

# Island Narrative and Bridge- Building: Postapocalyptic Isle of Love in Agualusa's *Os vivos e os outros*

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**Abstract:** This essay reads *Os vivos e os outros*, a novel published in 2020 by Angolan writer José Eduardo Agualusa, as a rewrite of both Luís de Camões's *Ilha dos Amores* (Isle of Love) in *Os Lusíadas* and Friedrich Nietzsche's *Glücklichen Inseln* (Blessed Islands) in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Drawing on the iconic elements of love from Camões and the will of creation from Nietzsche, while challenging the spatiotemporal settings of the classic island narrative in a postapocalyptic setting, Agualusa engages in renovating the island metaphor by examining the fundamentals of contemporary African literary production, conveying his belief that a successful outward projection of African voice relies on finding its connections with the people and the (is)land.

**Keywords:** African literature, Camões, Nietzsche, writing community, intertextuality

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In the sixteenth century, Luís Vaz de Camões immortalized the mythical and sensual *Ilha dos Amores*<sup>1</sup> as the emblematic space of corporal and spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> Camões himself only used terms like "insula divina" and "ilha namorada" to designate the famous island in *Os Lusíadas*; it was literary critics who later popularized the use of "Ilha dos Amores." See Aguiar e Silva 345.

compensation. In the turbulent year of 2020, internationally renowned Angolan writer José Eduardo Agualusa presents his own rendition of the island imagery in his most recent novel *Os vivos e os outros*.

Agualusa adopts a postapocalyptic setting in his presentation of the Island of Mozambique, which is a geographically small but culturally rich space near the East African coast that also makes for a cross-temporal bridge between these two authors. Camões stayed briefly on the island during his own homebound journey in the late 1560s, and Agualusa considered it home for a few years. In this open love letter from the Angolan author, the Island of Mozambique, while hosting an African literary festival, finds itself completely cut off from the rest of the world. As in a trial for an epic hero, the spirit of the island and the islanders is revealed during this moment of crisis. The unexpected isolation is at first attributed to a large-scale storm that hits the African continent, recalling the caprices of the Camoenian gods; only days later do the stranded islanders learn of a nuclear bombing of Jerusalem and the ensuing worldwide chaos. This apparent logical explanation, remains disputed, however, as the plot hints at another possibility: the reappearance of the old world could be the result of literary creations by African authors on the island.

It is in this mysterious context that the novel's focus on the interactions among the group of African writers needs to be deciphered. The Island of Mozambique has long been associated with cultural miscegenation and poetic creations, and in the seven-day span of the narrative that easily resembles the divine creation in Genesis, the fictional writers appear to obtain the supreme power of blurring the line between fiction and reality. In the meantime, protagonists of previous novels by these authors—a childhood cockroach friend, a nagging deceased father, a crudely evil doppelganger—all escape from the hypodiegetic level to haunt their creators on the diegetic level in their own search for meaning, which in turn aggravates the existential crisis of these writers. The metafictional aspect continues, as such encounters prompt the writing of new works on the island, which appear to produce the true crisis-averting heroes: the new protagonists are suggested to be responsible for the excavation of the disappearing old world as well as the construction of bridges between the living and the other realm that echo the title of the novel. Ultimately, the island breaks out of isolation, and the writers gain new understandings of their own mission and identity.

With the island as the core imagery, *Os vivos e os outros* constantly engages in a multilayered dialogue with Camões and *Os Lusíadas*. The Portuguese poet serves as a frequent reference when Agualusa delves into the rich intercultural history of the Island of Mozambique, a “contact zone,” as described by Mary Louise Pratt, in the Indian Ocean (34). Camões even makes a brief yet symbolic appearance in the form of his statue on the island, standing in front of the house he allegedly stayed in between 1569 and 1570. The enigmatic Pedro Calunga Nzagi, considered by many writers in the novel to be the father of Angolan literature, without anyone’s knowing his true identity or what he looks like, passes by the somewhat farcical statue of Camões and laments the poet’s “má sorte” for being “tão ridiculamente aqui representado e servindo de latrina aos filhos da puta dos corvos” (100). This harsh and unsympathetic comment serves as a reminder of the outdatedness and out-of-placeness of Camões’s legacy in postcolonial Africa, which most definitely includes his version of island symbolism.

This episode also serves as a starting point to analyze the more fundamental changes in the 2020 novel in relation to the 1572 epic: revamping of the island imagery as a spatially concrete but temporally elusive place, and literature, love, and mutual understanding as ultimate tools for African regeneration. Agualusa’s novel itself exemplifies the African consumption and regurgitation of European island narrative. For African writers to truly become a community and to exert a larger international influence, they need to acknowledge the peripheral island-like conditions of African literary production and the African societies as a whole, but what is also imperative is to draw inspiration from Nietzsche’s emphasis on Zarathustra, who on the Blessed Islands proposes breaking old frameworks in order to make new creations. What constitute the new creations are at once the fictional bridge-building for the spatial and temporal beyond, and the emergence of more proactive African writers and characters who resemble the Nietzschean “Overmen” who achieve a lucid comprehension of their state of being and exert consequential influence over the outside world.

