

JOÃO PAULO BORGES COELHO, JOÃO ALBASINI AND THE WORLDING OF MOZAMBICAN LITERATURE

João Paulo Borges Coelho, João Albasini e a Globalização da Literatura Moçambicana

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Recibido: septiembre de 2013; Aceptado: octubre de 2013; Publicado: diciembre de 2013

BIBLID [0210-7287 (2013) 3; 91-106]

Ref. Bibl. STEFAN HELGESSON. JOÃO PAULO BORGES COELHO, JOÃO ALBASINI AND THE WORLDING OF MOZAMBICAN LITERATURE. 1616: *Anuario de Literatura Comparada*, 3 (2013), 91-106

RESUMO: Em *O Olbo de Hertzog*, situado no pós-guerra em 1919, o escritor moçambicano João Paulo Borges Coelho apresenta um panorama cosmopolita da África austral e oriental nos tempos coloniais. «Moçambique» manifesta-se aqui não tanto como uma colónia portuguesa, mas sim como um sítio onde múltiplos e divergentes interesses se entrelaçam: locais e transnacionais, europeus e africanos, sul-africanos e moçambicanos, britânicos e alemães, coloniais e proto-nacionais. Deste modo, e de uma forma que distingue o romance no quadro da literatura moçambicana, *O Olbo de Hertzog* alcança um tipo de «worlding» que vai além do espaço colonial/nacional de Moçambique, sem no entanto admitir uma síntese. Este cosmopolitismo poderá ser lido como uma expressão das relações complexas e das hierarquias inerentes à sociedade colonial, e também (implicitamente) da globalização contemporânea. A mais

importante concretização dum tal cosmopolitismo crítico é a figura dos «dois mundos» de Lourenço Marques, incorporada na personagem central de João Albasini, o lendário ativista mestiço e fundador de *O Brado Africano*, um jornal proto-nacionalista (1918-1974). Albasini funciona como um Virgílio tutelar para a descida do protagonista Hans Mahrenholz ao inferno colonial de Lourenço Marques. Em especial, por citar material documentário –desde editoriais de Albasini a anúncios em Lourenço Marques– Coelho problematiza as divisões da cidade colonial, sustentadas pelo capital internacional, e fornece um contraste agudo à narrativa «europeia» –que tem a ver com um diamante famoso e intrigas sul-africanas– que domina o romance.

Palavras-chave: Literatura Moçambicana, Literatura Mundial, Primeira Guerra Mundial, João Albasini, João Paulo Borges Coelho, Colonialismo, Cosmopolitismo, Romance Histórico.

ABSTRACT: In *O Olho de Hertzog* (2010), set in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, the Mozambican writer João Paulo Borges Coelho presents a cosmopolitan panorama of colonial south-eastern Africa. «Mozambique» emerges here not primarily as a Portuguese colonial space but as a site of multiple entanglements between interests: transnational and local, European and African, South African and Mozambican, British and German, colonial and proto-nationalist. In such a way, and differently from previous Mozambican literature, *O Olho de Hertzog* performs a complex act of worlding that exceeds the bounded colonial/national space of Mozambique, but resists synthesis. This cosmopolitanism can be read expressive of the strained relations and constitutive hierarchies of colonial society as well as, by implication, of contemporary globalisation. The most important index of such a critical cosmopolitanism is the trope of the «two worlds» of Lourenço Marques, embodied in the central character João Albasini, legendary *mestiço* activist and founder of the proto-nationalist journal *O Brado Africano* (1918-1974). Albasini functions as a Virgil for the protagonist Hans Mahrenholz's descent into the colonial inferno of Mozambique. Not least by citing documentary material –Albasini's editorials and shop signs in Lourenço Marques– Coelho problematises the divisions of the colonial city, sustained by international capital, and provides a sharp contrast to the otherwise dominant «European» narrative of novel, which revolves around a fabled diamond and white South African intrigue.

Key words: Mozambican Literature, World Literature, First World War, João Albasini, João Paulo Borges Coelho, Colonialism, Cosmopolitanism, Historical Novel.

