quase quebradas, murchando-se. Quem teria dito? Para mim, era algo inconcebível. Até há pouco tempo, ainda sentia a força e coragem de um jovem Ícaro, mas hoje em dia sinto-me mais e mais como um discípulo do velho Sísifo, condenado a carregar para sempre as desilusões das minhas, das nossas, derrotas políticas e pessoais dos últimos tempos. As pedras no caminho são chatas, porque obstaculizam a subida ao céu, porém são as pedras no meu coração as que maior estrago causam, porque impossibilitam a esperança de um dia voltar a voar, embora fosse com asas de areia. Não cabe dúvida, os fins da história se manifestam das maneiras mais diversas, mais perversas e mais inesperadas. Contudo, o resultado final é sempre o mesmo, deixam-nos com as asas destruídas em pleno voo, fazendo que caiamos desamparada e profundamente só para um chão que nos aguarda com alegre dureza. A pergunta que resta é sempre a mesma: como levantar-nos se nunca aprendemos a cair?

O seguinte ensaio poético-teórico tenta responder a esta pergunta combinando a) o diálogo pessoal com trechos literários (chamados *Tô numa fase...*) extraídos de sete romances escritos ao longo dos últimos trinta anos nos espaços pós-coloniais de língua portuguesa, e principalmente em Portugal, Angola, Moçambique e Cabo Verde,<sup>1</sup> e b) reflexões teóricas

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<sup>1</sup> Os sete livros que serão saboreados são: *A Costa dos Murmúrios* (Lídia Jorge), *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* (Isabela Figueiredo), *Niketche – Uma História De Poligamia* (Paulina Chiziane), *Terra Sonâmbula*

surgidas da leitura dos textos em relação com alguns dos grandes temas dos processos de descolonização recentes que continuam sendo relevantes para as nossas lutas de hoje e amanhã, como são a questão da identidade pós-colonial, a experiência de derrota e desilusão depois das independências no continente africano a partir dos anos 60 e 70 do século passado, e a possibilidade e necessidade de buscar novos caminhos utópicos capazes de nos fazer crescer as nossas asas individuais e colectivas atualmente em estado de putrefação. O ensaio termina com uma breve reflexão acerca do poder da literatura pós-colonial de fortalecer a teoria e prática das Epistemologias do Sul, ferramenta de luta pela justiça social e cognitiva ideada e promovida por Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Mas antes de começar a leitura, sugiro escutar esta musiquinha para *muximar*<sup>2</sup> os olhos e a alma dx leitor(a): Cartola - Preciso Me Encontrar.<sup>3</sup>

### **Confusões ontológicas**

*Eu preciso afogar essas raivas e não tenho peito para tanto.*

(Couto, 2009: 23)

### *Tô numa fase Isabela Figueiredo*

A partir de certa idade, muito cedo na infância, já somos nós, o que há de perseguir-nos sempre. (Figueiredo, 2017: 160)

Los que me persiguen desde mi infancia son los espectros de Víctor Jara y Mao Zedong. Las canciones revolucionarias del primero, y las ideas y los lemas revolucionarios del segundo. Fueron mis primeros contactos, ya en la cuna e incluso mucho antes de saber leer, con el sueño de un mundo sin opresores y opresiones, es decir con lo que en aquel entonces, estamos hablando de los últimos años de la década del 70 del siglo pasado, se

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(Mia Couto), *Luuanda* (José Luandino Vieira), *A Geração da Utopia* (Pepetela) e *O Novíssimo Testamento* (Mário Lúcio Sousa).

<sup>2</sup> A palavra *muxima* (coração) vem da língua quimbundo falado em terras angolanas e é uma expressão muito utilizada pelo romancista José Luandino Vieira. Está na origem de vários neologismos e outros matizes de significação em comparação com as palavras aproximadamente equivalentes na língua portuguesa (Macêdo, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Disponível em <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUjOfsoBhMY>.

llamaba el socialismo por tierras latinoamericanas y el comunismo, por allí, no tan lejos de mi ciudad natal de Hamburgo, en la Unión Soviética fundada otrora por un tercer espectro que me ha acompañado desde siempre, el señor Vladímir Ilich Uliánov, también conocido como Lenin. Pero no se preocupe, estimadx lector(a), no es que no sepa que Uliánov y Zedong fueron responsables de demasiadas atrocidades. Lo sé, me lo contaron mil y una vez, y no tengo ningún interés de refutar o defender lo irrefutable. No obstante, pido su comprensión cuando le digo que tampoco puedo permitir que se condenen a dos hombres que dedicaron toda una vida a la construcción de una sociedad más justa y menos inhumana, y que fallaron, pero fallaron intentándolo, con una actitud y autoridad empapada de hipocresía, superioridad moral y sin nunca jamás haberse ni siquiera atrevido a soñar con esta otra sociedad. No, sinceramente, estas voces no las necesitamos. Pero no se preocupe, estimadx lector(a), esta vez no las vamos a callar como antiguamente lo hacíamos, es decir con violencia y censura, no, estos métodos causaron demasiado dolor. Esta vez las vamos a callar porque lo vamos a hacer mejor. Esta vez las vamos a callar porque hemos aprendido de nuestros innumerables errores. Esta vez las vamos a callar porque vamos a construir un nuevo comunismo. Un comunismo no-eurocéntrico, un comunismo despatriarcalizado, un comunismo pos-colonial. En fin, un comunismo que finalmente nos permita a todxs vivir la vida que merecemos, aquella sin opresores y opresiones.

