

Manuel Rui and Postcolonial Angola as it is Not

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Abstract: This article analyzes Angolan author Manuel Rui's short novel *Memória de mar* as offering both a case study and a methodology for revising notions of the "world" presumed in "world literatures," locating it in the Global South. The characters in the novel travel in time in order to investigate the disappearance of an isolated Portuguese church, and in the process discover different pasts, presents, and futures than those dictated by colonial time. The novel thus enacts Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's call in *Globaletics* to reconstruct a view of the world, and a literary canon, from the South, but does so by exploring not metaphors of space but temporalities. I consider the time travel in the novel as a series of historical propositions and epistemological experiments through which the characters explore the broken time of the colonial period, as well as other possible presents and futures that might be constructed by vacating colonial time of its teleological power.

Keywords: Time, world literature, Global South, colonial temporalities, sea

What is the relationship between Lusophone African literature, doubly marginalized as written in a "minor" language and originating in the Global South, and the "world" of "world literature"?¹ Such a question presumes that the "world" is constituted and located outside the point of "minor" cultural production—a critique of concepts of world literature well developed in the

¹ When I refer to Portuguese as a "minor language," I am referring to elements that linguist Diana Santos mentions such as perceived cultural prestige, publication and translation markets, and the "economic value of a speaker" as deduced by language support for products offered by multinational corporations (33). Helena Kaufman discusses Portuguese as "minor" in Deleuze and Guattari's notion of open to internal difference.

twenty-first century (Brennan; Chakrabarty; Lionnet and Shih; Ngũgĩ; Sánchez Prado “Hijos”). This article parts from a reconfiguration of this question posed by Kenyan writer and theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who invites us to think about what possible worlds are constituted by a look outward *from* the Global South. I propose to do so via the novella *Memória de mar* (1980) by Angolan author Manuel Rui (b. 1941), which stages a series of speculative historical propositions for understanding Angola's colonial occupation, independence, and post-independence futures. It thus offers us an opportunity and a case study to revisit what Ngũgĩ calls literature's imaginative “point of departure” for engaging with the world, centering it conceptually in the postcolonial (*Globaletics* 58). Reading *Memória de mar* in this way allows us to conceive of a world in which the geographic, linguistic, and conceptual point of enunciation about the postcolonial world and its Global North others shifts to the south. This gives us a refreshing view on the problems presented as “global” in “world literature” in two primary ways. First, it recognizes the agency of writers and creators in the Global South in the task of literary world-building, and second, it establishes the reader, writer, and public in the Global South as authorities on the globality implicit in concepts of “world literature.” In its temporal and historical games, *Memória de mar* also releases the postcolony from its condition of being out-of-time with the cosmopolitan metropole such that it becomes the author of its own present and future.

One of contemporary Lusophone Africa's most important writers, Manuel Rui is a member of the generation who established their reputations as Angola won its independence in 1975. Educated in law at Coimbra and a foundational member of the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), Rui served in a number of different government posts in the early years of the MPLA's single-party government. Rui's early literary successes included socially engaged works such as the story collection *Regresso adiado* (1973), his poetry series *11 Poemas em novembro*, eight short poetry collections released between 1976 and 1988 to commemorate Angolan independence, and *Sim camarada!* (1977), the first literary work published in an independent Angola. While *Memória de mar* is generally linked to Rui's early phase characterized by the euphoria of hard-won independence, the novella was also published in the wake of the 1977 uprising led by Nito Alves against the MPLA leadership followed by the party's violent purges of thousands of suspected participants. Rui has defended himself against accusations that his participation in interrogations of

suspected Alves sympathizers led to their deaths, and in the traumatic aftermath of the period he abandoned formal political involvement, while his literary trajectory shifted toward irony and cynicism about Angola's political present.² Rui's later work helped to define this generalized shift to critique among many Angolan writers through the 1980s and 1990s, against the background of the escalating conflict between the MPLA and competing parties, and the transformation of an authoritarian leftist single-party government to a multi-party market-based system after 1992.³ Rui's twenty-first-century fiction has continued to interrogate what Fernando Arenas calls a loss in national metanarratives (170), while depicting characters that try to negotiate a post-independence Angola "bereft of a 'moral compass'" (179).