### ***Intertextualities and the Becoming of Islanders***

Islands and their aloof relationship with the continents have been metaphorically impactful in human conception of the world. In the eyes of the continents, islands

remain a source of mystery, as their physical existence is accepted but their conceptual agency often neglected. Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci observed of Chinese cartography in the late sixteenth century: “their universe was limited to their own fifteen provinces, and in the sea painted around it they had placed a few little islands to which they gave the names of different kingdoms they had heard of. All of these islands put together would not be as large as the smallest of the Chinese province” (166).

Regardless of the islands’ true dimensions, they rarely bear much weight in the continent-driven worldviews. In current world geopolitics as well as the cultural and literary scene, Africa represents little more than one of these “few little islands” in the eyes of other continents. Much as exotic country names were primarily used by Ming Chinese to justify the superiority of their own realm, African literature has long been expected to confirm Western stereotypes, or the “África imaginada por eles” (Agualusa, *Vivos* 55). Furthermore, compared to English- and French-speaking African writers who have a relatively larger international audience, those who adopt Portuguese as their primary literary expression in postcolonial Africa need to work extra in order to strengthen the link between their symbolic island and the continent that is the rest of the world, in an effort that can be summarized as fictional bridge-building. Crucially, it is also in this particular context that Agualusa’s propensity for both intra- and intertextuality should be analyzed.

A maestro of the art of establishing cross-textual connections, Agualusa is known for his creative adaptation of previous literary icons, most notably the Africanized and motivated version of Eça de Queirós’s cultured yet cynical Fradique Mendes in *Nação crioula* (1997). His own fictional universe also contains characters whose stories span multiple works, like the former inspector Monte who reappears in *Estação das chuvas* (1996), *As mulheres do meu pai* (2007), and *Teoria geral do esquecimento* (2012). *Os vivos e os outros* is emblematic of both of his well-known tendencies. It starts with the viewpoint of Daniel Benchimol, a recurring character who first appeared as a journalist specializing in reporting missing people and objects in the award-winning novel *Teoria geral do esquecimento*, and in the politically engaged *A sociedade dos sonhadores involuntários* (2017) becomes a key figure in the antigovernmental protests while also finding his new love, Moira Fernandez, a photographer most

fascinated with her own dreams. With ancestral ties to the Island of Mozambique and having decided to settle there, Moira is the main organizer of the 1<sup>st</sup> African Literary Festival in *Os vivos e os outros*, and as the plot advances, she gives birth to a girl named Tetembua. The newly expanded family and their writer friends are gradually revealed to be the embodiment of both the struggles and glimpses of hope of the modern island, which in turn can be read as a microcosm of contemporary African literary production.

Key themes of *Os vivos e os outros* such as Africa's peripheral position as well as interest in apocalyptic impact resemble those in other texts by Agualusa, especially his 2013 novel *A vida no céu*. In this work, after a great flood inundates the entire world, survivors turn to the sky. The more powerful construct enormous "dirigíveis" called Xangai, Tokio, São Paulo, and New York to begin an airborne life, while the less fortunate have to make do in the rudimentary villages of linked balloons such as the one called Luanda. Carlos, the sixteen-year-old protagonist, has to first set foot in Paris to start his quest of finding the missing father, which reminds us of African authors' reliance on cultural and commercial networks based in European and American metropolises for their global circulation. Carlos's initiative turns him and his teenage companion Aimée into saviors wherever they go, signaling a reversal of power structure. Similarly, in *Os vivos e os outros*, African writers' magical ability of re-creating the outside world echoes the appeal for the symbolic African island to bear the weight of the center. The main difference, however, is that now the author-saviors need not step off the island in the same way Carlos and Aimée embarked on their adventures; instead, they engage in more inward-bound spiritual journeys to confront their own identity and their creations, which in turn exert extraordinary influence upon the outside. Such intertextual reading assists in situating Agualusa's novel in the context of world literary and his own creative universe, which has at its core the evolution of his vision of the island-continent relationship.

The inherent qualities of islands, such as geographical remoteness and difficulty of regular contact with the continent, not only consolidate this more traditional presentation of the Island of Mozambique as a safe haven, but also serve to address its unique position as a place of re-creation. In a seminal essay, Gilles Deleuze expounds on the essence of "desert islands" as the place of "a second origin," "the survival of a sacred place in a world that is slow to re-begin" (14).