*Tô numa fase Paulina Chiziane*

*Ah, meu espelho estranho. Espelho revelador:*

*Vivemos juntos desde que me casei.*

*Porque só hoje me revelas o teu poder?*

(Chiziane, 2016: 17)

Faz algum tempo já que cada vez que olho no espelho não reconheço mais a pessoa que está me olhando. Na verdade, o homem de fora ainda parece ser o mesmo. Tem mais ou menos o mesmo rosto, a mesma cabeça careca, aquela barba cada vez mais branca. Ou seja, tudo mais ou menos igual, tal-vez algumas rugas a mais. Sem grandes mudanças ao longo dos anos. O que parece ter mudado mesmo é o interior daquele homem. O olhar dele.

A alma dele. As certezas dele. As convicções dele. Olhando para o espelho me permite sentir esta interioridade em processo de algum tipo de transformação. Sente-se que algo está mudando no centro gravitacional daquele homem. Pelo momento, é um processo que traz mais dor que prazer. Mais angústia que alegria. Mais dúvidas que respostas. Tem sido cansativo viver assim por alguns anos já. Às vezes não aguento mais. Porém, ainda tenho a esperança de que o resultado deste processo (mesmo que efêmero) produza algo que valha a pena ser vivido.

### *Hacia una identidad trucha*

In the labyrinth of theorizations about post-colonial identities, the one that has resonated deepest with me and my own journey has been proposed by a fellow country-woman, Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui in her paper *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization*. Coming from a context, in which, in spite of being one of only two countries with an indigenous majority in Latin America, it took almost 500 years for the political leadership of the country to be in the hands of those who inhabited the land before colonization, with all the havoc this violent process imposed on people's sense of selves, Rivera Cusicanqui, herself of European and Indigenous (Aymara<sup>4</sup>) descent, introduces her very own contribution to the discussion about post-colonial identities, by what she calls the *ch'ixi*:

The world of *ch'ixi* also exists. Personally, I don't consider myself *q'ara* (culturally stripped and usurped by others), because I recognize my fully double origin, Aymara and European, and because I live from my own efforts. Because of this, I consider myself *ch'ixi* and consider it the most appropriate translation of the motley mix that we, who are called mestizas and mestizos, are. The word *ch'ixi* has many connotations: it is a colour that is the product of juxtaposition, in small points or spots, of opposed or contrasting colours: black and white, red and green, and so on [...] The notion of *ch'ixi*, like many others, reflects the Aymara idea of something that is and is not at the

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<sup>4</sup> The Aymara people are native to the Andean and *Altiplano* region of South America, and in particular to what today are the countries of Bolivia, Peru and Chile. Together with the Quechua, the Aymara represent the two largest indigenous group in Bolivia.

same time. It is the logic of the included third [...] The potential of undifferentiation is what joins opposites. And so as *allqamari*<sup>5</sup> combines black and white in symmetrical perfection, ch'ixi combines the Indian world and its opposite without ever mixing them. (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012: 105)

Next, Rivera Cusicanqui draws a clear distinction between the ch'ixi and the notion of hybridity as developed by thinkers such as Homi Bhabha and Néstor García Canclini:

The notion of hybridity [...] is a genetic metaphor that connotes infertility. Yet, hybridity assumes the possibility that from the mixture of two different beings a third completely new one can emerge, a third race or social group with the capacity to merge the features of its ancestors in a harmonic and as yet unknown blend. But the mule is a hybrid that cannot reproduce. The notion of ch'ixi, on the contrary, amounts to the "motley" [abigarrada] society of René Zavaleta and expresses the parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not extinguish but instead antagonize and complement each other. Each one reproduces itself from the depths of the past and relates to others in a contentious way [...] The metaphor of ch'ixi assumes a double and contentious ancestry, one that is denied by the processes of acculturation and the "colonization of the imaginary" but one that is also potentially harmonious and free if we liberate our half-Indian ancestry and develop dialogical forms for the construction of knowledges. (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012: 105-106)

I quote Rivera Cusicanqui at length here, because coming from a somewhat similar background than her, I felt a similar disconnection with the concept of hybridity as well as other constructions such as the numerous border and mestiza identities, as proposed by compañeras de lucha como Gloria Anzaldúa. Needless to say that I have no interest in establishing any hierarchies (and, I suppose, neither does Rivera Cusicanqui) between what are essentially invitations to ways of being in the world that are (self-)liberating and allow for existing in an at least slightly less dehumanized and, most importantly, more autonomous manner. Then again, my main attraction with the notion of *ch'ixi* was precisely the autonomy of the, in our case, two different beings, the fact that they both antagonize

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<sup>5</sup> The Allqamari is a mountain in the Bolivian Andes.

and complement each other, that they are in a constant but contentious dialogue, and that they are simultaneously something that is and that is not. Por otro lado, es precisamente esta distinción entre algo que es y no es, que me hizo buscar un elemento adicional a lo *ch'ixi* como consecuencia de mi experiencia como alguien que nació y ha vivido muchos años en Europa, y quien siempre transitó estos dos mundos (Bolivia y Alemania), muchas veces muy poco dispuestos a asumir su condición post-colonial. In fact, if there is one sentence that I have been hearing over and over again, in all kinds of languages, from all kinds of people, at all times of my life, it is that “You are not a real German”, and that “You are not a real Bolivian”. “Du bist kein richtiger Deutscher!” “Tu no eres boliviano de verdad!”. Es decir, I have been reminded again and again that I am something that I am not, or that I am not something that I thought I was. The adverb “real” or “richtig” is crucial in this regard. Not only because it implies an essential, “real” German and/or Bolivian identity, the one way of being German, the one way of being Bolivian, that those with a purer claim to national identity can deny me on the basis of their purity but also because the opposite of the German “richtig” or the English “real” translates into “unreal” or “false” (German: falsch), or perhaps the even more radical “fake”. Feeling “unreal” has certainly come up for me over the years in the sense of the slang use of the term, which is closer to “surreal” or “fantastic”, especially when one repeatedly fails to make rational sense why in spite of all the liberal public discourse about respect and tolerance and multiculturalism one continues to clash with the material reality of people's ignorance and the apparently irrepressible desire of the majority culture to give itself the right to define who you are. It is, however, the meanings of “falsch” and “fake”, which over time, and initially with some resistance, stimulated in me a sense of urgency to go beyond the *ch'ixi*, and start conceiving of a separate, though certainly not exclusive, or worse, sectarian post-colonial identity, which I propose to call the *trucho*.