Memória de mar revolves around the moment of Angola's independence, following a team of government investigators including a writer, a historian, a sociologist, and an army major who travel to the Ilha da Cazanga off the coast of Luanda just after independence to investigate why the island's longstanding community of Portuguese missionaries had recently disappeared. The team's multiple journeys over the small stretch of water turn out to be journeys through time to a series of key moments in both Angola's wartime present and post-revolutionary future. The team's time of departure is not specified as a specific year, but rather as the end of the quinhentos, the five-hundred-year anniversary of the Portuguese arrival to Angola in the early 1480s. When the team travels back to several years before the quinhentos, a time when the priests still occupy the church, the sociologist questions the church's Father Superior about his use of the collective first person "nós" to describe the island community:

- Nós quem?—perguntou o sociólogo.
- Nós os religiosos de origem, os que chegámos aqui para evangelizar.
- Não compreendo. Sou sociólogo e a questão interessa-me.
- Sim. Queria dizer, nós os que não descendemos do gentio, viemos de longe, deixámos pátria e família com a sagrada missão de cristianizar esta terra.

² For more on the accusations against Rui, see Mateus and Mateus (126-28). On Rui's defense of his role in the interrogations, see Rui, "Manuel Rui: não troco este país por outro."

³ See *Quem me dera ser onda* (1982), a parody of revolutionary culture, *Crónica de um mujimbo* (1989), which mocks the neocolonial order established by Luanda's elites, and *Rioseco* (1997), a condemnation of corruption.

–Ainda não entendo mas surge-me outra questão. Pelo que ouvi, isto não é a vossa pátria. (Rui 23-24)

In this comical exchange, the sociologist ultimately fails to make sense of the priests' "sagrada missão," their presence in a land that is not theirs, and their strange enforcement of apartheid separating themselves "que não descendemos do gentio" from the second-order African priests. The scene thus demonstrates the novella's controlling narrative technique with its simultaneous performance of two historical propositions. In the first, the Father recites the familiar "Christianizing" and "civilizing" mission justifying Portugal's colonial occupation, though ironically, since his enforcement of the divisions between the European and African-born priests betrays the language of the universal brotherhood in Christ, as well as the official position of the Estado Novo dictatorship (1933-1974) that the overseas "provinces" comprised integral parts of the Portuguese nation. In the second, however, the sociologist is a product of the world brought into being at the moment of Angola's independence, a socialist New Man who has no access to the collective memory of the colonizers' worldview. He finds the colonial priest's way of being-in-the-world incomprehensible. Here, the text mocks the fundamental temporal gesture of the colonial encounter, which positions the colonial other in a time not contemporary with one's own. The sociologist, rather, occupies what Johannes Fabian calls the time and place of the "here and now," while the priests are part of the "there and then" (27). The novella makes the colonizers' narrative seem strange and ridiculous, and thus the acts of imagination required to comprehend it appear more absurd than the team's leaps forward and backward in time.

In *Memória de mar*, the first-person narrator is a writer; the other members of the investigative team, a historian, sociologist, and army major, represent both the epistemological pillars on which the colonial enterprise rested, as well as the tools by which the ex-colony will understand itself anew. Indeed, the limited criticism of the novella has focused on its "subversion and countering to the chronicles of discovery" (Peres 96), the long shadow of colonial myth-making cast by Camões's *Os Lusíadas* (Macêdo 53-54), and the call to rewrite Angola's history (Madureira 155). I build on these approaches to consider how Rui's novel offers a methodological model for centering the "world" in the Global South. The team's travels expose them to what is for the reader a familiar series of points of contact, including the arrival of the colonizers to Africa, the enslavement of

Africans and their experiences in the Middle Passage, the imposition of European languages and enforcement of apartheid, and the war of independence. The team also travels to a time in the future, when the utopian dream of the revolution is a lived reality.

The team's time travel goes completely unexplained: its mechanisms are opaque, and the investigators' movement in historical time also introduces narrative ruptures that make reading and assimilating the text difficult. These narrative jolts defamiliarize the well-known tropes of discovery and conquest, enslavement, and colonization for the reader, and shift the center of meaning-making to the point where the various times, groups, languages, and modes of knowing come into contact—not the space or time of the colonial metropole, but of the newly independent ex-colony. *Memória de mar* thus enacts Ngũgĩ's thesis in *Globaletics* that “from its very inception, the colony was the real depository of the cosmopolitan” (52). The novel's performance of a new narrative epistemology, presented in the text as the domain of literature to make sense of the disjointed and discontinuous past, present, and future episodes, was an example of the coordinated projects through the twentieth century among African writers to counter colonial discourse and re-center African culture, traditions, and knowledge. Rui cites among his early influences poets associated with the mid-twentieth-century “Vamos descobrir Angola!” movement, which sought to create a body of knowledge of Angola's cultural landscapes erased by colonial violence, and realist author Luandino Vieira, who rejected continental Portuguese in favor of a literary language profoundly marked by local languages, usage, and referents (“Encontro” 718). Rui's work builds on these earlier cultural projects, embedding his text firmly in the internationalism of the 1960s and 1970s. Internationalist coordinated leftist political and cultural projects across the Global South sought liberation from colonization and imperialism through socialist revolution, including revolution in culture (Andrade). Reading Rui's novella requires us to accept the alternative premise of the newly independent ex-colony as the center of a new revolutionary world in the making, from which the mechanisms of colonial occupation and the former colonizers become anachronistic curiosities out of time and out of place. In what follows, I discuss how notions of time outlined by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze and Giorgio Agamben make visible multiple speculative sites of enunciation that can allow the text to speak beyond its embedded history in the late 1970s. In this way, its methodology serves as a

call to re-examine the futures that have been constructed from these pasts such that they contribute to a reconfiguration of the “world” seen from the South.