While the Island of Mozambique is not deserted, Deleuze's observation holds: "[a]n island doesn't stop being deserted simply because it is inhabited" (10), and the general neglect that Africans experience justifies the categorization. Deleuze further contends that "the second origin is thus more essential than the first, since it gives us the law of repetition, the law of the series, whose first origin gave us only moments" (13). As such, the second genesis is by nature intertextual. In *Os vivos e os outros*, the seven-day division of the plot is an obvious mimicry of the original Creation story in Genesis. While some writers choose to view the island as the end of time, at least Daniel comes to perceive the possibility of re-creation in this particular chronotope, which for him is like a "relicário": "Depois que o mundo acabar, recomeçará nas ilhas" (230). It is significant, in comparison, that the collapse of the old world is signaled by a nuclear bombing of Jerusalem (212), the epitome of the world's center in ancient and medieval European *Weltanschauung*.

In the grand scheme of things, the island serves as a place for the re-creation of the entire world; on the personal level, it provides a chance for regeneration for those Africans caught in an identity crisis from continued exposure with the outside. For Moira, "[d]esde a primeira vez que atravessou a longa e estreita ponte de três quilómetros, sentiu que era ali o seu lugar," and despite her not being born on the island, she believes that "podia pelo menos tentar renascer" (88). Her crossing of the bridge is both physical and metaphorical, as the adjectives "longa e estreita" highlight the difficulty for an African to find a place that is beyond Western scrutiny for a chance to truly be herself, "ou seja, a rir alto nos lugares públicos, sem receio de que alguém a olhasse com estranheza; a vestir capulanas deixando, por dentro os peitos soltos; a nadar nas águas quentes do Índico," and not to live in a place like Cape Town where she just feels like "uma Europa exilada" (88).

For Moira, "esse processo de renascimento incluía parir um filho ilhéu" (88). The Island of Mozambique reminds Moira and Daniel of their African roots, giving them the much-needed sense of belonging, so they make sure that their daughter Tetembua is able to be born and experience her childhood there. Moira ends up delivering Tetembua in the local hospital, even if it is now only a shadow of its glorious past (168–70). The act of giving birth is reminiscent of Zarathustra's enthusiastic preaching on the Blessed Islands that "you could well create the

overman. Not you yourselves perhaps, my brothers! But you could recreate yourselves into fathers and forefathers of the overman: and this shall be your best creating!” (Nietzsche 65). In Nietzschean philosophy, overman (*Übermensch*) represents the successor of the already dead God, the ultimate pursuit of human being, in an attempt to challenge the dominance of Christian values. Scholars differ on whether the term was intended to refer to a kind of individual, “who understands the tragic nature of reality” but nonetheless “attains joy or an ideal state of the spirit,” or “a state of mystical ecstasy” (qtd. in Bishop 6). For the purpose of the present study, the former sheds new light onto the actions of Agualusa’s characters.

In the novel, “fathering” (and “mothering”) can be interpreted both at face value and as symbolizing literary creation. On the one hand, Daniel names their daughter Tetembua, meaning “star” in the Angolan language of Kimbundu, and attentive readers should notice that the resurfacing of the outside world is signaled by the sudden reappearance of many stars in the sky (185), in a clear contrast with the description in the Book of Revelation that “the stars in the sky fell to the earth like a fig tree drops its fruit when it is shaken by a strong wind” (6:13). Using this line as a medium, Agualusa’s intertextuality extends to Zarathustra’s speech, for the part titled “On the Blessed Islands” precisely starts with a metaphor regarding fig trees, which compares the falling figs to his teachings and their ripe condition to lead to the discussion on the overman instead of God (Nietzsche 65).

On the other hand, becoming parent of the “overman” is also what serves as a keystone for Daniel as he goes through a psychological crisis toward the end of the novel. It is through attachment to Moira and Tetembua that Daniel breaks a major mental barrier in acknowledging the possibility of himself being “uma invenção” (246), a transformation that puts him closer to the overman, who is “emancipated from the question of free will which he knows is an illusion, he understands there is no other solution than to consent to this tragedy, to love it” (qtd. in Bishop 6). Furthermore, on the seventh day, Mozambican writer Uli Lima Levy attends a local storytelling gathering and hears Dona Cinema narrate how a little girl named Mweeri saved the world by herself (249). Upon realizing who this girl may be (without revealing to the readers), Uli’s first instinct is to tell Daniel, but on the way inexplicable forces stop him and he ends up drowning in the ocean, in the same way that he always dreamt and feared. In a previous conversation with Daniel, Uli reveals his philosophy of naming, believing that “os nomes determinam o

caráter da personagem” and “[i]mpõem-lhe um destino” (40), so it is important to analyze the girl-savior’s name to promote a better understanding of the quite unexpected turn of events. In Macua, a Bantu language prevalent in Northern Mozambique, “mweeri” means “the Moon,” which aside from pointing to Tetembua (which explains why Uli feels the need to tell Daniel), also reminds readers of an albino girl, whose name Ainur means “the Moon” in languages such as Arabic, Khazakh, and Albanian. Ainur follows Nigerian author Cornelia Oluokun around, and in a prolepsis, it is revealed that these encounters will help Cornelia break out of her writer’s block as she makes Ainur the protagonist in her next novel. In this way, Cornelia acquires the status of literary surrogate mother of the future savior.