In his novel *O Olho de Hertzog* (*The Eye of Hertzog*) the Mozambican writer João Paulo Borges Coelho casts his net widely. Although mostly set in Lourenço Marques in 1919 (today's Maputo), the novel draws on stories

from far and wide, including that of German soldiers on the East African front, white Afrikaners from South Africa, Goan workers in Mozambique and newly arrived American missionaries from Ohio. The main protagonist is a young German, Hans Mahrenholz, a former soldier who travels to Lourenço Marques posing as Henry Miller, a journalist from the Johannesburg-based newspaper *Rand Daily Mail*. It is not at all apparent what he is doing in the Portuguese colony; the reader is only told that Mahrenholz is supposed to get hold of a local journalist called João Albasini, and that the rest will follow.

What does follow is the gradual unravelling of a mystery, partly in the tradition of the imperial romance. Hans's mission, it turns out, is to retrieve a fabled diamond in the rough that supposedly had belonged to an elusive fortune-seeker named Glück, but which is also coveted by Afrikaners conspiring to usurp British-dominated rule in the Union of South Africa. The diamond is called «the Eye of Hertzog», a name that derives from this conspiracy: Barry Hertzog emerged in the 1910s as a key political player in the Union of South Africa and would eventually serve as prime minister between 1924 and 1939. As leader of the National Party, his pro-Afrikaner policies foreshadowed the destructive era of racist rule in South Africa known as apartheid (1948-1994). The seemingly innocuous moniker «the Eye of Hertzog» leads in other words straight to the heart of historical conflicts in southern Africa (although Hertzog himself makes no appearance in the story), and the fiction retraces and reassembles moments out of this history –before apartheid but after the Great War, in the long aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War, and still at the height of colonialism.

O Olho de Hertzog should perhaps not be read as an «historical novel» in the Lukácsian sense, but it does to a certain extent mimic or even parody such a novel in which (Lukács is here referring to Walter Scott) «the personal destinies of a number of human beings coincide and interweave within the determining context of an historical crisis» (Lukács 1983, 41). There are personal destinies galore in the novel, many of them referring to historical individuals (among them the famous German general von Lettow-Vorbeck), as well as historical crises in the plural –the Great War, political tensions in South Africa and colonial repression and labour unrest in Mozambique–but the sense of history evoked by *O Olho de Hertzog* is more haphazard than Lukács would have wished, less confident of our chances to summarise with any conclusiveness the «totality» of a given moment, and certainly more skeptical of the claims of literary realism, tending rather towards postmodern generic eclecticism. The diamond plot is the clearest example of the latter: a standard ingredient in the imperial romance and colonial adventure novel –as in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* or Rider Haggard's

King Solomon's Mines— it functions here as little more than a narrative device that enables Coelho to weave a cosmopolitan tapestry of narratives with the colonial urban space of Lourenço Marques at its centre.

It is precisely this juxtaposition of the cosmopolitan and local that interests me here. A question I will ask in this article is how the Lourenço Marquean urban space, which is represented in a more subdued and experimental stylistic register than other parts of the novel, relates to the swirl of intrigue and adventure that make up the bulk of the story. This will lead me to interrogate the foundational split between cosmopolitan and local tendencies in Coelho's representation of Lourenço Marques, a city of «two worlds» articulated metonymically as the city of stone and the city of straw (or reeds), and embodied metaphorically in the character of João Albasini. If Hans mainly moves in the city of stone, Albasini provides him with inroads into the city of straw. In such a way —and this is my main argument— that *O Olho de Hertzog* performs a complex act of worlding that exceeds the bounded colonial/national space of Mozambique, but resists synthesis. This worlding makes a distinct contribution to what could be called the *littérature-monde* (Le Bris and Rouaud 2007) of Portuguese language literature. Another way of putting it is this: the cosmopolitanism of *O Olho de Hertzog* is expressive of the strained relations and constitutive hierarchies of colonial society —but also, by implication, of contemporary globalisation. It is a cosmopolitanism of «the seam», to borrow a theoretical term from the South African critic Leon de Kock, which should be understood as «the site of a joining together that also bears the mark of the suture» where incommensurate communities have been brought together by imperial or economic compulsion (De Kock 2001, 276). The seam is not only «the site of difference», De Kock explains, but «foregrounds the representational suture, the attempt to close the gap and to bring the incommensurate into alignment by the substitution, in the place of difference, of a myth, a motif, a figure, or a trope» (De Kock 2001, 276). There are various tropes in the novel —as I have already indicated— that serve this purpose (and Lourenço Marques as such could be seen as a master trope). The main textual evidence that I will garner to demonstrate my point will be the frequent citation of two text genres that Coelho engages in throughout the novel: on the one hand shop signs and advertisements, on the other João Albasini's editorials. Such citation has the effect, within the fictional world of the novel, of stitching the cosmopolitan and local together, but it is also worth viewing from a metaliterary perspective as a continuation of what I earlier have discussed as a long tradition of cosmopolitanism in the marginal literary field of Mozambique (Helgesson 2009b). If this cosmopolitanism, ever since the anti-colonial and post-revolutionary phase (after 1975), has