The “world” I refer to here as the “world” of “world literature” is outlined concisely by Mariano Siskind as “an affirmative notion of the world as grounds for cosmopolitan cultural exchanges and translations that set the foundation for a universal (intellectual) community to come based on justice and equality” (210 n. 2).⁴ Such an optimistic sense of the world, as critics such as Timothy Brennan and Dipesh Chakrabarty have discussed, has nonetheless never been wholly available to writers in the Global South. Gesine Müller extends this critique by pointing to how a conclusion about the “world” that affirms the peripheral nature of writers and literatures in the Global South when measured by global markets is a critical dead end. She suggests, instead, that attention to the material conditions of the creation of literatures beyond these circuits both “deconstructs any affirmative usage of ‘world’” and offers a way to incorporate authors, texts, and corpuses that would have remained difficult to perceive (16). Ignacio Sánchez Prado, similarly, argues that discussions of “world literatures” rarely question or reformulate the presumptive centrality of European literatures to any conceptualization of “world” and, as a result, encounter difficulties in assimilating Latin American literary and theoretical writing, despite the region’s clear contributions to transnational conceptual frameworks (“Hijos de Metapa” 34). More recently, and in line with Müller, he suggests a methodology of reading “peripheral” literatures not for their desire for legibility or belonging to the “world” understood as a singular system centered in the Euro-American north, but for how they engage these broader canons in their concrete, local, and individual literary practices (“La literatura mundial como praxis” 69). In this sense, both Müller and Sánchez Prado rehabilitate the notion of “world” in “world literature” by shifting the terms by which the world is perceived to those enacted and practiced by writers in the Global South. Implicit within these spatial framings that dominate discussions of world literature (center-periphery, metropole-colony, global-local, etc.) is a temporality that likewise establishes the global “now” as articulated in the Global North. Rui’s novella remakes this temporal assumption by revealing it as a mere contingency. The text therefore

⁴ Siskind argues that two decades into the twenty-first century, such an affirmative notion of the world has come to an end (211). *Memória de mar* does not share this sense of total loss of the “world,” but neither is it entirely a work of revolutionary utopian optimism.

releases the Global South from its embedded condition of belatedness and makes it into a producer of both the present and the future.

In Rui's novella, estrangement through both space—the travel to the island off the coast of the Luandan metropole—and time—via time travel to the past and the future—offer a methodological exploration of how to put these shifts into practice. Thus, the reading I offer here is not the kind of reading of the authorial archive that Müller and Sánchez Prado perform or the global reception of particular authors, but rather on Rui's contemplation of the methodology, possibilities, and limitations of the work of building a look outward to the world from the material and experiential conditions of a time of historical crisis. Rui has articulated in multiple fora his interest in excavating the complexity and diversity of Angolan cultural expression, and in fact has said that the space of the island in his work represents a space of encounter between “quem é do mar e de quem é do rio,” pointing to the geographical divisions in Angola between the coastal-dwellers and the larger, and more rural, interior (“Interview” 2017). These local realities also offer a concrete point of departure for a look outward: as Rui articulates in a 2003 interview, Europe, and its empires across the Atlantic, would not exist without Africa (“Interview” 2003). In *Memória de mar*, this point of spatial encounter is thus already also a point of temporal encounter. Ngũgĩ suggests that the colonies were the original locations of truly global encounter, and, in his methodology of “globaletics,” proposes a view of the world that can be centered anywhere. A globaletic view would build cultural networks such as literary canons outward as in concentric circles, such that any text could be read for “the mutual containment of hereness and thereeness in time and space, where time and space are also in each other... Such a reading should bring into mutual impact and comprehension the local and the global, the here and there, the national and the world” (Ngũgĩ 60). *Memória de mar*'s contemplation of the multiple futures that can be constructed from fractured pasts and presents is the very reason that a text from 1980 can speak to the critical problems in world literature articulated by Müller and Sánchez Prado. As the characters travel in time in *Memória de mar*, their explorations pull apart historical episodes to recenter a vision of the world in the time and place following Angola's independence, and also allow a reconstruction of not just “hereness and thereeness” but “nowness and thenness” that uses tools responsive to the local conditions and the global perceived from those conditions. Their travel therefore constitutes a foundational act of enunciation that articulates the world, and their

experience in it, not *as is*, according to the colonial perspectives they dismantle, but “*as not*. These temporal experiments that allow us to see the world *as it is not* is the focus of my analysis of Rui’s novella.