The physical and literary “fathering” and “mothering” of the world-saving next generation represent Agualusa’s vision for the bigger role that Africa is bound to play, and becoming symbolic parents of the overmen islanders constitutes an essential phase for the development of African literary production. For both generations, the distinct island provides the exemplary place of growth, and renovations in spatial and temporal elements of the insular space are essential to personal and world re-creations.

### ***Materializing the Island and Searching for Identity***

The distinctiveness of the Island of Mozambique is constantly reflected throughout the novel. Daniel comments that “por vezes, assistimos a tempestades, lá do outro lado, como se acontecessem num planeta remoto” (39), and Moira relates the story of an Englishman who always wore sunglasses at night while on the island, “porque não suportava o esplendor das estrelas” (81). The *locus amoenus* in Camões’s epic poem maintains its out-of-this-worldly character in Agualusa’s novel, especially since despite growing uneasiness from isolation and the consequent logistics shortage, the literary festival carries on, proving the elasticity of human spirit in the form of cultural activities. However, what most separates this twenty-first-century island is its agency in the reconstruction of the outside world, which simultaneously draws strength from its specificity in space and its obscurity in time.

On the spatial level, the island’s location as part African is clearly presented.



It is no longer a Mediterranean island thrust by Venus the goddess into the Indian Ocean and lacking an indigenous population, whose sole purpose was catering to the Portuguese crew members, “cuja paisagem é pintada com as recordações da flora portuguesa e com as memórias intertextuais da poesia greco-latina e da poesia italiana renascentista,” nor is it the elusive space that only the founder of Zoroastrianism could locate (Aguilar e Silva 348). The Island of Mozambique is a historically and socially concrete place that is renowned for “a radiante mistura” of ethnic, religious, and cultural elements (*Vivos* 89). Apart from demonstrating the island as a living environment for the *ilhéus*, Agualusa also makes the effort of incorporating local fauna and flora like the black crowned crane, bird of paradise, and African blackwood to affirm its local identity. Johannes Riquet proposes that “[t]he textual construction of islands is part of their human inhabitation; however invested with ideology, poetic figurations of islands are a form of engagement with their spatiality” (11). Confirming the spatiality of the Island of Mozambique is consequential, for while it serves as a prison for those writers trapped in existential crisis who begin to doubt whether they have all descended into the land of the dead, its materiality provides an anchor for those who embrace their own Africanness as well as open-mindedness.

Such an embrace requires the special spatial settings that are available only on a small island. A closed space that limits contact with the outside but prompts internal communications, the island is the perfect space for congregation by the creators and their creations, while also providing opportunities for idea sharing and potential collaborations. Gradually, African authors of different nations and languages take steps toward a prototype of literary community that is forged on this culturally hybrid space. In this way, the Island of Mozambique distances itself from the memory of colonial oppositions as shown in Lília Momplé’s “Ninguém matou Suhura”; rather, it becomes an empowering space that contains the “productive capacities” as proposed by Homi Bhabha, which “may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based . . . on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (38).

Cross-diegetical and interpersonal encounters are of equal importance as far as both the plot and morals are concerned. Among the first kind of reconciliatory moments, *Os vivos e os outros* depicts two cases with most detail: Cornelia Oluokun with Lucy the cockroach girl, the only companion in her childhood when

locked in the kitchen while adults were absent; and Nigerian-English author Jude de Sousa with his eviler namesake who has been the protagonist of his only novel. It is significant that it is only after arriving at a final reconciliation with their proudest yet most haunting creations that these two outsiders to the island are able to create new fictional works on the symbolically charged space. In their final encounter, Cornelia and Lucy confess their respective fear of not understanding “quem é, de onde veio, e para onde irá depois que tudo terminar,” and Cornelia’s suggestion for Lucy to find her companion Max, “alguém que fosse como tu” (182), not only leads to Lucy’s subsequent departure but also is crucial in leading Cornelia to start conceiving a postdiluvian salvation story from the point of view of “a única ilha,” which in a reversal of power balance saves the continent that has degenerated into the “fim do mundo” (183). Cornelia used to view the Island of Mozambique as “um lugar estreito, fechado, bruto, longe de tudo o que ama” (106), but by a unique experience with her past creation on this island she furthers the understanding of her identity, and through this identification with the island she breaks out of her writer’s block. Angolan writer Ofélia Eastermann’s observation that the island is a type of Purgatory, that “não sairemos daqui enquanto não nos reconciliarmos uns com os outros e sobretudo com os nossos fantasmas,” offers a useful angle in explaining Cornelia’s transformations (148). Agualusa himself considers Cornelia as “dos que mais cresceu” and the novel’s most interesting character (Serra 16).