*Trucho*, in Bolivian slang, refers to the false or the fake and is often applied to falsified products sold in the market place or used to describe a person that comes across as false. Given the constant confrontation with people's need to assign me the label of not being “real”, and especially the frustration and sense of exhaustion this has produced in me, the category of the *trucho* allows me the possibility to both recover a sense of agency in defining myself (which other categories, of course, do as well); also, and more

importantly, it allows me to experience myself and my relation to others in new affective as well as discursive terms, as a result of a number of concrete actions that assuming the identity of the boliviano o alemán trucho me posibilitan. For example, being *trucho* invites me to at the same time mock myself and make fun of what it means to be “real” according to the sanctioned national identity. Based on my experience so far, this making fun of myself has produced a considerable amount of laughter and joy for me but also for my interlocutors, producing exactly the type of playful and relaxed atmosphere that open up the possibilities for more earnest conversations, about what is clearly a sensitive topic, afterwards. Besides, being *trucho* has also invited me to be more assertive about expressing myself verbally in a Spanish that assumes its falseness (both in the sense of “incorrect” and in terms of the multiple “Spanishes” I speak as a result of having learned my Spanish in different post-colonial and post-imperial contexts) as a way into describing experiences and sentiments that my former drive to speak in a way that I would not be perceived as a “false Bolivian” proscribed. Nowadays, speaking a false Spanish correctly is beginning to feel like another fountain of joy.

To conclude, this journey towards the *trucho* is still at its beginning with regards to a more theoretical definition of its post-colonial, liberating potential. On a visceral level, however, puedo constatar que asumirse como *truchamente* perteneciendo y no perteneciendo a los (como mínimo) dos mundos de un país pos-colonial como Bolivia y un país (ni tan) pos-imperial como Alemania se ha manifestado como una cura desestabilizadora y productora de nuevos ritmos y melodías, armonías y disonancias, anteriormente inaudibles. Y son precisamente estos nuevos ritmos falsos surgidos de una condición falsa, que más prometen en términos de nuevos caminos falsos hacia destinos falsos y con nuevas experiencias individuales y colectivas falsas que, quién sabe, algún día producirán algo verdaderamente falso o falsamente verdadero que valga la pena ser vivido, y posteriormente falsificado.

Para acalmar los ánimos después de tanta falsedad, recomiendo escuchar la siguiente canción boliviana, cantada por mi tío en aymara y con subtítulos en español: Los Jairas - Mamá Criso.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Disponible en <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8d8VCQBozew>.

## O direito à desilusão

*Desire and longing, these are what are left over  
when the initial impetus and the original enthusiasm  
are definitively exhausted  
(Bensaïd, 2007)*

### *Tô numa fase Mia Couto*

Pesava nos seus olhos a gravíssima decisão de criar um outro dia (Couto, 2016: 326).

Não me custa mais admitir que às vezes, ultimamente muitas vezes, tem sido quase impossível criar este outro dia. O corpo está bem, mas a cabeça e o espírito andam muito machucados. O que tem ajudado um pouco é escrever poesia. As três que seguem, compostas em Alemão, fazem parte de uma primeira tentativa de dar voz às minhas agonias.

#### **Klein mit Hut**

Ganz kleine Schritte  
Fertig mit der Welt  
Die Flügel sind müde  
Die Träume zerbrochen  
Keine Freu(n)de mehr  
Das Herz vertrocknet  
Selbstzweifel

#### **Lebenslust**

#### **(Aufbruchsstimmung)**

Alles ist gesagt.  
Nichts wird mehr hinzugefügt.  
Die Zunge schweigt.  
Die Seele atmet auf.



Schmutzige Ufer rufen.

### **Scherbenhaufen**

Die Splitter deiner Zähne  
reißen Wunden in meine traurigen Augen.  
I just can't find the ending.

### *Tô numa fase Pepetela*

Deixei de ser um lutador. Sei que me entendes. Perdi poucas batalhas, mas sou um vencido. (Pepetela, 2017: 257)

Mental health is a political struggle. The world is full of people like Aníbal, o Sábio, the main character of Pepetela's novel *A Geração da Utopia*, who dedicated a life time to the struggle for collective liberation only to be defeated not only politically, but especially physically, emotionally, mentally as well as with regards to our capacity to keep imagining, envisioning and dreaming of a world in which all the unnecessary and absurd waste of lives and potentials has finally ceased to exist. The sense of defeat we feel is hence a deeply ontological one. It violates the core of everything that gave us life for so long. It is the collapse of hope. The victory of doubt. The weariness of life in the eternal present of consumer capitalism and self-righteous, self-celebratory identity politics. But in spite of all this despair, and despair it is, we are not dead yet. Something resembling a fire is still burning in us. And sometimes, on bright days, you can feel it making love with the sun. It is a beautiful feeling.