Time and the Logics of World-Making

Memória de mar establishes the long temporal scope of its narrative games by referring to the “present” moment from which the team travels through time as the close of the five-hundred-year Portuguese colonial presence in Africa. The novel’s point of departure is thus unstable: all movement in time is relative to the quinhentos, which would logically be in a speculative future of approximately 1982, five hundred years after Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão’s arrival to the Lower Congo. However, the only explicit year in the text occurs at the end, when the team “returns” to 1978. The novella thus is constructed around multiple possible “presents,” building its narration on a premise of historical contingency. Each subsequent movement enacts this contingency, as when the team travels to the Ilha da Cazanga, where they revisit the Portuguese missionaries’ history of forced conversion, torture, and enslavement. From the priests’ perspective, however, the community is an idyllically ordered society, with classes presented as allegories of Portuguese colonial ideologies: the white priests, the second-class African priests, “serviçais” (“native” servants), and finally talking donkeys, an absurdist representation of the “unassimilated” Angolan people, presented as literal animals in the eyes of the priests. However, time travel does not just present itself through the team’s visits to the island. As the protagonists pass back and forth through the water between the mainland and the island, they come across a boat full of the island’s serviçais who recite the history and knowledge gained from the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Later, a Portuguese Viceroy of the Indies appears with his soldiers wielding their swords aboard a 1970s Portuguese submarine waiting for the declaration of victory over the Angolan revolutionaries that never comes before the submarine sinks off the coast of Luanda, blurring the moments of the beginning and the end of the Portuguese domination of Angola. When the team of investigators emerge from their explorations, they are old men with whitened hair and wrinkles; the narrator tell us “Parecia-nos até que o naufrágio acontecera há mais de cinco séculos tal era o calcinado das estruturas metálicas, dos aparelhos e computadores” (Rui, *Memória* 108). In this unspecified time in the future, they weep with joy to

discover that the island has turned into a communitarian paradise. They then return to a “present” of February, 1978.

The team’s time travel serves as a series of epistemological experiments with a variety of narrative framings of the central event, the disappearance of the priests, organized around the expertise of the investigators and their subjects. If we consider history in the colonial paradigm as a linear series of historical events whose status as both real and narratable is unquestioned, we can see that the temporal experiments in *Memória de mar* reveal that history as discursively constructed. The team, therefore, does not travel to real events in the past and future; rather, through language and the performative act of writing, time travels through them. We see this in one locus of the novella’s irony: these socialist “New Men” use disciplinary expertise born of the colonial encounter in their voyage of discovery and documentation. However, they also gather knowledge by other means, and from other realms: first-hand experience, song and oral storytelling, and non-Christian religious practice, each of which is brought into history through the team’s new revolutionary sciences, such that they can be superseded in the socialist utopia to come. Writing thus enacts multiple transformations of that past, as well as the presents and futures that may be possible from them. The novel’s transit through time, therefore, does much more to comment on the method and ideology of postcolonial history and world-making than to correct the historical record.

The most straightforward reading of time in the novel is as Marxist revolutionary time, an interpretation that, while supported by Rui’s own comments, does have inconsistencies. In this reading, the function of the team’s travels to the past and the future is to unearth and insert mythical understanding of the past into historical time, a necessary process for the socialist transformation of society. Rui argues that both the Portuguese “Christianizing mission” and the African mythologies recited by a griot that the team encounters in a boat during their passage from the island to the mainland equally threaten this teleology: “Quer seja a mitologia de tipo africano, quer seja de tipo europeu, elas tendem para a convergência” (“Encontro” 729-30). The novel’s staging of multiple historical possibilities thus serves, in this reading, as the practice of bringing this “convergência” into history. The team’s journeys, therefore, would be journeys of excavation—of uncovering pasts and futures that, once they are known and written, remain only to be lived during the time of inevitable revolutionary fulfillment—even if that fulfillment is deferred.