Comparatively, Jude de Sousa is in a more passive position in relation with his character. When the latter first appears, Jude the writer suffers severe discomfort, “sentindo que está prestes a virar-se do avesso” (153). In their final face-to-face exchange, the other whispers “estou aqui para te libertar” (188). Whereas Cornelia sets Lucy free by reminding her to find Max, Jude needs to be freed by his own creation. It is important to note that this “freeing” entails a deeper recognition and embrace of Jude’s African side. After constant vomiting following his first encounter with his creation, what comes to Jude’s mind is still typical British concerns of propriety: “não poderá voltar para Londres virado do avesso, com os sapatos estragados, a camisa toda suja de vômito,” and what he fears is the British customs officer’s rejecting his entry (154). Repeated interactions with the doppelgänger, however, help him reevaluate his condition of being “uma mistura dissonante” (213) of Nigerian and British self-identities. By the end of the novel,

Jude acknowledges that he will still “olhar o continente a partir de fora, com os medos e os preconceitos de um vulgar cidadão britânico” (213), but signs of transformation are clear:

. . . aqueles poucos dias na ilha o transformaram e não deseja mais a vida anterior, o que inclui a Inglaterra, com os seus dias escuros e os guarda-chuvas pingando nas escadas, e John, sempre tão cortês, sempre tão enfático na defesa dos desvalidos e das grandes causas, sempre tão louro e tão tediosamente previsível . . . (188)

Similar to Cornelia, who succeeds in writing the story about the excavation of a drowned continent after her encounter with Lucy, Jude too feels the need to create, which results in an oneiric tale about a castle builder who turns into a bridge architect after finding love. By trading the defensive mindset in the form of castle in favor of the possibilities opened by bridges, the character’s transformation clearly mirrors the writer’s more open-minded mentality toward Africa and the island. Furthermore, it is crucial that Cornelia’s and Jude’s respective creative bursts occur at a turning point in the development of the apocalypse in *Os vivos e os outros*, as textual evidence strongly suggests that these stories are the direct cause of the reappearance of stars as well as the reconnection of the Island of Mozambique with the rest of the world. When fictional bridges are built and crossed, so are those in real life.

Less fantastical but no less important, person-to-person interactions and conviviality within the selected group of African authors are another focus of Agualusa’s novel. Cornelia’s time on the island pushes her to face her childhood friend/enemy in Lucy, but it also helps her realize how much she needs the love and support of her husband, the Congolese and French writer Pierre. Jude’s transformation is also twofold, as it is brought about not only by his interactions with Jude the character, but also by his budding romance with Lúcia Valente, a young Angolan poet. Lúcia helps Jude get over the shock of meeting his own character, and gets him to reexamine his past life choices. In addition, the prolonged time together on a geographically limited island results in literary collaboration, such as with Júlio Zivane and Ofélia Eastermann. Toward the end of the narrative, we accompany their project of cowriting a time-less novel, a

fictional collaboration that echoes the real-world literary duet between Agualusa and his long-time Mozambican friend and fellow writer Mia Couto in *O terrorista elegante e outras histórias* (2019), in which neither claims individual authorship for any of the three short stories in the collection. This mixture of real-life practices and fictional ideals is another factor that makes Agualusa's island narrative attractive for modern readers, and his success as a Lusophone African author in the mainstream literary scene worldwide is a nonnegligible reminder of the potential of oft-perceived islands once given the role of creators.

In *Os vivos e os outros*, Agualusa grants certain characters the power of influencing reality via hallucination, dream, and literary creations, which can be seen as a continuation of Mia Couto's attempt in his debut novel *Terra sonâmbula* (1992). The area susceptible to such influences in Couto's book, however, is limited to Mozambique, and if given a bird's-eye view, this African nation is still a "flutuante ilha à mercê da água" (Rios 101). Agualusa's island, by comparison, is more outward-oriented. The surrounding waters are no less threatening to its survival yet despite being physically trapped there, the inhabitants and guests engage in affirming not only their own existence but also the outside world. This force for re-creation of the world resembles what Nietzsche's Zarathustra enthusiastically advocates on the Blessed Islands: "And what you called world, that should first be created by you: your reason, your image, your will, your love itself it should become! And truly, for your own bliss, you seekers of knowledge!" (65). Agualusa's project takes aim at a renovation of traditional island narrative and, at the same time, to borrow Nietzsche's well-known term, aspires after the becoming of African overwriters as well as overcharacters. These are the people who have faced their inner self, who understand their own limitations and even fictionality, but through love and courage continue to engage in the enhancement of the world they belong to, in the same way that Nietzsche's overmen constantly influence the world and the lives of others.