been possible to read as a means to secure symbolic capital from a world republic of letters on behalf of *national* Mozambican literature (on this issue, with a different emphasis, see also Leite 2008), *O Olho de Hertzog* seems more ambivalent about the chances or even the value of imagining Mozambique as a world apart from the outside world. A comparable ambivalence can be registered, moreover, in Mia Couto's 2006 novel *O outro pé da sereia*, which accommodates African-American as well Goan histories. In this respect, these novels –both of them circulated internationally, both of them written in a period of accelerated globalisation of the Mozambican economy– might indicate a gradual shift of emphasis from a national to a more open-ended global or cosmopolitan paradigm in Mozambican writing. I suggest this tentatively, well aware that it might seem provocative to writers in Mozambique. I must therefore underline that my suggestion is not normative but descriptive; I am not pushing an agenda, but am only trying to register certain implications of a novel such as *O Olho de Hertzog*. To clarify this point, I need to provide a brief overview of Coelho's work and its place in Mozambican literature.

Although *O Olho de Hertzog* is the first time he explores the post-First World War period, the concern with Mozambican history is recurrent in Coelho's fiction. Even in the few critical comments on Coelho that have appeared so far, this has already been addressed repeatedly, always with variations of my caveat above that his fictions should not be mistaken for «historical novels». There are some obvious reasons for this double manoeuvre of linking and separation: Coelho is an historian by profession and has been teaching for many years at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo. His fictional work draws on the body of knowledge that he has amassed in his professional capacity, yet it is very clearly written in another register. As Rita Chaves explains, «[s]ua carga inventiva permite que mesmo o apego ao detalhe e a tendência da precisão, mais que uma garantia da verdade perseguida pelas concepções positivistas da história, se revelem formas de consolidar a ilusão romanesca que faz sobreviver a utopia da imaginação» (Chaves 2008, 197)¹. This assessment tallies rather well with the author's own account of the difference between regimented academic writing and what he first experienced as the freedom of literary writing, a freedom which nonetheless turned out to be rigorously demanding in its own right (Coelho 2008, 232). Or, as he says in a later interview, literature

1. Its inventiveness allows even for the attachment to details and the penchant for precision to consolidate not a truth pursued by way of positivist conceptions of history, but rather the novelistic illusion that enables the utopia of the imagination to survive.

has been his hitherto unsuccessful attempt at liberating himself from history (Secco 2010).

It was not until 2003, however, that Borges Coelho fully entered this qualified *utopia of the imagination* by publishing his first novel *As Duas Sombras do Rio* (*The two shadows of the river*). He has since been exceptionally prolific, publishing almost a book a year, mostly novels but also two volumes of short stories under the common title *Índicos indícios* (*Indian Ocean indices*). His stories are often set in the present –such as the delightfully satirical *Hinyambaan* (2008)– or in the recent past –as in *Crónica da Rua 513.2* (2006), which deals with the 1980s in Mozambique– but the present of the narratives always has a diachronic, historical dimension. «History», in Coelho's writing, is seldom confined to the past. It has more to do, instead, with the narrative construction of a layered, often fraught, experience of temporality.