My purpose here is not to contest the validity of this reading, but to suggest that the novel opens itself up to another, more speculative understanding of time that would allow it to speak beyond the historical situatedness of its revolutionary context. This more speculative reading comes from the fractured premises of the novel's points of departure: first, within the novel, the multiple presents (1978 and the *quinientos*) from which the time travel departs, and second, the shattering of Angola's revolutionary effort amid the MPLA's loss of legitimacy following the 1977 purges and the ongoing civil war stalling the decolonization process. Taking the novel's jumbled chronology at face value as an effort to capture in writing the contingency of a past fragmented by the out-of-jointedness of the colonial experience allows us to consider the teleology outlined by the revolutionary reading as itself speculative. Mobilizing philosopher Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's understanding of the experience of coloniality as "broken time" will help elucidate the possibilities opened by the reading I propose here.

Eze defines "broken time" as the experience of coloniality. He addresses two ways that time is often manipulated in postcolonial African writing: postcolonial works frequently address how the imposition of ethnocentric and violent European modernities destabilize the transmission of African pasts, and also reveal that the ordering of the present as subsequent to or contingent upon those fragmented and uneven pasts is itself also unstable. Eze discusses how postcolonial writers are acutely aware of the traditions, experiences, languages, etc. that have been fractured, repressed, or lost under colonial violence and repression. For Eze, much of postcolonial African writing is often not just about the present time's reconstitution of histories "out of joint" or in untimely ruins. Postcolonial writing is also what Eze calls a language "of the movement of time" (34). Eze thus points to a tendency among the writers he analyzes to foreground the precarity of language and literary form to adequately narrate postcolonial pasts and presents, arguing that the "materiality of language," or the social, contextual, and intersubjective dimensions of its use, convey explicitly and implicitly the lived reality "that a culture or tradition *can* be so traumatically violated" (39). Because the brokenness of time is what reveals history as mere contingency, Eze's analysis helps us understand the team's travels in *Memória de mar* as the enactment of multiple pasts and futures staged through writing—a configuration that becomes possible through the point of enunciation in the postcolony. The text's center of enunciation, of meaning-making, and the view on the world shifts away from Europe to Africa.

The shift that Eze outlines is significant, because it makes visible a shift in the critical mode through which we assess postcolonial writing. The nature of the fractured and discontinuous past on which these experiences are founded builds into the literary language an element of hiddenness, or the “simultaneous occultic and obvious” (35) meanings of addressing both these ruins and a method of apprehending them. Rui makes a similar point by considering disciplinary expertise as what is at stake in both content and form. The colonial history that the investigators are seeking out on the island and in the shipwrecked submarine is simultaneously presumed to be known and thus not fully stated to the reader but is also unknown and incomprehensible to the investigators.

Eze’s conceptualization of the unreliability of the past in the postcolonial helps us understand the team’s relationship to history as speculative, and their travels not as movements to a series of stable moments in an already-established timeline but as possibilities that might emerge from different modes of writing the past and future. The implicit invitation that Eze’s understanding of postcolonial time opens is to consider what other pasts and futures could be constructed from the unreliable present that serves as the team’s point of departure. While a Marxist understanding of messianic time—the time of revolutionary fulfillment—would constrict those possibilities, invoking Giorgio Agamben’s theorization of messianic time in *The Time That Remains* allows a broader range of possibilities to emerge from the team’s postcolonial present. For Agamben, the time of the now—specifically, the time of the now after the messianic event has taken place—is the relation itself between past and future, a relation which contains a “remnant, a zone of undecidability, in which the past is dislocated into the present and the present is extended into the past” (74). Agamben calls this understanding of the world of the now the world “as not”—that is, not as the product of an unalterable sequence of events that we perceive as they pass us by, but one where the messianic opens up a potentiality that can be used without it transforming our identity in the present, or without living *as though* the past had not happened. This “use” can be understood as a habitation, where potential pasts can be inhabited in the present without having had to come to pass. Conceiving of the world from the time of the now is thus fundamentally a hermeneutic act, an act of interpretation. Simone Bignall, Daryle Rigney, and Robert Hattam draw on Agamben’s configuration as a way to understand the postcolonial world, where both the past and the futures made from it are particularly precarious. They argue that by “living in the world ‘as not’, one

remains always open to the radical potentiality that exists within *this* world”—that is, how the postcolonial subject or writer can summon multiple possible presents and futures from the conditions that might yet be met in the time of the now (Bignall et al. 277). Agamben’s understanding of perception of the multiple possibilities of the now helps to illuminate Rui’s staging of multiple historical propositions in *Memória de mar*. By the very nature of the instability of the presents and futures the team encounters, the text suggests that there may be other potential presents and futures that the hermeneutic task—which is the task that the team undertakes—could expose.