### ***Temporal Reorganization and Bridge-Building***

By materializing Camões's passive Isle of Love, granting it an African spatiality and voice by incorporating the Island of Mozambique's tradition of cultural and literary exchanges, Agualusa enables a new genesis story of African characteristics

in a postapocalyptic scenario. It is essential, however, that the order of time be temporarily abolished for this new world to form. Aqualusa himself acknowledges that in this novel as well as in the 2012 short story “O construtor de castelos” that inspired the former, what he aimed for “era escrever um romance sobre pessoas aprisionadas numa cápsula do tempo, num território fora do alcance do presente” (Serra 16). Throughout the novel, the island is indeed depicted as a fugitive of time: “—Tudo leva mais tempo a chegar a esta ilha — diz Uli com a sua voz macia. — Inclusive o tempo” (51). The emancipatory and redemptive power of the island lies in the dissolution of distinction between past, present, and future, challenging one of the fundamental prerequisites of Camões’s classic manipulation of time.

Camões’s epic built on verified prophecies to promote the idea of Portugal’s destiny as a pioneer in the conquest of new territories and the dissemination of Christian faith. Written more than half a century after the start of Portuguese maritime expansion in Asia, *Os Lusíadas* was able to present the “grande máquina do Mundo” (X, 80, i), the container of all knowledge, that showcased the fate of individuals as well as the historical evolution of nations, so as to dazzle the da Gama crew as well as contemporary readers into believing the inevitable rise of Portugal: “Até’qui Portugueses concedido / Vos é saberdes os futuros feitos” (X, 142, i–ii). The belief in linear progression of time and predetermination of fate was presented as indisputable; the epic did not bother to explore Vasco da Gama’s reactions to learning the circumstances of not only his own death but also his son’s eventual demise, because time and destiny are not subject to human will:

Nesta remota terra um filho teu  
Nas armas contra os Turcos será claro  
Há-de ser Dom Cristóvão o nome seu  
Mas contra o fim fatal não há reparo. (X, 96, i–iv)

Hélder Macedo notes that the episode on Camões’s Isle of Love illustrates “the paradoxical purpose of the feats,” which is “the achievement of pastoral peace and the restoration of the harmony of the Golden Age through the use of the arms of the Iron Age” (“Conceptual Oppositions” 71). In other words, Camões’s original conception of the famous scene on the island was based on the juxtaposition of dominant ideals from different epochs, resulting in a type of temporal hybridity in

a fictional space. However, this hybridity was more a result of anachronism than containing a truly revolutionizing essence, which is not the case in Agualusa's novel. Giorgio Agamben's affirmation that "the original task of a genuine revolution ... is never merely to 'change the world', but also—and above all—to 'change time'" (97) helps shed more light on the uniqueness of temporal arrangement in this twenty-first-century rewrite.

*Os vivos e os outros* presents an image of time of many directions but with none of the finalities. As a deliberate ridicule of the purpose of time, "Destino" becomes the name of a blind goose in the novel. On the diegetic level, the "desapagados," or the people who reappear after the old world is excavated and the symbolic bridge is built, return with memories not of their own, "lembrando-se de coisas que não podia saber . . . coisas que aconteceram aos netos dele. E ele ainda nem sequer tem filhos" (232). Meanwhile, on the hypodiegetic level that is the tale by Dona Cinema, the apocalypse begins when temporal orders are disrupted: "Os dias tresmalharam-se, amanhã se misturando com ontens, as pessoas adormecendo hoje e acordando cinco dias antes, numa prodigiosa confusão" (249). In both cases, despite the chaos and disruption caused, the rearrangement of time ultimately brings about the need for a new beginning and the rare opportunity for the previously unfavored to play a bigger role. In Dona Cinema's story, it is the little girl Mweeri, who previously was not eligible to participate in the holy ritual of organizing time that was reserved for the adult male "pescadores-magos," who goes on to save the world, symbolizing a gender and generational reversal of power.

In the main storyline, it is worth noting that the death of Uli occurs right after hearing the story of Mweeri, which implies a cross-diegetic impact and even certain danger of such chaos in time. Uli's death is perhaps the most enigmatic event of the novel. If we read Uli's personal trajectory separately, in which the charismatic Angolan writer has always been fearful of water because of a constant premonition of his own drowning, but ultimately succumbs to the sea after attending the gathering of Dona Cinema, we may deduce that the author is writing about the inevitability of fate and time. However, when seen in a broader context, Uli's seemingly inescapable destiny can be interpreted as a result of influence by his long-time friend Daniel's struggle against prophecy. In the previous chapter, Pedro Calunga Nzagi pays Daniel an unexpected visit and gives him a book called

*O enigma Benchimol*, which not only details Daniel's past secrets but also reveals his future, announcing that his wife Moira will have an affair with Uli and nearly die from being bitten by a dragon-fish while swimming in the ocean. Pedro tells the former journalist, "faça o que acha melhor" (242) with the book, and after struggling mentally, Daniel chooses to burn it and keeps it a secret from his wife. Uli's subsequent death is a justification of Daniel's defiance of the predetermination of fate, for the foretold family drama is now unable to come true. Such rejection of prophecy was not available to Vasco da Gama when seeing the future on the Isle of Love, and that is the difference that draws Daniel nearer the level of an overcharacter, because he now gains a higher-level understanding of the world. The love Daniel has for and receives from Moira assures him that "está vivo, vivo ou não" (246), which provides him with more than enough meaning for his existence.