### **Feuerprobe**

Die Wirklichkeit holt uns ein  
Wo zum Teufel sind wir?  
Eingegraben im Lager der Sehnsucht  
Gleicht ein Tag dem Anderen.  
Grau und undurchsichtig wird die Zeit zum wichtigsten Gut.  
Was muss weggeworfen werden?

Vor welchen Schatten müssen wir flüchten?  
Arroganz, stoische Ruhe, Wortkargheit  
kennen keine Klassenunterschiede.  
Das Gespenst der sozialen Ungleichheit leckt seine Wunden.  
Jetzt müssen Sie sich schon beeilen, sonst ist es zu spät.  
Für sentimentale Gedanken ist keine Zeit  
Vom Leben überwältigt. Wie sehen Blumen aus?  
Der kleinste Riss im Segeltuch bedeutet unseren Untergang.  
Leb wohl schöne Hoffnung.  
Durchhalten ist die einzige Herausforderung  
Aus welchem Holz bist du geschnitzt?

*The beautiful ones are not yet dead: A aposta melancólica*

In his biography about French philosopher Félix Guattari, his friend, Italian thinker Franco “Bifo” Berardi insists that one must accept the inevitable ‘depression’ resulting from having lost at least some of one’s personal and political struggles (Berardi, 2008: xi). Speaking from the perspective of philosophy and its potential role in dealing with the encounter with defeat, Bifo proceeds by stating that “[w]e have never elaborated philosophically the experience of depression. In fact, we have foreclosed it and made it shameful, as if it were something that cannot be addressed in public” (Berardi, 2008: 9). Linking depression to notions of desire and sense making, he defines it as “the fallout of the megalomania implicit in the construction of sense”, urging us to “not again start the process of creating sense without facing depression, without paying our bill” while at the same time suggesting and accepting that “there is a time for depression. And [that] we shouldn’t underestimate its cognitive potential” (Berardi, 2008: 10). While depression, especially in the form of burnout and the *fatigue society*, has in recent years received its fair share of public discussion as one of *the* pathological phenomena of living under contemporary capitalism,<sup>7</sup> the political dimension of depression has received much less attention and so has its cognitive potential.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Byung-Chul Han’s book *The Burnout Society* (2015).

Those who did write about it, however, did so from a perspective of deep personal experience as is the case of Mark Fischer, Daniel Bensaïd and of course Pepetela himself. Fischer, who battled with depression for years and finally committed suicide in early 2017, built on some of the work of Jacques Derrida and Bifo Berardi, to reflect about the implications for progressive political activism in times of what he called ‘capitalist realism’: “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it” (Fisher, 2009: 2), thereby instilling in many of us a “sense of yearning for a future that we feel cheated out of” (Fisher, 2012: 16), while simultaneously producing new subjectivities that he describes as beset by “reflexive impotence”, knowing that things are bad but also knowing (or believing to know) that there is nothing one can do about it, and exhibiting a state of “depressive hedonia”, that is, an inability to do anything else except pursue pleasure (Fisher, 2009: 21).

This rather bleak overall landscape notwithstanding, Fisher insists that “[t]he long, dark night of the end of history has to be grasped as an enormous opportunity” (Fisher, 2009: 80) and suggests a number of ways how this could be achieved. One is by confronting the “ruling ontology” through the invoking of the “Real”, as defined by Lacan.<sup>8</sup> Fisher explains: “one strategy against capitalist realism could involve invoking the Real(s) underlying the reality that capitalism presents to us. [Real(s) whose] real implications for capitalism [are] too traumatic to be assimilated into the system” (Fisher, 2009: 18). Three of the Reals Fisher specifically mentions are environmental catastrophe, capitalist bureaucracy and, crucially, mental health. The second response is a contemporary adaptation of the notion of haunting as developed by Derrida in his book *Spectres of Marx*. Fisher affirms that “provisionally, then, we can distinguish two directions in hauntology. The first refers to that which is (in actuality is) no longer, but which is still effective as a virtuality (the traumatic “compulsion to repeat,” a structure that repeats, a fatal pattern). The second refers to that which (in actuality) has not yet happened, but which is already effective in the virtual (an attractor, an anticipation shaping current behaviour)” (Fisher,

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<sup>8</sup> “For Lacan, the Real is what any ‘reality’ must suppress; indeed, reality constitutes itself through just this repression. The Real is an unrepresentable X, a traumatic void that can only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in the field of apparent reality” (Fisher, 2009: 18).

2012: 19). This latter type of hauntology, a hauntology that revives the possibility of a Bloch-inspired “not-yet”, for which it is worth struggling towards, brings us to Daniel Bensaïd, and his desperate struggle to stay politically, mentally and physically alive in a context marked by “so many occasions for giving up! So many temptations to bow one’s head and submit to expediency!” (Bensaïd, 2001).