The novel opens with the team en route to the island, where, like early European explorers apprehensive of confrontations with unknown and possibly dangerous “natives,” they must approach with caution. The novel captures the tension in debates underway during the era of decolonization about *what* and *how* the peoples of the new nation should see themselves as part of a community.⁵ The team’s disciplines of history, sociology, literature, and warfare reference the MPLA’s small intellectual vanguard, educated in disciplines born of colonial erasure and dehumanization of their subjects, but which are also the tools called upon in the era of decolonization to apprehend the social and physical landscapes anew. The four investigators’ reactions to a mango grove that had seen a recent harvest parody colonial notions of idealization of the “unfallen world,” suspicion of danger, and ethnographic curiosity. The novella’s narrator, the writer, is unable to resist picking a delicious-looking mango from one of the well-cared for orchards, soliciting an immediate rebuke from the others:

Rapidamente, o major retirou-me a manga das mãos jogando-a ao solo.

—É uma imprudência. Ainda não sabemos o estado da ilha. Suponhamos que os seus habitantes são inimigos! A fruta pode estar envenenada, a água também, o terreno pode estar minado. Não volte a repetir o que fez.

—Aliás, mesmo que a ilha não esteja ocupada por forças inimigas, teremos que respeitar os hábitos e costumes aqui existentes. Sei lá,

⁵ The disciplinary debate staged in the novella took place among the Angolan cultural elite, since at the time of independence the vast majority of Angolans were illiterate. Publicly-funded television and radio programs, especially documentaries, were conceived as pedagogical tools to instruct Angolans on the images and terms of the national community. See Maria do Carmo Piçarra’s “Ruy Duarte: A Cinema of the Word Aspiring to Imagine Angolanness.”

colher mangas, por exemplo, pode ser um ritual, uma cerimónia religiosa. E também desconhecemos o regime de propriedade em vigor. Colher uma manga alheia pode significar a condenação à morte—acrescentou o sociólogo.

—Major—falou o historiador que até aí se mantivera calado—eu aconselho regressarmos ao penúltimo ano dos quinhentos, ou seja, o penúltimo ano da guerra. Que convivêssemos com os habitantes da ilha registrando os eventos mais importantes. (18-19)

In this parody of the acts of discovery and conquest, the Angolans are the explorers and the Portuguese priests are the unknown community on whom the various methodologies of investigation are imposed. However, the apple of the prelapsarian world here is replaced with a mango—a symbol of Portuguese colonial exploration.⁶ On one hand, the team's expertise interprets and apprehends the colonizer *from* the colony, bringing the priests and their history into the new revolutionary time, and thus we could certainly read the team's ignorance *only* as a parody of the colonizer's approach to an unknown and unknowable place. The parody here, however, is made possible by a narrative point-of-view that inverts what W.E.B. DuBois called the double consciousness that results of living in a situation of coloniality. Rather than suffering under the unavoidable necessity to view themselves through the perspective of the colonial society, the investigators subject the colonial past to the lens of the decolonizing present. The struggle for comprehension also releases the investigative team from the epistemological trap of the priests' universalizing tendencies. This episode is thus a scene where the contingencies of time and history are on display. The world imagined by the colonizers has already been altered by the narrator's restaging: Eden's apple has been replaced by a mango. Without erasing the colonial history, the team's visit demonstrates that it has not foreclosed the habitation of the postcolonial present that the team is living.

The World As It Is Not

⁶ A 2019 *Times of India* feature recounts this history of Portuguese Jesuits' cultivation of the mango in Goa, noting that they became a "diplomatic tool" in Portuguese expansion (Alvares n/p). Alpern suggests that they may have arrived in West Africa via Portuguese cultivation on São Tomé (77).

Several other monumental historical episodes exemplify how the operations of historical defamiliarization are fundamental to the new view of the world proposed in the novella: the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the beginnings and ends of Portugal's military occupation of Angola. These processes are so important to Angola's colonial history that Rui once again evokes their traces implicitly in the "mar" of the title of the novella, without having to name their specific historical circumstances. In so doing, he simultaneously reaffirms their significance, while displacing the ways in which colonial-inflected histories have recorded them. The group of investigators, frustrated in their efforts to gain intelligible answers from the priests two years before the five hundred years, return to two years afterward. Their time travel is consistently linked to travel over the sea, as when they encounter a boat filled with the African "serviçais" from the church: "Seus remos passavam na pele do mar sincronizadamente sob o ritmo de um cântico espiritual. —Quem diria! Isto ainda se canta na América e no Brasil—exclamou o historiador" (64). The song of the "serviçais" at once establishes Rui's stated belief that Angolan literature begins with orature, rather than writing (Rui, *Entre Nós*), and manifests the double "here-and-now" and "there-and-then" inherent in this orature. As the *griot* aboard the boat tells the investigators, before the church's founder Dom Junqueira's arrival, "andaram por mil caminhos, conheceram o outro lado do mar, haviam carregado milhares de tipóias, trabalhado para milhares de senhores em milhares de plantações, engenhos e guerras" (65). The spiritual of the rowers is sung to the rhythm of the symbolic passage through the epochs that lead them to the end of the five hundred years. It is also sung during the literal passage through the sea: the substance that Édouard Glissant calls "the abyss," because it was via the Middle Passage that the linguistic, historical, and ancestral links among communities were broken via silencing, displacement, and death. This experience is part of the "memórias de mar." As Tania Macêdo recalls, because the sea was so central to the Portuguese imperial imaginary, for Angolan literature, it has also become a privileged site where writers can "resgatar a memória e os sonhos" (49). It is indeed in the water that historical moments converge, "historicity" and "timeliness" collapse, and notions of coloniality and postcoloniality are re-drawn. The singing of the servants is an embodied or material form of collective memory, here coordinated with their movements through the waters of the sea.