Coupled with history is an equally profound sense of place. As Chaves argues, it is notable that Coelho's stories are set in a wide range of regions and places in Mozambique. This is most obvious in *Índicos indícios*, whose two volumes are organised on geographical principles, following the coast northwards in *Setentrião* and southwards in *Meridião*. In true chronotopic fashion, place and time together generate Coelho's narratives, the one unimaginable without the other. It is this that motivates Coelho's current and strengthening position as a national, Mozambican writer, alongside Mia Couto, Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa, Lília Momplé and Paulina Chiziane, to mention just a few, all of whom have contributed to consolidate Mozambican prose fiction as a distinct, albeit struggling, field within contemporary «literatura de expressão portuguesa» (a term that in Mozambique is preferred to «literatura lusófona»). Mia Couto is of course exceptional in this context and interesting to compare with his age mate Coelho: widely translated, the recipient of numerous prestigious prizes (including the Prémio Camões in 2013), Couto is by far the most globally pronounced exponent of Mozambican literature. As such, he has always tended to emphasise the poetic principle in writing, producing narratives of Mozambique through word play and dream-like scenarios. While places are important in Couto's work, they are seldom named or specified in realistic terms. This stands in sharp contrast to Coelho's detailed and specific approach to place. Added to this, his work has a wider territorial reach within the national space of Mozambique. In purely geographical terms, no other Mozambican prose writer has explored so many different settings. Insofar as the Mozambican nation was first a literary invention (Mallinda, Matusse, Noa, Helgesson 2009a), Coelho has in other words continued to develop the tradition of imagining the nation. Drawing on António Cândido's reading of the importance

of territoriality in establishing a Brazilian literary identity in the nineteenth century, Chaves quite defensibly claims that Coelho is engaged in a comparable «gradual conquest» («conquista progressiva») of the national space.

This, however, is precisely where *O Olho de Hertzog* presents an intriguing anomaly. Not only is it set in the colonial past, long before the emergence of anticolonial nationalism, but its sense of place, as I have already indicated, is too complex to allow for a straightforward national reading. While it insistently, and with a density worthy of Geertzian «thick description», returns to the setting of Lourenço Marques, its cosmopolitan cast of characters as well as the spectacle of the fictional city itself present radically different and mostly tangential ways of relating to this particular place. The meditations in the opening chapter on the changing names of ships currently anchored in the harbour of Lourenço Marques set the tone for this relational –a term I will return to in the conclusion– rather than settled or absolute sense of place:

o *Niassa*, que foi *Bulow* antes de ser há dois anos capturado pelas autoridades portuguesas; o velho *Admiral*, glória da German East Africa Line, também ele obrigado a ser *Lourenço Marques*; e finalmente o *Beira*, nome pintado de fresco por cima de outro nome que ainda se consegue ler (Coelho 2010, 14)².

Underneath the new names, all of them referring to places or regions in Portuguese colony, the old names remain as palimpsests, reminding of other places, other histories, some with literary resonances. *Beira* was previously called *Herzog* which once had transported –his is mentioned parenthetically– «um jovem de nome Fernando Pessoa em solitária viagem de regresso a uma pátria desconhecida» (Coelho 2010, 15)³.

The cosmopolitan histories of the ships with local, Mozambican names produce a dispersed and attenuated sense of place. This sense of dispersion is further underlined by the way the novel is organised: the chapters take turns at third-person and first-person narration. The first-person narrative is told in Hans Mahrenholz's voice and recounts in the past tense his experiences as a German officer under the command of general von Lettow-Vorbeck. We follow here his unlikely (but factually plausible)

2. The *Niassa*, previously *Bulow* before it was captured two years ago by the Portuguese authorities; the old *Admiral*, the pride of the German East Africa Line which had also been obliged to become the *Lourenço Marques*; and finally the *Beira* whose name had been freshly painted on top of another which is still visible (my translation here and elsewhere).

3. A young man called Fernando Pessoa on a lonely trip back to an unknown mother country.

trajectory as a young soldier flying from Germany to East Africa in a dirigible, transporting supplies to the embattled German troops. Choosing to bail out behind enemy lines when the mission falters, he ends up as general von Lettow-Vorbeck's aide-de-camp, following the general's erratic but strategically shrewd wanderings with his troops across northern Mozambique⁴. The present-tense third-person narrative –which is how the novel begins– also has Hans as main focaliser, but is set in Lourenço Marques. This constitutes the narrative present, whereas the first-person narrative looks back on what led Hans to end up in Lourenço Marques. This creates a compositional circle whereby the first-person narrative ends where the third-person narrative begins. Besides this elegant compositional detail, however, it is not entirely clear what motivates the separation between the homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators, especially when one considers that in both of these narrative modes, much of the individual chapters consists of embedded, interpolated narratives. These are ostensibly told by other characters, such as Florence Greeff or Sebastian Glück, but conveyed in the third person.