Leslie Paul Thiele's assertion that "amor fati is the disposition of the overman" (200) proves useful in dissecting Daniel's mentality. Daniel fully understands his own fictionality as a character in a book, but is brave enough to embrace the nonexistence and finds joy at every occasion of the eternal recurrence (*Ewige Wiederkunft*). In fact, in a previous conversation Daniel and Uli showcase their wide difference on the matter of time. When asked what day it would be "se tivesses de passar o resto da tua vida preso a um único dia," Daniel responds that it would be a common day of reading, writing, swimming, and walking, but most importantly the day he had a great afternoon nap while cuddling Moira (72–73). In contrast, Uli fails to give his own answer; he feels "tão infeliz que não [tem] resposta" (74). Their respective (in)ability to find peace within their lives reflects a divergence on the topic of eternal recurrence, which foreshadows their endings. Daniel draws strength from love and approximates the status of the overman, and in the process exerts a larger impact on others, preventing his wife's future affair and a near-death experience, but it also comes with the price of the tragic drowning of his friend Uli.

For other writers on the island, the suspension of (Western but already globalized) linear and progressive time, the unique experience in a time capsule in the symbolically charged seven days, presents an opportunity to contend with their original temporal conceptions, which is crucial for a profound reflection upon their relationship with themselves, with their creations, as well as with the outside world.

The result is exemplified by the novel on which Ofélia and Júlio plan to collaborate after everything seems to have returned to normal. Such a work will have at its core the lack of narrative time, in which “as personagens estão em todos os tempos simultaneamente” (225), and an open ending because “se é aberto não pode ser o fim” (227). In fact, such a fictional work is a mirror of the time-less reality they were experiencing, which adds another layer to the intertwinement of fiction and reality. At the same time, the creative process serves as an emotional bridge between the two collaborators, like the final invitation from Júlio: “Com um dia tão bonito, Ofélia? Vamos passear a nossa história” (227). The love story is to be told simultaneously in writing and in life.

With the help of the propensity toward creation of the literary space that is a concrete island, and through the disruption of time, the apocalypse promotes the becoming of overman, forcing African writers to reexamine the value of person-to-person interactions and acknowledge the inseparability of their creations and their own identities. For those characters to grasp the meaning of *amor fati*, for the one moment of good to compensate for all the bad, even the possibility of their nonexistence, the solution is the simple yet elusive word love. It is only through the most mundane yet most universal feeling of love that transformations can occur at personal, national, and global levels.

### ***Redemption through Literature and Love***

Logically, the fear and yearning for the apocalypse as well as the need for a new genesis derive from dissatisfaction with the current world system, which is believed to be flawed to the point that it is only through large-scale shock therapy, through combat with a colossal disaster, that the deteriorating trends can be reversed and the best of humanistic traditions can be rekindled. Apart from Africa’s peripheral position in both literary and political realms, *Os vivos e os outros* presents some more generalized contemporary issues: the dissociation of literature with the land, the lack of social skills caused by increased time spent on virtual networks, and the inability to mediate between different identities in a globalized world. Together, these ill-functioning mechanisms constitute the slow-rising flood that threatens to inundate the entire world.

The ultimate solution to Africa’s island-like peripheral position as well as its



more universal conundrums obviously requires a collective initiative, but for writers like Agualusa, a clear first step should be engaging in more meaningful literary production that deals with African reality, which is demonstrated in his choice of a literary festival as the novel's context. Aside from the many native languages that are bound to specific places, English-, French-, and Portuguese-speaking writers also belong to different social networks, and ever since the decline of Négritude there is no cross-lingual African literary community identity. Agualusa chooses to fictionalize an African literary festival held on a small island in the poor country of Mozambique that successfully invites writers from Nigeria, Mali, and South Africa in addition to Portuguese-speaking countries such as Angola, Mozambique, and Portugal, with the semimarginalized Portuguese as the working language. Such an arrangement is in itself a challenge to the functioning mechanism of the society. At the festival, African writers from different backgrounds engage in rare interactions, and a recurring topic is the contradiction between their own aspirations and the expectations of the outside world, as most of their agents, journalists, and readers are from outside the continent and inevitably demand stereotypical African writing.