The *griot*'s storytelling places the servants' African belief systems into tension with the similarly mythical Christian beliefs, revealing that after the

violence of the servants' torture and murder by D. Junqueira centuries before, the water-deity Quianda had demanded "o ajuste de contas" through the sacrifice of Portuguese priests (70); when the Father Superior refused, she swallowed the Portuguese community (72). While the griot's insistence on the truth of the Quianda's vengeance is precisely what Rui criticizes as a challenge to the present time of the revolution, the water deity's revenge upon the Portuguese priests also mocks the centrality of the sea and the voyage to the Portuguese colonial imaginary. Beyond simply the victim taking revenge upon the victimizer, the narrative points to a complex system of postcolonial erasure, where the terms of colonial conquest and violence are not forgotten, but are evacuated of their previous significance—the means through which the colonizer arrive—and charged with a new narrative potential. Quianda's vengeance both wipes away the Portuguese settlement and sets the servants adrift on the waters between island and mainland, no longer either colonial victims nor protagonists in the history being constructed from the revolutionary present. It is the team's travels to the future that write the servants' experience and Quianda's retribution into history—her statue replaces D. Junqueira's at the center of the renamed "Ilha dos Pioneiros"—and in the narrative present on the sea, the confluence of the servants' mythical time, the colonizer's time and the investigators' revolutionary time rub against each other.

The novella subjects the beginnings and ends of the quinhentos to the same operations of historical fracturing, literally bringing the Portuguese conquerors into habitation in the novel's present. Toward the end of the novel, drunken counterrevolutionaries hoping to hear of the MPLA's defeat in the post-independence civil war wait on board a submerged submarine off the coast of Luanda for the signal to surface and celebrate their expected victory. As the news of their defeat arrives instead, the captain and seamen aboard the submarine are transformed into a sixteenth-century Portuguese viceroy and his nobles. Macêdo observes that this is one of several satirical instances where Rui refers to the foundational Portuguese texts of conquest, offering the example of *Os Lusíadas*. The Angolan text draws on its imaginative power to vacate the Portuguese imperial epics of the sea of their teleological authority when the submarine's first lieutenant declares to the viceroy, "Acabou-se-te a mania da navegação e isto deixa a partir de hoje de ser um submarino" (101). Macêdo sees in this appearance of the viceroy how Rui's text therefore "aponta para a necessidade de uma nova viagem, exploratória, que traga à tona a embarcação avariada" (53).

As in the case of the apple-turned-mango, the process of excavation itself brings *Memória de mar*'s investigators to a different writing of the past: the submarine sinks, and the team lives for a time under the sea, from where/when "Muitas vezes chegámos a corrigir o antes com o depois. Outras o depois com o antes" (106). Through writing, both the different pasts and presents are enacted, just as the submarine's library is transformed from the foundational texts of an empire to discarded artifacts that lie decaying on the sea floor. This impoverished colonial archive reminds us of the impetus for Rui's act of narrative enunciation via *Memória de mar*:

A biblioteca conservava livros de cinco séculos, a maioria deles dedicados à tática e estratégia de navegar e penetrar no continente. Todos eles estavam escritos em português. Nem um só livro científico escrito numa das línguas originárias do continente. Nem um só manual de ciência política. Um livro de plantar árvores. Um guia de colher frutos. Apenas um catecismo em quimbundo, datado de 1642 e com a seguinte indicação: <<obra póstuma composta pelo padre jesuíta Francisco Pacónio>>. (110)

The passage satirically juxtaposes the implied grandeur of the Portuguese colonial enterprise, whether narrated by its early modern epics or by the twentieth-century Estado Novo discourse, with the impoverished submarine's library, ironically accumulated over five hundred years. By refusing a single mode of either lament for a broken history or attempts to resuscitate a mythical African past, the text avoids the trap of reproducing the diminished library, the repository of but one possibility, one angle on the past five hundred years. The performative value of the submarine's archive is made clear: the false gesture of accommodation, the catechism in one of Angola's national languages, is a denial of the potentialities of a world "as not."