There is in other words a lack of a stable centre or a firmly anchored narratorial perspective in the novel –emphasised by a symbolism of mirrors and labyrinths– which could be read in a postmodern register but, I argue, is more meaningful to relate to the colonial setting. In *O Olho de Hertzog*, almost no one *belongs*. Most of the characters –such as Hans, Florence, Lettow, Natalie Korenico, Klopper, Glück– are displaced Europeans or white South Africans with no real foothold in the Mozambique of the novel. Much of *O Olho de Hertzog* presents us with an Africa viewed from the perspective of whites who are just passing through and whose frames of reference remain European. Klopper, whose aim is to secure Afrikaner rule in South Africa, is of course an exception. His sense of belonging is beyond doubt, even if for Coelho he represents the beginnings of what would become apartheid rule in South Africa. In this sense, the novel privileges nomadic over rooted existence.

A far more important exception to the unsettled European characters, however, is João Albasini. In real life, Albasini was an assimilated *mestiço*, a trailblazing proto-nationalist described by Jean Penvenne as «one of Mozambique's leading twentieth-century intellectuals» (Penvenne 1995, 65). He is remembered primarily as the founder *O Africano* (1908-1909)

4. Incidentally, it is worth noting that von Lettow-Vorbeck has figured in at least two other (relatively) recent fictions: in the first story in Peter Høeg's *Fortællinger om natten* (1990; trans. As *Tales of the Night*) and in Jan Guillou's *Brobyggarna* (2011; «The Bridge Builders»).

and its successor *O Brado Africano* (*The African roar*, 1918-1974), the latter destined become a uniquely long-lived journal published bilingually in Portuguese and Ronga, and catering mainly for an African readership. Before his untimely death in 1922, Albasini campaigned tirelessly against racial discrimination, unjust colonial laws, the exploitation of workers and alcohol policies that ruined the health of African men (Capela 1996). Although his main political aim was equal treatment under the laws of the Portuguese republic rather than independence, Albasini is widely regarded as a forerunner not only of Mozambican anti-colonial nationalism, but also of Mozambican (written) literature in a wider sense. Besides being adept at various genres himself, from opinion pieces to autobiography, *O Brado Africano* would publish poetry every so often. By writing about Albasini, Coelho is self-reflexively inscribing the very beginnings of Mozambican written literature in his own novel.

Albasini is the only central character in *O Olho de Hertzog* who can be said to belong in Lourenço Marques. This is at the same time an ambivalent belonging, always threatened by the double-bind of the colonial system: its simultaneous production and intolerance of hybridity. Hans Mahrenholz's emergent understanding of this ambivalence, and hence of the racialised, double nature of the city of Lourenço Marques, constitutes a significant sub-plot in the novel through which Coelho attempts to «ground» the other, more or less fanciful narratives of the European characters. The narrative trails are not, however, easily integrated. It would be more accurate to say that the interactions between Hans and Albasini run parallel to the other narratives revolving around the massive diamond, the Eye of Hertzog. This is perhaps symptomatic and could be read in analogy with Mozambican literature's tenuous position in relation to world literature, which is where the notion of worlding becomes pertinent. As with the ships' names referred to above, «Mozambique» emerges in *O Olho de Hertzog* not primarily as a Portuguese colonial space (there are, intriguingly, almost no Portuguese characters in the novel) but as a seam where multiple interests are sutured to each other: transnational and local, Christian and secular, European and African, British and German, South African and Mozambican, colonial and proto-nationalist. At the same time, however, it presents the reader with crucial qualification of a politically naïve cosmopolitanism and renders in effect its own main narrative –the romance of the diamond– frivolous in comparison with the struggles of Albasini and other colonial subjects in the novel.

This is then my main point: while the pronounced cosmopolitanism of *O Olho de Hertzog* denotes a new departure for Coelho (and possibly for Mozambican literature), it is tempered precisely by the figure of Albasini

and Hans's response to what Albasini teaches him. Coelho's novel achieves thereby a new form of worlding in Mozambican literature. In order to demonstrate this, I will restrict my choice of textual examples to those chapters and passages where Hans engages with Albasini and the urban spaces of Lourenço Marques.

There are two patterns here that are of interest, and they are established early on in the novel: the first is Hans's habits as *flâneur*, the second is Albasini's role as Hans's guide –a Virgil, if you will– into the inferno (or at least the purgatory) of Lourenço Marques. If Hans's wanderings allow for an impressionistic discovery of the colonial city, the purpose-driven Albasini enables him to see precisely that which is not immediately apparent. This duality corresponds precisely to Albasini's split position between «two worlds», one of the main organising tropes not just of the novel but also in Mozambican as well as Angolan literature more generally (as is particularly notable in Mia Couto's work –see for example *A varanda do frangipani* and *O último voo do flamingo*).