Parting from the sobering affirmation that

[t]his world in decline, prey to the inconsolable desolation of a faithless religiosity, of a commercialised spirituality, of an individualism without individuality, prey to the standardisation of differences and to the formatting of opinions, no longer enjoys either “magnificent sunrises” or triumphant dawns. It’s as if the catastrophes and disappointments of the past century have exhausted all sense of history and destroyed any experience of the event, leaving only the mirages of a pulverized present. (*ibid.*)

Bensaïd asks us (and himself) not to submit to the conformism of remembrance commemorations, and neither to adjust ourselves to the moments of fatigue nor to the insidious rhetoric of resignation (*ibid.*), but rather to engage in what after Bensaïd’s death has been called a “melancholy wager”<sup>9</sup> (Traverso, 2016; Löwy, 2017). This wager, combining obstinate hope and surmounted despair (of one’s own illusions), and based on a clear distinction between “victorious defeats” and “unalleviated collapse”, allows for us to convert ourselves into proverbial moles “whose stubborn advance made up of irreconcilable resistances [and] well-directed ramblings along tunnels which seem to lead nowhere [nonetheless] open up into daylight, into an astonishing, blinding light” (Bensaïd, 2001). According to Bensaïd, in spite of everything, the mole always burrows on and so should we: “even when we are on the point of believing that nothing more is possible, even when we despair of escaping from the relentless order of things, we never cease to set the possibility of what might be against the poverty of what actually is” (*ibid.*). What we need, therefore, is “the joyful passion of permanent revolution, in which are brought together duration and event, the determinate conditions of the historical situation and the

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9 Apart from Daniel Bensaïd, there have been a number of other intellectual-activists who have theorized Pascal’s wager since the middle of the past century, in particular Lucien Goldmann (1913-1970), Alain Badiou and Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

uncertainties of political action which strives to transform the range of possibilities” (Bensaïd, 2007). What we need is to cultivate a commitment to the responsibility towards the possible.

In summary, Bifo, Fisher and Bensaïd, in their different ways and with different emphases and potential ways out, all agree that it is important to treat the experience of individual and collective political defeats and their difficult consequences for one’s mental health as well as one’s capacities to keep dreaming and taking action towards a more just society as something that should become one of our default elements when analyzing and assessing our political struggles, in what I would propose we call the “Right to Disillusionment”. I agree with Bifo when he insists that the root of (political) depression lies “in this impotence of political will that we haven’t had the courage to admit” (Berardi, 2008: 13), and that “depression basically is a disinvestment of libidinal energies in facing the future [and] in facing the world” (Berardi, 2008: 158). On the other hand, if we learn to accept that defeats are and will always be an inevitable element of any political struggle, then the right to disillusionment will figure as precisely the type of political therapy that is not paralyzing, accommodating or that produces reflexive impotence but rather re-energizes and re-mobilizes, because it allows for not only the *Enttabuisierung* of one’s doubts, fears, anxieties and moments of “weakness”, but also because, as Berardi suggests, the cognitive potentials these affects may give birth to can serve as precisely the type of learning needed so that we, but especially those who are just entering the political arena as well as those who are yet to begin their struggles (*the beautiful ones that are not yet born*, as Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah calls them) can “start again in the middle” as Bensaïd (2007), citing Gilles Deleuze, liked to say. And it is this supporting the beautiful ones that are in the process of being born that our old comrade Anibal, o Sábio, towards the end of Pepetela’s novel and out of the depths of his stoic despair, finds a new, less grandiose but equally important way of keeping the flames of hope and his responsibility to the possible alive, i.e. by sharing his withering wisdom, accumulated as a result of years of defeat, with members of a new generation of activists who are now asked to make their own melancholic wager on the possibility of a more just post-colonial future, right to disillusionment included. There can be no doubt: The beautiful ones are not yet dead.

### **Em busca da(s) utopia(s) perdidas**

*When resignation and melancholy follow the ecstasy of the event,  
as when love's excitement dulls under the force of habit,  
it becomes absolutely essential not to adjust yourself to the moments of fatigue.*

(Bensaïd, 2001)

*Tô numa fase José Luandino Vieira*

Mas a nossa hora chega sempre (Vieira, 2012).

Ich bin ein ungeduldiger Zeitgenosse. Das war noch nie anders, und es wird sich wohl auch so schnell nicht ändern. Ich kann es einfach nicht ertragen, zu warten. Herumzustehen. Von anderen abhängig zu sein. Ich verliere schnell die Nerven, wenn ich irgendwo Schlange stehen muss, wenn die Autos vor mir zu langsam fahren, oder wenn Kolleg\_innen und Freund\_innen zu spät kommen. Und noch weniger Geduld habe ich für die Ignoranz und Unfähigkeit von Menschen, für ihre Kleinkrämerei, ihren Neid und ihre Spießigkeit, meine Wenigkeit natürlich eingeschlossen, auch wenn es wehtut.

Aber all das ist Pillepalle im Vergleich zu dem, was mich wirklich ungeduldig macht: Die Welt, in der wir leben. Soll heißen, die Welt der im Grunde uneingeschränkten Vorherrschaft des Kapitalismus, des Kolonialismus, des Patriarchats, des Rassismus, der tagtäglichen Ausbeutung, Verletzung, Demütigung, Ausgrenzung, Abwertung, Entwürdigung, kurz gesagt, der Entmenschlichung des Menschen durch den Menschen. Diese Welt kann ich auf den Tod nicht ausstehen. Sie macht mich fuchsteufelswild. So wild, dass ich viel zu häufig die Kontrolle über meine Gefühle und Gedanken verliere, und dabei leider auch immer wieder geliebte Freund\_innen und Verwandte verletze. Das tut mir leid, und ich wünschte, ich könnte versprechen, dass es nicht wieder vorkommen wird, aber das ist mir bedauerlicherweise unmöglich. Versuchen werde ich es selbstverständlich.

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<sup>10</sup> Disponible en <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5gKaJ0ITLk>.