When the team completes their investigation into the island and the shipwrecked submarine, they emerge as old men a distant time in the future leaving behind the decaying relics of Angola's colonial history. In the future, the Ilha dos Pioneiros consists of an idyllic space with carefully cultivated gardens, frolicking children, and a statue of Quianda in the center of a shimmering pool (116). However, this future remains unconfirmed. The team discovers in a documentary a recording of a child who recites a poem written by a writer of

their own generation, an act that moves them all to tears. Declaring that this scene confirms the value of their investigation, the historian worries, nonetheless, that “se lhe contarmos o passado, pequenos pormenores do que foi a ilha, o submarino, não acreditariam que o real sempre mais de sonho que o imaginário” (118). Breaking the spell of the visit to the future, the historian informs the others, “Sinto-me feliz. Tudo mudado mas para depois... Mas agora temos de voltar para hoje...Porque o limite de sonho é sempre o real” (118). The narrator’s final hesitant act is to “assassinar o maravilhoso com a insónia do tempo,” shutting his eyes as his pen writes the date of 1978 on the final page of an unnamed text—a text that has not been mentioned explicitly until this final page of the novel—with the inscription “feito em Luanda, Fevereiro de 1978” (119). By dating the text, the writer brings the novella, and its travels through time, to an end: he “assassinates the marvelous” by fixing it in place. In this inscription, however, the narrator’s performative act also calls into being an alternate past to the submarine’s archive and confirms an alternate present where the “unlived potentialities,” the world “as not” can yet be lived. The reference to the specific date both inscribes it as part of the transition away from a generalized phase of hope for a more just post-independence future, and releases the text from being *just* an artifact of this moment. Its inscription is almost ironic, because the 1978 to which the investigators return is not the same 1978 from which the narrator departed. Their present of enunciation at the end of the text has already been changed by exploring the historical connections and non-connections that he has narrated in the novel. This is the crux of the potentiality of the world “as not.”

This Angola as it is not can thus doubly respond to the demand of the post-independence moment in the 1970s—in the revolutionary future projected in the novel—as well as to the twenty-first-century era of frustrated development and internal coloniality that Rui critiques across his later texts as a failed inheritance of Angola’s early post-revolutionary idealism. Angolan critic Luís Kandjimbo articulates the urgency of reinhabiting the dreams of the past in such a way that helps further elucidate the stakes in bringing *Memória de mar*’s methodological potentialities to bear on a new present. In “Apologia do tempo e da história,” he critiques an Angolan ruling class that continues to exist in a relationship of imitation and thus belatedness to the Global North as a betrayal of the “sonhos” of the ancestors who fought for independence from the Portuguese. Resuscitating the dreams of the ancestors in the present would thus open the potential to materialize a different future. Kandjimbo invokes Ndunduma, the king of the Bié

kingdom who resisted Portuguese conquest of Angola in the series of wars that defined Portugal's post-Berlin Conference consolidation of territorial control, by asking: "Onde está o *soma* Ndunduma? Há cem anos desterrado, jaz ainda em Santiago de Cabo-Verde... O tempo e a história deste país está também na realização do sonho do *soma* Ndunduma e outros antepassados. Este homem que marcou o fim do século passado nas resistências quererá regressar à Ekovongo" (176-77). In Kandjimbo's figuration, the construction of history moves in multiple temporal directions: an approximation to the past also requires re-inhabiting the "sonhos" of prior generations in the present. This memory is not an abstraction but, like the exiled and re-patriated body of Ndunduma, opens the doors for a transformation of the material lives of those in the present.

Reading *Memória de mar* in this way offers us a way out of the anxieties and critical "dead ends" that Müller identifies with recent debates over the "global" in world literature as reproducing imperial, colonial, and neocolonial paradigms, exacerbating economic inequalities, and reaffirming the "minority" of the postcolonial world and its languages. The speculative interpretation I have offered here of *Memória de mar* thus requires our own critical habitation of the world "as not," where the hermeneutic practice required to see the text in this way also shows how the meaning of world literature can be re-thought from both the Lusophone world and the Global South. The text itself becomes an example of Eze's materiality of language by offering a literary language and methodology that could only be produced *from* its Angolan, Lusophone, and Global South contexts. By enacting the precarity of time, the novel emerges not just as an archive of a moment of collective transition from post-independence euphoria to hope lost to the ravages of war, but as an articulation of the performative possibilities of alternative experiences of and in the world.

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