This is where the two different forms of documentary citation –signs and advertisements versus Albasini's editorials– novel accumulate significance. As soon as he disembarks, Hans Mahrenholz starts registering the spectacle of the city: «Olha esta praça, afinal distante de Hamburgo, povoada de gentes tão distintas, moldada pelos caprichos de quem a foi edificando, que a salpicou de pequenos quiosques, estranhas construções encimadas por minaretes de ferro forjado, chinesices» (Coelho 2010, 19)⁵. But the act of seeing –of registering impressions– is quickly doubled by the act of reading: «Pavillion Kiosk de Cândido de Sousa Teixeira e dona Carlota Fornazini de Sousa Teixeira, Bebidas geladas nacionais e importadas da Metrópole, do Transval [*sic*] e das principais capitais europeias» (Coelho 2010, 19)⁶. And so it continues in most of the Lourenço Marques chapters; commercial signs are almost obsessively registered in great detail. Two additional examples:

Caixa Económica Ferroviário da Província de Moçambique, Associação de socorros mútuos fundada em 1914, Previne-se o público que esta instituição aceita depósitos à ordem dando o juro de 3% até 3.000\$00 e 2%

5. He looks at this square, so far from Hamburg, populated by such distinct people, shaped by the whims of those who built it, who sprinkled it with small kiosks, strange constructions topped with finely crafted minarets in wrought iron.

6. «The Pavillion Kiosk of Cândido de Sousa Teixeira e dona Carlota Fornazini de Sousa Teixeira, Cold drinks, both national and imported from the Metropolis, from Transvaal and from the major European capitals».

quando a importância for superior a 3.000\$00 até 5.000\$00, Segurança absoluta, facilidades extraordinárias (Coelho 2010, 91)⁷.

Hans alternava dias de tédio, assistindo absorto ao cair da chuva, com passeios pelas ruas da cidade.

Casa ABC, Praça Mouzinho de Albuquerque, Sortimento colossal de artigos para brindes de Ano Novo, Extraordinária variedade de brinquedos para crianças entre os quais mencionamos os seguintes que se impõem à nossa atenção, Bonecos e animais de pano, mobílias, serviços de chá, soldados de chumbo, espingardas, caminhos de ferro, jogos variadíssimos, blocos, mecanos, brinquedos de corda, carros, camas, ferros de passar (Coelho 2010, 147)⁸.

The examples can be multiplied; what they alert us to is how the Lourenço Marques of the novel is integrated in the network of global trade. Almost all of the signs –which very likely are authentic, although I haven't been able to confirm this– could be summed up in two words: «For Sale». But there is something more as well: as with the «Casa ABC», the commercial players of the city are actively producing desires for consumerist tastes and habits from elsewhere. The toys listed above are geared towards reproducing a particular European, petit bourgeois way of life; they also gesture towards the recently concluded war (the tin soldiers). Not unlike a displaced Walter Benjamin, Hans Mahrenholz produces in this way an archaeology of the present, unearthing through his wanderings the premises of the everyday in colonial Lourenço Marques. And yet, thanks to Albasini, he learns that so much more remains to be learned.

In the novel, Albasini is first and foremost portrayed as a journalist. As Hans first encounters him in December 1918, he is just finishing the editorial of the first issue of *O Brado Africano*. The pathos of the opening lines is characteristic and unmistakable:

7. «The Railroad Pension Fund of the Province of Mozambique, Mutual insurance fund founded in 1914, The public is advised that this institution accepts legal deposits with an interest rate of 3% for deposits up to 3.000\$00 [escudos] and 2% for deposits between 3.000\$00 and 5.000\$00, Absolute security, extraordinary facilities».

8. «Hans alternated the days of tedium when he listened to the rainfall with walks through the streets of the city. The ABC House, Mouzinho de Albuquerque square, Colossal selection of New Year's presents, An extraordinary variety of children's toys among which we mention the following which leap to our attention, Stuffed dolls and animals, furniture, tea sets, tin soldiers, rifles, model trains, a wide variety of games, building blocks, meccano, wire toys, cars, beds, irons».