Warum erzähle ich das alles? Weil es bei mir, trotz aller scheinbar ontologischen Ungeduld, genau eine Art von Geduld gibt, die bis dato nicht gerissen ist, und zwar die Geduld und das Vertrauen, dass unsere Stunde, die der Träumer\_innen einer gerechteren und schöneren Welt, irgendwann kommen wird. Dass unsere Stunde *immer* irgendwann kommt, selbst wenn die Dinge dann oft recht schnell wieder in die gewohnten Bahnen zurückfließen. Unsere Stunde wird kommen. Da bin ich ganz sicher. Das ist die Urgeduld, die mir noch bleibt und mit der ich gerne noch ein wenig Zeit verbringen würde.

*Tô numa fase Lídia Jorge*

Acha que não se pode fazer nada? Oh, não diga isso, pode-se sim! Pode-se muito - ...  
(Jorge, 2017: 94)

A veces tengo la impresión de que hay demasiadas personas que, con mucho criterio (hay que dejarlo bien claro), pasan mucho más tiempo analizando y criticando las relaciones y estructuras de poder injustas, los poderes fácticos y/o los poderosos que detentan este poder, en vez de dedicar un poquito más de tiempo, energía y fuerza cognitiva para pensar acerca de nuestros propios poderes. De hecho, gracias a estas personas, lo que ellos, los poderosos, pueden, ya lo sabemos bien. Tienen el poder para matar, torturar, silenciar, ocultar, masacrar, dominar, disimular, asesinar, insultar, exterminar, aniquilar, atormentar, fustigar, sacrificar además de muchos otros -ares, -eres (desaparecer, aborrecer, favorecer, barrer, desconocer) e -ires (punir, advertir, incumplir y, sobre todo, deprimir). Y lo que es peor, lo pueden todo impunemente. Lo pueden todo a la vista de todos, riéndose de nosotrxs y nuestras critiquitas, protestitas y micro-luchitas. En fin, lo pueden todo porque sí, y por lo tanto una de las preguntas fuertes que tenemos que plantearnos es qué tipo de poderes tenemos nosotrxs para hacerles frente a estos poderosos que aparentemente nunca más abdicarán de su poder. Tengo algunas respuestas, estimadx lector(a), pero me gustaría mucho escucharle a usted. Por ende, le quisiera proponer que componga su propio poema, en el cual nos cuente los poderes que más debemos regar para que un día podamos reírnos de ellos, o de nosotroxs, o de los dos, o de nadie. ¿Quién sabe? Felizmente, el poder de pronosticar el futuro todavía nos ilude.

## Oda a nuestros poderes

Lo que podemos es:

*xx*

Lo que podemos es:

*xx*

Lo que podemos es:

*xx*

Lo que podemos es:

*xx*

Lo que podemos es:

*xx*

*Tô numa fase Mário Lúcio Sousa*

Aventurái-vos! (Sousa, 2010: 112)

No, the world was not a better place thirty or forty years ago but there can be no doubt that the dreams we dream nowadays are much more modest than they used to be. And I am sorry, but I really do not think that we should celebrate this modesty as some type of progress, because all the previous dreams were apparently so megalomaniac, masculine and totalitarian in nature. In fact, I will not apologize for insisting on dreaming of a world, in which the starting point of all life is that all basic human needs are satisfied for everyone all the time, forever. If that makes me a patriarchal, megalomaniac totalitarian, then so be it, but I will no longer accept watching the horizon for a revolution which is not coming, because our current, modest dreams have put us to sleep. “Aventurái-vos!”, is what the reborn, feminine Jesus asks herself and her followers to do in Mário Lúcio Sousa’s novel *O Novíssimo Testamento*. Concretely, what she asks people to do is to dare to venture out into the creation of new ideas on the basis of old concepts, to venture out into the creation of a culture of life, love and passion, to venture out into the creation of a culture of the



body, care and affection, in short, to dare to defend and venture out into the creation of a new world. Sincerely, I can see nothing totalitarian in this invitation. And neither would I like it to be gendered or made more modest, though, who knows, that might be my privilege speaking. In any case, “Aventurai-vos!” seems like a pretty good motto for today’s times. Perhaps some of us could try it together and see what happens.

*Entre a Poesia do Possível e a Poesia do Necessário*

In his 2017 book *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures* and his 2012 article “Introduction: Spaces of Utopia” Australian post-colonial scholar Bill Ashcroft, picking up from LT Sargent and German philosopher Ernst Bloch, distinguishes between the notion of utopia (Greek for no-place) - as an essentially literary construct -, and utopianism as “social dreaming”, a type of “future thinking”, for which “[u]topia is no longer a place but the spirit of hope itself, the essence of desire for a better world” (Ashcroft, 2012: 2). Ashcroft goes on by stating that, in his view, one of the hallmarks of postcolonial writing is that it “is suffused with future thinking, with a utopian hope for the future, a belief in the reality of liberation, in the possibility of justice and equality, in the transformative power of writing and at times in the potential global impact to be made by postcolonial societies” (*ibid.*). For him, this postcolonial hope is intricately linked to our individual and collective capacities to harness our political imaginations since “only the imagination can comprehend the future” (Ashcroft, 2017: 7) and, even more crucially, “[a]lthough not everything we imagine will be achievable, what is never imagined cannot be achieved” (Ashcroft, 2017: 5). It is here that I would like to intervene with regards to some of the seven post-colonial novels treated in this article and their relationship to utopianism as social dreaming, their harnessing of our political imaginations, as well as the type of concrete actions they may enable, with the latter, I believe, being paramount in order not to reduce social dreaming to mere fantasy and, ultimately, inaction.