Uli enjoys exceptional popularity at a literary fair in Berlin not because of his books but for his mastery of the Mozambican divination method called Tindhlo (140–41). Cornelia, perhaps the most renowned among these writers in the novel's setting, is the most troubled by her time on the island, partly because she is unable to produce the family saga already hailed by the *Times Literary Supplement* as “a segunda descolonização de África” (107) without a single word written. Some authors resort to quite unconventional solutions to others' expectations. For example, Jude has not published a second work because he rejects repeating himself, while Júlio Zivane keeps on writing the same story, only from different points of view. It is often the shared experience of rebelling against prejudices and stereotypes of African literature that leads to the gradual bonding between authors. In different manners, they explore what African literature can accomplish and how they can contribute to contemporary fictional writing, serving as a vital force to shake up the stagnating Western literary scene. For instance, Jude finds that the “alegria da efabulação” (84) has been lost in contemporary European literature but remains vigorous in African storytelling. If we were to consider the possible etymology of utopia as a “happy place” instead of just a “nonexistent place,” then

the description of day-to-day small talks by these writers on the island, as well as Uli, Jude, and Lúcia's improvised game of guessing if the others' stories are real or invented, stops being a trivial pastime, as the close link between happiness in life and literary creations may constitute the core of the African utopia of the new generation. The three writers later reveal that all their stories are true, which again blurs the line between fiction and reality by annulling the possibility of a story staying on the diegetic level. This new utopia that questions the distinction between fiction and reality and between recreation and re-creation is in conception different from the one dreamed by the first pan-Africanists, a continent "sem o estorvo das fronteiras, independente, vivo, livre da miséria e da corrupção," thus contrasting with Daniel's initial lament that "nem sequer fomos capazes de criar novas utopias" (62).

The redemptive function of literature, however, goes through a major trial in the appearance of hypodiegetic characters in the diegetic world, which adds another metafictional layer to the novel. The merging of two worlds aggravates the cognitive crisis of the writers; some begin doubting the nature of their existence on the island, suspecting themselves to have inadvertently passed on to afterlife to be a form of death. In fact, it is quite clear from the beginning that the Island of Mozambique departs from the classical idyllic imagery as it simultaneously evokes paradisiacal and hellish connotations. Daniel and Moira opt to make this island the new home for them and their newborn daughter, not because they believe it to be a "paraíso perfeito," for Daniel himself sees that the expression "não é uma redundância" but "um oxímoro" (56), but because Moira finally can be herself and Daniel has unconditional love for her. "Ele, Daniel, tivera sorte. Com Moira e com a ilha dela" (14).

Love plays a central role in the island narrative, and love-knowledge symbiosis in this novel resembles the latter part of the Isle of Love scene in *Os Lusíadas*, when only after consummation with the nymphs are da Gama's crew given the divine privilege of witnessing with their mundane eyes the secrets of world history. Hélder Macedo argues that "from the Isle of Love there is no possible return," as "love, for Camões, is a first cause, an existential process and the ultimate purpose of human quest. Through love, appetite is transformed into reason and reason into knowledge" ("Love" 51). Macedo further observes that for the Portuguese poet, "love, the prescient guide to the divine, becomes the blind guide to that unknown

region which is the territory of the other,” and that “[i]t becomes a quest for the new” (52). In Agualusa’s latest novel, love’s paramount importance and its intimate link to knowledge are maintained, as it is only through love that Jude, Cornelia, and many others understand their own Africanness and how to express it both in real life and in writing. As for the primary family of the novel, in a prolepsis that has now become a trademark, Daniel and Moira’s daughter Tetembua “se revelará o mais curioso e social dos seres, amando o ruído, as festas e as multidões” (171), African traits that are now clear of the stigma after the formerly isolated island saves the continent and reinvents world order. Love does not lead the characters closer to God but to its Nietzschean successor in the overman, who is by birth an African and an islander. Agualusa discloses in an interview that what interests him the most in the novel is “o sonho enquanto utopia, enquanto matriz de mudança” (Serra 17), and Zarathustra’s celebrated exclamation that “what is great about human beings is that they are a bridge and not a purpose” (Nietzsche 7) serves well to summarize the forging and becoming of African overmen on an island in an apocalyptic setting.

### ***Conclusion***

By reading Agualusa’s island narrative in *Os vivos e os outros* as a palimpsest of the Ilha dos Amores episode in *Os Lusíadas* as well as of the Blessed Islands scene in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, this article dives into the Angolan writer’s ambitious plan to redefine island narrative. He calls for agency of the island through a reconnection of writing with life experience and ends up envisioning the genesis of a new African utopia through consistent boundary-crossing and bridge-building at intertextual and interpersonal levels. In the novel’s postscript, Agualusa emphasizes the inherent “vocaçã para a poesia e para o maravilhoso” (251) in most of the inhabitants of the Island of Mozambique, and expresses gratitude to “todos os ilhéus, que me receberam como a um irmão africano” (252). The tiny island, then, symbolizes the potential for Africa to incorporate all its rich historical and literary heritage through a reaffirmation of space and a reorganization of time.

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