Todo aquele que não luta pelo seu Direito condena-se voluntariamente a ser capacho dos outros. Parar é morrer. Aos povos subjugados, então, mais do que aos outros, esse dever é uma religião. Ante o Altar do Dever prostremo-nos pois e façamos por nos fazer ouvir nas nossas queixas, nos nossos brados, nas nossas súplicas! (Coelho, 2010, 27)⁹.

The main tendency in the quoted editorials (which are documentary material), is not however anticolonial in a strict sense. Instead, Albasini appeals to the implicitly cosmopolitan, liberal underpinnings of the young Portuguese republic (proclaimed in 1910). When decrying racial discrimination, he does so in the name of the «democratic and egalitarian» principles of the republic, not in opposition to colonialism as such (Coelho 2010, 134). This is characteristic of the times: shortly before the war, Sol Plaatje had headed a delegation to the British King to protest –in the name of equality under imperial rule– against the Native Land Act in South Africa; in the same period, African journalists in the Gold Coast (Ghana) were often supportive of British rule, particularly during the First World War (Newell 2011).

In Mozambique at the time, Portugal pursued the so-called assimilationist policy, a version of the «civilising mission» that allowed black Mozambicans who could prove that they were «civilised» –i. e. were literate, spoke Portuguese and lived according to Portuguese norms– to become full citizens instead of *indígenas* (natives), supposedly with the same rights as white Portuguese. The policy was contradictory and racist in its very premises, and served mainly as an ideological excuse for colonial rule. Even so, its *ostensible* promises, which included the assumption of equality before the law under the Portuguese republican dispensation, allowed for the kind of rhetoric of resistance developed by Albasini. No more than a minute fraction of the African population would ever achieve *assimilado* status, however: between 1917 and 1920 a total of 93 individuals acquired an assimilation certificate (Penvenne 1995, 65). João Albasini was one of these few, and as such he bore the brunt of living precisely along the seam that divided and joined the worlds of colonial Mozambique.

The paradoxes of this position, and of the divisions of Lourenço Marques, are elaborated in chapter eleven of *O Olho de Hertzog*. Acting the *flâneur* once again, Hans Mahrenholz browses the journals on sale at the

9. «Those who do not fight for their rights condemn themselves voluntarily to becoming the doormat of others. To stop is to die. This duty is a religion for subjugated peoples, more so than for others. We prostrate ourselves in front of the Altar of Duty to make our complaints, our screams, our prayers heard!».

Tabacaria Americana: news of the Versailles peace treaty, German reactions to the demands for reparation. Nothing but «[n]otícias de uma terra distante» (Coelho 2010, 290; «[n]ews from faraway lands»). But next to the foreign journals, Hans discovers the new issue of *O Brado Africano*: «Ao contrário dos restantes, todo ele virado para a realidade de Moçambique, e sobretudo para o falso progresso e a falsa euforia desta estranha cidade» (Coelho 2010, 290)¹⁰. Continuing his walk, Hans muses that Lourenço Marques is «uma cidade de pedra envolvida numa falsa azáfama de bem-estar e de progresso, mas cercada de uma auréola cinzenta feita de força bruta, sofrimento e palha: o mundo dos condenados. Numa só cidade, duas» (Coelho 2010, 291)¹¹. This apparently Fanonian view of the colonial city –«the world of the condemned» is strikingly reminiscent of «les damnés de la terre»– is however not quite as Manichean as in Frantz Fanon's work. The two worlds remain related in their separation even though Hans sees that this very relation can be articulated in two different ways:

Os habitantes da palha usam uma metáfora rasa para imaginar o mundo, eles cá fora e os outros dentro. Os da pedra, não! São mais presos a uma ordem vertical, gostam de se imaginar em cima, suportados, organizando os outros. Por isso falam de um todo que amalgamam com o artifício das eleições. É esta a argamassa que une os dois mundos, dizem (Coelho 2010, 292-293)¹².

This spurious unity is, Hans concludes, what Albasini himself embodies, endures and struggles in vain to render credible:

Não é um qualquer sentido de justiça que faz mover o jornalista, é antes este desconforto de uns o verem como um branco de pedra, outros como um preto de palha. É por isso que ele, nuns editoriais se indigna com uns, noutros com outros. Daí a importância que dá a esta questão sobre a qual

10. «Unlike the rest, it was entirely devoted to the reality of Mozambique, targeting above all the false progress and false euphoria of this strange city».