The argument I would like to put forward is that we need to distinguish between what might be called the “Poetry of the Possible” and the “Poetry of the Necessary”. The two terms emerged for me as a result of engaging with the novels by Chiziane, Vieira, Pepetela and Sousa, with the first two, based on my reading, belonging to the category of

the “Poetry of the Possible” and the other two exemplifying elements of a “Poetry of the Necessary”. The difference between these two has to do with what post-colonial activist-intellectual Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls *actio in proximis* and *actio in distans*, with the former “privileging actions focused on the everyday and amount to improvements here and now in the lives of the oppressed and excluded” (Santos, 2014: 114) and the latter being a radicalised version of the *actio in proximis*, through the

searching for the subversive and creative aspects of the everyday, which may occur in the most basic struggle for survival. The changes in the everyday have thus a double valence: concrete improvement in the everyday and the signals they give of far larger possibilities. Through these signals, *actio in distans* becomes present in *actio in proximis*. In other words, *actio in distans* only exists as a dimension of *actio in proximis*, that is, as the will and reason of radicalization. (*ibid.*)

I would like to suggest that the “Poetry of the Possible” resembles the *actio in proximis* and the “Poetry of the Necessary” is related to the *actio in distans*. My concern is that, in times of a largely uncontested hegemony of capitalist realism, as discussed above, the “Poetry of the Possible” is privileged and over-appreciated to an extent that, unwillingly but surely, we will end up in a situation where our political imagination has shrunk to a degree that the only type of agency left is the agency of survival, the agency of the possible, with neither “signals of far larger possibilities” nor “utopian textures”, as described by Angolan writer Ondjaki in the preface to Pepetela’s book (Pepetela, 2017: 11), any longer on the horizon. This is obviously not to say that the “Poetry of the Possible” should be abandoned. On the contrary, I can agree with Santos that *actio in distans* (should) exist as a dimension of *actio in proximis*, and that one can hence argue that “possible” and “necessary” mutually constitute each other. This dimension, however, has to be actively constructed, nourished and defended, lest we can soon, paraphrasing Ashcroft, no longer imagine what could be achieved.

In other words, apart from doing what is possible, we also must do what is needed, and while the two are sometimes synonymous, other times our struggle for the possible deactivates or weakens our need and struggle for the (seemingly) impossible. In short, while both types of poetry are equally indispensable ways of saying “Yes” to a different

world, what is needed is the kind of enabling force that can link the two and allow for the possibility of radical social transformation in the present and future. For Ashcroft, as for me, it is utopianism as social dreaming that might become this force because it has the power to “energiz[e] the present with the anticipation of what is to come” (Ashcroft, 2012: 4). What remains, is hence, the question where this social dreaming can be done. What is the site where it might take place in our everyday lives? Undoubtedly, one such site can and must be the arts, whether theatre, music, dance, and yes, poetry and literature, and specifically, at least in post-colonial contexts (though by no means exclusively there), post-colonial literature, because its “utopian function [...] is located in its practice as well as its vision – the practice of confronting and transforming coercive power to produce an imagined future” (Ashcroft, 2012: 12). Keeping open and producing an imagined future is therefore one of our most urgent tasks. This too will require a type of wager, perhaps less infused by melancholia and more relying on such old-fashioned affects like enthusiasm and joy, but in whatever affect it comes, wagering we shall.

No imagined future, without Freiraum in den Köpfen: Lena Stöhrfaktor - Die Angst vor den Gedanken verlieren.<sup>11</sup>

## **Voando juntos pelas linhas abissais – Literatura Pós-Colonial e as Epistemologias do Sul**

*Talvez Ngunga tivesse um poder e esteja agora em todos nós,  
nós os que recusamos viver no arame farpado,  
nós os que recusamos o mundo dos patrões e dos criados,  
nós os que queremos o mel para todos.  
Se Ngunga está em todos nós, que esperamos então para o fazer crescer?  
Como as árvores, como o massango e o milho,  
ele crescerá dentro de nós se o regarmos.  
Não com água do rio, mas com ações.  
(As aventuras de Ngunga, Pepetela)*

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<sup>11</sup> Disponible en <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hqJEFQksqo>.

In “Decolonization is not a metaphor”, Tuck and Yang, writing in the context of settler colonialism in today’s post-colonial North America, argue that the too-easy adoption of a decolonizing discourse (thereby making decolonization a metaphor) is just one part of non-Indigenous peoples making moves to alleviate the impacts of colonization and what Mawhinney calls “moves to innocence” (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 3). As a result, the two authors urge us to think about what decolonization actually wants, which in their case, citing Fanon,<sup>12</sup> includes the creation of an ethic of incommensurability, which guides moves that unsettle (settler) innocence and stands in contrast to aims of reconciliation (which, for them, is about rescuing settler normalcy and rescuing a settler future), one day leading to the end of the settler nation and the unwritten possibilities of native futures (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 35-36).

From the perspective of my engagement with the seven post-colonial novels discussed above and from within the larger framework of the Epistemologies of the South, two elements are particularly relevant here: 1) What does decolonization want? and 2) What are some of the possible components of this “change in the order of the world”? While neither of the two questions are original in themselves, they do form the constant backdrop that informs our concrete actions towards decolonization that are both material and symbolic in nature. I say both material *and* symbolic because for me there can be no doubt that the kind of decolonizing transformation that is required on an individual, collective and societal level will have to do justice to both material and symbolic, that is metaphoric, needs. I use the word “need” here very deliberately in contrast to “want”, because from all I understand based on my own life as a post-colonial subject, un boliviano trucho, kein richtiger Deutscher, but also based on the type of affect the reading and discussions of the novels have produced in me (and that I have observed in others) and, finally, as a result of my work as a theatre maker in many post-colonial contexts, the two transformations are mutually constitutive as something that resembles an ontological core, i.e. the need for material and symbolic dignity and self-respect. So if we replace “want” with “need”, then the question becomes “what does decolonization need?”, or perhaps, “what are the basic human needs that decolonization is based on?”. Consequently, the

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<sup>12</sup> Incommensurability is an acknowledgement that decolonization will require a change in the order of the world (Fanon, 1963).

question becomes one of ontology and ontological transformation, which is precisely what I argue *needs to be* one of the indispensable elements in order for decolonization to be a process that can allow for liveable futures for all post-colonial subjects, and in particular the former (?) colonized, who continue to be subjected to (neo-)colonial continuities. bell hooks' text "On Self-Recovery" goes into a similar direction, describing a process of trying to become whole again, of reuniting fragments of being but also of seeing ourselves for the 1<sup>st</sup> time (hooks, 1989: 28-34).