11. «A city of stone engulfed by a spurious bustle of well-being and progress, but surrounded by a grey halo of brute force, suffering and straw: the world of the condemned. Two cities in one».

12. «The inhabitants of the city of straw use a horizontal metaphor to imagine the world, those on the outside and those on the inside. Not so those who live in the city stone! They are beholden to a vertical order, they like to think of themselves as being on top, being held aloft, organising the others. This is why they speak of a whole that is brought together by the pretence of elections. This is the cement that holds the two worlds together, they say».

escreve com tanto calor –eleições para unir dois mundos que, sente, são irreconciliáveis (Coelho 2010, 293)¹³.

Hans himself, led by the twists in the diamond plot, becomes something of an intermediary between the two worlds, culminating at the end in his and Albasini's crossing to the Indo-African community in Catembe, across the bay from Lourenço Marques. This does not, however, lead to a synthesis in respect either of the fictional city or the narrative's resolution. The seam, one might say, disallows the integration of the two main narrative threads of the novel –its narrative discourse is precisely not *seamless*. The split sense of place (and hence of the world) articulated in this novel –disjointedly cosmopolitan on the one hand, unhappily restricted on the other –could however be theorised in terms of «relational spacetime», as discussed by David Harvey. I will briefly elaborate on this by way of conclusion. As a complement to what he calls absolute and relative conceptions of space, Harvey also sees spaces as constituted relationally. «An event, process, or thing cannot be understood by appeal to what exists only at some point», he writes, and enlists the example of individuals assembled in a room to discuss political strategies. They

bring to their discussion within that absolute space a vast array of past experiences, memories, and dreams accumulated directly or indirectly (through reading, for example) from their engagements with the world, as well as a wide array of anticipations and hopes about the future. Under the relational view disparate influences flow from everywhere to everywhere (Harvey 2009, 137).

This is a perspective suited not just to how spaces are evoked and constituted in literature in general, but particularly with regard to the fractured colonial space of *O Olho de Hertzog*, with its two cities in one. In this respect, all the elsewheres consistently invoked in the shop signs, the newspapers, the myriad narratives of (mainly) whites passing through are equally a part of what *makes* Lourenço Marques as the narratives of suffering and endurance that Hans encounters through Albasini's mediation. The worlding at work in Coelho's novel could in this respect be described as critically cosmopolitan: its cosmopolitanism, and hence its contribution to

13. «It is not just a sense of justice that drives the journalist, but rather the discomfort of being seen by some as a white from the city of sone, by others as a black from the city of straw. This is why he attacks one side in some of his editorials, and the other in others. Hence the importance he attaches to the issue which he debates with such fervor –elections that might unite the two worlds that he senses are irreconcilable».

the worlding of Mozambican literature is readable only in relation to and as an aspect of its representation of a conflicted colonial space.

The evocative ending, where Hans visits a barber in Lourenço Marques, seems to confirm this. The plot has by now been unravelled rather than resolved (there is no diamond to be found). Hans's sense of self, as the barber transforms his appearance, also appears to unravel. The boundaries between reverie and reality dissolve. Is Hans actually entering a building with a baroque entrance ornamented with Corinthian columns, tritons, lions and foliage in stone, or is he just daydreaming? There is something unreal about the city of stone, a relational space that fails to relate to the absolute space of its location. Hans, too, seems increasingly unreal: «Sempre que agiu, errou. Agora, além de agir, procura concentrar-se a fim de abdicar da própria intenção; para que até esta se suspenda. Fã-lo de tal forma que consegue captar uma brisa ligeira que mal faz mover a cortina de tule da barbearia» (Coelho 2010, 439)¹⁴. The closing words «—Está pronto. Oxalá consiga agora despedir-se da cidade» (Coelho 2010, 439)—¹⁵ are ambiguous. He might be leaving Lourenço Marques, but he might also simply be abandoning one cosmopolitan way of relating to the city in favour of another.

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14. «Whenever he acted, he was mistaken. Now, rather than acting, he will concentrate on abdicating from intention itself so that even this will be suspended. He will do so until he is able to seize the light breeze that barely makes the barber's tulle curtain move».

15. «He is ready. Hopefully he will now manage to take leave of the city».

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