The metaphor I would suggest for this journey of reconstruction, reconstitution and rebirth, both material and symbolic, is the Phoenix, the bird of ancient Greek and Egyptian mythologies who resurrects from its own ashes in order to start a new cycle of life. In other words, what I believe we urgently need today is to learn how to grow wings and begin to fly across all those abyssal lines<sup>13</sup> that continue to plague our human existences and cause so much unnecessary and unacceptable pain and suffering for the vast majority of the world's population. In fact, wings were one those frequent guests in a number of the seven novels, and in particular in Chiziane's *Niketche*, that constantly reminded us as readers that one of the fundamental, "strong" questions<sup>14</sup> of our time is still the one posed by Persian/Afghan poet Rumi almost 800 years ago: "We are all born with wings, why crawl through life?" And it is based on this capacity of formulating and stimulating strong questions, strong affects, strong thoughts, strong discussions and strong, critical relationships with oneself and others (characters included) that I believe that post-colonial literature has a fundamental role to play in an Epistemologies of the South, in which what Santos calls "non-extractive methodologies" must become the crucial cornerstone of any, truly emancipatory and decolonizing research and social struggle.

Basing himself on the notion of epistemic extractivism,<sup>15</sup> as developed by Ramón Grosfoguel, de Sousa Santos proposes the development of "methodologies of knowing

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13 According to Santos, "abyssal lines [are] drawn by the dominant abyssal thinking of our time through which both human and non-human realities existing on the other side of the line are made invisible or even actively produced as non-existent" (Santos, 2014: 11).

14 As part of the Epistemologies of the South, Santos defines "strong questions" as those that "address not only our specific options for individual and collective life but also the societal and epistemological paradigm that has shaped the current horizon of possibilities within which we fashion our options, the horizon within which certain options are possible while others are excluded or even unimaginable" (Santos, 2014: 20).

15 Extrapolating from the practice of economic extractivism and building on the concept of cognitive extractivism, as recently theorized by indigenous Canadian writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Grosfoguel characterises epistemic or intellectual extractivism as "una mentalidad que no busca el diálogo

with”, and “being with”, as opposed to the traditional, eurocentric approaches that “know about” and that “extract information from others, turn this information into knowledge” and in the process objectify (and colonize) the people who provide the information. He goes on to argue in favour of new processes of knowledge creation that legitimise historically oppressed populations as bearers and subjects of knowledge, thereby leading to a scenario, in which researcher(s) and those usually considered as objects of study engage with each other as mutually cross-fertilizing subjects linked together in a relationship of interknowledge<sup>16</sup> and informed by a collective desire to struggle against and beyond “capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and all their satellite-oppressions” (Santos, 2014: 27). In sum, what is needed is the “creation of alternative ways of constructing knowledge” as well as “the construction of alternative knowledges”, what Santos calls post-abysal type of knowledges generated by methodologies that are not reducible to metonymic reason;<sup>17</sup> rather, they “involve all senses, not just seeing/observing” and that, most importantly, emerge from the perspective of those who are “victimized by fascism, violence, torture, [as well as] the tearing apart and shattering of bodies” (Santos, 2017).

In my view, post-colonial literature, especially (but not exclusively) when written by post-colonial subjects, has proven its potential in becoming one such “methodology of knowing and being with”, or returning to the metaphor of the Phoenix, it is a methodology that has the power to write (post-colonial) wings into a material and symbolic existence, with which to begin our individual and collective flights towards the non-abysal worlds we all deserve to be living in. Listening carefully, I can already hear the winds calling us softly. Can you?

PS: “You wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down” (Morrison, 1977).

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que conlleva la conversación horizontal, de igual a igual entre los pueblos ni el entender los conocimientos indígenas en sus propios términos, sino que busca extraer ideas como se extraen materias primas para colonizarlas por medio de subsumirlas al interior de los parámetros de la cultura y la episteme occidental” (Grosfoguel, 2016: 132).

16 According to de Sousa Santos, “the utopia of interknowledge consists of learning new and less familiar knowledges without necessarily having to forget the old ones and one’s own. Such is the idea of prudence underlying the ecology of knowledges. The ecology of knowledges assumes that all relational practices involving human beings and human beings and nature entail more than one kind of knowledge, thus more than one kind of ignorance as well” (Santos, 2014: 297).

17 Another key element in the thinking of de Sousa Santos, “metonymic reason, [is] a kind of reason that claims to be the only form of rationality and therefore does not exert itself to discover other kinds of rationality or, if it does, it only does so to turn them into raw material” (Santos, 2014: 263).

Solo lxs locxs piensas que pueden volar (y cuantas veces ya lo han conseguido):  
Pedro Pastor y Suso Sudón - Sólo los locos/Viva la libertad.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Disponible en <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aa394I6bq78>.

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